

WORKERS' fight



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

NO, THEY DON'T RULE FOR "ALL THE PEOPLE"; THEY RULE FOR THE BOSSES!

It was no surprise that Labour won the snap election on 4 July. Sunak was already "drowned and out" the day he stood in the rain outside Downing Street to make his snap announcement.

However, it was surprising that Labour's share of the vote was only 34% - which nevertheless gave it 63% (412) of the Commons' seats. It's a smaller vote-share than it got in 2017, when with 40%, it won only 262 seats - and lost the election!

Yes, such is the absurdity of this electoral system! In fact in 2019 Labour's vote share was just 1.9% less than today, yet apparently, this was its "worst result since 1935"!

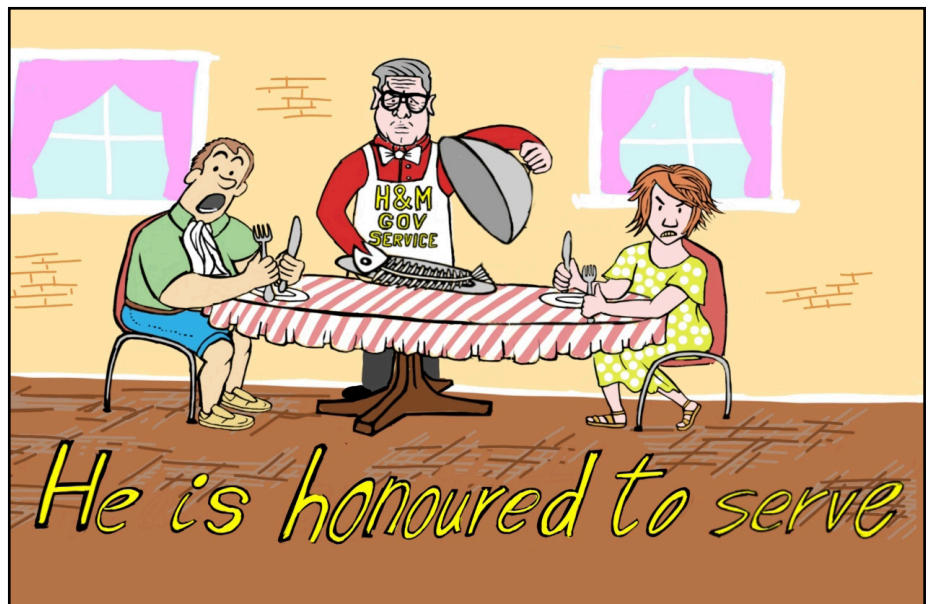
Actually, abstention won

A more interesting piece of electoral arithmetic, is that 80% of the electorate didn't vote for this Labour government, which nevertheless is firmly ensconced in Westminster. Or to put it another way, only 1 in 5 voted for it. This takes abstentions into account, of course, but that's necessary given that so many working class people made a conscious decision not to vote. Turn-out was the second lowest in a British general election since 1885!

So, it was "Abstention" which actually "won". But for now at least, there's no party to represent working class "abstention". Shouldn't there be one? We will come back to this point!

Anyway, a Labour government isn't in power today because the electorate thought it was offering "change". The majority of the electorate just wanted rid of Sunak's government, including quite a few Tories, who voted for Nigel Farage's Reform party, splitting the Conservative vote in a number of constituencies and allowing Labour in... Labour won by default, even if it's not behaving that way.

Yes, newly-appointed ministers like Chancellor Rachel Reeves, claim



they have been "given a mandate". In her case to "grow the economy", but responsibly, of course as the "party of business". And Starmer claims he has a mandate from "all 4 British nations". Except it was Sinn Fein which won the majority in Northern Ireland and it's certainly not affiliated to Labour!

They all govern for the capitalist class

And then, whichever party wins, its leaders claim they will rule "for all of the people"! Even the newly-elected president of brutally autocratic Iran, said that's what he'd be doing!

But how does this "ruling for all" work, in a capitalist system made up, by definition, of two main social classes whose interests are diametrically opposed? Indeed it's a built-in class struggle at the heart of the system! The capitalists only remain in power through deception and force in fact. As Lenin said: the state is "armed bodies of men".

So no, whether it's Starmer here in Britain, Mélenchon or Macron in France, Biden or Trump in the USA, all of them rule for the bosses, big and small. And for themselves too, maybe.

It's true that in times of plenty there might be a few crumbs to throw at the working class to keep it quiet. But these times are over; capitalism with its inbuilt tendency to crisis, thanks to the finite nature of the world's resources and the system's competitive basis, is now in permanent recession. There are hardly any crumbs left.

And this brings us back to the workers in our ranks who already see that there's no point in voting for parties which don't represent their interests... Because what's clearly needed is a party to organise those who see through the system and who are ready to change it. And not via a ballot box, but through action in the workplace and in the street; that is, through social revolution. ☐

International

UKRAINE: FEWER SOLDIERS, MORE WEAPONS?

Predictably, the NATO Summit gave renewed support for the war being waged by Ukrainians on NATO's behalf against Putin's Russian army - which has so far not been "weakened". After the multiple Russian missile strikes - including against a Children's Hospital in Kiev - Zelensky has renewed his calls for more air defence and F16 aircraft.

In the meanwhile Zelensky's latest conscription measures to mobilise 500,000 new recruits are not yielding results: quite the opposite. (These cut the age to 25, increased the length of time at the front and allowed driving licences to

be removed, bank accounts to be frozen or property of those avoiding the draft to be seized.) In April alone, 30 drownings of people trying to cross the Tisa river (border with Hungary and Romania) were reported. Conscription squads fetch young men off buses and trains and take them to enlistment centres. A man interviewed by the *Guardian* explained: "I had to move out of a working class area, conscription commissioners visit too frequently there. I had the means to move into a building where MPs lived, here I don't risk anything".

There is no indication (at least

publicly) that talks over a peace deal are likely any time soon, even if various intermediaries like the Chinese or even India's Modi who visited Russia at the beginning of July, have been put forward. The poor and the working class in the meantime face a sharp fall of living standards due to the degradation of working conditions, the destruction of energy facilities and the severe labour shortages resulting from conscription. They've nothing to gain from the war and everything to lose. □

ISRAEL: NETANYAHU'S ENDGAME, OR HIS END?

This one-sided war on the Palestinians of Gaza is now in its 9th month. Israeli intelligence says Hamas can't be defeated militarily... Yet Netanyahu says again and again that his red lines can't be crossed in any deal for a ceasefire; i.e., the defeat of Hamas...

If no holds have been barred from day one of the Israeli army attack on Gaza, today the bombing is even less restrained, if that were possible. To kill one "Hamas operative", a school is bombed killing 30 men, women and children. Every day now, when there's a report on TV, newscasters warn of "distressing scenes". Yes, "you might want to look away" from the sight of wounded toddlers, covered in blood, several to a bed. Or the woman cradling the body of her 1-year old son - "I went

out to buy him milk and they killed him"...

Israeli protests growing

However the Israeli population is getting tired of this war and moreover, angrier and angrier over the fact that 120-130 hostages remain hidden somewhere among the rubble - alive maybe, dead, maybe. Larger and larger demonstrations are calling for Netanyahu's resignation and an end to the war, on whatever terms.

So yet again (at the time of writing) talks over a deal to exchange hostages (there are now 9,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails) and to proclaim a ceasefire are taking place between Israeli officials (not politicians, but Shin Bet security officers) and Hamas leaders, with Egyptian

politicians presiding.

A deal too late

The fact that the main backer of Netanyahu's war, doddering US president Joe Biden, is distracted by calls for him to stand down as candidate in the November election, might well mean that there will be no deal. Not yet anyway: Netanyahu intends to address the US Congress on 24 July. Those in the know say nothing will happen before then. Unless the Israeli population - in fact, the working class, including in the West Bank - decide to take matters into their own hands and throw out the "rats in the Knesset" - as demonstrators call Netanyahu and his ultra-Zionist war cabinet.

SUDAN: BRUTAL CIVIL WAR FED BY REGIONAL AND IMPERIAL POWERS



Sudanese fighters ride in a vehicle in a military convoy accompanying the governor of Sudan's Darfur region while en route to Port Sudan on Aug. 30. AFP

Half of Sudan's 45m inhabitants might face hunger by September. This is the direct result of the brutal civil war between the two principal repressive military forces in the country: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by general al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by general Dagalo (a.k.a. Hemedti). It was Hemedti who led his "Janjaweed army" against the people of Darfur in 2005/6 - a genocidal slaughter in which over 300,000 died.

The population takes to the streets

This civil war is the outcome of a failed

revolution. In 2019, a wave of popular protests sparked by the sudden increase in food prices had rapidly turned against the regime, demanding the resignation of absolute dictator Omar Al-Bashir and an end of his 30-year long repressive Islamic regime.

Bashir was forced to step down, but the army then took over. After several stages of negotiations between organisations which had pushed themselves into leadership of the mobilised population, a transitional government was meant to organise elections. But as one protestor at the time explained, "this military will do

all it can to hang on to power" - and it did!

Rivalry between warlords

Al-Burhan's SAF and Hemedti's RSF initially joined forces to repress the 2019 popular mass movement. Both generals then staged a coup d'état in 2021, which put Al-Burhan in power. It was their subsequent rivalry which sparked the civil war, which has so far killed 50,000 people and displaced 8m.

While Al-Burhan enjoys the support of Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Turkey and Eritrea, Hemedti receives aid from the United Arab Emirates. But behind the UAE's support, lurk British and US interests. The UAE is one of the most important US and British allies in the region and one of the top buyers of British weapons. In the past decade alone, it has spent close to £20bn on British arms.

If Sudan is not to become another battle ground for local and imperial powers, the same population that toppled the dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir would need to mobilise around its best organised section, the working class. But also beyond its borders and into the south - to ensure that their forces are strong enough to kick the generals and their backers out!

• The Durham Miners' Gala

This year the Durham Miners Gala will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. It's always a great festival of working class culture - with the parade of the incredible hand-painted union banners and the colliery brass bands. And, it's still going strong, despite the pit closures of the 1980s and 1990s.

In fact it's almost never missed a year - taking place on the second Saturday of July since 1871! It grew out of the annual meeting organised by the Durham Miners' Association which had been founded a few years before. And apart from the two world wars and the Covid pandemic, it has only ever been cancelled if miners were on strike...

Wonderful colliery brass bands

Of course today all the deep coal mines are long since shut down - covered up with green grass. The last working pit at Kellingley in North Yorkshire was closed in 2015. Nevertheless, the Gala has turned into the most important working class gathering in the country. And the skill of playing brass instruments and competing in its annual brass band competition is still being passed down to each new generation.

This year, the usual parade of the amazing union banners along with the bands, through the streets of Durham features the special banners made for the strike 40 years ago. And of course

there's the line-up of speakers for the "Big Meeting" which follows the parade, this year on the theme of "Solidarity Forever". Leaders of those unions whose members took strike action in support of the miners - like train drivers



Our society

- will address the 200,000-strong crowd which is anticipated to attend. And yes, solidarity in words is good to hear. But solidarity in deeds is what counts... and that is still a work in progress for the time being.

• And a festival in Tolpuddle

On the last weekend in July - the 19th to the 21st - the South West Region TUC always hosts the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival in the village of Tolpuddle in Dorset. Over the last few years it has turned into a sort of local "workers' Glastonbury" with trade unionists from the region and further afield camping out and attending a full timetable of events including film, music, poetry, theatre and of course many political meetings and discussions.

The festival is, as the name implies, held as a tribute to the 6 Dorset

farmworkers who were deported to Australia in 1834 for "illegally swearing an oath" of fraternity when they met to organise a secret union. Unfortunately a spy had been sent into their ranks by the local farm bosses, who had them arrested. The irony was that by then it was no longer against the law to form a trade union, but the farm workers didn't know that, living as they did in the agricultural wilderness of Dorset!

Through the efforts of the short-lived, but one million-strong Grand National Consolidated Trade Union (co-founded

by the utopian socialist Robert Owen), which provided lawyers and organised huge demonstrations in London in their support, the 6 were quickly pardoned, but only one of them returned to his home in Tolpuddle.

Today the SWTUC celebrates the "Tolpuddle Martyrs" as the founders of trade unionism, which is not exactly true, but the festival (this year, taking place on 21 July) is a chance for trade unions and socialists from the region and beyond to enjoy a really unique event.

Fighting "green steel" for their livelihoods

Tata Steel workers are still fighting for their jobs. Unite members in Port Talbot, South Wales, were meant to walk out indefinitely from the 8th of July; on the 18th of June, they had started an overtime ban, as well as a to work to rule. However, Unite officials cancelled all industrial action on 1st July, apparently after talks with Tata "confirmed [the company] was prepared to enter negotiations" about the future of the plant - whatever that means. In fact it looks more like union officials conceded to Labour shadow ministers' calls to cancel the walkouts...

On 4th of July, Tata went ahead with the planned closure of one of the two blast furnaces. The company had planned to close the second one in September, but while Unite's indefinite strike was on the table, it threatened to close it earlier, because a shortage of workers (with about 1,500 of them striking) would have meant that "operations" wouldn't be "safe"! On top of it all, on the 6th of June, managers called around 250 Unite members to a "meeting", where they asked them to put in writing their intention to strike, no doubt hoping to intimidate them!

In the meantime, the division between the unions involved has worked in the bosses' favour: GMB and Community unions pointed the finger at Unite officials for "giving Tata reasons" to close the plant earlier - as if calling a strike was the problem! But indeed, it's a problem if workers are not all out together. While union officials seem to be guided by the bosses' promises or threats, the workers know better how to fight against these attacks - and it's not too late.

Their society

Throughout the election campaign, both Sunak and Starmer were promising that they would not raise income taxes. That was the closest either came to acknowledging the cost of living crisis which is affecting a large proportion of the population. Yet for the working class, the crisis isn't one of taxes, but wages and prices, about which the politicians had not one word to say.

The official inflation index may be back down to 2%, but that's only because the price rises of more than a year ago are no longer counted - inflation only compares current price rises to the last year. So, the previous 2 years of rising prices no longer appear in the statistics, but of course those price-rises have already happened and have not fallen since. Food prices are more than 25% higher than two years ago.

The pay rise we need

And of course, no worker had a 25% pay rise. On the contrary, the last few years of high inflation (reaching 11.1% CPI in October 2022) came on top of 15 years of already stagnating wages, since the 2008/9 crisis. In fact even the Financial Times, not a news paper on the side of the working class, has to admit that workers are out of pocket. It writes that

• Labour's "no-secret" plan to cut benefits

Labour leader Keir Starmer has declared that he will be as "bold as Attlee" when working towards ending poverty. Ironically, Labour's manifesto falls a wee bit short in this respect... Not that Clement Attlee's welfare state did away with the "Five Giants" of "idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want", which William Beveridge's 1942 report proposed to "conquer".

While comparisons with the social situation after World War 2 may not be exactly right, poverty levels - including among the "working poor" - have never been so high. Many workers are doing two jobs and still not earning enough to pay their bills. Unsurprisingly, given Starmer's preoccupation with wooing the capitalist class, the manifesto doesn't mention a single concrete action to help benefit claimants.

Record poverty levels

In fact, the only thing Labour is committing to, is a "review" of "Universal Credit so that it makes work pay and tackles poverty". Reading between the lines this sounds very like the Tory cliché that benefit claimants are lazy and refusing to work in order to live the high life at state expense. This

COST OF LIVING CRISIS WHICH THE POLITICIANS CAN DO NOTHING ABOUT



The Guardian's Martin Rowson cartoon entitled "Labour's new Stakanovites" - they said they'd hit the ground running...

the "average worker" would have £10,000 more, per year, than he/she has now, if wages had continued growing at the same rate as they had from 1945-2008.

Instead, even two full-time salaries are not enough for two parents with children to live on. More than 30% of children live in poverty - but in families with 3 or more children, that rises to nearly 50%! Almost one third of households in Wales said they had to borrow money last year to pay essentials, and Citizens' Advice Bureau says it has had to help record numbers of people with "problem debt" this year.

Controlling prices and rents

Governments can help if they want to. For instance with statutory price and rent controls. What's more, wages across the public sector (the parts which aren't outsourced!) are ministers' responsibility - so they could raise them. However the responsibility of all governments - and Rachel Reeves can't stop saying it - is first and foremost to the bosses and their profits. So the working class - public and private - has its "work" cut out... To recover its losses it will have to take matters into its own hands. ☐

when the government's own statistics show that 12 million people are living in absolute poverty; 18% of the population! And 61% of adults in poverty live in a household where at least one person is in work, so they have no choice but to rely on state benefits.

Liz Kendall says it all!

But never, mind, the new Work and Pensions Secretary, Liz Kendall, has spelled it out: "... if you can work, there will be no option of a life on benefits". Forget about "hard working families" who slave for bosses who don't pay them enough to put food on the table!

The sick and disabled (a record number of 2.8m post-Covid) who have already been forced to jump through all sorts of humiliating hoops in order to retain their benefits will face even more humiliation in order to prove that they cannot work. And this to receive a miserly universal credit amount that does not even cover the essentials (food, shower, heating), according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. In fact, universal credit is £900 a month short of the average cost of living!

So how is Kendall going to "end mass dependence on emergency food parcels"

as she pledges? Easy. She will impose "punitive measures" on those who've been out-of-work and on benefits for more than a year, i.e., cut their payments or stop them completely. And then pass them on to the NHS, which already can't cope, or the undertaker?

Class Struggle n° 121

Spring 2024

- Editorial: Labour waits in the wings, while the Tories act out their last scene
- The 1984-85 miners' strike 40 years on, what lessons are there for us today?
- The economic crisis in the USA
- The social and political situation as American capitalism moves toward wider war
- Chinese capitalism: facing its own contradictions and facing imperialism

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WELCOME TO THE RECESSION!

New Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, has already promised to lead "Britain's most pro-growth Treasury". She claims that she is taking over the worst set of circumstances since the Second World War, referring to the fact that GDP per head has barely risen since the 2008/9 crisis, and actually fell last year. But Labour's promise to "grow the economy" is meant as a promise to business; that Labour will do whatever it takes to make sure profits of British business keep going up!

Tim Harford, writing in the *Financial Times*, blames underinvestment, both private and public, for stagnating productivity and a stagnating economy. Certainly, the British economy lags behind the other G7 economies, including Canada, Italy and Japan... And it's true that investment in productive industry - which will not yield immediate profits, has been lacking. The capitalist class prefers to use its cash to speculate these days and this is not exactly "productive" of surplus value!

Apparently following the FT's advice, Labour's pitch to business is that it will make investment "easier". That is, it will offer businesses competitive tax breaks,

exemptions from certain regulations etc., so they invest here, rather than anywhere else... To achieve this - and echoing the message during Labour's election campaign - Reeves said she will work "hand in glove" with business to deliver her new "industrial strategy".

What's obvious is that Brexit has restricted economic growth. Labour says it will look for ways to bring Britain closer

Their economy

to the EU again, but without joining a customs union or the single market - which it could do, of course, without reversing Brexit. And reversing Brexit is something it says it will never, ever, do, playing to the right wing gallery which could perhaps throw it a few votes. In the end there is no actual difference between Reeves and Truss or Hunt: class enemies all of them, equally. □



• Bringing up in the rear

Throughout the election campaign, Rishi Sunak pushed hard the idea that Britain's economy was "growing faster than almost any other major country". That was only true for the last 3 months to April, however. But over the whole course of 2023, Britain's economy grew by 0.1%, slower than every single major country! In fact it was briefly ahead

only of Germany, in the league of G7 countries. France, had growth of 0.7%. And if growth is measured since the pandemic, Britain is still second from bottom, ahead of Germany, and behind France.

The predicted economic growth for 2024 and '25 also has Britain on the bottom rung, according to the IMF

and OECD. And it's no surprise. This country has the oldest and most decrepit capitalism of all - and its isolation from the rest of the world, fuelled by nationalism which claims it's "best" when it's actually worst, hardly helps sell its charms to international capitalism. So good luck to Ms Reeves in finding her "investors" to grow her economy!

Electric car transition not going too well

Car bosses say the "mass market" isn't ready to switch away from ICE (internal combustion engine) cars to electric (EVs). There will be "a longer transition", even if "Electric is still the future", according to President of South Korean car company Hyundai (owner of Kia). The British transition deadline, after which no more new ICE cars are meant to be sold, is meant to be 2035. It seems likely it will be extended.

Anyway EV sales are falling. These cars aren't cheap - on average they cost 33% more. The trailblazer Tesla, whose

sales fell 4.7% in 12 months, has cut prices: but even a well-used Model 3, which costs £42,990 new, still costs £18,000.

Green cover for screw-turning

Of course, the transition to EVs allowed the car companies to "restructure" - that is, cut jobs, increase work intensity, and boost profits. They may sell fewer, but they make more £s.

Ford Europe is cutting 20% of

its European workforce, about 12,000 jobs: 4,000 will go with the closure of Germany's Saarlouis Focus plant. At Valencia in Spain, where Fiestas are made, 1,100 jobs went last year and another 1,600 are

threatened. Last year, Ford UK was meant to cut 1,300 out of its already-reduced ~6,000 workforce. But anyway, its largest production site at Dagenham makes diesel engines only, at this point in time...

Union officials declaring war?

Whether the car bosses really believe there is the potential for a "mass market" in electric cars, is another question. If anything, Ford, for instance, seems to have decided to go for the luxury end of the market - cutting the Fiesta and Focus, in favour of the new electric Explorer, being built in Cologne.

By painting a picture of "uncertainty" over the future, they hope their union "partners" will accept these attacks. But it seems this time Ford has misjudged: even the top metal union bureaucrat in Germany has sent out a "declaration of war" against the company. Let's hope it's not just sound and fury. A fight against Ford (and the others) is long overdue.



Their society

We're told that this year a "record" number of "illegal migrants" crossed the Channel - but so far it's just 12,901 people (since 2018, only 127,220, yes, over 6 years!)... So, is this a lot?

Let's see: even legal migration this year, which Labour, Tory and Reform taunt each other about, at around 700,000 (including 378,000 students and dependents) was still not enough to fill the current, crying, 262,000 vacancies in the NHS and social care (110,000 and 152,000 respectively)!

And by the way, neither has immigration been enough to stop the decline in the population due to falling fertility rates. Today it's even worse, with only 1.6 babies replacing every 2 adults!

In fact, immigration has been consciously made into a "key" issue over the years by politicians and the media. The politicians harvest votes using the politics of blame, just because neither they, nor any of the mainstream parties, have the faintest clue what to do about a degenerating economic and social system which is in near-permanent

YES TO FREE MOVEMENT FOR ALL!



crisis, world-wide.

They sow the divisive nonsense of "too many immigrants" to weaken the working class in its ability to wage

collective fights to defend itself. But we know we need this new blood! The "British" population's future depends on it. □

• Cooper needs tranquillising

When asked on the pre-election Question Time episode to answer "yes or no" as to whether asylum-seekers would get into rubber dinghies to cross the Channel if there were safe and legal routes available, Yvette Cooper refused to reply. Instead, she got red in the face and shouted about "criminal gangs"! According to her they are the sole cause of the small boat crossings. Never mind the logic nor the reality: that nobody would take the risk

of putting his or her life in the hands of crooks (at great cost) if there were other routes into the country! The truth is that the human smuggling business exists and grows only because of rich countries' increasingly repressive laws.

Cooper says she will attack these smuggler gangs by introducing a new cross-border police unit... There is one already. So whether Cooper actually believes that more police officers will

reduce the number of crossings, is anyone's guess! But of course this is not the issue here. The truth is that Labour wanted to garner votes from reactionary Tories and potential Reform voters, since the centrepiece of both their election campaigns was immigration and "stopping the boats". A failsafe solution to the problem would of course be to use a large official boat to ferry migrants over.

• Throwing Afghan refugees back into the abyss

The cynical farce continued when Cooper claimed that Labour would tackle immigration by sending aid to countries suffering humanitarian crises that lead people to flee their homes. It would also "strengthen support for the people of Afghanistan, currently the largest group trying to cross the Channel".

According to Labour, the key will be to increase Britain's aid commitment to developing countries by 0.2%, reaching 0.7% (United Nations target). Never

mind that this is really a micro-drop in the ocean... and it will only be possible "when the fiscal situation allows"...

Today, the figure for total Official Development Assistance provided by all donor countries, was less than \$223 billion, while the amount paid in debt repayments from the poor countries was over double that - at \$400 billion!

One should add that Cooper's rhetoric in support of Afghan refugees and the Tory-implemented Afghan and Syrian

"resettlement" schemes comes in the same week that Labour refused to rule out sending Afghan refugees back to the Taliban-controlled country from which they'd escaped. To date, only 27,182 Afghans under this scheme have been allowed to settle in Britain. That's 0.4% out of over 6 million Afghans who have claimed asylum, or are registered as refugees. Yet another micro-drop in the ocean of barbarism created by the Western powers.

Post Office enquiry: revelations get worse and worse

At the end of June, senior Fujitsu software engineer Gareth Jenkins, who claims to have helped to build the Horizon accountancy system, but consistently claimed it was "robust", gave evidence at the Post Office enquiry. No surprise, given this blatant lie, that he was used as an expert witness by successive Post Office CEOs and the Crown Prosecution Service, between 1999 and 2015 to prosecute 15 of the 983 sub-postmasters and mistresses for fraud.

However, by 2013, at least one legal adviser for the Post Office noted that

Jenkins' statements had become so obviously contradictory that he shouldn't be used as an "expert witness" in court proceedings any more. But it did not mean that those already falsely convicted had their cases reviewed. Seema Misra, for instance, was sentenced to 15 months in prison (while pregnant) in 2010, thanks to Jenkins' evidence and has lived under this cloud ever since.

Of course, telling lies under oath is a crime, punishable with imprisonment. So now Jenkins is trying to stay out of trouble. While he kept denying he knew

of bugs in the system at the time, when asked if he felt under pressure from the Post Office to refute suggestions there were issues with Horizon, he was happy to agree that "there were certainly cases where they were trying to put words into my mouth". In other words, blaming others for his lies.

Like the others who helped to perpetrate what is being called the worst miscarriage of justice in British legal history, Jenkins has said "sorry". It will never be enough.

• The doctors' "waged" an effective campaign Health and wealth

Wes Streeting, now Labour's health secretary, said he'd be phoning up the British Medical Association (the doctors' union) immediately, the very first day after the election.

Unlike the rest of the union leadership, apparently the BMA leaders had no qualms whatsoever about staging a 5-day strike during an election campaign. It ended just 2 days before polling day. And it had the desired effect,

because apparently no further strikes have been called.

It's a pity therefore that others - like Mick Whelan of the train drivers' union - were too respectful of the electoral process and the Labour Party's "image" to take advantage.

Whether the English doctors, who have been on strike for 44 days altogether since March 2023, will accept less than the 35% pay rise they have been

demanding, remains to be seen. But Welsh and Scottish doctors have done so, based apparently on the principle that a deal offered by anyone other than a Tory can be considered...

Streeting, if he has any sense, would have known he had to settle this dispute pronto. So one would hope that the money for the doctors' pay rise was already set aside by the new Chancellor. In full?

• Labour's private outsourcing: the parasitising of the NHS continues!

The Labour Party was very careful not to say in its manifesto how exactly it will "get the NHS back on its feet" as its slogan goes. The manifesto contains many pledges: 40,000 more appointments per week, double the number of cancer scanners, 8,500 additional mental health staff and the return of the family doctor, amongst others... and all powered by AI!

As is well known by now, Streeting is open to private "solutions" to public health care. In fact Labour has long

since scrapped the pledge that it would end outsourcing to the private sector, which used to be in its manifesto. In fact this April, the media exposed the fact that Streeting had accepted over £175k from Peter Hearn, the CEO of OPD group Ltd (a private supplier to the NHS), and John Armitage, hedge fund manager and investor in UnitedHealth, the biggest private health insurer in the world.

In the meantime Streeting speaks about using private sector resources to

cut the waiting lists and help end bed-blocking - as if this was something new, when in fact this has been a routine practice, starting with the Thatcher government continuing through the Blair and Brown days up until today. The excuse being that there was no other way to cope with long waiting lists. Maybe there wasn't and isn't. But there would be a way of ensuring that private profits were not made out of NHS work. Just refuse to pay them...

• Convalescent homes: a rational solution in an irrational system

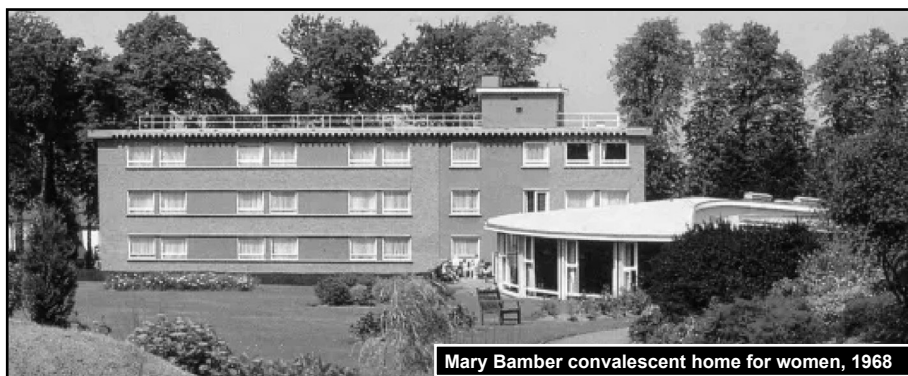
Trying to cover their backs for the crisis in the NHS, politicians and NHS bosses have, amongst other things, blamed "bed-blockers" - patients who, after a medical intervention, injury or illness, don't need acute medical care any more, but aren't well enough to return home. In fact many are discharged home anyway with a social care package which is meant to substitute for rehabilitation and convalescence, but doesn't. Care homes are unaffordable, and convalescent homes and cottage hospitals have all but disappeared.

These were places where people used to be looked after until they were ready to go home. As an ex-patient wrote to *The Guardian*, "you had someone checking you were all right, a doctor looking in once a day and, most importantly, good meals and company". These homes first appeared in the early Victorian era, for the wealthy, however; workers and the poor were treated in charitable hospital and then sent back to their slums. But since diseases (such as tuberculosis) spread easily in crowded spaces and

unsanitary living conditions, convalescent homes for the working and poor started to be set up in the 1840s - away from the cities, offering healthy cleaner air. By the end of the 19th century, more than 300 convalescent homes had been set up in Britain - mostly for workers, soldiers and children.

Convalescent homes were especially needed during the World Wars, remaining in use until the 1980s and 1990s; but in the last few decades,

most have either been taken over by private health companies to provide different services, or have been turned into something else - like luxury flats! However, it's common sense that setting up a proper infrastructure which provides for patients' recovery, would ease the pressure on hospitals and the nurses and doctors working in them. Whether the government is interested in "investing" in this idea, though, is another question!



Mary Bamber convalescent home for women, 1968

Railways: new government... same policies?

Keir Starmer has appointed Louise Haigh as the new Transport Secretary. It's no surprise, like the other new ministers she was already shadowing the position - in her case, since 2021.

In April, Haigh re-announced plans to "renationalise" the railways having previously just reiterated the plan put forward by Labour pariah, Jeremy Corbyn. But this time it seems as if she is, instead, taking up the name "Great British Railways" - and the

plan, announced by the Tories in 2021, but which hasn't been implemented yet. However, for Labour this won't be immediate either: it will span over five years, as the franchise contracts of the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) expire, some only in 4 years' time. Haigh says that Labour could speed up the process when "poor performances breach contracts".

Despite the dire need for new high speed lines to back up the East and West

Coast mainlines and provide access across the centre of Britain, Starmer has said it is "not possible" to resurrect HS2. This one-quarter-constructed line is currently moth-balled, after the Tories, having allowed its budget to explode into the pockets of their private construction mates, cancelled it! That said, it's been reported in the press that Haigh hopes to reinstate the leg between Birmingham and Crewe. It needs far more than that.

International

KENYA: THE YOUTH FACE UP TO
PRESIDENT RUTO

Between 18 June and 1 July, Kenyan President Ruto's thugs shot dead 39 youth and wounded hundreds. These youngsters were protesting against Ruto's Finance Bill, introduced and voted



for in May and which imposed high levels of VAT on basic foods and essentials: 16% on bread, 25% on cooking oil, 50% on fuel, etc, etc. On 25 June the mainly young demonstrators stormed the parliament building and occupied it. Part of it was set alight. That day, parliament fearing for its life, decided it would rescind some of the tax rises. But the protesters wanted the whole Bill withdrawn.

Don't mourn, organise

When the dead and wounded were counted and an international outcry began, Ruto stood up and apologised and said he would indeed cancel the bill.

In the meantime the protesters identifying as "Gen Z" who proudly call themselves "leaderless" and belonging to no political organisation, were burying their dead.

On 7 July, Saba Saba day, they held a concert in memoriam... This day happens to commemorate the 1990 protests against the quasi-dictator, President arap Moi, to demand that he organise elections. Even the brutal Moi didn't fire on protesters that day - although he did

have his political opponents beaten up and jailed.

Back to the USA... and Haiti?

Ruto has form - lots of it. He was implicated in inciting ethnic riots during the 2007-8 election campaign in which 1,300 people were killed and 600,000 displaced. He is known for his many visits to world capitals and got himself invited to Washington, receiving new facilities to borrow money; Kenya's government is deeply in debt to China... No doubt the US is looking to impinge on what it sees as too much Chinese influence in what should be a US backyard.

Anyway the irony of ironies is that the corrupt Ruto - with his own especially violent history - is meant to be sending, at the request of the USA, 1,000 of his cops to help control the violence of the gangs in Haiti. (The first contingent of 400 came back to Nairobi after spending just one day on the Island.)

We can only hope that "Gen Z" realises that it needs to ally with the large Kenyan working class in order to organise effectively against Ruto. □

PORTUGAL: THE 1974 CARNATION REVOLUTION, ANOTHER
LESSON TO LEARN

It's 50 years since Portugal's "Carnation" Revolution - when young army officers overthrew the repressive far-right dictatorship of Caetano, who'd replaced António Salazar in power in 1968. Salazar was an ally of Spain's far-right dictator General Franco who'd drowned the Spanish 1936 revolution in blood. He modelled his authoritarian state on Franco's, ruling over it for 36 years.

Before the revolution

By 1974, compared with other western countries Portugal was economically and socially backward - the result of decades of quasi-feudal dictatorship under the thumb of Salazar's secret police and the Roman Catholic Church. By 1974, largely primitive agriculture was still the main economic activity, and especially in the south, where peasants worked in miserable serf-like conditions.

The regime's survival depended on its African colonies, from which it exported fresh food, raw materials and metal ore. But since the 1960s, colonial rule had been shaken by Nationalist and Communist-led guerrilla movements fighting for independence: in Angola since 1962, Guinea-Bissau since 1963 and Mozambique since 1964. These wars were costly in terms of money and men; at least 9,000 Portuguese soldiers (whose military service lasted 4 years) had been killed.

It was no surprise, therefore, that discontent had grown strong within the

army. By the end of 1973, some junior officers had created a clandestine Armed Forces Movement (MFA) to organise to end the colonial wars.

The coup d'état

At dawn on the 25th of April 1974, an almost bloodless military coup put an end to the dictatorship. The people of Lisbon took to the streets, attacked the political police and opened the prisons filled with political oppositionists, while the soldiers put red carnations in the barrels of their rifles. Caetano handed over power to the anti-Communist General Spínola, "so that power would not fall to the streets". Conscious of the influence that the Communist Party had among the workers and peasants, however, he formed a government with the CP as well as with the Socialist Party, so that popular mobilisations could be "controlled".

Despite this, the following months saw large-scale fights, resulting in gains for workers and peasants: for instance, new political and trade union organisations emerged, strikes and land and housing occupations spread across the country; workers' pressure forced the government to nationalise most of the big companies and legitimise the agrarian reform which farm workers had already imposed. On May Day, a million people marched through Lisbon!

The frightened bourgeoisie fled to Spain, France and even Brazil, while in

the army, non-commissioned officers and soldiers organised general assemblies and committees. Discipline disappeared in favour of discussion and democratic decision-making. A ceasefire was called in the colonies where the liberation forces were then able to proclaim their independence.

The turn to the right

After successful strike waves by workers, in November 1975 a rebellion by left-wing soldiers in Tancos - a hundred kilometres from Lisbon - was put down by the right-wing faction of the army. The pendulum of history swung back to the right and, over the years, many of the advances won by the workers and peasants (trade unions, cooperatives, social laws, nationalisation, land reform) were reversed. In the years which followed, the Socialist Party and the Right alternated in government, while the "tamed" CP channelled popular mobilisation towards reformist ends.

The "Carnation" Revolution was not a workers' revolution - so while it opened the door to social change, it could not sustain it. Organisations claiming to be part of the working class reinforced illusions in capitalist institutions - which are designed to deceive. This was yet another example of the importance for the working class of having its own, independent organisation to lead a class struggle. □

CHINA: 35 YEARS SINCE THE TIANANMEN SQUARE PROTESTS

In the spring of 1989, students and workers shocked and surprised the dictatorial Chinese regime by occupying Tiananmen Square in Beijing in their hundreds of thousands, to demand freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and an end to corruption and state privileges.

Few of the protestors were under the illusion that they were living under "communism". By the early 1970s China's economy had been opened up to the world market by then leader, Deng Xiaopeng, under pressure of the USA. This led to the growth of a new class of Chinese capitalists, joined by capitalists who'd fled at the time of the revolution and now returned to take advantage of Deng's reform.

This had the effect of increasing social differentiation, with rich and super-rich against the huge impoverished majority of peasants, workers, jobless youth and students. Living standards deteriorated fast as Deng's "reforms" systematically cut many of the social benefits which the population relied upon.

One million in the Square

It was the suspicious death of one of Deng's opponents in the party leadership, Hu Yaobang, in April 1989, which finally triggered the protests which led to



the occupation of Tiananmen Square. Rallies were held every day, attended by tens of thousands of students and youth. Some took inspiration from the "internationalist communism" of the 1871 Paris Communards. They waved red flags and sang the Commune's anthem, the "Internationale". At the height of the movement in mid-May there were one million occupying the Square and protests had spread to over 400 cities often led by workers on strike.

By 2 June the regime decided to end the movement by force and 22 army regiments from outside Beijing were called in. On 4 June the army opened fire. After the square and surrounding avenues were finally cleared, thousands lay dead and

injured. The regime then rounded up organisers, many of whom were to spend decades in jail.

Freedom still to be won

This was the last of the great protests demanding political freedom. Deng's successors continued to integrate China into the world capitalist economy. By 2001 it was admitted into the World Trade Organisation. It became the "workshop" of the world, offering millions of cheap workers to multinational investors. A Chinese middle class and "bourgeoisie" established itself which was able to enjoy virtually all the same privileges as their western counterparts, while students attended universities and took posts abroad.

Today these "freedoms" are no longer guaranteed. With the world economy in recession, the renewal of "Cold War" anti-Chinese policies and the raising of tariff barriers, workers are already facing a harsh turn of the screw and increased social restrictions. Certainly a new political movement of Chinese workers and youth is overdue. If it does emerge, it will need to be forewarned and forearmed by the experience of the brave young freedom fighters of 1989. □

In late May, civilians blocked the first wave of unarmed soldiers who had come to enforce martial law in Beijing and explained to them why students were protesting. This unit turned back. Credit...Jian Liu



What follows is the editorial Ford Dagenham Workers' Fight bulletin written on the 5 June 1989, the day after the army moved in to suppress the movement of workers and youth - but at this point, we were still full of hope that they could resist.

China: the corrupt and the privileged counter-attack

On Monday, after 48 hours of almost continuous street fighting, the machine guns of the so-called People's Liberation Army were still busy repressing the rebellion of the people of Beijing.

The town was occupied by tanks and armoured carriers. But the barricades made of military vans which were still burning, were as many witnesses to the fierce resistance of the population.

While Tiananmen Square was cleared by the tanks, in the suburbs steelworkers were joining ranks with the students to fight against new reinforcements entering the town.

And a huge wave of spontaneous demonstrations was spreading to the main cities all over the country.

What initially appeared to be a students' protest has grown into a movement of all the poor and the dispossessed against the corruption and privileges of the Chinese rulers. This is what the Chinese leaders wanted to avoid at any cost. What was tolerable coming from the student minority could only become a deadly danger for the regime once it started to spread to the hundred million strong battalions of the working class.

The first demonstrators to be jailed last week were not students. They were three originators of a new "Autonomous Workers' Union" and that was not a coincidence.

So, twice, the army was ordered to move into Beijing. Twice the soldiers were met with growing numbers of workers, of youth, of ordinary people like them. Twice the soldiers were turned away, while some of them even

joined the demonstrators. Each time these failures could only reinforce the determination of the population and its conduct.

In the end the Chinese rulers have chosen not to take any chance. Once more they have called in the army. But this time it is not to intimidate nor to deter. Probably already 2,000 have been killed. That is what the army was sent for this time, to kill, to scare the millions who had started to rebel, back into resignation and into passivity. The indiscriminate violence of the army's intervention can only have one aim - to terrorise the population.

But the butchers of Beijing have not yet crushed the tide of anger in the population. On the contrary they may well be creating the cement that is going to turn the hundreds of millions of Chinese dispossessed into the most formidable army against all corruption and privileges.

King's Cross railway station (London)**• You don't win without a fight**

The day after the general election, ASLEF's general secretary, Mick Whelan, said that "today is a win for workers". What win and for which workers? We've still not got the pay rise we've been striking for.... But for union leaders, who'll get a chance to sit round a table with government ministers for the first time in 2 or 3 years, it may well be a "win" - yes, for the seat of their pants! But it's no guarantee we'll get the pay rise we need, nor that rail bosses will keep their sticky fingers off our Ts&Cs! That guarantee only comes whenever we fight. [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• We know "what's in a name"!

Apparently Labour's transport minister is planning to talk to the RMT before Parliament goes into recess, but when that is, is "to be confirmed". We suspect that when she does meet Mick Lynch, whether it's before September or before Xmas (!) she'll try to offer a miserable deal just like the previous one(s), hoping we'll accept just because this is "Labour". But we won't. [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• Money for thinnish cats

We hear that LNER managers are giving themselves a pat on the back, plus two thank-you bonuses: one for 2022-2023 and another for 2023-2024 totalling

£2,700. This has been agreed after "a series of conversations with DfT and DOHL". So when it comes to the bosses, the DfT has no problem coughing up? We're taking note. [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• While pay is pending a strike is impending

Of course, the pay rise for train drivers - who are indispensable to the service - has been pending for 3 years, while it's 2 years for the rest of us railway workers, who do all the work on the ground! So what do we need to do about it? Take a long summer "holiday" and see how they cope without us? [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• What does this mean for us?

We read that the DfT's OLR (Operator of Last Resort that has been running LNER and employs LNER workers) has already been replaced by a National Train Operator (NTO). Presumably Tory Harper was already launching "Great British Railways"? So, does the different name imply a different function? And then what? And what does this mean for Labour's promise to renationalise? What will be left alone, and what will change? [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• Dangerous GN night shifts

Why is nothing being done to change the rosters being worked by GN station staff - when they include 12-hour consecutive night shifts? This is unsafe, dangerous and damages workers' health - proven



facts, which have been known for decades. Whether union officials signed off these rosters many years ago or not, makes no difference. They have to be thrown out! [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• Bosses ignoring H&S

By the way, any worker who does nights is meant to be offered an annual full health examination and regular heart, blood pressure tests and also a chest x-ray every few years. This is according to existing H&S regulations! Why is this not happening any more? [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

• Unisex skirts, the other option!

When it was very hot weather two weeks ago, some of us working on KX and Euston stations thought the natural - and safest - thing was to wear shorts. However, managers said that "shorts are not part of the uniform". Okay, then we can all wear skirts - a much "cooler" option! [King's X Workers' Platform 10/07/24]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**BMW's production chaos: not for us to pay for!**

On the 1st of July, production at the BMW Cowley plant returned to two shifts, after 5 months of only one morning shift. Each "team" rotated in blocks of 2 weeks, while one team was at work the other was laid off. We had no lay off pay, instead we could "choose" to use our annual leave, or to "borrow" wages from BMW via the "Working Time Account" system. But we have to "repay" these wages to the company in the future, through compulsory overtime whenever it

demands.

Despite the "slow-down" supposedly being over, we've already had "down days" scheduled in, and have night shifts regularly cancelled - apparently because of parts shortages! On top of it, BMW has introduced scheduled stoppages whenever enough faulty cars are produced. In each of these cases, we are not paid, but "loaned", wages, which have to be "repaid"... So, when it gets to the end of the week, instead of having our usual



day off on Friday, or a weekend, BMW calls overtime shifts so we "pay back" our "loans"... As if we owed them anything! ☐

• Safety first

How can R&H tow-train drivers get just one hour break in three bits (2x15min, and 30mins) in a 9¾-hour shift? Tow-trains may not be high-speed HGVs, but they can still do damage. We need more drivers and longer breaks. We haven't forgotten the accidents involving tow-trains over the past few years, due to management speed ups. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 02/07/24]

• No skin off our backs

Because of Brexit, cars manufactured here have to meet certain "rules of origin" in order not to be charged an extra 10% tariff when exported to the EU. 40% of the value of the car, and 30% of the battery pack and cell, have to "originate" in Britain or the EU.

This percentage was meant to go up at the start of the year, but that is now postponed until 2027. Nevertheless, if the bosses have to pay a 10% tariff, it's

for them to pay, not us! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 02/07/24]

• Putting them to good use...

These new racks BMW's given us to use next to the line are crap! They're made of cheap plastic, and break into pieces if we just look at them... Does that mean we can get one of these managers to hold the tooling for us? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 02/07/24]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Letter from the North West

Welcome to the silly seasonal variations in our start/finish times. It's yet another change union leaders agreed to without our consent. We were finding it hard enough to finish in our allocated time as it was. Now, duties simply aren't going out for delivery. And we're meant to try to do the impossible even faster, to finish by the new finish times!

Some of us are also having to put up with the "snake": our sorting frames

are now in one long line. The space we had to prep our duties has been reduced. The natural light we used to enjoy has been covered over by the "wall of death". Delivery 2.0? Misery 2.0 we call it. Whatever happened to the 75/25% split in slots on the letter frames (i.e., 75 single slots and 25 double, which eases prepping for deliveries)?

The two tier workforce we went on strike against, is really taking hold now. Offices are reaching the point where



the old hands are in the minority. The savings being made must be enormous. No paying for breaks, no paying of supplements, no Saturdays off. Before the strike we would never have put up with it. What a mess! ☐

• What a cock-up!

Apparently, the Mount's (juvenile!) top manager thought that his early morning appearances at 5.30am would suddenly turn his "re-alignment" into a success. In fact, this place has never been so upside-down, precisely thanks to his ridiculous new re-alignment! But we don't expect him or any of his fellow bosses to admit their utter failure. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/07/24]

• Making matters worse...

So what are these managers doing other than throwing their hands up? In fact, they're offering more of their lousy 9-month-VRs! We've already said goodbye to workmates this month, and we expect more farewells in August

and maybe September? That is, more workmates going without replacement. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/07/24]

• "Fire and rehire"?

It's shocking in fact: last week, despite managers claiming a "redundancy" situation, they brought in more agency workers. This shouldn't even be possible according to employment law. What's more, it's proof, if it was needed, that managers' realignment is totally unworkable. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/07/24]

• Ridiculous

Distribution can also tell a story: we're now arriving at 6.30am for the morning shift, and sitting around for 30 minutes to an hour until there's a van we can use!

Yep, the night shift are often delayed, and the vans that are available, are often the wrong sort! Example: they're too big to drive into or out of some DOs. The situation couldn't be more disjointed and illogical! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/07/24]

• We're not their stakeholders

Those of us who haven't sold our shares got a letter from the bosses, telling us about EP Group's move to take over RM and advising us to sell. But union leaders say we shouldn't sell them and are calling for "whoever owns Royal Mail to now give postal workers a very significant ownership stake in the business" instead... So this is it? Whatever happened to their pledge to "fight" for renationalisation? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 10/07/24]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Ford's promises were never worth the paper...

In mid-June Ford Europe bosses announced that 1,622 jobs at the Valencia plant were to be cut - about a third of what's left of the workforce, after successive job cuts have decimated this former "mega-plant" which used to produce 5 different models. It's now shrunk to around 3,200 workers, producing just the Kuga. In April its small transit was already transferred to Turkey...

The union officials are stunned. Hadn't they participated in a "forced bidder" competition with Ford Saarlouis counterparts, agreeing to longer working

hours and a wage cut, in order to guarantee production... Now there is only a vague promise of a so-called multi-energy model maybe due for production in 2027. In the meantime, the workers have no jobs!

The German officials are also in shock... They're calling Ford's breaking of the "Ford Future Agreement" they signed "a declaration of war" by Ford. Because Ford now wants to change its plans and all the guarantees of no redundancies (it was only until 2032, anyway) which they gave union leaders are off the table - and jobs are to be cut.



Well, if the Chairman of the German Works Council is inviting all Ford workers in Europe - and Britain - to join in a war against Ford, that would be a "first". But, sure, we're all for it... ☐

• Sacking the old hands!

Transport Operations bosses want to change the sick leave review process. They assume that if we've been off sick we're swinging the lead - an assumption based, no doubt on their own mentality. So after damaging our health with years of shift work and manual labour, they're trying to finish the job by terminating us? Literally? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 03/07/24]

• Indefensible

By the way, they say that this was part of the change in collective agreements which Ford unilaterally made - after we turned down the last pay deal! So no, they can't use that fraudulent argument in their defence. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 03/07/24]

• Permanent or nothing

Some temps have already had their "contracts" renewed 3 times! So why on earth are they still temps? Indeed, what's

Ford's excuse for having any temps at all? Is it that union leaders told them it was OK, back in the day? Because it never was!

• Can't even give them away?

It made us laugh when we heard that Ford might be offering us a discount on one of the many EVs which they aren't able to flog - instead of a pay rise this year!! No thanks! But we would take a free EV, plus charger, plus what they owe us after the below inflation "cut" we got last year! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 03/07/24]

THE FRENCH "SNAP" ELECTION

France's political leadership and left-wing reformists standing in President Macron's "snap" election were worried that Marine Le Pen's far-right "Rassemblement National" (RN) would "win" the 2nd round on 7 July. In fact it didn't. RN won 142 parliamentary seats getting 10m votes - a 37% share.

To everyone's surprise, the rainbow alliance of the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) came first, with 190 MPs elected. Macron's centre-right "Together" alliance, came second, with 165. Both these awkward alliances were cobbled together at the last minute after RN's first round "win", (and EU election success) for the purpose of keeping the RN out of government. On 7 July, 63% of the electorate turned out - a record(!), giving the 2 main anti-RN blocks a collective 51% vote-share.

The defeat of the RN certainly provides a respite for workers and especially those of immigrant origin, given the divisive attacks it planned to

launch against their rights. But it would be a mistake to believe that this threat is now dispensed with.

Hung parliament

This result meant, however, that no party gained the required majority of 289 MPs (in the 577-seat assembly), to form a government. So now, from their point of view, the "coalitions of convenience" need to hold together - even though in previous similar scenarios, they did not.

Journalists describe the NFP as "hard" or even "extreme" left. Led by former Socialist Party senator, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of "La France Insoumise", (=France, unbowed!), this front brings together Socialist and Communist party politicians who've served in previous governments, plus Greens and a few anti-capitalist activists. In other words hardly "far-left", nor new! It was Mélenchon's support for Palestine which gave him a reputation he hardly deserves... Anyway, this coalition consists of parties/

politicians who fully respect the political establishment.

Revolutionaries are needed

In the meantime, the NFP pledges to revoke Macron's increase in the pension age to 64, to increase the minimum wage, and tax the wealthy. But it's unlikely that Macron, who remains president for the next 3 years, will give them much political space. Moreover, the French capitalist class, which dictates government policy from behind the scenes, will ensure that its will prevails, whoever dominates parliament.

As the comrades from *Lutte Ouvrière* (our sister group in France) wrote: "There may be 3 blocks in the Assembly, but there are still 2 fundamental classes in society. To defend their interests, workers will have no choice but to confront the bourgeoisie and organise politically, and independently, in order to take power into their own hands". □

Letter from India: mob lynchings and train crashes

The Hindu far-right saw Prime Minister Modi's re-election for a 3rd term on 4 June as a green light to resume - if not escalate - attacks against Muslims. The BJP might have fewer seats in parliament, but its ability to organise communal violence on the streets hasn't diminished.

On 7 June, two Muslim men transporting cattle allegedly for slaughter were killed by BJP youth activists in the eastern state of Chhattisgarh. On 18 June, a Muslim man accused from stealing from a Hindu home, was publicly beaten to death in Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh. In Mandala, Madhya Pradesh, 11 Muslim homes were demolished by the police for "storing beef" (banned in this state). On 19 June, a crowd led by the BJP-affiliated Bajrang Dal attacked and looted Muslim shops in Nahan, Himachal Pradesh.

Railway cuts and privatisation kill again

The breakdown of public infrastructure continues. On 17 June, a goods train smashed into the Kanchenjunga Express, near the town of Jalpaiguri in West Bengal: 15 people were killed, including the driver and guard of the goods train; 60 were injured. It's less than a year since the train crash in Odisha, where 296 were killed and over 1,500 injured.

The Railway Board blamed the goods

train driver for passing a red signal. It was later revealed that the driver had been officially authorised to disregard red signals on the route, since the automated signalling system had failed three hours earlier. Now Railway Board members have decided he was driving above the speed limit, but refuse to make public the train's actual speed. They also blame signalling staff for not repairing faulty signals.

This cover-up is the usual outcome of these investigations, which inevitably

exonerate the authorities. What's clear, is that maintenance isn't done: there are officially 300,000 unfilled vacancies on the railways; there simply aren't enough Signal and Communications workers to fix signalling systems.

The plan to cut the public sector workforce and privatise the whole system, pursued by Congress and BJP-led governments alike since the 1990s (the reason why these vacancies are not filled) can only result in more disasters.

Onlookers watch as National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescuers work at the site of a train collision, near Rangapani station, West Bengal state, India, 17 June 2024



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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