

WORKERS' fight

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

FOR A COUNTER-OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE PROFITEERS!

The saga around Jaguar Land-Rover (JLR, owned by India's Tata group) is a testament to the hypocritical policy of this government in the present crisis. At the eleventh hour, the government seems to have chosen to sink the company's bailout. As plans for the future of the JLR plants had been suspended for months, pending the outcome of these negotiations, JLR's 15,000 workers and probably at least twice as many subcontractors, are now left to their own devices in order to defend their jobs.

Cynical, chauvinist demagogy

Yet, compared to the astronomical bank bailouts, the sums involved were peanuts. Nevertheless the government raised unprecedented demands: the right to appoint JLR's chairman and a member of its board, and to oversee decisions on investment and jobs. And this was portrayed by Brown as a "bold move" to protect workers' jobs.

But did Brown lift a finger when JLR sacked 450 workers a few months ago? Or when car companies sacked their agency workers? No, these job cuts were all met with the same deafening silence! In fact, this government is among the worst job slashers. In the banks it controls, it has presided over more than 10,000 job cuts among mostly low-paid workers, while its ministers are savaging many more in the Royal Mail and other public services.

And they want us to believe that their policy has anything to do with protecting jobs? What a cynical farce!

In fact, in an attempt to make even more political capital out of the JLR saga, ministers said they

wanted to ensure that taxpayers' money would not be used by Tata outside Britain! But has Darling ever demanded from RBS that it did not use public funds in the US, where most of its investment business is located? Of course not! So why make this demand when it comes to the Tata group, if not for the sake of pandering to crass nationalist prejudice?

Our jobs are only safe in our own hands

In fact, this government is politicking with workers' jobs. Never trust the bosses' politicians! This is the lesson of the JLR saga. But it is also an illustration of the dead end into which union leaders keep pushing us, when they tell us to go to Brown with a begging bowl, in the hope of getting a subsidy for our employers to "save" our jobs.

As if the bosses were in the business of saving jobs rather than making profits, including by cutting jobs and wages. If they can get away with it, they will take the money and run! And Brown will certainly not stop them. After all, isn't "commercial interest" the motto of this government?

The Tata group, JLR's owner, is just like any other company. It slashed JLR's workers jobs just as it is now slashing jobs at Corus, another of its British subsidiaries. Should Tata be stopped? Yes! Should the government be trusted to do that, as our union leaders tell us? Certainly not!

The sacked Visteon workers did not fall for such fairy tales and they were proved right. They did not ask Brown for help on Visteon's behalf. On the contrary, they threatened Ford, Visteon's former owner

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Contents

p2 The "swine flu" pandemic
Costs savings before safety
NHS whistleblowers

p3 Budget: the rich, the jobless
and public services
Hands off our pensions!

p4 Unite for jobs
Hillsborough 20 years on
Return of the "SUS" law

p5 Workplaces:
Job cuts at Royal Mail

p6 Workplaces:
- BMW Mini - Oxford
- King's Cross - railways

p7 Workplaces
- Ford-Dagenham, Visteon

p8 Iraq
The G-20's bogus "aid"

and main customer, with mayhem. There were only 600 or so of them, but they won a payout far larger than they could have got from Brown.

The future of our jobs will only be safe if we, workers, use our collective strength in a general counter-offensive against the profiteers, to force the bosses to use the wealth they piled up over the years to share the work between all of us, without loss of pay. And if bosses go bust, then the state can take over their plants, without compensation for shareholders, and run them on a non-profit basis - not under the control of ministers who worship capitalist profit, but under our own collective control! □

What they don't say about the pig flu

By 8 May, 34 British cases of the new "swine flu" had been confirmed. Nobody here has died. But in Mexico, there have been 42 lab-confirmed deaths so far. And that is the tip of the iceberg, because Mexico has not got enough resources to test - let alone treat - flu victims. In fact, a total 1,840 cases of this flu with severe pneumonia, were diagnosed by doctors, causing at least 152 deaths - mainly among young people between 20-40, rather than the very old, very young, or already sick, who are the usual flu victims.

So obviously this flu, for which there is no vaccine yet, is a threat and needs swift responses from health agencies. But guess where the first delay originated? Mexican doctors had to send lab specimens all the way to Canada, because they were refused entry into the US under Terrorism Laws! So even as cases were identified in the US, no link with the Mexican

virus was made until a week later - a potentially lethal delay in a pandemic!

Of course, some measures (forced quarantines, school closures, etc..) may seem over the top, but over-reaction is certainly better than under-reaction, as happened with the "mad cow" disease! However, the flu is infectious 24 hours before it even causes any symptoms. So staying at home and the obvious "catch it, bin it, kill it" advice will not stop flu spreading.

Only the availability of effective drugs and vaccines and good tracking of the virus by tests can reduce its consequences. Luckily for the rich countries (and the filthy rich drug companies), they stockpiled Tamiflu against the 2003 bird flu which didn't materialise and Britain has 50 million doses, fast expiring - now being given to flu contacts.

But poor countries like Mexico don't have such "luck". □



Never mind the risk, cost savings must come first!

Unbelievably, or maybe we should believe anything is possible with the present government, the front-line health officials at Heathrow who work for the Port Health Authority are having their hours cut as part of the public sector "efficiency" cuts. Yes, while there's a swine flu pandemic risk! Not only that, but the Health Protection Agency itself is responsible for these cuts. This will

mean that the health inspectors will be there only from 6am to 6pm and any flights arriving during the night will not be checked for health hazards!

The workers concerned exposed these cuts as making a mockery of the government's swine flu "protective measures". And they sure do. □

NHS - the whistles can only get louder!

Public sector workplaces are now supposed to have a policy to protect staff who might blow the whistle on bad practice, as a result of the Public Interest Disclosure Act. Despite this, jobs still depend on the "good word" of managers. A third of whistleblowers say they've been victimised, or suffered in their jobs as a result. All too often, unless they take the "drastic" step of going public, any concerns they report get buried under bureaucracy.

Margaret Haywood had an unblemished 20 year record as a nurse. When she came to Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust, she found herself working in "the worst ward she had ever seen". This hospital is supposed to be the Universities' flagship, but she found patients who were dying of cancer, left without pain relief for hours. Clearly believing that she could get things changed no other way, she agreed to film secretly for BBC's Panorama.

Eventually, the Trust admitted to the appalling conditions and made an "unreserved apology". However, the management were infuriated to see their "flagship" exposed as being more like a vermin-infested prison hulk and were determined to take revenge against Nurse Haywood. She was struck off the Nursing Register for "breach of patient confidentiality".

The Nursing Council accused her of placing working for Panorama before her nursing duties. But what is a nurse's duty, when she sees patients suffering? Does confidentiality come first? They also said that "meaningful prior consent" was not obtained. But patients and their relatives did agree to use of the footage after the filming. They were horrified by the conditions on the ward and knew exactly what they were consenting to. What if prior consent had been obtained? The management would have got wind of it and seen to it that the public never did! □

Darling won't make the rich sweat, even if they're squealing

Darling's 50% rate for those earning £150,000/year (but only from 2010-2011) caused some uproar. He must have been pleased, because he certainly wants us to believe he is doing something to take from the rich and give to the poor, when that is precisely what he is not doing!

It is worth remembering that there was a top rate of 60% up until 1988 - under Thatcher herself - and that it was 83% in 1974-1980! So today's rate is not even comparable to the rate during the last serious recession, in the 1970s. Besides, the top tax rate is among the lowest ever, thanks to Labour - and corporation tax is at its very lowest (18-28%)!

Anyway, the wealthy pay nothing on their assets. Their capital gains are only taxed at 20%. They do not pay NI contributions on salaries above £884/w, nor on financial income. And they can easily reduce their "taxable income" if they turn themselves into

a company, convert income into capital gains, retire early, or invest in a "tax avoidance" lawyer! Unlike the rest of us whose tax is taken directly out of our pay packets, they can hide their wealth and jump through hundreds of loopholes to avoid paying a penny. In 2007, the TUC worked out that just by using legal tricks, the rich avoided paying £13 billion in taxes!

In fact this bogus 50% rate turns out to be, not only the sum total of Darling's means to "make the rich pay"... next year, but a way to divert attention away from the government's real aim: to make workers pay for the crisis. Tax on tobacco and alcohol increase immediately. Fuel tax goes up in September. Public spending cuts will lead to serious service cuts and tens of thousands of job cuts. In short, this raft of anti-working class measures will have to be fought. □

Cuts in public services - an injury to all

After all the money that was thrown at the banks, the big black hole in the government's finances has to be filled somehow. Darling claims he is not going to cut public services - "you can't cut your way out of a recession", says he. But, in fact, his budget aims at an extra £5bn of cuts in public services (NHS, Education, etc.,) over the next year. This comes on top of the £30bn of cuts already planned. In total, £45bn in "efficiency savings" are to be achieved by 2013 in the Civil Service alone. Oh but these cuts will only be in "back-office" services, claim government officials - as if these workers did not need to make a living and as if their jobs were not actually part of the backbone of the public sector!

These extra cuts are supposed

to come from things like "shared services" - that is, centralising functions like computers and personnel management, in order to cut jobs. And for the remaining staff, the programme of relocating them out of London will be stepped up so as to flog off the vacated London buildings. In addition, more slices of the public sector - like the Royal Mint - are to be privatised.

None of this is new, of course, and ministers will undoubtedly cover their backs by peddling, once again, the worn-out rant about the so-called "privileges" of low-paid public sector workers. But this is just another way of making all of us pay for the capitalist bailout - by cutting public sector jobs and, as a result, cutting services to the working class as a whole. □

• Thumbs-up for the job-cutters, thumb-screws for the jobless

Darling's budget included some pious words about helping the jobless. So, under-25s out of work for more than a year will be "guaranteed" a job or training - in fact, they will have no choice, since their benefits will be cut off if they turn down the "offer". Not that Darling intends to create decent jobs - even though this would be a far better use of public funds than lining the bankers' pockets!

Nothing new here - just another leg of the tired old "New Deal". Except that, while this just spells more harassment for the jobless, some businesses will benefit from Darling's "benevolence". For instance, a large chunk of the £1.7bn allocated to "helping the jobless" will go to companies involved in policing ("counselling" in government speak) the unemployed.

As for "training", the budget gives an example: private care homes taking on young jobless will be able to get their wages subsidised. Presumably, ministers consider this a way of "training" young workers into the habit of earning rock-bottom wages!

Significantly, Darling says nothing about preventing employers from cutting jobs. In fact, in this same budget report, the government boasts about having itself cut 86,700 civil service jobs since 2004. Which says it all!

• Hands off our pensions!

A hidden cost of the crisis is that pension funds have lost about 30% of their value. In the case of final salary schemes, regulations gave employers 10 years to make up for any deficit. But last month, the regulator decided that this rule would no longer be enforced. The next day, share prices went into an upward surge. Shareholders know what is good for them!

Things are even worse for the majority in defined contribution schemes, which were designed to free the bosses from any risk. The pensions of millions stand to be cut as a result. Worse, in April, insurance giant Aon cut its contributions to its employees' scheme by up to 50%. Ominously, Aon is a pension adviser with companies employing nearly 4m workers - so that other bosses can be expected to try the same trick.

Entrusting workers' pensions to the financial market, not to mention the bosses, was always a dangerous gamble. But given the capitalists' drive to make workers pay for their crisis, it is a gamble that the working class just cannot afford!

"Unite for Jobs", yes, but against the job slashers!

After the 28 March TUC demo in London and the May Day marches across the country, a follow-up was urgently needed against the bosses' attacks on jobs. Unite's 16 May "Unite for Jobs" march could have been this next step. However, this was not what the Unite leaders had in mind. Instead of going for a national mobilisation, to allow the largest possible number of workers to make themselves heard and measure their collective strength, Unite chose to confine its march to Birmingham.

In fact, rather than uniting workers' ranks, the objective of the Unite leaders' campaign is (in their own words) to bring "the union together with senior business, academic and political figures to make a historic case for action to protect jobs" - this "action" being a £1.2bn government subsidy to industry, supposedly to "save 600,000 jobs".

No-one will be surprised that union leaders, whose main concern has long been their cosy relationship with big companies, should come up with such a policy - nor that someone like ex-

CBI director Digby Jones should support it. After all, companies welcome public handouts, preferably with no strings attached, so that they can take the money and run - cutting even more jobs in the process!

But how can it be in workers' interests to join ranks with the very bosses who are slashing their jobs and cutting their wages? And this, to "win" the dubious privilege of subsidising these job-cutting employers with tax-payers' money? This is just pro-business nonsense!

On the contrary, it is high time the capitalists stopped lining their pockets out of public funds. To be effective, any fight back over jobs should be aimed at forcing big companies and their wealthy shareholders to shoulder the cost of their system's crisis, by advocating the sharing of available work between all workers without cutting jobs or pay. Whether this is on the union leaders' agenda or not is irrelevant. What will be decisive is what is on the demonstrators' own agenda! □

Hillsborough 20 years on: police still covering up the cover-up

15 April this year marked the 20th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster, when 96 Liverpool football fans were killed in a crush at a Sheffield football ground. But even now, many questions remain unanswered.

No-one doubts that the police bear heavy responsibility for the many deaths, by failing to ensure that fans were directed to areas of the ground that were not yet full. But their commanding officer of the day originally claimed that fans had forced open the gate into the ground. And the Sun newspaper supported these attempts to blame the fans.

Records made available only a few years ago, however, have to some extent exposed the police cover-up during the inquest and public inquiry. One constable's original statement said that his colleagues were sat down in tears, while fans were carrying the dead and injured to safety. A senior officer added an instruction to rewrite it, as it showed the fans were

better organised than the police. Other statements were altered to remove references to victims laid out on the pitch, but still showing signs of life. On the basis of these statements, the coroner had confined the scope of the inquest to the events up to 3.15pm, on grounds that by then, nothing could have saved the victims. As a result, the inquest did not consider whether some lives could have been saved, nor why only one ambulance ever got through to the pitch, where it was quickly overwhelmed.

No criminal charges were ever brought against police commanding officers. Nor was anyone charged over the fact that a semi-final had been commissioned on a football ground whose safety certificate was a decade out of date. If some of the facts are finally filtering out, it is only due to the determination of the victims' families who, twenty years on, are still fighting to expose the truth. □

• How many Clubcard points for a Tesco mortgage?

Tesco has been making superprofits - on sales of £1bn a week it made £3bn pre-tax profit this last year. Those of us (everyone?) who have to buy food, washing powder, etc.. know why. The food prices which spiralled last year have not come down and soap, toothpaste and other necessities have been going up too.

What's more Tesco stores have appeared all over the place, including in old Woolworths stores, so in some parts of the country, it is hard to find anywhere else to shop. Tesco thinks it has got us where it wants us. So now CEO Terry Leahy says he wants Tesco to open its own bank - in an attempt to cash in on people's current understandable mistrust of the high street names. He thinks we will trust greedy Tesco any more?

Leahy plans to start with 60 branches and to "tap into" customers' Clubcard data to find potential banking customers. How will they choose, one might wonder? Will they avoid those who buy only the cheaper "value" brands, seeing them as "sub-prime" customers? Or will they be its chief targets?

• Return of the "SUS" law

The police's unsocial behaviour is under the spotlight. Videos have shown an officer knocking Ian Tomlinson to the ground, minutes before he died on the day of the G20 protests as well as other acts of police brutality.

Since then, figures about the use of section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which allows police to use stop and search powers without any suspicion of wrongdoing, have been released. In London, there have been more than 150,000 random stop and searches since October 2007. But they are not "random" since there was an increase of 185% for white people, 277% for Asians and 322% for Caribbean and African people!

Police bosses now promise to go back to using Section 43 of the Act, which requires "reasonable suspicion". But there will be exceptions: around parliament and Whitehall, the police can still assume that everyone is a potential terrorist!

The way the police overreacted at the G20 protests, their callous treatment of Ian Tomlinson and their racist overuse of stop and search, are all sides of the same coin. By using terrorism as a pretext for massively increasing police powers, Labour has only exposed its ever-increasing arrogance.

Royal Mail: privatisation or not, the government goes on the offensive...

At the start of May, the sale of a 30% stake in Royal Mail - as proposed by Brown - was again put into question. Deutsche Post said it definitely wasn't interested. The most likely buyer, TNT, now also seems reluctant. And then there are hints that, due to his very low standing in opinion polls, Brown might think again about this unpopular sale after all.

But part-privatisation or not, the government is going ahead with massive job cuts, attacks on workers' conditions and the introduction of new delivery methods, making fewer workers work harder for less. One of the larger London sorting offices may be closed while 5 sorting offices in the North-East, together with

those in Oxford and Reading, are already being wound down for closure - which will mean thousands more job losses. In Mount Pleasant - the largest London sorting office and the delivery office for the City, 314 job cuts, including 15% of delivery jobs, are planned.

On top of this, a pay freeze was announced on 27 April - so that given the already low rates of pay (£285-£311/week, full-time), which can only be made up by bonuses, allowances and overtime, will go down even more in real terms!

These cuts are not only unacceptable for workers, they also mean reduced level of mail services for the public, and they must be resisted! □

How the CWU leaders try to dodge the necessary fight over jobs and wages

Opposition to the government's new attacks is widespread in Royal Mail. In Scotland several delivery offices have already taken official 24-hour action and there have been spontaneous walk-outs in some offices. In London, where 1,600 immediate job cuts are planned, a region-wide strike ballot is being conducted at the time of writing.

However, whether the CWU leaders are willing to wage a real fight back is another question, even if workers are prepared for it. For instance, in London, union officials huff and puff over the managers' imposing cuts and revised duties without consulting local officials first. Under union instruction, workers rightly refuse to sign up to the new duties. But when they want to walk out in response to managers' bullying tactics, the CWU tells them they must wait for the London-wide ballot! Yet CWU leaders have actually offered Royal Mail a strike "moratorium", if it agrees to involve the union in deciding where and how the axe falls!

The CWU leaders do not plan to oppose ALL job cuts. They only want to remain RM's recognised partners! But it gets even worse:

over the years the CWU leaders got into the habit of "selling" jobs for a "share" of Royal Mail's savings as a bonus to remaining workers. Never mind the fact that such divisive tactics undermine any resistance! Needless to say, Royal Mail was more than willing to play ball! But this time round, RM no longer wants to play along, thereby pulling the carpet from under the CWU leaders' feet. If there is a strike ballot at all in London, it is only because this dirty horse-trading is off the agenda. But if RM put it back on, the CWU leaders have already said they will call off all strikes! As for the pay freeze, it is treated as a secondary issue. When in fact, given the low wages, the fight for jobs and decent wages should go hand in hand!

Postal workers have been through this before - resorting to unofficial action precisely because of the CWU leaders' policy of opposing any serious fight back against the drastic job cuts of the past 5 years (probably 70,000, at least). This time again, they will need to take their fight into their own hands - and they will need to keep it there! □



Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• EC needs some dc!

It's urgent that something's done about the situation in EC - and we're not sure this can wait till a "London-wide ballot" over the job cuts is ready... Things are getting out of hand! The bosses are playing a dirty game trying to make us sign up for the reduced number of jobs under their revision - and many fear that even the minimal benefits of seniority will be lost. This doesn't need to happen! But we do need to keep it together! While rejecting any reduction in our numbers, we could redesign all the jobs ourselves, so they're as equal as possible (with special jobs for the less able) and then allocate them according to our own plan, including replacing all lost jobs - which would be essential! This is what we need to talk about! [W.Fight bulletin - Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 5/5/09]

• It's a chance to sort out the union too!

A "yes" vote in the coming strike ballot won't only be a chance to stand up against the cuts. It will also allow us to be in a position to kick the backsides of some of the union officials who don't sound altogether convinced about a proper fight back. (Let alone the national fight back so obviously needed). The "call to arms" for London ends with some convoluted reasoning - but then again, we're used to that! We can sort out the most effective way to fight on the ground, ourselves - and extend it cover the pay freeze, too, as well as the rest of the country - why not? We have everything to gain. [W.Fight bulletin - Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 5/5/09]

King's X - a king-size can of profiteering worms

How many private companies does it take to run a railway station? In King's Cross, it takes at least 7, on top of the owner of the station and tracks, state-run Network Rail.

There are 4 train operators: First Capital Connect (FCC) runs the suburban lines, while Hull Trains, Grand Central and National Express East Coast (NEXC) share the East Coast Mainline. Then there is Rail Gourmet, which supplies NEXC trains with food, ISS which cleans trains and Initial which does station cleaning.

Every company rents offices or workshops from Network Rail, while the train operators also rent track use. In fact, each company has commercial contracts with several others - for permanent services but also, on an adhoc basis, to deal with day-to-day hiccups. And this leads to real absurdities.

For instance, when repairs need to be done, a mountain of paperwork has to be completed even before the work can start, even though workers could get it done without delay. So, when a simple on-train water pipe connection needs replacing, 3 companies get involved: Network Rail, which is responsible for the water supply, ISS, which is in charge of filling the water tanks, and NEXC, which employs the pipe fitters. And all 3 check that the others are not cheating on them. Because money has to change hands and profit has to be generated somehow.

Ironically, much of these profits come out of public funds, anyway! The only "benefit" of privatisation is to fuel this on-going in-fighting between the railway sharks for their share of the state's subsidy - resulting in this absurd can of worms. □

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• At our expense? No way!

All 4 shift pattern up for vote in this week's ballot include excessively long shifts and/or compulsory Friday and Saturday working for everybody, on Working Time Account (WTA, hours which are "banked" and paid back in kind) or otherwise. Two include a late/night Sunday shift as WTA or overtime. In other words, BMW is demanding that we should produce 90% of vehicles built last year at Cowley with only two thirds of the workforce! No way! [W.Fight bulletin - BMW Oxford 5/5/09]

• It's simple: Reinstate the sacked workers!

If BMW wants weekend working, they know what they can do: invite the sacked weekend workers back. Or beg them on bended knees, we don't care, whatever it takes! What we won't accept, is to kill ourselves with overwork! [W.Fight bulletin - BMW Oxford 5/5/09]

• Muddle-headed management

At the start of the week, a manager asked a worker if he could come in on his day off as there were too few hands. He declined. Two days later, the same manager came by and asked him to take the next day off, as there was now too little work. The mate pointed out that he would be taking his... rest day, off! [W.Fight bulletin - BMW Oxford 5/5/09]

BMW - Cashing in on the crisis

Three months after BMW cut the weekend shift at the Oxford Mini plant, sacking some 500 agency workers, the company is trying to turn the screw on the remaining workers to meet ever-increasing targets!

So, to make more cars with fewer workers, managers have presented the workforce with proposals for new shift patterns - some of which include working on Saturdays and possibly working extra Sunday shifts as well. In other words, they want to reintroduce the weekend shift by the back door without the weekend workers - by forcing the reduced number of weekday shift workers to stretch themselves over 6 or 7 days, instead of 5. They already introduced longer shifts (10 hours) and

Friday night working for the month of May - but now they want even more. The new shift patterns are quite crazy in fact - some would mean workers have to change from an early to a late shift mid-week and each week they work different days and on different shifts.

But even this additional screwing of the workforce may not be enough. So management are once more recruiting agency workers! They probably think that the workers who were sacked with a few minutes notice at the beginning of the year will have forgotten and forgiven them. Just as they expect the existing workforce to endorse the new shift patterns by voting for them. They may be in for an unpleasant surprise on both counts! □

King's Cross railway station (London)

• We said no!

It's employee survey time again - First Capital Connect wants to hear "your voice". But we already voiced our opinion over their staff-cutting ticket office plans, when we voted to strike against them. Are they hard of hearing? [Workers' Platform bulletin - King's Cross 5/5/09]

• Let's not disappoint them

National Express drivers' managers are training up as guards - allegedly to "understand the job better". Sounds to us like they're preparing for a tug-of-war. No problem - since there are far more of us than them, all we need to do is to pull together... (ref. to possible guards' strike) [Workers' Platform bulletin - King's Cross 5/5/09]

Stagecoach: bail out tastes better when added to profit

Stagecoach, which owns South West Trains (SWT), is trying to sue the government over possible future losses. Not that SWT is particularly hard up, though. In 2008, Stagecoach made £174 million profit and felt rich enough to award a 31% dividend increase to its shareholders.

So why is Stagecoach crying poverty? Simply because passenger numbers are not increasing fast enough, even though they are still increasing, by 7.3% in the 48 weeks up to the end of March. So, the company is now trying to take opportunity of a little-known clause included in all private train operators' contracts, which provides them with government support for any loss incurred.

Of course, SWT has not incurred any loss so far. But fear not, Stagecoach has its own interpretation of the clause. Pulling out its crystal ball, the company's Mystic Meg can tell you already that SWT will be losing money in 2010 and, on these grounds, Stagecoach wants the government to fund its "anticipated" losses in advance. Whatever next! In that case, SWT passengers should demand to travel for free, in the not so unlikely event of serious delays, and SWT workers should demand a year's wages in advance, in case their jobs are cut, like those of the 760 workers made redundant this year!

The private railway companies want to cherry pick - privatise profit and nationalise losses. How about re-nationalising them and sending these beggars packing? □

Visteon workers aren't leaving yet...

Visteon workers in Belfast were going into their 35th day occupying their factory against closure, when a redundancy deal was announced by Unite union officials on 30 April for the 610 sacked workers at Belfast, Enfield and Basildon plants.

Those who joined before 2000, when the factories were still under direct Ford ownership, would get an additional 52 weeks pay, on top of statutory redundancy pay, apparently financed by Ford itself - after Ford was provoked into agreeing to get involved, by the threat of its Engine Plant in Bridgend being picketed out! But for the 100 or so recruited since Ford "spun off" this parts-making section in 2000, there will be a pay-out of only 26 weeks pay.

Most workers said this deal "stank with inequality". All of them were sacked with only a few minutes notice at the end of March when Visteon, declared itself bankrupt. Belfast and Enfield were then occupied by workers

who carried out a vocal campaign - which in the case of Belfast, had the main aim of keeping the plant open. They wouldn't have won this improved pay-off without their action. And maybe they would have won more if they'd controlled the negotiations with the bosses themselves, rather than allowing the "partnership"-peddling Unite full-timers to take over.

Visteon was a shady business from day one, when Ford "spun it off" to downgrade workers' wages and conditions. Visteon or Ford, are just the same thieves in different pinstripes. So the issue is to ensure that they cough up and that workers' pensions are safe. Workers aren't leaving till their money is in their pockets. □



USA : "bankrupt" Chrysler targets workers

On 30 April, US car giant Chrysler filed for bankruptcy - not because it was bust, but because bankruptcy law allows companies to savage workers' jobs and conditions at will.

Since coming into office, Obama has blackmailed US with the threat of their employers being "forced" into bankruptcy. On 29 April, with this gun to their heads, Chrysler workers agreed to a no-strike deal, with drastic cuts in pensions and health cover for retired workers, a wage freeze until 2015, possible wage cuts by 2011 and cuts in overtime rates, bonuses, breaks and paid holidays.

The next day, however, Obama got Chrysler to file for bankruptcy regardless, exposing the hypocrisy of a plan prepared months in advance. Within 2 hours, 8 plants had been closed down for good, with 6,500 workers made redundant and production was stopped in the others. There are now plans for a "new Chrysler", with fewer workers with much reduced conditions, as part of a tie-up with Italian giant Fiat - with the Chrysler workforce paying the brunt of the bailout. And this may well be only the beginning, as General Motors seems to be going down the same road.

In fact, Chrysler's bankruptcy was "justified" by the \$4.5 billion loss incurred by 4 banks which held 70% of Chrysler's debt. Except that this loss was peanuts compared to the \$120 billion bailout money which the same banks received from the US taxpayer. However, the most urgent issue for Obama and the bosses was not to make good use of taxpayer's money, but to help the bosses cut jobs and wages! □

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

After the job cuts, labour shortages and speedups

In the last few weeks workers at Dagenham Engine plant have been told that there will be less down time. The "Lynx", the "oldest" engine being built (a 1.8l diesel for the Focus), had been cut to a single shift and seemed on the way out. But now workers are being pushed to up production to unprecedented levels for this engine - and with fewer workers and older and worse machinery!

There is even talk that the night shift might be reinstated. But where the workers will come from is another question! Workers from the second

Lynx shift were sent on the "Tiger" line (Dagenham's newest engine) to make up for shortages caused by the sacking of 250 temps last November.

In fact along with the cut of 500 workers at Southampton Transit plant and 340 at Dunton in Essex, Ford has cut almost 10% of its British workforce in the last few months. But now it looks as if Ford might have to recall some of the temps it fired. It also now has a responsibility to offer ex-Visteon workers "first pick" on any jobs which come up. This may be sooner than they expect! □

• Lynx-engine undermanned, overworked

(Boss) Turnip now wants the 1.8 litre single shift to do 90 engines/hr, (even 110?) when we never ever did that much, even when fully manned up! But now we've so many 2-3 man jobs where he took 1 or 2 mates off, that the line's a danger hazard! Like buy-off - among others - where there should be 2 hoist men, but now there's 1, helped by someone with 2 other jobs! This same hoist injured a mate who's still not fit to return! We now hear Lion workers may be asked to come over. But under what conditions? If Turnip won't get realistic, then we'll have to - to cut the score and the crap! [W.Fight bulletin - Ford Dagenham 28/4/09]

• A real labour shortage?

Since so many mates are being laid off from north and south estates, why not ask them to backfill on engine plant lines here Ford claims there's a need to "push" production? As if that's a credible need anyway, when they run us like mad one day and lay us off the next! [W.Fight bulletin - Ford Dagenham 28/4/09]



The true face of Brown's "new world order"

Remember Brown's victorious noises after the London G20 summit? They were all about the advent of a "new world order" - a caring order which would not only sort out the mayhem of capitalist finance but also "rescue" those most in need of help. In particular, the rich countries were to provide the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with £300 million to help out the poor countries.

True, this was not much, considering the billions of people concerned, not to mention the drastic strings usually attached to IMF loans. In fact, it was a pittance compared to the trillions generously awarded to the capitalist bingo machine.

But, as it turns out, even that pittance may not materialise. On April 26th, the G20 finance ministers met in Washington, failed to agree on how to share out the cost of this "rescue" package and... left it at that. For all the politicians' "good words", they will not lift a finger to stop the world's poor from starving, any more than to stop the bosses here from savaging jobs. Brown's "new (capitalist) world order" could not care less! And this is why the working class majority of the world needs to bring about its own social order, freed from the parasitism of the profit sharks! □

Just as the withdrawal of British troops was celebrated in Iraq, an "Invest Iraq" Conference took place in London, at the end of April. In attendance were British officials, representatives from 250 western and 100 Iraqi companies and the whole of the Iraqi government (!).

But what exactly were they planning? Could it be that they were out to resolve, at last, the problems which were never addressed during Britain's 6-year occupation of Basra, like the chronic electricity outages, or the absence of working sewage and refuse systems, with all the health issues this implies in such a hot climate?

Profit, however, is more important than such "secondary" issues! Iraq's 119bn-barrel oil

reserve is enough to whet the appetites of western companies. With the end of the British occupation of Iraq, the City is getting ready to cash in on the occupation's "dividends". After all, wasn't that the primary purpose of Britain's involvement in the bloodbath of Iraq? These dividends come in the form of a list of 500 projects due to be financed by the country's oil revenue, including anything from oil derivatives production to tourism and developing the finance and banking sectors.

As for the people of Basra, they will have to go on living with their stinking sewers, dirty drinking water and, moreover, the legacy of the tens of thousands of Iraqis killed in the British zone alone. □

When Darling's nightmares go online

In its "Global Stability Report", released on April 21st, the IMF estimated worldwide financial losses at £2,800 billion, double its previous estimate, six months ago - proof, if any was needed, that even the most sophisticated economic "experts" are totally blind when it comes to guessing the future of the capitalists' chaotic system.

But there was something else in this report which caused the hearts of Downing Street's tenants to sink: it stated that the cost of the banks' bailout to British taxpayers was likely to reach £200 billion - far more than anything Brown and Darling had ever dared to mention.

Apparently, the government had a go at IMF officials and, within

hours, this incriminating estimate had disappeared from the version of the report posted on the IMF's website. So much for Brown's claims to "transparency"! But concealing the truth behind an electronic veil of secrecy will not change the reality - especially given the IMF's record of underestimating the real damage caused by the crisis! □

In addition to this monthly paper, we publish a quarterly journal, "Class Struggle", the "internationalist communist forums", a series of pamphlets as well as fortnightly bulletins based on several large workplaces in the South East.

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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