

WORKERS' fight



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

THIS CRISIS-RIDDEN PROFIT SYSTEM CRIPPLES SOCIETY

Britain's paralysis as a result of the cold weather and snowfalls, is yet another fitting illustration of just how crippled this system has become.

It did not take more than a few days of snow to make roads and motorways unusable, turn streets into ice rinks, isolate whole areas, reduce bus and train services to a trickle, close down thousands of schools and deprive tens of thousands of households of electricity - and, often, heating.

From systemic negligence...

Contrary to what we are told, this was not just the result of "extreme conditions".

In fact, following comparable snowfalls, in February 2009, councils were issued with guidelines requiring them to keep a 6-day supply of gritting salt. However, the guidelines were not enforced and no-one bothered to ensure adequate supplies of gritting material. Hence the gritting crisis when the snow came.

As to the breakdown in electricity supply, we are told that it is due to snow falling from tree branches and damaging cables. But why is it that Britain still uses such an antiquated system when most industrialised countries use high-voltage cables hanging high above the trees or buried deep underground?

Well, ask the utility companies. For all their hot air about "necessary" price increases to fund investment, they invest just enough to keep the system going - that is, until the snow starts falling. Hence their enormous profits!

Likewise, the official admission that 100 factories were hit by gas outages is a telling symptom of how close to its limits the whole system is. Yet, the causes are well-known. For at least 8 years, report after report has warned against low gas storage capacity. But nothing was done about it, simply because none of the gas utilities is willing to dent the dividends of its shareholders to make the necessary investment!



Far from being only due to some sort of "natural catastrophe", the snow-related havoc reflects the negligence of this system and the on-going storm of profiteering which presides over its operation.

... To systemic failure

But at least, we can be sure that the havoc of these winter days will come to an end soon. The same cannot be said of the havoc of the crisis.

Of course, politicians are cynical enough to hail the "falling rise" of unemployment - as if the fact that 2,000 workers were losing their jobs every day was not intolerable!

They acclaim the "record sales" of the big retail chains. But these sales only reflect the fact that, being hard up, people waited for the winter sales to do their shopping. Meanwhile, dozens of lesser chains are going belly up, because the purchasing power of the working class is at its lowest.

While financial speculation is booming again, feeding on taxpayers' money, the bosses and their politicians, Labour and Tory, plan to squeeze even more out of the working population. Tens of thousands of job cuts planned in the civil service, Royal Mail, etc.. will just add to the mass of the unemployed.

The austerity measures they intend to force down workers' throats, to pay for the bailout of the finance sharks, will only reduce our standard of living even more, thereby threatening yet more jobs. This is a vicious cycle that can go on and on, for the foreseeable future.

So, no, this crisis is very far from being over. It is the crisis of a system in which profiteering has come to paralyse the ability of society to cater for the needs of the majority - on a world scale, of course, but even in a rich economy like Britain's. Such a system offers no prospect to mankind - except the prospect of replacing it!

Public sector workers under fire

Having slashed pension benefits in the private sector, big business is clamouring for the same to happen to public sector pensions - hoping to get their cut of the savings. Politicians are willing to oblige. The Tories and Lib Dems have already promised "reforms" (ie cuts) of public sector schemes, while Labour boasts about the cuts already made and those which it plans - including increased workers' contributions.

This is a combination of bad excuses (to turn the screw on public sector workers) and demagogic nonsense (to insert a wedge between private and public workers). The alleged colossal future cost of public pensions is as much

of a con as the alleged "deficit" of final salary schemes - public or private. The experts who compute such figures are the same ones who always fail to predict financial "hiccups", even just a year in advance. And they expect us to believe they can produce pension estimates valid for the next 90 years? That's a joke!

One thing is certain, though: by cutting tens of thousands of jobs and privatising whole areas in the public sector, governments have reduced the ability of public sector schemes to pay present and future pensions. There's no way that workers should pay the bill for this job slashing, yet again! ☐

No to the pensions lottery!

The value of private sector pension funds fell sharply last year, due mainly to the turbulence in stock and bond markets. It's only to be expected, when pensions are based on the lottery of the capitalist financial system. But this fall is also likely to be used yet again as a pretext by companies to ditch their final salary schemes. Last year, Morrisons (profits £655m), Barclays (profits £6bn) and BP (profits \$25bn) all closed such schemes to new entrants. And they are just the latest in a long

line of companies to do this - 9 out of 10 final salary schemes are now closed to new entrants and a fifth are closed altogether.

A pension is not a "perk" or a "bonus". It is simply what workers are owed - a part of their wages which is deferred till their retirement. If the profit system can't even ensure a decent old age to those who make all the profits, shouldn't it be the system which is scrapped, not workers' pension benefits? ☐

London Tube's last PPP on the brink?

Private sector involvement in refurbishing London Underground's Northern, Piccadilly and Jubilee lines over the next 7 years was put in question last month when a regulator ruled that Public Private Partnership contractor, Tube Lines, was being too greedy. The regulator said that work for which Tubelines demanded £5.75bn, should cost only £4.4bn. But publicly-owned London Underground Ltd (LUL) had only planned to spend £4bn. If the government does not step in with the £400m shortfall, LUL now says it will raise fares (which it has just done already), or else cut costs elsewhere - on top of over 100 ticket office closures and 1,200 job cuts already planned!

Tube Lines, owned by US engineering giant Bechtel and British contractor Amey, accuses LUL of wanting to destroy the PPP and drive it out of business. After all, Metronet, which had a similar PPP contract, was eventually taken over by LUL after going into administration in 2007. PPP was always a means to channel public finance into companies' coffers while apparently reducing public sector borrowing. On London Underground it has been a disaster throughout - predictably so, as profiteering from public services is a contradiction in terms. The whole lot should simply go back in the public sector, which it never should have left. ☐

Class Struggle n°86

In the coming issue of our journal, you will find articles on:

- Britain - The crisis, the politicians and the next general election
- Iraq - Western troops may be leaving, but the damage of the occupation remains
- USA - Obama's health reform and big business
- Russia - the crisis and the critical state of the country

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• Not such true grit

Up and down the country, the snow has paralysed local life and isolated whole areas. Even in the south, conditions have been awful. In Berkshire and Hampshire, 2,000 motorists were stranded in their cars and many decided to abandon them. The failure of local authorities to grit roads and pavements was spectacular. Many councils seem to be taking a "buyer beware" approach to pavements, so that it is "the pedestrian's own responsibility". Fife Council almost ran out of road grit and Liverpool council did run out.

East Sussex County Council justifies its inaction by saying that it costs £10,000 every time it sends its gritting lorries out. Yet, just before Christmas, hundreds of extra casualties were treated in East Sussex hospitals, due to people slipping and breaking limbs - surely costing more than £10,000 to the NHS!

Although we've seen more severe winters in the past, roads and pavements have never been so bad in many parts of the country. Council cutbacks give us the real explanation and yet, they are planning more. East Sussex is considering cutting its winter maintenance budget by £400,000. This would be one of the most swingeing cuts, but all the other councils are at it, too. Cut the costs and never mind... the cost!

The real cost of the crisis

Experts from Oxford Economics have worked out that the value of gross domestic product (GDP) per head is now 1.3% lower than in 2005 in real terms, and that it will fall by another 1% over the coming year.

This is bad enough. But it is still an understatement of the reality faced by the working class. GDP per head is, in fact, a very unreliable measure of the actual purchasing power per head, because it takes no account of social inequalities. The gap between rich and poor was already deteriorating before the crisis. But since the bosses have begun to

cut job and wages, this gap is turning into a precipice. The real fall in purchasing power is far greater for workers who lost everything when they lost their jobs - because they had nothing else - than for shareholders, whose shares may have lost some of their paper value (although they are going up again), but whose remaining assets were intact.

This is no big surprise, of course. Capitalism is a system designed by the wealthy for the wealthy. And this is why the working class has but one choice - to replace it with a society freed of any form of profiteering! □

A case for repossessing the banks!

The repossessions figure for the third quarter of 2009 may be officially down by 30-50% compared to 2008, but it is actually up by 3%, to 13,987, compared to the previous quarter. As to the total number of households in arrears, it may have fallen by 1.8% compared with the previous quarter, but it is still at 395,000 - meaning that around 1m people, counting all members in these households, are potentially on the repossession waiting list! So, contrary to the politicians' lullabies about things looking up for everyone, they aren't!

This is hardly surprising, at a time when 2,000 workers are losing their jobs each day - unemployment being, by far, the main cause

behind arrears and repossessions - and when, according to the CAB, in 1/3 cases, mortgage lenders do not comply with the government's voluntary "pre-action protocol", designed to give embattled borrowers a breathing space allowing them to stay in their homes.

But then who can believe that bankers would "voluntarily" miss a chance of making a quick buck out of a repossession? Apart from the riot act and the threat of nationalisation without compensation, what other language can these profiteers understand? And what other language do they deserve, especially after having been bailed out on public funds when they themselves "got into arrears"? □

Avoiding Darling's bonus tax is easy

It was the windfall "super-tax" of 150% on bankers' bonuses of more than £25,000 that grabbed most of the headlines in Darling's pre-budget report. Hardly a way to make financial vultures pay for the crisis they caused nor in any sense a "pay-back" for the estimated £1.2 trillion lavished on them so far! Nevertheless the bankers made a big song and dance over it.

One may well ask why. Because this "tax" will be paid by the banks themselves rather than the bonus recipients. And only cash bonuses paid between the 9 December and 6 April can be taxed - which not only allows banks to defer bonus payments by 6 months, but leaves the vast majority of bonuses paid in shares untouched! What's more, Darling exempted whole sectors, like share traders and asset managers for the

very rich.

No wonder Darling expected his "super-tax" to raise only £550m. And claiming that the £40bn in salaries and bonuses announced by the biggest banks for January means that there'll be more tax revenue than Darling estimated, is naive (or hypocritical, depending on who says it)! This £40bn announcement is the bankers' two fingers to attempts to halt the "bonus culture" and no doubt a large chunk of it won't be taxable (which Darling knows full well). By contrast, Darling will take £7bn from working people in increased National Insurance contributions, and wants a 1% pay cap and reduced pension contributions in the public sector. The bonus tax is a cynical smoke-screen for making all of us foot the bill. □

Enough of their business secrecy!

It took a year for Darling to disclose the secret £62bn loan extended by the Bank of England to HBOS and RBS in October 2008, to prevent them from going bust. Parliament was kept in the dark and not even all the members of the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee were informed.

Any ordinary taxpayer has to reveal everything, down to the smallest few hundred quid in earnings, to the taxman. But a £62bn loan - the equivalent of £3000 for every household in the country - can be kept secret from virtually everyone. This is the logic of banking secrecy! In October 2008, this secret loan was in breach of the rules. But since then, a new banking regulation bill gave the Bank of England the power to make secret loans "in the interest of financial stability".

As if it was not, precisely, banking secrecy which allowed the banks to pile up mountains of risky lending, eventually causing the present crisis! But instead of ensuring that this cannot happen again, banking secrecy has now been reinforced! Nothing surprising there, though - "business confidentiality" is vital to conceal the capitalists' on-going looting of society. This is why, as long as such secrecy remains, working people will never be in a position to control anything in this society, and why it should be scrapped.

Climate change - a problem of social organisation

The climate change circus rolled into Copenhagen last month. 98 world leaders and 15,000 delegates and officials attended the UN global summit to "save the world", plus 5,000 journalists - and Prince Charles. 140 private planes flew in the big-wigs, the top £650-per-night hotels were booked solid and there weren't enough limos in the whole of Denmark to meet the demand. As for the less privileged attendees, the Danish government had prepared a "welcome" for the thousands of protestors by setting up a temporary prison and equipping the police with new powers, water-cannon and taser guns.

All this to decide... to do nothing. The so-called "non-binding deal" was nothing more than a face-saver. But why should anyone be surprised that the political representatives of this system can't plan ahead to safeguard the long-term future of the planet, when they proved incapable of pre-empting the crisis which is happening right now? The present crisis, like the past ones, was the result of the economic chaos caused by private profiteering and, therefore, by the private ownership of the means of production. No planning ahead can take place in this society as long as these private profiteers run the show. So, yes, just as the system's economic crises are, the future of the planet is a question of social organisation - and it is that which must be changed!

Swines getting fat out of flu

It seems that all the hysteria over swine flu was uncalled for - it causes a relatively mild illness in most cases and the "pandemic" is waning.

Just as well, because last month it was revealed that the anti-flu drug Tamiflu, which the government stockpiled at a cost of over £500m, doesn't prevent complications as its manufacturer, Roche, claimed. On the other hand, it does make almost half those taking it feel rather sick, and can have other side effects like certain serious (though rare) disturbances of brain function. It is no longer even recommended by experts as an effective treatment.

NICE - the government's drugs watchdog - was happy to "pass" it for use, seemingly without checking Roche's research. It then compounded this folly (blatant hand-out to the drug companies?) by its order

for 60m doses of vaccine, when only 30m are needed for "at risk" patients of whom only 1 in 3 have decided to have it!

Tamiflu was handed out like smarties, including to children, after people diagnosed themselves online or by phone, even though "swine flu" symptoms are similar to those of many other illnesses. That in itself was dubious. How much more dubious when the drug concerned has little benefit and has potentially harmful side-effects?

But why worry? Roche, which "misrepresented" Tamiflu's benefits, is laughing all the way to the bank, having got billions from governments all over the world - and so is the very happy drugs giant, GlaxoSmithKline, which makes the vaccine! The drug industry got the bonanza it wanted, with the politicians' help! ☐

Yes, we need new body scanning - in the NHS!

Immediately after the alleged plane attack over Detroit, Gordon Brown "ordered" the introduction of full body scanners at British airports. These scanners, currently being trialed at Manchester and Heathrow are due to be introduced as early as February and they cost around £100,000 each. Shares in OSI Systems, a company which makes the scanners, rose by 24% straight away.

One cannot help but make the connection between this sudden largesse towards airport security and companies which thrive out of it, in the name of the "war on terror", and

another kind of scanner - eg., the PET scanner, used to help cancer diagnosis, among other things - which is currently only available in very few hospitals due to funding shortfalls. Since far more people die of cancer - 155,000 per year (or 1 in 4 of all deaths) - than from terrorism, if the population which pays for this equipment via taxes had the choice, we would rather have the waiting lists cut for PET scans, MRI scans and CT scans, than have the queues in airports lengthened by full body scans to check what's inside people's underwear. ☐

Not free at the parking point

English hospitals made an estimated £110m in parking charges last year, with some visitors paying £4/hr. Cancer patients coming regularly for chemotherapy or radiation might have to pay as much as £325 to park during a course of treatment. While Scottish and Welsh MPs already stopped these charges (as well as prescription charges), largely to garner votes, in England the government hasn't seen fit to do it up to now. But lo and behold, with an election in sight, the health minister has just announced that parking charges for inpatients (!) and their visitors

may be phased out... over 3 years!

A "consultation" has begun, to see if certain outpatients should also be exempt from charges. As if any patient should have to pay to go to hospital, which is what this amounts to. Isn't the NHS supposed to be free to use? The charges, which often also hit staff, should end immediately. If hospitals relied on this petty and insensitive racketeering as a source of funding, it's just another indictment of the NHS "market", which Labour promised to end, but actually encouraged. ☐

• More than a bit rich

In a new study called "A bit rich", the "New Economics Foundation" calculates that hospital cleaners on £12,000/yr create £10 in value for every £1 they earn - by killing germs and speeding up patients' recovery. By contrast, for each £1 of useful work, leading bankers earning between £500,000 and £10m a year, destroy £7 of value - by having to be bailed out due to dodgy investment - while tax accountants, on £75,000-£200,000, destroy £47 - by cutting funding to public services using tax dodges.

Yes, such is the madness of this society. On the one hand, the working class, mostly low-paid, majority produces all new wealth; while, on the other hand, a tiny, very rich minority, which lives off the labour of the working population, squanders this wealth, due to its parasitism and the insanity of its economic system.

This is why the working class has an enormous potential in its hands - that of starving the parasites of their loot by withdrawing its labour - together with the means to free society from any form of profiteering and to build a new social organisation capable of pooling together available resources for the benefit and under the democratic control of all - that is, the communist society that has never been tried yet.

• Gas suppliers can plunder your bank account!

A survey by a consumer website in October found that more than 5 million gas users in Britain have been overcharged by their suppliers. Over 4 million had not yet asked for the overpayment back. Gas companies including British Gas and E.ON failed to cut the rates paid by households paying by direct debit, after they cut their tariffs last year. The suppliers owe them a total of £454m, an average of £89 each!

Not only does this dwarf the £280m in arrears owed by 2 million households, but it gave them the potential to earn £5m in interest! Direct debit is sold as a way for consumers to save money, but it seems that it's an even better way for the gas companies to benefit at their expense!

Postal workers' fight isn't over by a long shot



When the postal strikes were called off on 5 November, union leader Dave Ward said there was to be a "period of calm" until the end of the year, during which a long-term deal could be reached. Royal Mail was to stop introducing their "modernising" changes and the union would be given a say, and, what it really wanted - a role in their implementation.

An "interim agreement" spoke of the possible reversal of some of the revised working conditions and job cuts already implemented, whose adverse effects were felt worst in deliveries.

But far from reversing these changes, not to mention further attacks against conditions which took place during the strikes, RM continued to

cut jobs and conditions. It also continued openly to prepare future job cuts. A further 20% of jobs in delivery offices are to go, as vans are given to delivery postmen, thus merging yet more walks and scrapping current driving duties, while expecting erstwhile foot postmen suddenly to know how to drive! On the cards is the extension of weekday delivery times to 3 or 4pm and Saturday deliveries beyond noon. The delivery of junk mail will become compulsory and the amount increased.

One can only guess what else is in store, since union negotiators say that they cannot tell the membership, having been "sworn to secrecy" by RM bosses! Which makes them completely unaccountable to the membership. That should have been reason enough not to participate. Yet, not only have officials kept on talking, but they agreed to extend the deadline from the end of December to 22 January, in order to achieve an "acceptable agreement". That this agreement will be quite the reverse, is fairly obvious. □

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• **Yellow**

Roger Poole, the "independent chair" of the negotiations was even allowed to write to us on CWU headed notepaper to tell us all's well. Never mind that RM is still ignoring the (very few) restrictions on its behaviour, imposed by the Interim Agreement. Wasn't that why London reps wanted the strike back on? But they were put down by Ward, who insists that RM is respecting... him?? What does one call that? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 14/12/09]

• **Some "fall"!**

A continued fall in volumes, claims RM? Sure, when many delivery postmen/women can't even fit half of our walks into our bags! Packets are falling, yes... they're falling OUT all over the place! And there aren't enough

vans to deliver the piles of parcels. This Monday heralds our "busiest day in the year" and we'll be weighing, counting, timing... and cutting off! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 14/12/09]

• **Bring them on board**

Some casuals were trained for the TOP 2000 machine straight away. Others were trained on the smaller sorting machines as well. This hasn't really happened before. So can we therefore assume that, having acquired some expertise, they'll be offered permanent jobs after Xmas, to make up for all the many jobs which have been cut? (And that permanent part-timers will be offered full-time, if they want it...) [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 14/12/09]

• **One way to stop 'em!**

The ground floor's new trucking routes



regularly block up. There's just not enough space. It was predictable, but as usual there's no connection between RM's "grand plans" and reality. And there are now too few flats frames and not enough workers. We have a solution: whenever managers propose a change, we should, as a matter of course, invite them to first show us how it's all going to work, by doing it themselves. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 14/12/09]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Crisis or not, gravy trains are still running!**

According to Michael Roberts, CEO of the private train companies' association, the increase in train fares is "good news for passengers". Good news, because the fares "only" went up by 1.1%? Sure, when the majority of people have seen their wages frozen if not actually cut! Not to mention the unemployed for whom train journeys get ever more out of reach!

Of course it's good news for the train companies, especially on lines like London to Swindon where some fares went up by 15%! The fares

which "only" increased by 1.1% are those regulated "controlled fares". But some operators still managed to increase fares more than they should, by, for instance reducing the off peak periods when people can use cheaper tickets, knowing full well that many travellers' wouldn't be able to adjust their work times and would have to pay more. Anyway, these latest increases come on top of much larger ones. East Midlands had 2 fare increases last year - 7% in January 2009 and 5% in May. National Express East Coast

• A short history of rail privatisation

After 13 years of privatisation, the East Coast Line has rejoined the "public sector". So what did it mean for the workers? Well, a new name badge to start with, and ...that's it!

But what if we go back a bit in history? When GNER (under US group SeaContainers) took over in 1996, they got government subsidies to paint the trains with their colours and change the staff uniforms. By the time of their second franchise, the US company was in

trouble and they started reducing the services and cutting jobs. Over a year ago, a new company, National Express, took over, repainted the trains with their colours (at least some of them), changed the staff uniform and as soon as the crisis hit, they began to cry poverty and, once again, started reducing the services and cutting jobs.

The government took over on the 13 November 2009 and put stickers on the trains with the new name and



increased advance ticket prices by 11% last May.

Was it too much to expect that the train companies should cut fares on account of the crisis? Sure it was. The train bosses and their government cronies have to be forced into it, by us, the travelling and working public. What about joint travel-for-free "strikes"? ☐

changed the staff name badge. The new management structure (straight out of the private sector!) promised to invest and to provide a better service. But at present, they are only recruiting to cover the existing staff shortage. Not a peep about re-employing or replacing the workers whose jobs were cut by the successive private sharks. But shouldn't this be the top priority? That is, if they really mean to improve services, as they say... ☐

• The god of transport has arrived

Saturday morning, Transport minister Lord Adonis and other "dignitaries" accompanied by Press, came to ride the First state-owned 8:00. The few bits of East Coast uniform floating around were scraped together and donated to the crew, so they could look their best for the telly. But what was that empty train following closely behind? A spare, because they were worried about an embarrassing breakdown? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 11/11/09]

• We need "service better than usual"!

So the new East Coast catchphrase is "business as usual". And who exactly wants that?! The trains are falling to bits inside and out. And the terrible incident over the weekend (a woman assaulted on a late train) proves what we already knew - that there aren't enough of us on trains, platforms, etc. Since we don't have parasite

shareholders to feed any more, we want better, now! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 11/11/09]

• Terminally daft

Some bright spark in FCC decided to reprogramme the barriers so that they retain "London All Terminals" tickets. Trouble is, it means they also retain City Thameslink and London Blackfriars tickets, which passengers need to keep to make their onward journeys. So we're continually having to retrieve these tickets from the gates. When we're so short-staffed, this is a recipe for big hold-ups. Brilliant. We can't wait to hear their next idea. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 1/12/09]

• It's basic

East Coast guards are balloting over the commission we've lost, 'thanks' to the barriers which are being installed in stations. We should never have had to rely on commission to make up our wages in the first place. And we shouldn't lose

out now - we need a real increase in our basic to fully compensate us. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 15/12/09]

• Still not good enough

FCC drivers are reballoting on the revised pay offer. Other grades have been offered 1.5% or £337.50 this year (and 2% or inflation + 0.25% or £450 next year). Of course, for most of us the lump sum is bigger - but not nearly enough. They didn't even see fit to throw in Healthshield health insurance cover, as they did for First Great Western. So - no thanks! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 15/12/09]

• Signals are red

Signal workers in South Wales are on strike for 6 days this week. Network Rail management is trying to force new rosters on them. This may be a local issue but conditions are being downgraded, one way or another, all over the network. They're signalling the way forward for all of us! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 15/12/09]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Ford's blast from the past

When Ford started manufacturing diesel engines in the new Diesel Centre at Dagenham in Essex (DDC) in November 2003, it boasted about its "state-of-the-art" production facility. At the time Ken Livingstone, even gave Ford a "green" award, because its electricity came entirely from 2 windmills....

Let's take a look under the bonnet, though. DDC's newest assembly line, the Tiger engine line, is known as the "chicken farm". And no wonder. It has the old non-stop conveyor belt system. Workers have no control over the line speed. If they go "over cycle", that is if the operation they are doing takes a few seconds longer than

expected, lights start flashing and the foreman comes running to have a go.

All the jobs require you to stand, no seats are allowed anywhere near the line and this means being on your feet for 7½ hours a day - even if you have a half-hour for lunch and 2 tea-breaks. But you don't even have 5 minutes to sit during tea-break: after reaching the rest area (at the end of the line) to get your tea, a buzzer calls you back after 5 minutes and you must be back working when a final buzzer marks the end of the break. There is usually no "job rotation", so that each worker has to make the same repetitive movements over and over, the whole working day - which is mind-



numbing and physically damaging.

In fact on the "old" Puma line in the "old" non-state-of-the-art engine plant next door, workers rotate round different jobs and many are seated round a table and are in control of each stage of the process of assembly... But this line is most likely to be phased out! Talk about history being played out in reverse! ☐

• Desperate offers 1

Tiger bosses are so desperate for workers that drivers were offered "special terms" to shift to the Farm. Yes if we signed a bit of paper we wouldn't have to fill in that ridiculous 7-page form nor, even have a farcical interview. We'd be "guaranteed" a job, but we'd have signed away our right of return. No way, hosay. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 8/12/09]

• Desperate offers 2

Another measure of their desperation: a notice was put up to say ANYone can apply for these jobs even if we have

disciplines or sickness bad marks on our records. For the sake of getting us to be chicken fodder, they'd even wipe our records clean! Did they ever think of making the job down the Farm a bit more attractive? Seats. Proper breaks. No buzzers. Job rotation... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 8/12/09]

• Barking cold

If it wasn't for the fact that Tiger machining and Tiger assembly ran Sunday night, engine plant workers would probably have frozen solid on Monday morning, thanks to Ford's scrooging over the heating. (Not that it was "warm" in the machine shop Sun night.) Anyway we all still risk turning blue!

But how many body warmers have been issued? Instead of giving these freely to all, Foremen are supposed to fill in... a 7-page form to get them for us? What the hell's wrong with this place? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 5/01/10]

• Why Ford can afford more

Ford sold Volvo cars to Chinese company Geely for (an estimated) \$1.8bn after buying it in 1999 for \$6.45bn. But it increased its own sales in China by 55% on last year - via its front company, Changan Mazda. And Ford just saw a 2% rise in share price after quadrupling its stock value over the year.. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 5/01/10]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)



• New Olympic event: build-a-mini

Last month BMW won a contract to supply vehicles for the 2012 London Olympics, which makes it a "Tier One Sponsor". Given that BMW sets line-speeds that need all of us to be athletes, will it be submitting a team as well? [BMW Oxford 15/12/09]

• No real alternative

So BMW got the current shift pattern extended with a reduced Saturday - unless they fell like adding up to 4½ hours from our Working Time Account! No change at all really. But what was the alternative? Of course we want shorter shifts, instead of undermining our health for the future. But why should we pay for it in 6 days of earlies and 5 of lates and nights, in never-ending rotation? [BMW Oxford 15/12/09]

• Try the scout hut next time

We hear that at what were meant to be pay negotiations, BMW spent 2 days pleading poverty (in a posh hotel!). All the graphs and pie charts were supposed to show that the 10th richest company



on the planet can't afford a no-strings attached pay rise - despite having pulled off the trick of producing the same number of cars with fewer people. Obviously if they can afford to spend all that cash on an elaborate joke, all of us can expect a decent rise if we make a stand on it! [BMW Oxford 15/12/09]

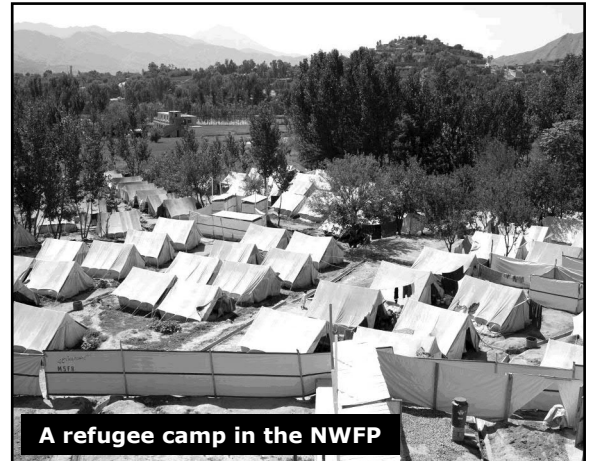
• *Pakistan - falling into a bloody chaos*

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan has long been a threat to Pakistan. Due to the porous border between the two countries and the large population of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), this area was bound to serve as a rear-base for the Afghan forces opposing the invasion.

As a result, especially since Obama's election, the US put pressure on the Pakistani government to send its army to cut off the Afghan resistance from its rear bases in the NWFP. A massive army offensive in the Swat Valley forced over 2m people to flee the area last summer. In recent weeks a similar offensive in South Waziristan, another area of the NWFP, is likely to have the same results, while the US drones have

taken to bombing targets in Pakistan.

The Afghan war is now feeding political rivalries across Pakistan. Local fundamentalist forces use the anger caused by this war as a lever against the pro-US political establishment, while backing up their bid for power with terrorist attacks. In response, factions within the army, one of the world's largest with a long tradition of military coups, seek to promote themselves as a bulwark against insecurity. The population is caught in the cross-fire, with hundreds being killed in suicide attacks, like on New Year's day, during a volley-ball tournament.



A refugee camp in the NWFP

Only a complete withdrawal of all western forces from Afghanistan will end the bloody chaos created by the occupation and prevent this chaos from engulfing Pakistan as well. □

• *Iraq - The scramble for oil has begun*

Since last June, around 30 international oil companies have crowded into oil contract auctions held in Baghdad. These are only tentative contracts and the companies will not get one penny of oil money out of them before the coming general election in March and, above all, before the chaos caused by the country's occupation ends. This won't be tomorrow, judging from the fact that

Iraq's single export pipe-line is shut down 25% of the time by terrorist attacks!

In the meantime, the oil vultures are scrambling to get their feet in the door, in preparation for the real sharing out of the spoils. Most of the big US oil majors did not feel they needed to bother - after all, they still have over 200,000 US soldiers and mercenaries to defend their interests

on the ground. BP and Shell had a big presence, though and they were rather better treated than their rivals, whose governments did not take part in the occupation.

Yes, when Blair said recently that WMDs were not the main issue in his choice to go to war, but that "regime change" was, it was yet another lie. He only wanted to fill BP's and Shell's coffers! □

• *Disgrace list*

The New Year "honours list" was duly announced and the odd actor or retired ex-banker can now be called "sir", while various other acceptable figures got their admission ticket to the establishment. But there was something quite shocking about the fact that assistant police commissioner, Cressida Dick, who gave the order for Jean Charles de Menezes to be shot in the head on a tube train, in 2005, without any warning or questions asked,

has been given the "Queen's Police Medal"! Yes, a reward for being responsible for cold-blooded murder of a civilian, for responding like the rest of the police force and Blair and his cohorts, for that matter, with total and uncontrolled hysteria to the "terrorism threat" which they themselves created.

In the end nobody took responsibility for the shooting to death of this young Brazilian electrician who had just been on his way to work.

Protracted court cases were sabotaged by the cops themselves. They caused a long and painful saga with undisclosed and concocted "evidence". So much for the criminal justice system - criminal being the operative word. As for the honours list, it belongs in the dustbin of history - and according to an online Observer newspaper poll done in 2008, 69.3% of respondents thought so too. Abolish it! □

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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