

WORKERS' fight



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contact@w-fight.org

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

FACING UP TO THE BOSSES' OFFENSIVE

Despite the minimal media coverage, images of angry working class protests across Europe filter through to our TV screens. The latest of these, which took place in France on September 7th, brought over one million marchers onto the streets against a planned attack on their pension system.

This raises the question of when and how workers in Britain will be given a chance to voice their anger against the bosses' attacks and the cuts being prepared so arrogantly by the Con-Dems.

The TUC in search of partnership

Over the past two years, in almost all of the (few) cases where union leaders took the initiative (or yielded to members' pressure) to resist the bosses' attacks, they left workers to fight in isolation.

Whether in local government or at BA, for instance, there was never any attempt by union machineries to involve all the workers targeted by the same attacks, thus weakening those who were fighting back.

Since the Con-Dems first announced their drastic cuts, it has taken four months for the TUC leaders to come up with a "comprehensive" response in the form of a "statement on the economy" for its annual conference. But it would be hard to detect in it any real will to fight.

Among other things, the TUC congratulates itself on the fact that "employers and unions worked to avoid job losses". The many workers who lost their jobs due to job-cutting "deals" recommended by union leaders will appreciate this! So will the growing army of under-employed workers, who are kept out of the jobless count!

The cat was let out of the bag when the TUC leader, Brendan Barber, stated in an interview: "I am hopeful that he [Cameron] will meet us before the



French protesters calling for a joint public-private general strike

spending round". The TUC document added that "unions do not oppose negotiated change or genuine efficiency savings" - i.e. job and service cuts, in plain English. The TUC's "response", therefore, is that these attacks should first be "negotiated" with union leaders!

Building up the balance of forces

The TUC document includes a "timetable for action". But while the Scottish TUC plans to call local protests on 23 October, there won't be any national protest before... March 2011! The present threats against jobs and services are obviously not a matter of urgency!

In the meantime, the TUC's "action" comes down to lobbying coalition MPs, arguing ludicrously that the "poll tax was defeated when government MPs realised that their seats were in danger". The next thing they'll tell us is that our only "hope" is to vote Labour - to get more of the same anti-working class policies!

As if the huge protests against the poll tax had not been the decisive factor - as bosses, fearing that the protests might affect their profits, ordered Tory politicians to repeal their tax!

So, yes, the lessons of the poll tax protests should be remembered, but not the TUC's distorted version. Like Thatcher, the Con-Dems fear only one thing - that the anger of the working class might endanger capitalist profiteering.

The budget deficit was never more than a pretext used by both parties, to consolidate and extend the bosses' offensive against workers' conditions - ever since the onset of the crisis.

We live in a society which is awash with cash when it comes to luxury and speculation, but "strapped" when it comes to necessities for the majority. If this is to be reversed, if the capitalist class, which is both responsible for this crisis and its main beneficiary, is to be made to pay for it, the working class has to show its strength and to voice its anger. And the sooner, the better! □

Housing: a looming crisis

The minimum deposit to even get considered for a mortgage loan is now £40,000 and if you earn less than £25,000, you won't get onto a shared ownership or part-rent part-buy schemes. So housing experts are now saying that renting has been seen as an alternative to the "home ownership culture"! In fact home ownership is falling and since 2001, private rentals increased by one million.

But as there is no control over how landlords maintain their

properties, an estimated 40% of these rented homes are officially considered "non-decent" - i.e. damp, with inadequate bathrooms or kitchens, or with broken windows! That is, for those who will still be able to afford a privately-rented home if and when Osborne's plans come into force. It is estimated that by capping housing, the Con-Dems will make another 750,000 people homeless, who will join the 1.8 million already waiting on council housing lists.

But it is not as if there was no way of providing a decent home to every household. This could be achieved by using the huge stock of empty properties which exist in every urban area - of which a census could be made in each locality by the population. Councils could undertake to repair and refurbish these homes quickly, by re-establishing their in-house skilled workforces, thereby creating tens of thousands of jobs and killing two birds with one stone!

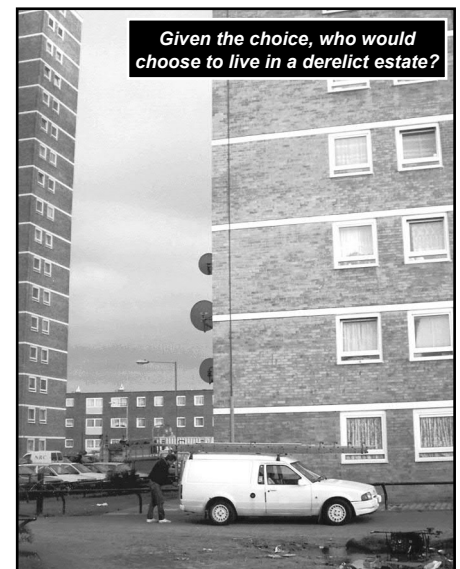
• A home is not for life?

Cameron's proposal to end lifelong council house tenure was meant to conjure up an image of some wealthy house-hogger hanging on to his council home when he should have moved on to something better, thus preventing the needy from getting a council tenancy.

What a joke! The reason the needy haven't got homes is because successive governments have refused to build social housing. Who would stay in such basic and often dilapidated accommodation when they could afford something better?

This is a particularly nasty form of hot air. It may be true that there are

elderly people on their own occupying flats which are too large for them, but most councils haven't been able to put a framework in place for them to "downsize" (most older people don't have the Internet) and anyway, they don't have smaller flats or houses suitable for the elderly to live in, because they haven't been built, and those that used to exist, have been sold off! Nevertheless, this hasn't prevented Kensington and Chelsea from calling up council tenants to ask them if they might like to leave their large flats. No prizes for guessing their answer.



• Connaught workers must be taken in-house!

After the collapse of the building maintenance firm Connaught, which was contracted to maintain council flats and houses up and down the country, construction group Morgan Sindall agreed a deal to take on 2,500 of its 4,400 workers. So what about the others?

In the London borough of Barnet,

Connaught's workers were collectively sacked by conference call! These workers once worked directly for Barnet council, then were transferred to the arms-length company Barnet Homes, and then transferred to Connaught when it "won" the contract for repairs. Now they are sacked. Except that Barnet still

needs them to do the repairs on council tenants' properties. So the obvious solution is for them to be taken back in-house by the council. The council chose to privatise this essential socially necessary service. So it is responsible for fully compensating these workers and giving them their jobs back.

Cameron's unsavoury gang

Cameron is signing up big bosses to his special business advisory committee. After his election pledge "to stand up to big business" and oppose the "crony capitalism" favoured by "Roadblock" Brown, he's doing just the same. But who could believe he'd do otherwise?

One of his first appointees is Philip Green of Topshop, owner of the second biggest retail clothing business in the country. Known

for lavish parties, Green plays Monopoly on a gold set featuring his own acquisitions. He's also known for screwing his workforce, lately having forced workers to double their pension contributions and work 5 years longer to protect their final pensions! Having installed his wife and kids in (tax haven) Monaco and made her the owner of his Arcadia fashion group, he pays little or no tax.

So now he's asked to do a

review of Whitehall spending, to find efficiencies. In other words, he's meant to find savings to make up for the deficit, when he's one of those people responsible for it, as part of a tax-dodging brigade who cause an annual £120bn tax hole! As many commentators have said, it might be better to appoint him to catch tax avoidance crooks, since he knows all the tricks - only after he's paid up himself, of course...

NHS: ring-fenced or strangulated?

The Con-Dems published their NHS White Paper on 12 July, called "Liberating the NHS"! Many staff feel it's just the "same old, same old". How often have they heard ministers claim they're going to get rid of bureaucracy and give patients "choice"? However, there is something "new" - a huge cut! Because the centrepiece of this reform is the abolition of 10 Strategic Health Authorities and 152 Primary Care Trusts, thus "liberating" 60,000 staff from their jobs at a time of record unemployment!

But health minister Lansley still has the nerve to claim that this

isn't about cuts and that he'll increase NHS spending year on year! A nice start is being made with the £137,000 average "golden goodbye's" offered to chief executives of PCTs, out of the £1.7bn put aside for these redundancies!

So, the plan is that PCTs' functions will be taken over by GPs organised in "consortia", which will "buy" essential services (like x-rays, blood tests, physio) from the "market" - with even more private healthcare companies encouraged to take their cut of public funding.

Of course, GPs were never happy

with the PCTs' powers to ration resources - which led to the "postcode lottery", whereby they sometimes refused access to new, expensive drugs. But GPs are rightly suspicious of Lansley's plans. Indeed, how can the situation be improved by dumping this administrative burden on already overstretched GPs, while pouring more public funds into the coffers of private healthcare? Surely GPs should be allowed to get on with their work and adequate funding should be provided for the treatments required by patients, period! □

Unison the union says it's "illegal"

Unison, the largest public sector union, has decided the best way to challenge the new NHS reform is ... through the courts! It claims that Lansley's "failure to consult" the public is "unlawful" because these changes are so "sweeping".

The NHS Constitution enshrines a principle that the staff, unions and public have an absolute right to be consulted over changes - although no right to decide, of course! So, at best, Unison's move could be a delaying tactic, but certainly not a way

to derail the Con-Dems' further privatisation of the health service.

Besides, who can believe in the resolve of union leaders who did nothing against the reforms introduced under the previous Labour governments, thereby allowing the private health care companies to substitute themselves for the public sector through Blair-Brown's PFI and PPP? Who can trust their real agenda, when they cannot even bring themselves to expose the hypocrisy of ex-Labour health Minister Andy

Burnham, who launched a "save our NHS campaign" after having presided over some of the latest blows dealt to the NHS?

For the working class, seeking to protect the NHS against the profiteers by appealing to a justice system designed to enforce their rule makes no sense. Only the huge battalions of the NHS workforce have the capacity to do the job, by using their collective muscle and the active support of the working class majority, as users of the health service. □

• Consultancies and corruption

Last year a Labour government-sponsored report into the NHS by McKinsey&Co suggested sacking 137,000 staff to help achieve the £20bn savings then required. These business consultants were paid up to £1,000 per day to tell ministers how to save money, by cutting health care! Then one or two of them suddenly reappeared as NHS bosses, like the chief of NHS London, Ruth Carnall, on £247,000 a year, or Attila Vegh, who is now managing director in South West Essex NHS. McKinsey boasted it was providing the NHS with "new talent".

In 2009 alone, NHS trusts spent £300m on management consultants - enough to pay 10,000 nurses and as much as the skin and lung cancer budgets combined. All this was to "re-design the NHS". So, now, with an even bigger "redesign" underway, Andrew Lansley claims he will bring down consultancy costs by a third. Except that if he cuts out NHS managers, as he

said he will, it's obvious who is going to step in to "sort things out". The likes of McKinsey will have a field day.

• Cutting already

The NHS in England has been told to find £20bn worth of cuts on top of the planned "reforms", supposedly due to increased needs from an aging population. Any "increase in funding" if it happens, will need to be "self-financing"! One plan was to phase out the phone helpline, NHS Direct, although Cameron has now denied it. Originally set up to take pressure off GPs, 40% of NHS Direct staff are qualified nurses. The proposal was to replace it with a cheaper, non-professional phone line called NHS111. Patients would speak to "call advisors" who would get 60h training - like all 999 call operators take. The pilot scheme for NHS111 service has 25 call advisors to one nurse. Surely a lot cheaper. But it's quite obvious that it won't fulfill the same role. So if this does happen, GPs will have even more on their plates!



The banking system: an on-going threat to society

The 4 largest British banks - HSBC, Barclays, RBS and Lloyds - announced a combined £15.5 bn profit for the first half of the year, up from £2.3 bn over the same period last year. So, when the working class is expected to foot the bill of the banks' bailout, the banks themselves are doing very well, thank you!

Not that the losses resulting from the banks' past mad gambling have all been accounted for. International financial institutions such as the IMF, estimate that hundreds of billions worth of banking losses remain hidden across the world and British banks are unlikely to be less

delinquent than their foreign rivals.

The banks' bailout was supposed to prevent the economy from being stalled by a shortage of cash. But politicians did nothing to force the banks to lend the public funds made available to them according to needs. Banks were left to decide according to their own interests. As a result small businesses were starved of cash and an even larger proportion of the population was priced out of the housing market.

Nor was the banks' bailout used as a lever to inject sanity into the banking system. Instead, the cash was deliberately handed over to the

banks to kickstart a renewed spree of profiteering on their part - including banks like Lloyds and RBS which are effectively under government control. In fact, the bulk of the profits they have just announced come from their "investment" arms - meaning from speculation.

More than ever, the parasitism of the banking system remains a factor of instability for the economy and a threat for society as a whole. Nothing short of the nationalisation of the entire banking industry, to form a single bank placed under workers' control, will protect society from this devastating parasitism. □

• Capital's unaffordable parasitism

City speculators are rejoicing. In some respects, they are doing better now, than they were before the crisis broke out, and better in London than anywhere else in the world.

Take currency trading, for instance. Its total value across the world has increased by 20% since April 2007, to a mind-boggling £2,600 billion per day! This means that every

day, a value equivalent to 24 days of the planet's entire production is being traded on currency markets, with more than a third of this being traded in London alone.

What for, one might ask? In theory, these markets are supposed to provide the currencies required for international trade, tourism, etc.. In practice, out of every £1 of currency

traded, over 90p are traded for speculative purposes only.

Today, bosses cry poverty to justify cutting jobs and wages, while politicians cut services which are vital to the working class majority. But the world is awash with the cash hoarded by the capitalist classes, whose speculative parasitism remains a constant threat for society as a whole. □

• Racketeering the population

Some of the banks' profits also come from short-changing retail customers. For instance, overdraft interest rates reached a record 19% average in August. Ironically, among the banks charging the highest rates is government-controlled RBS! Likewise, credit card interest rates have risen again, to an average 18% - from 16.5% over the past 2 years.

Never mind the fact that those most likely to be in need of credit for the most basic necessities are precisely those who faced wage and/or job cuts as a result of the crisis caused by the banks' profiteering!

As to those working class households lucky enough to have put some cash aside, they can only watch the value of their savings melt away, due to interest rates falling well below inflation - to 0.7% for an ISA account and as little as 0.2% for an instant-access savings account!

Despite the mountains of official reports exposing the banks' daylight robbery, no government has ever shown the slightest political will to end this racketeering - because for politicians of all stripes, private profiteering is a no-go area!

• Darling's taxing problem

Labour's former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, has admitted that the 50% tax he put on bankers' bonuses last year, failed to curb the City's appetite for outrageous pay and bonuses. According to him, this was because "the very people you are after here are very good at getting out of these things and... will find all sorts of imaginative ways of avoiding it".

As if Darling didn't know what to expect! Didn't he, himself, design this tax to apply only for a limited period and certain kind of bonuses and to be payable by the banks themselves, rather than by the bankers? Wasn't it obvious that, in the best of cases, bankers would just wait a bit longer until the tax no longer applied, in order to resume paying themselves even larger bonuses?

If the state managed to raise even one single penny through this tax - officially a total £2 billion, in fact - it's probably simply because the banks preferred to pay something rather than to take the risk of having the tax man inspecting their books too closely: they have too much to hide!

• Profit and job cuts mix well in their books

RBS and Standard Life have both just announced a new round of job cuts. So what is happening? A new crisis looms, their profits have been cut? No, in fact most banks (these 2 included) have just announced record profits. RBS is planning to cut 2,600 jobs while announcing pre-tax profits of £1.14bn while Standard Life with a more "modest" profit of £182 million is planning to cut 500 jobs! So, the more profits, the more job cuts?

What's even more shocking in the case of RBS is the fact that it is 84% owned by the government. This new round of job cuts, brings the bank's total job casualties to 24,600 jobs, thereby adding significantly to unemployment. What is the point of a bank being publicly controlled (with our taxes) if it is not in the interest of the public, one might ask? Well, this is precisely where this system reveals its true colours: when politicians talk about "public interest", what they mean is "big business interests"!

SOUTH AFRICA

Once the World Cup was over, it didn't take long for workers to start blowing vuvuzela horns on their own account - a battle cry for their strikes over jobs, wages and conditions. On 18 August, 1.3 million public sector workers closed clinics, hospitals and schools as well as government offices across the country, in one of the most militant and angry strikes in many years. And they held out against a hysterical, government-driven media campaign as well as against the apartheid-style weapons used by the army and police - including armoured cars, water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets.

Indeed, in the "democratic" land of post-apartheid, "essential services" provisions have been used repeatedly to ban some of these workers from striking. Many nurses were victimised after their last battle in 2007. If they chose to risk their jobs again this time, it is because the stakes were high: prices have been soaring, with food going up by 14% on average, electricity by 30%, etc., while many of the strikers haven't had a pay rise since 2007.

Besides, anger has been simmering for some time against ministers who cry poverty while wasting an estimated £3.5bn on the Soccer Cup and lining the pockets of their cronies with millions out of public funds and against a regime which has failed to deliver real improvement to the black majority. Indeed, social apartheid lives on, with 40% out of work and half as many at

Workers' anger boils over



Strike picket at Soweto's Baragwanath-Chris Hani hospital

least living in makeshift shanties in sprawling urban slums without water or electricity, let alone toilets.

After three weeks of strike, politicians got worried enough to agree to a tentative "deal" involving an 7.5% increase and £70/month housing allowance, still short of the unions' demands of 8.6% and £88/month house allowance. Nevertheless, union leaders used this to "suspend" the strike for three weeks under the pretext of consulting members. In a way, they immediately got a taste of the strikers' feelings when teachers kicked them out of a meeting near Johannesburg, in Gauteng province. So much so, that the provincial government attempted to defuse their anger by conceding ground on strike pay, thereby bypassing central

government negotiators!

The future will tell whether the public sector workers allow their mobilisation to be wasted on this deal. Especially as, at the time of writing, tens of thousands of workers remain on strike over similar demands in the private sector. By arming themselves with objectives capable of uniting their ranks across sectional boundaries and with organisations which they can really control, these workers could spread the mobilisation to many other sections. Then we might see the same South African working class which brought down apartheid in the 1980s, forcing western companies and their corrupt South African middlemen in government to cave in very quickly! □

FRANCE

On September 7th, news programmes showed some encouraging footage for once: hundreds of thousands of workers marching against government cuts in France. Even the French police's conservative figures admitted to over 1.2 million marchers across the country, with more on strike in the public and private sectors. And another similar day of strikes and protests is already planned for September 23rd.

The union confederations had chosen to focus the day on the government's planned "reform" of the pension system: no-one will be able to draw a pension before 62 (instead of 60) and the number of years of contributions required to get a full pension will be increased to 44 (instead of 40).

But just like in Britain, this "reform" comes with a whole range of attacks

- against jobs, wages, public services, allegedly "justified" by the budget deficit caused by the bankers' bail-out - as part of an offensive of the capitalist class which needs to be resisted as a whole. However, the French union leaders are only flexing their muscles in the hope of being invited to the negotiating table, in order to cut a deal with the government over pensions, while ignoring the other issues.

This means that in order to derail the bosses' offensive, just like here,



A contingent of car workers from Peugeot-Citroën in the Paris march

French workers will have to go much further than the objectives and the methods of action proposed by union leaders. They will have to embark on a counter-offensive on all fronts, using all their collective strength - a counter-offensive that will only be effective if it is proportionate to the bosses' offensive! □

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Train delays blues**

On the 19 August 2010, a fire in Newark caused major delays on East Coast rail, as the line was closed around Doncaster for almost 4 hours. The Guardian was quick to praise Elaine Holt, the Chairman of East Coast for helping out at King's Cross' Customer Information Point and lending a phone to a distraught parent (a Guardian journalist). Never mind the fact that this is what platform workers do every day! But the Guardian couldn't care less about what workers actually do!

When other serious delays happened

11 days later, due to a broken down train and overhead wire problems, all the Leeds services were cancelled and trains were more than 2 hours late. But Elaine Holt didn't give a "helping hand" to train drivers who ended up driving more than 5 hours without a break (1.5 hours more than the safety maximum), because no replacement could be found. And how come was there a shortage of drivers when more than a dozen services had been cancelled? Quite simply because each one of the private shark companies



which has run East Coast over the past years has done its very best to cut jobs. Having made their profits, they walked away, one after the other, but the staff shortage remained. And it is a safety hazard!

• Talk is cheap (and doesn't fix trains)

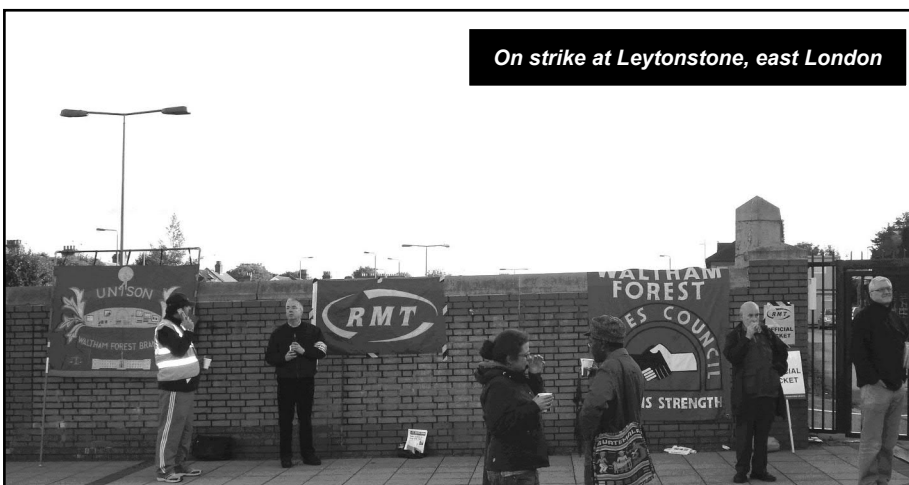
Apparently, accidents on board EC trains have increased. Management thinks that it's just a question of reporting faults. But we have been doing this for some time and find the same faults a week or more later. In fact, everyone knows that National Express had run everything down before they left, including maintenance. So how does East Coast expect things to improve without increasing the number of maintenance workers? [King's X - Workers' Platform - 08/09/2010]

• Russian roulette with payroll jobs

Payroll services was moved from York to Colchester when National Express took over the east coast line, to centralise it for all their franchises. Now they've left, it has been moved back to York, disrupting the lives of clerical workers again. Faced with the "choice" of uprooting themselves and their families or redundancy, 16 chose the latter. Yet again, the workforce suffers the fallout from the fragmentation of the railway and the franchising lottery. [King's X - Workers' Platform - 08/09/2010]

• Peak cheek

Train companies' evening peak hours are getting earlier and earlier, with some starting as early as 3pm. And who is the worst offender? Though FCC is a past master at this sneaky game, it's East Coast which has the longest "peak" period, of 4 hours, followed closely by Virgin. According to the rail watchdog Passenger Focus, some fares have nearly quadrupled since last year. The TOCs say they want to bring more people onto trains - but only if they pay top dollar, obviously. [King's X - Workers' Platform - 08/09/2010]

London Tube strike: for safety's sake!

On strike at Leytonstone, east London

London Underground (LUL) workers struck for 24 hours on the 6-7 September in the first of four 24-hour strikes planned up to the end of November. They're fighting 800 station and service control job cuts and cuts in wages and conditions for maintenance workers. This is the first time

the union TSSA, which represents some station staff, has taken action on the tube since the 1926 General Strike!

Tube bosses have been cutting jobs consistently for years. In 2008 they stopped replacing staff who left. Last year, despite a 48-hour strike, they

tried to implement 1,000 job cuts, claiming these were "backroom" jobs. But they are cutting safety inspections of tracks and escalators from 2 per week to 1 per week and ignoring minimum safety critical levels of staffing, including in vital signalling! No wonder there are weekly "near misses" when trains could have crashed head-on! The Oyster card's introduction was an excuse to cut "customer-facing" jobs, leaving stations unmanned or with just one worker to manage both ticket office and barrier. Never mind that problems with the Oyster cards require even more staff!

The real question is why are union leaderships only organising 24-hour stoppages? Surely this unsafe and undermanned tube should be shut down completely and not re-opened until the bosses have restored all the safety standards they shelved and the jobs they cut - for the sake of all passengers and all workers?

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Plenty of engines, not enough workers!**

Ever since 250 temps were marched out of Dagenham engine plant in November 2008, there's been a shortage of hands. On the "Lynx" 1.8l engine and "Puma" 2-2.5l engines lines, a whole shift was cut, but the "cut" workers went straight to the newer "Tiger" 1.4 and 1.6l engine lines where a 3rd shift was created. All the other lines were left with ongoing labour shortfalls, even if now, this could be alleviated by workers transferring in from the soon-to-be-closed Body Subassembly and Wheel Plants, as well as from the Press shop, which is reducing its headcount.

After the summer holiday, instead of re-manning a 3rd shift on the Puma engine line, Ford decided that the extra engines it now required, should be built at weekends. So Puma remains on a "double day" shift pattern weekdays so as to do the overtime Saturday/Sunday. But a Saturday shortfall is meant to be filled by workers who just finished a late shift at 10.30pm the previous night, leaving only 8 hours between shifts. Never mind the danger to health and safety! There are rumours Ford might take on 60 temps at



the end of October, inviting back those it sacked in 2008. About time and fine, although we could do with many more - but only if they get permanent contracts from day one!

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Behind the gloss, workers are stripped bare**

BMW's profits jumped sixfold to around £700m in the second quarter of this year. With booming sales of Rolls-Royce, the new BMW 5 Series and top-of-the-range models, BMW is set to equal its best-ever, pre-recession sales. Proof indeed that the rich have gained, not suffered, from the crisis that they created!

BMW workers are under no illusion that booming profits will end the bosses' unrelenting offensive against their jobs and conditions. Management utilises every opportunity to underline the "provisional" nature of the recovery and there is no let-up in its attacks. Last year, BMW

imposed 8,000 redundancies, mainly in Germany. The other prong of its offensive is to replace permanent BMW workers with lower-paid temporary agency workers without pension entitlement - "to keep jobs at home", they say - much like, in fact, what is happening throughout the car industry.

In fact it is at the Mini plant at Cowley, that BMW has gone significantly further than any other UK-based car maker in its use and abuse of temporary workers. Workers taken on as temps, as long as 8 years ago, are still denied permanent contracts. Today, with a possible



shift reduction and managers talking of having 80 agency workers for every 20 BMW workers, the inappropriately-termed long-service "temps" at Cowley face a tough fight to turn the tables.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• We have to bury this zombie yet again**

It looks as if the Con-Dems will soon be trying to break up the postal service and sell off all of RM operations (even if finding buyers in this climate may well be a big problem, just like it was when Mandelson tried it). Hooper Mark2 is due out this week. And we'd fight it a lot better all workers together, especially with DHL, UKMail, UPS etc., workers organised alongside us. (Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 7/9/10)

• This is where the "revision" was needed!

More Processing mates will leave on 16 Sept. Farewell and

good luck. But when is the re-sign? We've now waited over 2 years to get off jobs which some of us from other offices were originally slotted into on a "temporary" basis! Is the cynical answer that bosses can move us anywhere under flexibility, so re-signs aren't needed, as nobody is "permanent"? Anyway, while they were busy "transforming" why didn't they devise ways to automate for the most tedious (and wearing) jobs first? (Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 7/9/10)

• Cover uncovered

As if it's not bad enough, this summer there's been no effort to cover absent postmen/women's duties, and especially at weekends. So what about absent managers' duties? Covered! All the blooming lot! (Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 7/9/10)

**• Get scrubbing!**

The shortage of (real, working) hands is probably worst in Romec cleaning, where it's aggravated by managers' policy not to replace anyone who leaves. And then they give 1 hour overtime to cover a missing worker's 8 hours! Given there's a full complement of RM managers (i.e., far too many) it'd make a lot of sense if they got given cleaning and scrubbing duties asap - thus preventing them from causing any more grief. (Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 7/9/10)

Pakistan

The floods which spread over Pakistan during August were among the worst seen to date. Twenty-one million people have been affected – one eighth of the population. Six million have lost their homes and eight million need immediate emergency aid. The official death toll of 1,600 so far, is bound to be a vast underestimation.

On this occasion, the huge machinery of the Pakistani army - one of the world's largest - and the country's notoriously corrupt civilian regime proved incapable of providing the immediate help required by the population. The floods only exposed, once again, the on-going collapse of the institutions of the Pakistani state, on which fundamentalist forces have been thriving over the past years.

As a result, the population was largely left to its own devices. Donations flowing from individuals abroad did help, but less so the aid pledged by the rich countries - in fact, only half of it has been paid so far, of which a significant part probably ended up lining the wrong pockets, as usual. But this help did not and could not provide the heavy equipment that was needed. In particular,

The "aid" was there - but they wouldn't use it!



many people died in the flooded areas because there was no helicopter at hand to rescue them.

Yet, it is not as if there is a shortage of such equipment in the region. Just over the border with Afghanistan, there were hundreds of British and US helicopters and all the air power required to drop food

supplies over the affected areas. But they were simply not used. Instead, the war went on regardless of the floods, including US bombings over the border in Pakistan. Spreading death and destruction is far more important for the imperialist powers than saving lives! ☐

Iraq

In the run-up to this November's mid-term congressional election in the US, Obama had to be seen delivering on his pledge to withdraw from Iraq. Hence his announcement of the "end of US combat operations" on August 31st.

But this "pull-out" feels more like another stage in the same old occupation. Not only will 50,000 US troops remain stationed in Iraq for 16 months at least, but the 15 military bases they man seem increasingly likely to become permanent - all under the control of the US embassy in Baghdad, the largest in the world. This big occupation army is already

supplemented by at least twice as many "private security contractors", whose numbers are to be increased even more. And tens of thousands more are employed by various foreign governments, international bodies and western companies operating in Iraq. This fake "withdrawal" looks more like a privatisation of the occupation than an end to it!

As to the country itself, despite all the lies about rebuilding its infrastructure, it is still in ruins. Most of the population still have no electricity, drinkable water or access to basic services. The Iraqi regime propped up by the occupation forces

remains based on rival militias vying for political power. This regime is so unstable that since the last parliamentary elections held in March, its protagonists have been unable to agree on the composition of a new government, while their rivalries have boiled over once again in the streets, in the form of renewed terrorist attacks and gun fights, with the population being caught in the crossfire.

The Iraqi population has already paid an enormous price for the western occupation. It should not be prolonged for a single day more, in any shape or form! ☐

Behind the US "withdrawal"

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

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

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.