

WORKERS' fight



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

THEY CAN LIVE ON £53/WK? LET THEM TRY!

From the comfort of his £1,600/wk salary (after tax), work and pensions secretary Ian Duncan Smith dared to boast on Radio 4 that, if he had to, he would manage to live on £53/wk - or just under the lower rate of the Jobseekers' Allowance. He was being challenged by a member of the audience who was working on market stalls after being made redundant.

Well, let him try to live on £53/wk! These well-off ministers may not have a clue about the realities of life - but they certainly aren't short of hypocrisy. Anyone who has to live on such an income knows how impossible it is! Especially now that the government has started to slash, in a big way, all the other benefits that low-income households could claim - thereby pushing an even larger section of the working class into worse poverty.

Gutter politics

Duncan Smith's arrogant boasting wasn't the end of it, however. Osborne felt he had to add his own cynical charge against welfare claimants, by lending his support to a Daily Mail campaign, which claimed that Derby child-murderer Mick Philpott was the product of a "benefits lifestyle" - something that Cameron endorsed the next day!

If Philpott is the product of anything, it is of this dysfunctional society itself. Wasn't this man, who was obviously deranged, judging from his long history of domestic violence (including a prison sentence for attempted murder), let loose with no psychiatric treatment nor follow-up by social workers? And just as the Daily Mail's owners are hoping today that their campaign will be a good "seller", wasn't Philpott repeatedly invited by TV shows to parade his sick contempt for women, in a bid to boost their audiences by appealing to the crassest prejudices?

So, yes, Philpott was produced by a



Manchester marches against the bedroom tax

society which puts money first and has no way of dealing with deranged criminals except a blind system of punishment.

But that millionaires like Osborne and Cameron, who don't know what the word hardship means, use the sickness of Philpott's crimes to direct the hostility of their electorate against welfare claimants, is even more sickening. For all their public school and Oxbridge upbringing, these men really belong to the gutter into which they are trying to drag the poorest section of the working class!

Disconnect capital's drip-feed!

Behind this crude demagoguery, there is, of course, the ConDems' need to rally the ranks of their electorate behind their drip-feeding of big shareholders.

Hence their scapegoating - of the jobless (for being "lazy"), of the poor (for being poor), of migrants (for coming here), and of all workers for being a "burden" on welfare.

But who's a "burden" on society? Is it the 660,000 households facing a benefit

cut they can't afford, for having a tiny spare bedroom in a tiny social home? Or is it the 13,000 millionaires, in their large mansions, who have just been awarded a tax cut? As if these fat cats needed it!

Are welfare benefits such a "burden" on society that it warrants capping their increase to 1% a year - well below inflation - and depriving hundreds of thousands of disabled of any benefit? This, when corporation tax is cut by another 2%?

The problem with welfare is not that it's a "burden", but that it's needed at all. In a rational society, people would work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs - regardless of age, health, etc.. But in this society, which is run as their private property by a tiny minority of big capitalists, only their greed matters. These parasites are the real "burden" on society - because of how they bleed workers' labour and milk the state. If anything is to change, if today's attacks on workers are to be stopped, it is the stranglehold of this minority over society that will have to be ended! □

Banking crisis still looming

Since last summer, the "Funding for Lending" scheme provided banks with cash lent by the Bank of England at a rock-bottom 0.75% interest rate. Most big banks grabbed the opportunity. But official figures published in March show that far from increasing their lending to the economy, they cut it even more - meaning that all this cheap public money was used for speculation.

This explains why, in 2012, the gross profits of the five largest banks soared by 45%, to £31.5bn. If their actual profits went down over the

year, it was only due to the fines (money-laundering, Libor scandal) and compensation (PPI scandal) they had to pay.

However, even after all these years on life support from the state, at taxpayers' expense, it would be wrong to think that the British banking system is in any better shape. A recent report by financial authorities estimates the losses still hidden in the same banks' accounts at £31.8bn. Drip-feeding the capitalist system is too costly. Getting rid of it is the only cure. □

• PPI won't go away

The scandal of the mis-selling of Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) isn't dying down. In fact it's escalating. The number of customers claiming compensation for having been conned into buying insurance they didn't need is expected to be much higher this year than last. The Financial Ombudsman is getting 2000 new cases a day, over claims turned down by lenders, and expects to close three times more cases in 2013 than in 2012.

Obviously, the scale of this scam was much greater than previously admitted by the high street banks. Between them, they've increased the amount of money they've put aside to cover compensation claims to around £14bn in total. So that's the true measure of the extent to which they robbed their customers - because the so-called "compensation" is just paying back, with normal interest, the sums they shouldn't have taken in the first place.

Anyone who tried to help themselves to a tiny fraction of that amount from a bank would go straight to jail. But we still have to hear about bankers being taken to court, let alone jailed, for this colossal theft!

• EU bankers' "bonus cap"

Cameron finally failed in his lonely crusade to stop bankers' bonuses from being capped across Europe. From July 2014, no EU banker will earn more than the equivalent of his annual salary in bonuses (admittedly a comfortable cap!), except when a "super-majority" of shareholders explicitly raises a bonus to a maximum of twice this level.

London's banks responded by claiming that this will cost them

£500m/yr in order to "compensate" lower bonuses by paying higher salaries. Meanwhile, Osborne complained bitterly that this will "undermine responsibility" just when the principle of "clawing back deferred bonuses" was making bankers avoid risky gambles. If only!

This is pure hypocrisy. Up to now, one of the City's main attractions for foreign bankers was the British tax system, which imposes much lower tax rates on bonuses (which are mostly paid in shares) than on salaries. But with this new EU-wide cap on bonuses, London will be far less attractive for the banking world's fat cats. And that really bugs Cameron and Osborne.

• Want to be a millionaire?

Who needs to play the lottery? To become a millionaire, you just have to get a top job in a bank.

Barclays has, for the first time, disclosed that 428 of its staff earn over £1 million and 5 top executives more than £5m (even more than its chief executive, who "only" gets £2.6m)! In contrast, half of the workforce earns £25,000 or less. HSBC has 204 employees in its millionaire club. Even RBS - despite its 80% public funding - has a senior executive on £4.8m and 93 millionaires among its staff. Comparatively, Santander is small fry, with "only" 19 millionaires.

This is a kick in the teeth for the majority of working people, whose real wages have been cut by 1.4% on average over the past year. No wonder the banks used to keep all these figures under wraps...

• Pipeline for profit

When technical problems temporarily stopped gas being piped from Belgium to Britain during the recent cold snap, stored supplies dwindled to 2 days' worth of consumption, leading to scare stories of soaring prices. No wonder. Gas companies never bothered to invest in storage capacity, so there's never more than 15 days' stored supply. Some in the media claimed the problem was linked to depletion of North Sea fields - but Britain has been a net importer of gas since 2004. Anyway, when North Sea gas was in full flow, it didn't mean bills were low.

This short-term shortage caused a jump in the wholesale price of gas on the artificial market where the privatised gas distribution companies supply themselves from the privatised gas production companies. This market is so dodgy that it has been under investigation since last year, over widespread price-fixing. Above all, like any market, it is driven by speculation - for the sake of profiteering. And all the way down the line, it's the rest of us, consumers, who foot the bill.

Letter from Sussex

• Tortuous closure?

In 2006, East Sussex NHS Trust had announced the closure of either the Eastbourne or Hastings maternity unit. Since then, it has been faced with angry and large protests, the likes of which many would not expect of the "affluent south-east" so the axe-men decided to bide their time, while cutting staff and resources.

Now Eastbourne's maternity unit is to be downgraded from a consultant-led to a midwife-led service, because, being "under-staffed", it's "unsafe"! It's been deliberately run down, in other words. One retired gynaecologist observed that it would take only one death, due to complications that midwives could not cope with, to close the unit completely, thereby completing the Trust's mission - but at what cost?

• Outsourcing "side-effects"

Local councils in Sussex recently ditched their in-house refuse collection and signed a contract with Kier Environmental, saying that by doing so, they'd save some £30 million over the next decade. Kier immediately said that since the councils' town halls are "commercial properties" (as they can be rented out to third parties), they would have to pay 300% more for refuse collection! Of course, that might provide councils with an excuse to refuse renting rooms out for public meetings - which might be quite beneficial for them, in times like these...

Workers have no nationality: our country is the world!

Cameron's 25th March anti-immigrant speech targeted his waning electorate. But along with all the main parties' leaders, he is engaging in crass, xenophobic overbidding with regard to migrant workers - especially Romanians and Bulgarians who'll finally, on 1 January 2014, 7 years after their countries' entry into the EU, be able to work here, without restrictions.

Said Cameron: "Ending the something for nothing culture needs to apply to immigration as well as welfare. We're going to give migrants from the European Economic Area a very clear message. Just like British citizens, there is no absolute right to unemployment benefit." Yup, the same abusive tones he uses against the poor and unemployed, implying that the jobless ("benefit scroungers") have no jobs because they don't want "to get on in life".

• British jobs for "benefit scroungers"?

It's a little hard to understand how the government can label migrant, "foreign", workers as too-lazy-to-work, "benefit scroungers" and "social housing queue jumpers" - and then immediately afterwards, accuse them of taking all the jobs away from "native" Brits!

Yes, after insulting us with their

• Universities starved of foreign students

Business leaders and academics who fear for their now private-capital-dependent universities are dismayed at government policy with regard to visas for foreign students. They point to a £15bn/yr "industry" generated by the exorbitant tuition fees and living cost paid by these

• Security sharks gather around UKBA's corpse

The abolition of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) was also announced by Cameron. The agency has been through several incarnations since Labour declared it "unfit for purpose". Ten years later, Home secretary, Theresa May, has now decided that this is true, and that it should be centralised under the Home Office!

Many explanations for the poor

Now, apparently migrant workers come here for the sake of "benefit tourism"!

However Cameron refuses to substantiate such inflammatory claims. And no wonder: very few foreign nationals claim benefits. They already have less access to welfare and the NHS, needing to prove "habitual residence". Indeed, most of Cameron's "new" measures were already in place.

Being a migrant worker is already tough. However, in the context of the recession this kind of scapegoating

blatant class prejudice, Cameron & Co are pretending to give a damn about the lack of jobs - a situation they had more than a hand in creating. They say they will attempt (against EU law) to discriminate against all workers who are not British (and what is the definition of "British?") and stop all EU nationals, as well as all

students, mainly from India and China. In the year to last September the number of such students fell by 70,000, due to the clamp-down by the Home Office.

The question is whether the government will back down, due to the "£" signs in front of its eyes, or whether it

performance of UKBA are given, like the "botched" computerisation, which exacerbated backlogs, etc., but who actually pointed to the real cause of the UKBA "crisis"? Who exposed the serial job cuts which meant even fewer workers processing the floods of papers to handle, in these days of shoring up borders and so-called "terrorist threat"? And what

This March, protests by workers in Bulgaria brought the government down. Is it what worries Cameron?



can fan the flames of violent racism, as happened catastrophically in the run-up to World War II. But the base prejudices distilled by the likes of Cameron can be challenged - by all workers standing up together, for each other and behind their common class interests. □

other foreign nationals, from taking jobs which could be done by a native worker! So are foreign workers taking jobs, or are they taking unemployment benefit? Cameron can't have it both ways. He should make up his mind.

will carry on playing to the racist gallery which it imagines is out there, hanging onto its every word. Because if it doesn't back down on the visa issue, the already cash-strapped universities are likely to make the ConDems even more unpopular by raising fees even more.

about the lucrative contracts dished out to private agencies (using agency temps on rock-bottom pay) in the Home Office itself, as well as deportation operations and prisons, etc..? It's big business. One wonders what juicy schemes for private sharks will come out of this new set-up. Because one thing's for sure - that's what May has in mind!

• Autumn 2014: a time bomb

In England and Wales, the school-age populations are increasing more rapidly than the classrooms to teach them in. Since 2010, 81,500 new primary-school places have become available but another 240,000 will be required by the end of 2014.

The fact is that from 2006 onwards, the numbers of 4-year-olds starting school every year has increased. At the

time, the future growth of the population was underestimated - with the ONS predicting 595,000 births for 2010, when the actual figure was 690,000.

Meanwhile, both Tory and Labour politicians have used state education as a political football. Vast sums have been ploughed into secondary "academies", "free schools" and "faith schools" while neglecting primary schools. Today,

teachers in state schools are deeply demoralised, with 10% leaving every year and insufficient numbers training to replace them. Pay and pensions are being decimated. Class sizes are ballooning. If an explosion takes place when term begins in September 2014, politicians of all descriptions will only have themselves to blame.

Budget 2013

Predictably, the 2013 budget included yet another raft of hand-outs to the capitalist class, which will add billions to Osborne's budget "deficit". And this, just at the time when the poorest section of the population were being targeted by a series of ruthless welfare cuts supposed to reduce the same "deficit".

Never has the coalition so blatantly displayed its determination to transfer the burden of paying for

For wealthy skivers and City scroungers

the crisis onto the working class. Osborne called this budgeting for "growth". But when the likes of Osborne talk about "growth", it's not socially useful production they have in mind. Nor is it the creation of real, decent jobs. No, what they're aiming at is the "growth" of company profits and shareholders' dividends, period!

Never has the capitalists' parasitism reached such a level either.

Of course, the City and its men in government have every reason to feel confident: they have nothing to fear from a TUC whose main concern is to sit around in committees with bosses and ministers. How far the capitalists are able to extend their looting of society on workers' backs, however, depends on something else: the patience of the working-class, which is not infinite! ☐

Capital on income support

Going even further than his past promises, Osborne announced that, by 2015, the rate of corporation tax - the tax paid by companies on profits - would be reduced to 20%, down from 28% when the ConDems came into office. This means that, between now and 2015, something like another £20bn per year will be transferred from public funds to the capitalists' coffers. Much of this bounty will be turned into dividends - a cherry on the cake of the very same rich shareholders who have just been awarded a cut in the tax rate they pay on salaries over and above £150,000 a year, from 50 to 45%!

Osborne proudly boasted that "Britain will have... the lowest business tax of any major economy in the world", insisting that this is a "vital necessity" for the British economy to survive in the face of "foreign competition".

If so, one can only wonder how the British economy managed to survive during the first four years of Thatcher's government, for instance, with a corporation



tax rate above 50%? But then, if a lackey of big business like Osborne had his

way, wouldn't corporation tax be abolished altogether?

• Tax fraudsters reassured

This time round again, Osborne was vocal about clamping down on tax evasion and avoidance. A recent deal with Guernsey will supposedly, reinforce its "commitment to tax transparency". More like serve as a cover for its continuing role as a tax haven! In fact, this is a very respectful way to treat this very British tax haven, when the only obstacle to a police raid on the island is a statute dating back to the Middle Ages.

If the deal goes along the same lines as the one recently agreed with the Isle of Man, the British residents who've stashed their money away there, have until 2016 to "volunteer" to pay the tax they owe - which gives them plenty of time to hide their assets some other way.

But what if these fraudsters fail to come forward? Is Revenue and Customs going to send its inspectors over and force the banks to open their books? Judging by their past record, there's no chance of that. So everything will still depend on the goodwill of the island's authorities - whose main concern is to protect the highly lucrative "business" of tax-dodging.

• NIC - hands off our wages!

Bosses have long been demanding a cut in their NI contributions. So, in this budget, Osborne reduced the NIC bill of every company by £2,000/yr. Obviously, this is peanuts for all but the smallest businesses.

Although it's unlikely to entice them into creating jobs, contrary to what Osborne claims. In fact, in retail for instance, since most jobs are part time on the minimum wage, bosses don't usually pay NIC contributions for their workers anyway!

However, behind this symbolic hand-out (although it will still cost £1.5bn which will, no doubt, have to be paid for by more cuts in public services and welfare!), there is something more sinister - Osborne's claim that employers' NI contributions are a "tax on jobs".

This is an outright lie. Just like the employee's NI contribution, the employer's NIC is taken out of the worker's wages and paid directly to the state, in order to fund welfare provisions. It's not money taken from the bosses, but money already earned by workers through their labour and that's a big difference!

So any cut in employers' NICs which doesn't immediately result in a corresponding increase in workers' wages, is just a cut in workers' real wages!

• And for the happy few...

Probably none of our readers has shares in startup companies nor cash in speculative funds. But some of the ConDems' sponsors undoubtedly do. For those particular individuals, Osborne has prepared another cherry to adorn their already very fat cake - by scrapping the 0.5% stamp duty on transactions involving such investments.

This was a tiny tax by any measure. But apparently, even that was too much. Fund managers, for instance, complained that they were "at a disadvantage" compared to tax havens such as Luxembourg.

The poor guys were obviously breaking Osborne's heart - despite all his proclaimed determination to clamp down on tax evaders. But then, of course, if he manages to scrap all taxes on profits and such like, that will be the end of tax fraud, won't it?

Making workers pay

The ConDems claim their welfare and tax changes are aimed at "making work pay" and ending the "welfare trap". Of course, they wouldn't dream of tackling the bosses who pay so little that their workers are reliant on benefits, nor those who make workers redundant to boost their profits. But they say they are helping the low-paid, by increasing the personal allowance threshold - the amount earned before tax kicks in.

In fact, the opposite is true. Some workers earn so little that they didn't pay tax, even before the increase. And those who will pay a bit less in tax, can end up keeping as little as 15p in each extra pound, since as income rises, benefits are cut! What is more, the welfare cuts which come into effect this month, will hit everyone. Child benefit and some tax credits have been frozen. Other benefits and tax credits will rise by only 1% a year for the next

Budget 2013

three years - which is likely to mean a cut of 4% in real terms, thanks to inflation. Many will face housing benefit cuts (including the notorious "bedroom tax") and council tax benefit cuts, on top of all this. And 3.7 million disabled people will be hit by multiple benefit cuts, which will cost them, collectively, an estimated £28 billion over the next 5 years!

This is not about "making work pay", but just making the working class pay, and pay again. □

• Childcare swindle

Osborne's budget was billed as a "budget for families, with children, who want to work hard", on the grounds that it introduced extra childcare subsidies for working families. Parents can get up to 85% of childcare costs covered - but only if they both earn enough to pay income tax. So the lowest earners - those who work part-time so they can juggle their family responsibilities, perhaps - will miss out on the increase. By contrast, any family which is not on benefits or tax credits can get £1,200/yr per child, if neither parent has a salary of more than £150,000. In other words, families earning £300,000/yr could still be eligible. In any case, the bulk of the extra subsidy for childcare will go to those above the benefit threshold (and some well above), rather than those who need it most.

The government itself has worked out that its welfare cuts will push another 200,000 children into poverty over the next few years. They know very well that families which, although working, are too poor to pay tax, will be made even poorer. This is cynicism at its worst.

• Legal aid cuts bite

Just as the "bedroom tax" came into force on 1 April, housing charity Shelter announced the closure of nearly a third of its offices. It can no longer afford to run them, since losing government funding. The government has also imposed means testing for legal aid (a threshold for household income has been set at £32,000) for employment cases. This comes on top of the obstacles already placed in front of workers who decide to go to Tribunal. There are now fees for claims and hearings, caps on awards and the qualifying period for unfair dismissal has been doubled to 2 years.

Justice Secretary Chris Grayling announced that the biggest chunk of the legal aid budget - defence in criminal cases - will also face cuts. From this summer, he proposes to seize defendants' cars and sell them, to recoup costs if they are found guilty. Of course, this will be a drop in the ocean, given the fees lawyers charge. But in this case, Grayling's intention was merely to grab cheap headlines.

• Hypocritical "help"

A pilot project to pay housing benefit direct to social housing tenants has resulted in big increases in arrears. One housing association in Cwmbran in south Wales reported an increase of 50%. Of course, private tenants who receive housing benefit already pay their own rents, but the government wants to extend this to the very poorest in society. They say it's all about "helping" people to "manage money responsibly". In fact it's just preparing the ground for Universal Credit - the simplified benefit system which is meant to be cheaper to administer.

But the results speak for themselves. Tenants fell behind with their rent payments because they didn't have enough money to pay gas and electricity bills and other basic necessities. This scheme has exposed, entirely predictably, just how inadequate the overall incomes of many social tenants are. No amount of patronising "help with financial management" will get round that.

• An upside-down world

On average, every job advertised in Britain attracts 4 applicants, but in some parts of the country, it can be much higher. The London borough of Hackney has 20 people applying for every job available. But there are even worse spots: in Hull, over 50 people are chasing each job and in Eastbourne, recently, 900 people applied for 10 jobs which were advertised in a new DFS store!

But these figures don't even show the true problem: more than 20% of young people aged 16-24 are unemployed, with a third for more than a year. No wonder over 2,000 young people applied for 50 positions in a 4-year apprenticeship scheme with EDF, despite a starting wage much below the minimum wage.

At the same time, the number of over-65s in employment is close to the million mark - in fact this category constitutes half of the "increase in employment" so much celebrated by the ConDems over the past 3 years.

What should one call a society in which older workers can't afford to retire while young people are "retired" before they can even start working? Mad?!

• Jobseekers Bill whitewash

Stung by the appeal court ruling in favour of two jobseekers who challenged the legality of being forced to work for their benefits, the government has rushed to change the law, in order to make "workfare" legally enforceable. As it stands, about 300,000 claimants who had benefits cut for refusing to do unpaid work could seek compensation, and this is what ministers want to prevent.

Not only do they now wish to legalise this slave labour, but they also want to wipe out the illegality of all those previous sanctions by changing the law retrospectively! A DWP spokesman summed it up: the legislation would "protect taxpayers" from claims by "people who didn't do enough to find work". As if being free labour for scrounging employers was anything to do with finding work, and as if there was anywhere near enough real work to find! But never mind, this didn't prevent Miliband from instructing Labour MPs to abstain in this vote in the Commons. Yet more proof that the ConDems and Labour are on the same side against the working class!

• Jobless are the target

Jobcentres now apparently have to meet "targets" with respect to cutting claimants' benefits! Advisers have been warned to expect disciplinary action if they don't! A leaked newsletter from Malvern Jobcentre stated it was "among the worst-performing offices" and that under a "new sanctions regime", if more claimants were not penalised, it would be put in "special measures". Staff at Walthamstow Jobcentre were similarly warned to "up their game" as the office was "95th in the league table".

ConDem ministers and top DWP civil servants have tried to wash their hands of this latest scandal, denying that such targets exist at all. One official did admit that the comparative figures were available, but claimed they were for monitoring, not "league tables". But, of course, it's the staff at these offices who are in the frontline of the government's campaign against the unemployed. So it's highly likely that they are being used as its footsoldiers.

King's Cross railway station (London)**• ISS strike - low pay, no way!**

ISS, the huge services multinational has cleaning contracts in lots of railway stations as well as offices in Britain. It pays its workers as little as it can get away with - meaning often just the minimum wage, without basic things such as sick pay, night-shift

premiums, etc.

These are the conditions of ISS workers employed on the East Coast Mainline train-cleaning contract. Having had enough of it, we decided to take industrial action. After 3 strikes and the threat of a fourth one,



the company finally came up with two very small increases which, considering that we hadn't had a pay rise in 13 years, were not acceptable. The fourth strike took place over 2 days during the Easter weekend. There were strong pickets at King's Cross and Newcastle, the two main strongholds of the strike, with over 100 workers involved. And we are determined not to sit on our hands. Unless ISS comes up with serious proposals, especially concerning wages, there will be more strikes in the coming weeks.

**• Time to grab a railway bargain?**

The government has failed to find a bidder for the Crossrail train project meant to link Canary Wharf to Heathrow airport. Obviously, big companies have no appetite for such a long-term investment, these days. So the government has now decided to fully fund this £1bn project. Well-heeled City businessmen needing rapid transport are well worth such an investment, ven if there's not a

penny to spare to improve other ordinary commuters' routes!

Meanwhile train companies are having a very profitable time. The last quarter of 2012 has been the most lucrative ever for the train operating companies, thanks to soaring fares (increasing over and above inflation) and rising numbers of passengers (driving has become far too expensive). So, after years of East Coast Mainline being

kept in public ownership, and on the strength of the £600m profit it made in 2012, the government has now decided to re-privatise it - by 2015. And the chances are that this time, the government won't have any problem in finding bidders. Because unlike the long-term profit yield expected from CrossRail, bidders for East Coast stand to make a very quick buck.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Big issue needs big plans**

So the protest (an Easter Saturday "strike") of our fellow workers from Crown Post Offices brought (the CWU says) 2,000 out onto the streets - plus public supporters - against the closure/franchising out of 70 more of the 373 remaining Crown offices.

Of course they must stay open as "real" post offices, and in fact those in the back of a sweet shop should be rehabilitated! But token actions like this one never got anything done. So we're asking: when is the real strike, and who's joining in? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 3/4/13]

• What about their present conditions?

Since the CWU doesn't go in for effective action, maybe it could at least organise some effective research into the

pay and conditions of all those many (unorganised) workers in the thousands of franchised post offices? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 3/4/13]

• The "Can Wait Union"

Now the union says the boycott of Down Stream Access post from UK Mail, TNT, etc., is to be put off? Ofcom (the government's postal "regulator") said it'll monitor private companies competing with RM to deliver the "final mile" (like TNT tries to do in west London) and ensure the Universal Service Obligation (USO) is OK. The CWU said the boycott may be imposed after delegates vote at annual conference. Nothing's urgent after all? Not defending private postal workers' jobs, wages, and Ts&Cs, never mind our own? And what about our pay rise, due now? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 3/4/13]

**• Mr Ward "deeply concerned"**

Actually the CWU and Ofcom speak the same language, so we aren't very surprised. Ofcom's "monitoring" of companies competing for DSA only means it will ensure "fair competition". And that's exactly what the CWU's Dave Ward wants - when by definition, competition is about kicking out, by undercutting, your rivals. No other way to make "fair" profit, except by cheapening the cost of labour, one way or another. For workers it's unfair, for the bosses it's fair. Simple(s). [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 3/4/13]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Not acceptable**

Tho' Southampton mates reluctantly voted to accept the VR/EVR offer (despite only 100 jobs remaining at the docks), in S&TO we're still not finally convinced to go for VR. Hence the 1 in 4 who didn't vote to agree the offer. And especially not when the "new" Engine Plant Toolroom (meant to become the main European power train tooling centre!), will only offer 25 new tooling jobs!!? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

• Walks and quacks like compulsory redundancy

Yes and the one skilled job just advertised at Dunton required CAD, so not open to toolmakers... All this talk about there being "no compulsory redundancies" is cotton wool! It's time to call these job cuts what they really are! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

• Broaden the struggle?

The appearance so belatedly of union officials like Unite's Maddison (Mr Sell-out supreme) in S&TO and the hint that a strike vote may still be offered, is just not serious on their part. It underlines the fact that "our part" can't possibly rely on weak, self-appointed

"leaders". Anyway, there's a lot we can still do to defend our futures - and since these futures are tied up with those of mates in DEP/DDC, let alone the other Ford plants, shouldn't we be deciding how to go about it together? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

• Throwing a spanner in the works!

Despite the wave of attacks on all car workers, over the Channel, big fights are on-going.

In France Peugeot-Citroen (PSA) workers are resisting the closure of the huge Aulnay factory near Paris, and where, as a result, not one car has left the lines for 2 months. Or in Romania, where Renault Dacia workers are striking for a 25% wage increase!!

They're making sure the car bosses don't find it so easy to turn the screw! A good example to follow! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

• Open the channel!

As for the Ford Genk closure - tho' it's hard to get all the facts, since the inter-union channel is shut to us ordinary workers, we read in the news that "production resumed on 18th March". So when did it stop, for the "n"th time!?

After all, since October last year only



7,000 cars were produced instead of 70,000... Now we hear that a vote went in favour of a new VR offer - and that subcontracted "suppliers", through their protests and strikes have won the same deal as Ford employees! Yes, they may not have won the 5 years wages they demanded - but they've won 2½ years wages - and it's for everyone... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

• High time for an ultimatum

We can't understand the latest variation on a VR offer, given to DEP/DDC mates and mates in other UK plants. If we accept Ford killing our jobs, which we don't - the bottom line has to be the same (best) deal for all!

The only "incentive" we on Lynx have to leave, is a total negative: the fact that the "alternative" jobs and conditions on DDC's Chicken Farm or in the Den are so outrageous. There again, high time we all did something to change this, isn't it? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/3/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Our sweat and blood, their harvest**

With BMW's record sales and profits last year, no surprise that BMW Boss Norbert Reithofer has a record pay packet of £5.84m and the 8-man Board is walking away with a combined £28m. Mind you, their haul looks like chicken feed compared to Johanna, Susanna and Stefan Quandt who own 47.6% of BMW shares. Their combined "take-home" last year was £622m or, as the German Rich list puts it, £311,000 per hour. That's the extent of BMW's lying, every time they make excuses for not spending money on the basics. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 18/3/13]

• A bonus that isn't

With the Team Bonus due in our next pay packets, we'll be able to see how incredibly arbitrary the payouts are. In most areas of production, for example, workmates have absolutely no control over what comes down the line. Since 21 January technical teething problems - due to BMW trying to do too much too fast - have decimated production. Now apparently the bonus is to be decimated too. Which just reinforces

the argument against having a productivity bonus system in the first place. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/3/13]

• The full 0.6% now!

Now we know why BMW was so quiet about announcing the pay increase - they only ever intended to pay 2.3%, not the 0.6% inflation proofing. This is how it works: in March 2014(!) a proportion of the 0.6% will be paid depending on the team bonus we get in 2013. Only if we earn the full bonus do we get 0.6%. If we only get the 25% minimum - as many did this year - we only get 0.15%. Not inflation-proofing at all then - and not what was put to a vote! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/3/13]

• Lessons for the future

It says something when one of the 3 or 4 richest car companies in the world tries to get away with a below-inflation payrise. How come? Clearly the endless delays introduced by BMW last year during pay talks as they threatened to run down the pension fund, change shift patterns, not to mention shorten our tea breaks, was designed to wear us down. Eventually a majority voted for a 4.5% revised offer (but with 22% not voting). We were wrongly told that Year 2 would



be protected and it was only 7 months away... But isn't there a lesson here? For instance: to impose our own deadlines - and make BMW pay for any delays. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/3/13]

• half-a-day is bad enough

Job rotation, says the collective agreement, is "pivotal to BMW Manufacturing", and the standard is training in 4 jobs each, in Assembly at least. If rotation is applied consistently, we avoid repetitive strain injury (RSI). But like all agreements this one is only as good as its enforcement. At the moment it suits Assembly management to keep many of us on the same job all week - and sure enough, workers are showing symptoms of RSI. We had better instigate our own rotation before it's too late. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/3/13]

Cyprus

For now, the Cyprus banking crisis - a by-product of the Greek crisis - seems to have eased off. For better-off depositors who will have to pay some of the bill, the pill may be bitter, but they can swallow it. Not so for the majority of the population which, after 2 years of austerity, faces another turn of the screw. The jobless rate, already at 15%, will soar due to massive job cuts in the banking and public sectors, while living standards will plummet.

But why is such drastic treatment inflicted on a tiny country whose population is even smaller than Birmingham's? After all, the bailout and "savings" now demanded from the population are insignificant compared to the EU's GDP - just 0.1%!

But in this capitalist world, where the law of the jungle rules, the weakest always pay the highest price and bailouts are only designed to help the big international banks. EU leaders chose to set an example, all the more painful

Strangled by the big banks

as tiny Cyprus couldn't bargain. Hence their original demand that all depositors should be taxed - only to realise, belatedly, that this might trigger a run on the banks across Europe.

Cyprus' overblown, opaque banking system, used by Russian millionaires for tax-avoidance and by the Russian mafia for money-laundering, is a convenient justification for this ruthless treatment.

But Cyprus isn't alone in this league. Its banks may have loaned out amounts equal to 8 times the country's GDP, but what about British banks? In the early years of the crisis, their loans represented over 6 times GDP and 90 times those of the Cypriot



Cyprus Bank workers march against job cuts

banks! As to Russian millionaires, aren't they buying properties and football clubs in Britain, not to mention executing their rivals here?

From this point of view, there is nothing "exceptional" about the economy of Cyprus: it is just another cog in this world's crazy, profit-driven machine - like London's City! □

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Assembly last month voted on an amendment aimed at banning abortions in private or voluntary sector clinics, and outside of the narrow anti-abortion framework dictated by the obsolete (British), 1861 "Offences Against the Persons Act". Obtaining an abortion in the NHS has always been virtually impossible, so the recent opening of a Marie Stopes abortion clinic in Belfast was a step forward for women. But reactionary politicians and religious groups

Fighting for abortion rights

wanted to shut it down.

For once, though, the built-in sectarian nature of parliamentary rules in Northern Ireland gave a good result: the amendment failed to get cross-community support, so couldn't pass, even if those opposed to it were in the minority! For now, at least, the Marie Stopes Clinic is safe, even if the legal right to abortion in NI remains severely limited.

In fact the absurdity of the situation - Northern Ireland was always

excluded from the 1967 Abortion Act, which legalised abortion, even though it was (and is still) "part" of Britain - was highlighted by 100 women who decided to admit publicly that they took medication (which they got via the internet) which provides non-surgical termination. Unbelievably, that's a criminal offence in NI. It's even more unbelievable that anyone should need to risk imprisonment to highlight the criminal denial of women's rights. □

Falklands

Thirty-one years after a bloody war claiming 900 lives, Falkland Islanders last month recorded a 99.8% vote in favour of "staying British". Here was a chance for Cameron to reclaim the mantle of "Gotcha" Thatcher, under the pretext of responding to patriotic rhetoric from the new Argentinian president claiming her country's rights

Cameron in Thatcher's footsteps

over the island. With only the local 1,672 British passport-holders allowed to vote, the result of this referendum was a foregone conclusion.

Of course, the Argentinians have never threatened to drive the islanders into the sea, even though a British battleship grabbed the islands in 1833 and drove out resident Argentinians.

Argentina has, however, disputed Britain's colonisation of an area which, by any logic, historical or geographical, is theirs. But instead of bowing to the obvious, the British lion, however moth-eaten it may look these days, still prefers to keep this distant colony under its paws, at whatever cost. □

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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