

WORKERS' fight



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

HANDS OFF OUR JOBS!

Osborne hailed the latest industrial production figures as evidence that his "recovery" is alive and kicking, because they show a 1.2% monthly increase. Never mind the fact that this only reverses a 1.2% drop over the previous month, or that industrial production is still 8% below its 2008 level!

So what's "recovering"? Profits? Yes, definitely, with share prices now higher than before the crisis. The sales of luxury goods are soaring and the price of a square foot of property in leafy urban areas has reached unprecedented, obscene levels. The capitalist class has nothing to complain about!

But, just as definitely, the two things which aren't "recovering" are workers' jobs and living standards. In fact, as regards living standards, the government doesn't even bother to hide the reality. Its own statistics show that wages are either lagging well behind prices or being cut. And even this is only part of the picture, since these figures do not reflect the cut in incomes faced by the many workers who are forced to work fewer hours.

The on-going job drain

As to jobs, according to Money Charity, 1,447 people have been made redundant every day between June and August! The past months have seen another string of redundancies in big companies: in banking, with 2,000 jobs cut at Standard Chartered and 1,000 to come at the Co-Operative Bank, in steel, with 500 jobs cut at Tata (ex-British Steel), in manufacturing, with 140 jobs gone at glass manufacturer Pilkington and up to 600 at WR Refrigeration, to name just a few.

And how many more permanent, full-time jobs are being cut, without being reported, because the employer or



Workers at the Govan shipyard are paying for BAE's greed

subcontractor replaces these workers with part-time, zero-hours, self-employed, casual workers, either directly or via an agency? Then to crown it all, this last week BAE systems, which is still one of the country's largest companies, announced that it was cutting its shipbuilding operations! Its Portsmouth shipyard will be closed down completely and it will "downsize" in Scotland (in Glasgow and Rosyth) and Filton, near Bristol. This will mean that 1,800 more jobs will disappear into thin air, plus an unknown number in subcontracting companies. The blow for the surrounding areas, which are already desperately short of jobs will be huge.

Jobs can be defended

BAE blames defence cuts. It would. But, while there may be fewer warships to build (which is rather good news!), why should workers foot the bill for this?

BAE is not a cash-strapped company. It made a hefty £911m net profit last year, all of which went straight into the deep pockets of its shareholders.

What's more, BAE's £387m cash pile would be enough to pay a decent wage for 7 years to all of these 1,800 workers - to do nothing, or to produce something socially more useful than warships!

Yes, rather than cutting jobs, it should be payback time for companies which have accumulated so much profit out of workers' labour - and even more so, for those which, like BAE, have been living a parasitic life on public funds!

Of course, not all job-cutting companies are as wealthy as BAE. But the capitalist class is awash with wealth. So, while some companies may be in a mess, the capitalist class could and should be made to pay, collectively, for the crisis it has caused - not the working class!

This would require sharing out all available work between all available hands, without loss of pay for those who are already in full-time jobs, while providing a decent wage for all. And, of course, the bill should be presented to the capitalist class as a whole! □

Blacklisting still thriving

A blacklist which barred 3,200 construction workers was used by 40 companies over a period of 15 years.

First exposed in 2009, it's only after sustained legal action that 8 construction giants (McAlpine, Balfour Beatty, Carillion, Costain, Laing O'Rourke, Skanska, Kier and Vinci) were forced to offer compensation - but only £1,000 for each worker concerned!

Never mind that the workers were deprived of jobs for years on end. Their campaign group walked out of the talks in disgust.

Despite being illegal, blacklisting is still widely used. "Not Required Back", or NRB, operates on the North Sea oil rigs. And BFK, the CrossRail subcontractor just had to reinstate a Unite shop steward, sacked shortly after he raised a safety issue, even if the company still denies blacklisting union activists.

It has also been confirmed by

the Independent Police Complaints Authority (very belatedly) that the police and special branch were involved in supplying information to

bosses about activists.

No surprise. The state is at the service of the capitalist class and its police just does their bidding. □



Free labour IS forced labour

When the Court of Appeal ruled that Iain Duncan Smith's regulations constituting the Work Programme were flawed, his department appealed to the Supreme Court. At the end of October he lost again, for the same reason - the regulations were not detailed enough to mandate Jobcentres to threaten the unemployed with benefit sanctions

if they refused to work in arranged placements. What advantage the jobless can take out of these judgments is unclear, however.

In fact, the two unemployed people who first brought the case had argued that their participation in the placements - one of which was a month's of free labour at Poundland - was forced labour, which breached

their human rights. But in this they got no joy from either court. This should come as no surprise. Which judge would torpedo such a major government programme? But it doesn't mean that resistance is pointless. It just means that it's more likely to be effective if it involves collective action rather than just legal action. □

• Shameless

MPs have learnt nothing from the scandal over their expenses - not even to keep their mouths shut on the subject! Last month, they objected to plans to restrict their expenses for food and taxis. Claims for tea and biscuits, the £15 dinner allowance for when the House sits after 7.30pm and taxis home before 11pm would all be scrapped.

• Spot the difference

Education secretary Michael Gove's reform introduced the possibility for parents and "social entrepreneurs" to set up "free schools" - free from local government control and thus providing a somewhat doubtful quality of education. But in fact, this is just building on the autonomous

The MPs were indignant, despite the fact that their basic pay is set to go up from £66,396 to £74,000. No "professional" is expected to pay for such things, they squealed.

It seems they don't expect to foot the bill for anything that ordinary people have to pay for. The Sunday Mirror reported that they are allowed to claim for heating

their second homes - and the top-claiming MP, a Tory, claimed a cool (or hot!) £5822.27 for heating his Warwickshire estate. He wasn't the only one whose heating bill, presented to the taxpayer, ran to thousands, either. So they can afford to be sanguine about the rises in fuel prices faced by their constituents here, in the real world...

"school academy" concept, initiated by Labour under Blair.

Gove's rebranding of the Labour party's idea seems to have upset Tristram Hunt, Labour's newly appointed shadow education secretary. Which must be why he announced that under the next Labour

government, the "free schools" concept would be reclaimed by Labour under the new name of "Parent-Led Academies". Would it not be easier for Hunt to join the Tory party and keep the "free schools" name?

Lewisham Hospital campaigners win!

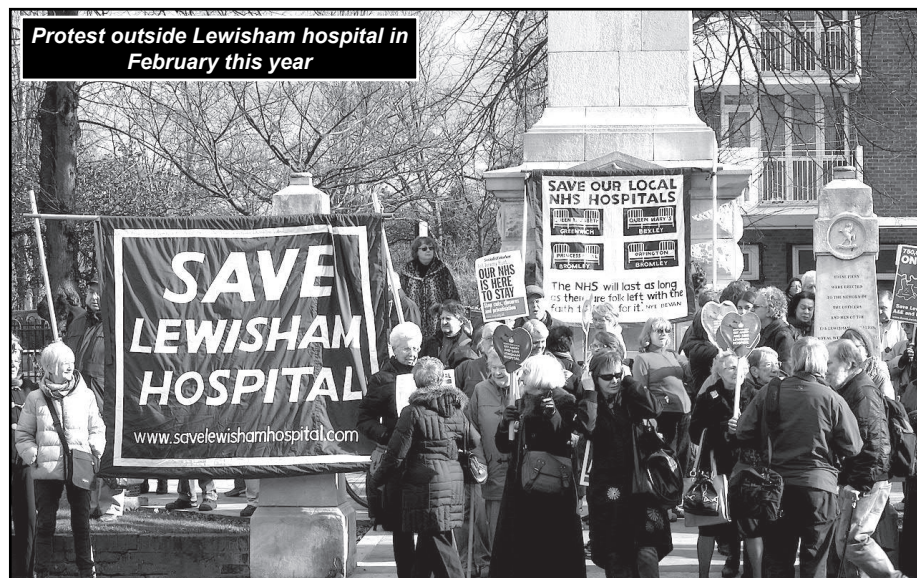
Lewisham Hospital has won a reprieve after the Court of Appeal ruled that the upstart Tory Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, was acting illegally in trying to cut A&E and maternity services. Maybe he'll keep his hands off this hospital in future.

However the government doesn't like being defeated by its own courts (the so-called "independent" judiciary), so it's trying to clarify its powers under the 2006 Health Services Act - which was used in the judgement. This might mean that in the future, the health secretary and "Monitor" - the supposedly "independent" regulator for the ConDems' new semi-privatised NHS - will have the power to "reconfigure" health services at will.

Ironically, it was Lewisham Hospital's "independence" from the cash-strapped South London Healthcare Trust (which could not meet its PFI bill and was targeted for radical cuts by Hunt!), which saved

it. And the fact that GP commissioners, which the ConDem Health and Social Services Act 2012 has empowered as never before, had not agreed to Lewisham being cut. So

"Tory" NHS reforms helped the legal case against these Tory cuts! But if it hadn't been for steadfast campaigners, Hunt might have got away with it. ☐



• *Harassing the disabled*

Introduction of the new "Personal Independence Payment" for the disabled, to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA), due on 28 October, was delayed in most of Britain. The DWP said this was in line with the way it is phasing in other benefit changes with pilot schemes, such as Universal Credit. But the announcement at the last minute

suggests that the changes were not going to plan - as Universal Credit certainly isn't, with £120-160m of IT spending already wasted according to DWP documents.

Just as well. The purpose of the change was to achieve a 20% cut in spending on DLA, so the reassessment of claimants for the new PIP will be designed to make

fewer people eligible, regardless of whether they need the money or not - whereas DLA recognises that many disabilities involve additional costs, in medication or equipment. Slandering claimants as malingerers for receiving DLA for many years without reassessment, as the DWP has been doing, is a scandal and should stop.

• *The last of the Remployees*

The ConDems closed the last 3 Remploy factories, the end of a

6-year run-down that Labour started when there were still 83 of them.

Originally founded to provide work for disabled ex-servicemen and miners in the 1940s, employment at these government-owned factories peaked at around 10,000 in the late 1980s.

The three remaining factories in Blackburn, Sheffield and Neath had "failed to find buyers" and were closed down on 1 November. So, with one hand the ConDems are pushing the disabled onto the dole while, with the other, they are treating those who are out of work as "cheaters" and "skivers"! Their hypocrisy seems to know no bounds.



Housing *More social housing needed, not less!*



In October, the social housing group "Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth" (HASL) occupied two

council houses near Borough Market, which had been sold by Southwark Council for just under £3m. This is a council which faces an acute housing crisis, just as so many other London boroughs. With 25,000 people on its housing waiting list and 1,000 people living in temporary living accommodation, it can hardly afford

to ditch its existing social housing stock!

Of course, to make this sale more

palatable, the council did promise to build 20 new council homes somewhere else. But who will believe in its good words after the scandal surrounding the redevelopment of the Heygate estate in which, according to HASL, "there will be just 79 homes for social rent out of a total of 2,535 homes, when the estate had once provided 1,100 structurally sound social housing units"? And yes, HASL and the tenants who are opposing the council's sell-off are right to resist it. Urgent action is needed to solve the housing crisis. In the meantime, occupying empty properties seems the most reasonable thing to do.

Hands off Focus E15!

East Thames, a private housing contractor, is threatening 29 young mothers with eviction from Focus E15, the mother and baby support unit in a hostel for homeless young people in London. They are old they may be "relocated" as far away as Hastings or Birmingham. If they say they want to stay in London they will be deemed "intentionally homeless" and taken off housing benefit.

East Thames claims it cannot support the unit due to a £41,000 funding cut from Newham Council. The Labour-led council blames the ConDem government for this cut. Ironically, this council found money

to host one of the most expensive town festivals in London and to build a £111 million headquarters building, fitted with with designer lights that cost £10,000 each!

The Focus E15 mothers have decided that they won't be pushed around. They say they're fighting to stay, and will keep fighting till they win. And right they are!



• Subsidising the rich

A parliamentary committee has questioned the efficacy of the government's New Homes Bonus. It's supposed to help councils subsidise the building of new homes, by rewarding them for each extra one built in their area.

The government claims that this money is going where housing needs are greatest. Yes it's urgent to build social housing - and where

it's needed! But that's where the catch is. Since this bonus is only paid after the home is actually built, it doesn't help cash-strapped councils to expand their social housing programmes. Instead, they have to rely on the goodwill of private developers, who'd rather build expensive homes in wealthy areas, than social housing in poor areas, regardless of real needs.

What's more, more than half of the £950 million which has been allocated for the first 4 years of this scheme comes from a reallocation of the money central government gives to local government. In other words, money is being diverted from the poorest boroughs to ones which are better-off - Robin Hood in reverse.

• Help to Buy, but not in London

Shortly after it was launched, the government's "Help to Buy" scheme is already becoming irrelevant in London. Indeed, the average asking price for a house in London jumped by nearly £50,000, or 10.2%, in October according to property website Rightmove, to £544,232. This is easily the largest rise in Britain, at a time when asking prices have

been falling in Wales and the West Midlands.

Since London prices were already the highest in the country, this will put buying a house there out of reach of even more people, regardless of Osborne's "Help to Buy" subsidy. The October average London price is nearly the £600,000 upper limit for Help to Buy anyway. So Osborne's

scheme is least relevant to the housing crisis in the city where it's most acute! But housing market activity counts towards economic growth figures, thereby allowing Osborne to boast that his policies are "working". And if real estate speculators make a killing with the Treasury's help too, then Osborne will probably have achieved his real objective.

Putting the fight for wages on the agenda

The first week of November was "Living Wage Week 2013". London's Tory Mayor, Boris Johnson announced that this wage should now be no less than £8.80/hr in London and £7.65 in the rest of the country. And business top-brass were invited to high-profile events where the campaign's backers - a motley crowd of politicians, TUC leaders and big companies - urged them to voluntarily "phase in" wage increases up to this level.

Today, an estimated 5.2m earn less than this "living wage", including 3/4 of 18-to-21-year-olds. So, of course, it would be an improvement if it was to replace the current paltry minimum wage (£6.31/hr for adults, but £3.68 for the under-18s and £5.03 for the under 21s). Although this would still fall short of paying the bills, especially for

those on part-time or zero-hours contracts.

But the fact that this "living wage campaign" is promoted by Tory toff Boris Johnson and big finance companies like Aviva, PWC, Deloitte and, last but not least, reckless bankers like Lloyd's and JP Morgan, should be a warning that this campaign has nothing to do with the interests of the working class. Its aim is just to lure workers into thinking that they have common interests with the bosses, making the need to fight for wages and conditions completely redundant.

But the campaign's "achievements" speak for themselves. Despite Johnson boasting about its 400 affiliates, only 30,000 workers will benefit from this "living wage"

increase - meaning that most workers in these 400 affiliates are already above the "living wage", anyway! Meanwhile the number of those paid below the "living wage" increased by 400,000 over the past year, showing that far more employers remain determined to turn the screw on workers.

Whatever those who dread the idea that workers might start using their collective strength - be they politicians, bosses or trade-union leaders - may claim, no gain has ever been made by the working class without a fight. And it will take a determined struggle to force the bosses to pay for these years of attacks - a struggle that is both necessary and possible. □

[From the editorial of the Workers' Fight workplace bulletins distributed on November 5th]

• We know where the £s go!

According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, real wages (after inflation) in Britain have fallen at a record rate over the last 5 years and a third of all workers have seen their wages cut or frozen. As for the poorest, they have faced benefit cuts.

• Enough of these non-jobs!

Following the zero-hours contract scandal, the Office for National Statistics was commissioned to estimate how many workers were employed under such contracts. But it only managed to come up with a figure of 250,000. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, however, gives a much higher estimate of 1million!

In other words, nobody seems to

• ...in the worst possible world

In a recent answer to the Trussel Trust (the biggest network of foodbanks in Britain), Julian Huppert, LibDem MP for Cambridge pointed out that there were "only" 565 foodbank users in Cambridge out of a population of 82,000. As if one person having to use a foodbank wouldn't be one too many! In fact the number of foodbank users in Cambridge has doubled in the past year.

Comments from MPs on this issue expose naked contempt: Edwina Currie, senior Tory MP, has "no sympathy for foodbank users, who are just rational opportunists, enjoying free, fresh food since

Yet the cost of living has been climbing: while average annual inflation is 2.8%, transport costs have increased by 1.7%, food has gone up by 3.7% and electricity, gas and fuel by as much as 4.5%! No wonder more and more families have been using food banks.

know the real figure! But what we we do know, is that their estimates don't include "self-employed" temporary workers, who depend on job agencies for work without any guaranteed working hours, nor those workers who are contracted for just a few hours per week. In fact, a survey carried out by Unite concluded that 5.5m workers were not guaranteed more than 3 hours of work a week!

nobody is starving in the UK". As to Paul Maynard, MP for Blackpool, he warns that "foodbanks could become bad habits"!

As if anyone could just "pop in" to a foodbank without being referred! Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau explained how a young worker on a zero-hours contract, without work, and waiting for his benefits application to be processed, had no money for 14 days before being referred to a foodbank - at which point he was literally starving.

But for these politicians, everything is for the best ... since they can't see beyond the walls of their own cushy world!

In contrast, the proportion of society's wealth which goes to the richest is actually increasing. But at least that confirms that there is more than enough money in the system to pay the working class adequate wages. If workers decide to fight, they can aim high!

In any case, one thing is beyond doubt. Since there are obviously not enough real jobs for everyone, it's high time all available work was shared out between all available hands, and without loss of pay for those who are already in full-time jobs and on a decent wage - for the sake, not just of those who aren't, but in the interests of the whole of the working class!



Their crisis

Today, workers are facing an ongoing deterioration in their material conditions. Poverty is rising, as is shown by the growing use of food banks - and not just by the unemployed but also by the working poor. In fact, the entire working class is being hit by falling living standards, due to the lag in wages, far behind inflation - sometimes even being frozen or cut - but above all, due to

The parasites

That the capitalist class and their system have become an obstacle to the harmonious development of society is nothing new - and it is brutally illustrated, once again, by the present crisis. This is expressed by the fact that far from devoting the resources they control to mend and to develop the economy in the interests of all, they just accumulate wealth for the sake of it, or waste it on luxury goods.

Figures reveal the extent of their parasitic life on society. Four decades ago, for every £10 of company profits, roughly £7 was reinvested in

Behind their soaring affluence

the ever-rising number of low-paid, casual jobs.

Companies and the wealthy, however, are doing very well. Share prices have more than recovered from their crash at the beginning of the crisis, the sales of luxury goods are soaring and the price of a square foot in the leafy, trendy areas of the big cities has reached unprecedented, obscene levels.

plants and machinery. By the eve of the crisis, this had already fallen to just over £5, then to £4.30 by last year and to less than £3 this year. This means that while production facilities are ageing, becoming obsolete or closed down, a growing proportion of the value created by the working class is wasted - either in the form of dividends paid to shareholders or in the form of unused cash piles accumulated by companies.

Thus, dividends are expected to reach £80bn this year, a 45% increase over the past three years. In fact, dividends paid in Britain surged

But then, of course, if the rich are becoming so much richer, it is because the working class on whose labour they feed, is producing more for less and becoming poorer. In fact, no matter how much they whine about "hard times", the capitalists have transformed the crisis of their own system into a weapon to increase their share of the value created by the working class. □

to an all-time high in 2010 and then carried on increasing year after year! As to the cash piled up by companies, it has increased by 450% over the past 5 years, this year reaching an astronomical £420bn - or more than twice the annual welfare budget that Osborne is so viciously cutting!

Not only is the capitalist class incapable of curing its own system of the crisis it has caused, but its parasitism on society is aggravating this crisis and, potentially, paving the way for an even deeper one, sooner or later. □

• Currency madness

A new financial storm is gathering pace. After the reckless speculation on real estate which triggered the crisis, and the Libor scandal, all the big banks are now under investigation for their frantic speculation on currency markets.

Trading in currencies has long been very big business, especially for the City which has a 40% share. Of course, this market has a function, since it allows goods to be traded between countries.

• Spare a thought for them!

The EU plans a regulation to limit bankers' bonuses to 100% of their basic salaries - or 200% with shareholder approval. Predictably, the City, via their men in government, were quick to call this a "scandal"! Since top bank executives' salaries are not usually less than £1m (the salary of RBS CEO, Ross McEwan) and are sometimes a lot more, one can see their point. How will these poor men

However, far more currencies are exchanged everyday than are needed for the conduct of world trade: already 35 times more in 2007, but 52 times more today, with a total of £3,300 billion-worth of currencies traded every day - the equivalent of 25 days of the planet's entire production!

The colossal speculation which lies behind these mind-boggling figures, has vicious consequences. For instance, in

(and women?) manage, without those additional millions? It makes one's heart bleed.

It's probably no surprise either, that Osborne was one of the only 2 finance ministers who opposed this plan among the 27 EU countries. The so-willing-to-cap-benefits-for-the-poorest Osborne is even planning to go to court to prevent any cap on bankers' bonuses. But banks

poor countries whose national currencies cannot resist a frontal attack, the gambling of the international banks has often caused havoc for the standards of living of the population. But above all, the hyper-inflation of the currency market is yet another expression of the profiteering of the capitalist class gone mad, so mad that they are prepared to risk wrecking their own system into the bargain!

have already found loopholes. Barclays is planning to increase executive salaries by a third to compensate them for any future "loss". Yes, never let it be said that the bankers let a few rules get in the way of their great appetites. Until they are forced to choke, that is, by some "class action"...

• Royal Bad Bank of Scotland

Shares in Royal Bank of Scotland, 81% of which is state-owned, took a nosedive after the announcement that £38bn of toxic assets (loans which are likely never to be paid back) would be ring-fenced, to create an internal "bad bank". This is obviously in preparation for re-privatisation. RBS is hoping to sell off this liability

as soon as possible.

In addition, not only is RBS still making huge losses, but it has had to make increased provision for PPI compensation (to a total of £2.6bn) and is also implicated in the rigging of both the Libor rate and foreign exchange rates, so can expect some hefty fines. Which means

that the bill for the taxpayer is actually getting heavier.

Not that this is real news. Despite Osborne's spin around the sell-off of part of the government's stake in Lloyds in September, no amount of "talking up" the economy can conceal the fact that the banking crisis is far from over.

Super-charged profiteering

Four of the "Big Six" energy utilities (NPower, British Gas, SSE and Scottish Power) are making the headlines again with electricity and gas prices hikes of between 8 and 10.4% - with the other two likely to follow. And the fact that the CEO of the owner of British Gas, Centrica, waived his bonus for this year (but he won't return the nearly £5m he got last year) won't change anything

as regards these ludicrous charges.

The four companies blamed rising wholesale prices, green levies and network costs for these increases. Except that the green levy makes up less than 4% of household bills and only increased by £10 per household over the past year - as have network costs. As to wholesale prices, they actually went down for gas (by 7% over the past two years)

Soaring bills

while increasing by less than 5% for electricity.

TUC figures show that household energy costs rose by 152% over the decade to September 2013 - 4 times more than the RPI price index. No wonder the "Big Six" utilities' combined profits surged by 73% over the past 3 years, to reach £3.3bn! ☐

A "free market" monopoly

When privatisation was carried out in the 1980s for gas and in the 1990s for electricity, under the last Tory governments, this was supposed to result in lower energy bills for consumers by introducing "competition" and "increased efficiency". Except that it didn't.

Of course, the workforce of the new private utilities had to face the axe, thereby paying the cost of increased dividends for shareholders. But so did consumers, whose bills went through the roof. The famous "competition" proved to be a joke, because the companies made sure that it wouldn't harm their profits.

Today, the "Big Six" energy utilities control 98% of the electricity and gas market, which allows them to form a cartel in all but name. Of course, this



is illegal and the regulator Ofgem is supposed to stop them doing this. But this regulator is itself run by people who came straight from the top banking and accounting stable - that is, the very kind

of people who see it as their job to help big business make even bigger profits. So why would they stand in the way of the "Big Six" and their profiteering?

• It's the market, stupid!

"Red Ed" Miliband caught the newspapers' headlines by pledging a 20-month energy price freeze if Labour comes to power in 2015. And, to resolve the problem of escalating bills once and for all, he promised that he would increase

• More hot air

Energy minister Ed Davey has threatened to make "manipulation" of the energy markets a criminal offence, apparently trying to sound tough and counter Ed Miliband's plan to freeze energy bills. It's already a civil offence, but of course there's never been the slightest suggestion of taking the "Big Six" energy utilities to court, despite their operating as a de facto cartel for years?

• Hanging us out to dry

After allowing energy companies to do as they please in terms of price rises, the government has decided to beg Thames Water - via a lovely pleading letter - to "reconsider" the 8% price hikes it announced at the beginning of November. In fact there was some suspicion that water companies would try to put prices up in anticipation of an announcement by "Red Ed" of a water price freeze

"competition" in the energy market.

But given Labour's record, this is more a joke than a promise. Wasn't it Blair's government which deregulated the electricity market in 2001, allowing speculation on prices and making

Manipulation of the financial markets is already a criminal offence, but if prosecutions were brought, the courts would overflow. Because big speculators constantly strive to influence markets to their advantage - by trying to trigger reactions with massive buying or selling operations, when they do not circulate more or less dubious rumours! Yes, the line between "market manipulation" and

- following his announcement of a temporary freeze on energy price rises if Labour gets into government in 2015...

These companies were already allowed by Twat (sorry, Ofwat!) the regulator, to increase prices by an average 0.5% above inflation for 2014 & 2015. Thames Water was allowed 1.4% above inflation, although this is a company which made £549m profit last year, but

consumers' bills totally dependant on the gambling mood of the biggest speculators on this market - namely the biggest utilities themselves? And since Miliband has no plans to abolish this market, he's only offering more of the same!

"speculation" is indeed very thin!

The only way to stop this, in financial markets just as in the energy market, would be to get rid of these markets altogether - something that the ConDems wouldn't dream of. So the "Big Six" are unlikely to be quaking in their boots over the posturing of either of the Eds.

paid no corporation tax!

And now water companies have announced their intention to make water meters mandatory and for households to be charged according to usage - which would substantially increase bills. Isn't it time to take all the essential services into the working population's control, to stop these crooks from wringing the last drop of blood from us?!

Grangemouth

The bosses' cynical blackmail..

Ineos, one of the world's largest petro-chemical groups, shut down its Grangemouth site in October, locking-out 1370 permanent workers and 2000 contract workers employed in both refinery and petro-chemical plants. Billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, its owner and chairman, claimed the refinery was "losing money" and threatened permanent closure. Ineos, however, had a turnover of £26.9bn last year and its profits grew by 20%! But never

mind, it still claimed that the "only" way to "save" jobs was for workers to accept a "survival plan", which translated into replacing their final salary pension scheme with a less secure money-purchase plan, reducing shift payments, freezing wages, cutting occupational sick pay, cutting hundreds of jobs, and last, but not least, ending collective bargaining.

This was exposed as pure blackmail: when the deal was accepted by the union, the company immediately

announced that not only would the plant reopen, but it would invest £300m in a new gas terminal, with the Scottish government approving a £9m subsidy and Osborne giving his guarantee for a £150m loan! Ineos workers are no strangers to militant action - they forced Ineos to back down from ending their final salary pension scheme in 2008, after staging a 2-day strike. No doubt this was precisely what Ineos' blackmail was about this time round.

.. and Unite's bad breath

The Unite leadership played straight into the hands of Ineos after Ratcliffe's blackmail hit the headlines and politicians rushed in to have crisis talks "to keep Scotland's only oil refinery open".

Of course Ratcliffe's stunt was designed to get exactly what he wanted: union servility and government subsidies. And more's the pity, given Ineos workers' tried and tested willingness to fight. Unite leader Len McCluskey stepped up to the plate to "save" 800 jobs (although, actually, there's no guarantee jobs won't be cut after all!). The wage,

bonus, sickness benefit and pension cuts were all agreed, "warts and all". Worse, he agreed that Ineos workers should sacrifice even more than Ineos asked! The original 2-month no-strike deal is now to be 3 years!

Everyone applauded this melodramatic, "11th hour" rescue. It could have been made in Hollywood. But in reality, it was a sorry spectacle: Unite leaders, instead of choosing to spread the dispute, answering threat with threat, so as to save workers' wages and conditions, chose to be "responsible" to the "company" and, to that last refuge

of a scoundrel, "the country"...

That said, given the record of these union leaders, it was all too predictable.

Asset strippers

In the Grangemouth conflict, billionaire John Ratcliffe proved to be adept at using cow-boy methods. But, with 51 facilities worldwide (including 6 in Britain) and £27bn in annual turnover, his company Ineos is certainly not small fry.

However, there is a parallel between Ineos and Petroplus, a group which collapsed in 2012, after closing down its Coryton refinery in Essex, with 800 job losses. Both came to life in the 1990s, in Holland, by taking over ageing facilities requiring large investment from the "oil majors". Ineos acquired assets from BP and Petroplus from Shell, Exxon, BP, etc.. Subsequently, Ineos became the world's 4th largest petro-chemical company and Petroplus Europe's largest oil refiner - and they moved their headquarters to tax-friendly Switzerland.

With both backed by investment funds determined to "sweat the assets", the workforce was squeezed to the bare bones and investment confined to minimum maintenance. Meanwhile the facilities were used as surety to borrow more money, in order to expand the companies, but, above all, to line the pockets of their backers. They were just operating an industrial Ponzi scheme - and was what led Petroplus to collapse. As to production itself, that wasn't never their problem.



... to the Unite leadership's shameful retreat without a fight, in 2013

From the Grangemouth workers' victorious strike in 2008...



Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Overwhelming rejection of the pay offer**

Ford's "final offer" of a 2-year agreement, with a 3.75% pay increase in year one, a 0.5% plus inflation ("at least 2% guaranteed") in year 2 - was rejected by 94% of the Dagenham workforce - and the vast majority of Halewood, Bridgend and Dunton workers too, in a consultative ballot organised by union officials in plants, on the 6 November.

There was nothing else on offer, either - except an ominous increased death-in-service-benefit and "paid

• What next?

Nobody believes that union leaders will call a strike. But they would be obliged to hold a strike ballot, if Ford doesn't make an improved, "final", final offer. And that is their dilemma and our frustration.

• No way out?

What's causing much anger in the meantime, is union officials' endorsement of Ford's blatantly unjust and divisive retirement schemes in the context of plant closures.

Ford imposed 4 different retirement packages of descending value - the best for Southampton workers with no realistic alternative employment after their plant's closure; then comes Dagenham Stamping and Tooling (S&TO); third is the package for Lynx engine line workers at Dagenham, whose engine ended production; and fourth, the "normal"

leave for expectant fathers for 2 antenatal appointments" - with no mention of mothers! The 6% who didn't vote to reject, spoiled their ballot papers. There was not one vote in favour!

Ford offered this pathetic deal despite record 3rd quarter net profits of £1.1bn - plus a 100% increase in dividends paid out to shareholders over the year! The company has also cut by half its so-called "losses" from European operations,

While the long-discredited union leaders talk tough, to try to win back our confidence, their "partnership" approach to relations with the bosses means they'll inevitably sell out our interests in the end, in exchange

Ford retirement package. However, there was a possibility of retiring on a better package for Dagenham engine plant workers, by swapping "grade for grade" with someone from S&TO who has decided to stay on, thus benefiting from their special terms.

Many who applied were turned down - despite 30-40 years service and/or being over 58. The allocation of the special packages was opaque and seemed to favour friends of the union convenor/management. As for the union officials' "pay claim" for



after 3 plant closures in 12 months (including Dagenham Stamping and Tooling). Of course, Ford expects us to pay for shareholders' super-bonanza, even if it wouldn't have one penny in profit without our labour! No way!

for steak and chips at the bosses' table.

So if anything at all is to be gained, we will have to get ready to take action without them.



this year, it has not even demanded "30 years service and out on full pension", regardless of age, which has always been the position of the union in the past... There is much that the officials have to answer for.

• Deals behind our backs, so what's new?

Some of us old cynics know the ink has dried already on the pay deal even before the so-called negotiations and rejections. Then again, no reason to let that stop us from putting up our own firm resistance! [Workers'Fight Ford Dagenham 28/10/13]

• Temps ... on what sort of contract?

We're told Ford is looking to call back 60 to 70 temps in Jan 2014, who might still get part of the shutdown holiday pay. But there will be no 2014 holiday pay for any recruited after April. They're supposed to either slog away, or accept an unpaid holiday? [Workers'Fight Ford Dagenham 28/10/13]

• No recruits except permanent!

Of course Ford's "final offer" proposes that new starts, on or after April 2014, will get full holiday pay. So how do we fix it for these recruits and ensure they get their 3 week's pay? Well, we ensure that they are taken on permanently, with equal Ts & Cs. And we add that to our pay claim's demands! [Workers'Fight Ford Dagenham 28/10/13]

• One year ago

It's the first anniversary of the announcement of closures - DS&TO, Genk, Southampton. It was a big blow to us, but and even bigger one to the Genk workforce where 4,000 direct and many more indirect jobs are to be lost by next year. Which is going to devastate the whole town and its population. It's also

the anniversary of the caving in of the union leaderships across Europe, who made no attempt to lead a fight, when the workforce was prepared to do it. Yes, let's remember, that for 3 whole months the Genk workers didn't allow one car off the line! [Workers'Fight Ford Dagenham 28/10/13]

• Doolally, the grim reaper

A consumer report just out shows that Fords were voted 26 out of 28 for reliability - just two from the bottom! Yup, all sorts of "quality issues" and why aren't we surprised? Not when we're each doing the jobs of 2 or 3 and there's no such thing as quality control except in the bosses' newsletters... The miracles of Mulally's "efficiencies" - he can turn a car into a house of horrors! [Workers'Fight Ford Dagenham 28/10/13]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• The Royal Mail floats with the CWU on board**

After caving in completely in the face of the private flotation of the Royal Mail, the postal union, the CWU, pretended to flex its muscles over the Royal Mail bosses' subsequent 2-year pay offer, by turning it down and announcing a 24-hour strike for 4 November. Talk about closing the stable door after the horse has bolted! The share price, which had started at 330p and soared to 530p in the 2 weeks since the flotation,

scarcely fluttered.

And then, predictably, the CWU leaders cancelled the strike, telling reps at a special meeting that instead of the 3-year guarantee of their terms and conditions post-privatisation which had been on offer, there was now a 5 year guarantee, and an improved (but unspecified!) pay offer (4.6% had initially been offered in year one of the 2-year deal and 4% in the second year). There



will also now be a joint "charter" on how to conduct relations between managers and union in the future... with which the CWU officials are apparently delighted.

They continue to negotiate at the time of writing. But the "goodwill gesture" of the bosses says it all - they have agreed to extend the CWU's strike mandate to the 20 November. The union officials tell the workers "we still could call a strike" - but everyone knows that's unlikely.

ROYAL MAIL (WI)		Current	432.75
		Hi	454
		Lo	431
Last Trade 12:30:29.5			
432.75	O	454	
433.2075	N	227	
433.125	O	227	
433.305	N	227	
433.305	N	227	
5	28.948	432.75	433.00
5	28.948	432.75	433.00
5		432.50	433.25
2	17.798		

CEO Moya Green at the launch of Royal Mail's flotation

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• It was bound to happen

OK the strike cancellation was predictable. Ward always said the vote was to be used as a bargaining chip. And we heard Moya didn't even bother to go along to the initial negotiations. Was it all a foregone conclusion..? Need we ask? [Workers Fight Mount Pleasant 14/11/13]

• Born yesterday?

Yet again Dave Ward told reps at the Monday briefing that the fight against privatisation was dumped because the top Labour leaders had "disappointed"! As if any workers' fight ever depended on Labour Party support! Pathetic.[Workers Fight Mount Pleasant 14/11/13]

• Crown ceo vennels!

Crown Post Office workers' strike was also called off - the 13th in 9 months of being strung along! The £697,000/pa boss who gave out £3.4m in bonuses to top bosses last year, froze their pay,

threatens 1,500 jobs and 75 out of the remaining 372 Crown Offices (like the one here at MP). The possible joint action with us, which would have helped them (and us), is off the table, so what's on it?? We're waiting to hear...[Workers Fight Mount Pleasant 14/11/13]

• All you need is lumps

Have you seen the new RM's TV ad? With the Beatles song, "All you need is love", ending with "We love parcels"! Advertising managers should come here for a reality check ... Anyway, all we need is fight!![Workers Fight Mount Pleasant 14/11/13]

• He's got it right!

"Dear Granny Smith" postman, Roy Mayall, wrote a review of this ad on his blog "Going Postal" and makes the point that soon RM won't be delivering the mail to anyone, let alone all these very untypical TV-ad people - it will only be delivering to shareholders.[Workers Fight Mount Pleasant 14/11/13]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Casually bringing in casuals**

East Coast, the (re-)nationalised railway company has found its own way round the EU Agency Workers' Regulations which brought in equal pay for agency temps. Of course it already makes extensive use of subcontracting for certain types of work, like cleaning and catering supplies, in order to cut labour costs. But a year and half ago, it took on new station staff, on a short, fixed term contract (which it had never done

before), creating a new job title for them, in order to pay them less than their permanent counterparts - though they were doing exactly the same work.

And when they use the same kind of contract to cover maternity leave, they add an element of higher flexibility by telling workers that their contract could end earlier than stated, if the person on maternity leave returns earlier!



Which only goes to show that in this system, legal protection is virtually never even worth the paper it's written on!

• Shocking news

One of our Rail Gourmet mates died of pneumonia a few weeks ago, after working the night in the chillers.

The conditions he was working under would be harmful to anyone's health. He was working in the chillers all the time, without rotation and proper breaks. No one should have to spend whole shifts in the cold.

Another workmate in the same position had already quit the job, but management showed no concern over these inhuman, if not illegal working

conditions. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 22/10/13]

• East Coast not riding the storm

Which planet is East Coast management on?

All the other rail companies said in advance that they wouldn't start a service before 9am on the Monday of the predicted storm. But EC advertised their very early Monday train as running on time.

Some hope! One hour later, they had calmed down a bit and it was the 7.35am

that was advertised as running on time. Wild optimists to the end! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/13]

• Zero tolerance

ISS promised that everyone would have new permanent contracts, with no zero-hours nonsense, by mid-October.

Needless to say, as with most ISS promises, this one was broken. We still haven't had them - and we're completely fed up of this saga, when all we're asking for is what they're legally obliged to provide. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• All smiles and fun?**

Just like his Labour predecessor, PM Cameron uses every opportunity to visit Cowley and milk the occasion to boast about how much he is doing for young people, while at the same time lavishing praise on BMW for investing in the workforce. It's no surprise that he visits apprentices who are not in a position to challenge him or BMW. But even if all his big business friends keep their promises and create an extra 100,000 apprenticeships, it will hardly dent the shocking figures of the 1m or so unemployed in the youth age group. [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 4/11/13]

• Deja vu and dirty tricks

At a meeting the latest intake of apprentices were told that they would be the last to be included in the final salary pension scheme. Meanwhile, we hear that BMW is bent on reducing its spending on pensions one way or another, and has scheduled a meeting with officials in the coming weeks. So what's changed since Unite made a public campaign to warn BMW off closing the final salary scheme two years ago? Certainly not the uncontrolled rise in living costs, nor the fact that BMW can easily afford the status quo! [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 4/11/13]

• First things first

Last time BMW's threats to the pension scheme and toying with the "Swedish derogation" for agency workers to get round the equal pay regulations, delayed our pay rise for months. Ensuring we can pay our bills is a matter of urgency, so why should we tolerate BMW imposing diversions now? The feedback for the pay claim was a one-year deal with no strings. Shouldn't take long to sort out! [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 4/11/13]

• To tackle our problems

Of course, any successful fight against the pension scheme closure - or any other BMW attack - would have to be linked to the fight for contracts for agency workers. Otherwise why should agency workers who don't even have job security - let alone pensions - lift a finger for the rest of us? There are all sorts of question marks about the capability or willingness of union leaders to lead such a fight. The best thing would be for us to make our plans and let them run after us! [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 4/11/13]

• We beat Gi

Some agency workers always insisted the way we accrue holiday pay was wrong. Recently, an Employment Tribunal agreed. Because it was not accrued and



paid the same way as for BMW employees, Gi was in breach of the agency regulations and now faces a bill to make good our underpayments over the last 2 years. We owe this to the persistence of a workmate who wouldn't take no from Unite officials here. They found nothing wrong but Unite's solicitor supported our mate - when he was allowed to approach him! [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 22/10/13]

• Come clean now!

Gi have not given out work instructions for the period of short-time working in just over 3 weeks. BMW and Rudolph & Hellmann issued theirs weeks ago. Keeping us in the dark for so long suggests BMW and Gi are cooking up a nasty surprise involving a long stand-down which won't be "equal treatment" either! The forthcoming dip in BMW's workload is BMW's own doing and BMW's problem. Why should there be a cost for any of us? [Workers Fight BMW Oxford 22/10/13]

Lampedusa

On the 3rd October, yet another boat carrying migrants from Africa and the Middle East sank in the Mediterranean, off the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa, a point of the European coast which is closest to North Africa. At least 360 people drowned. Almost every other week another boat sinks, and yet still more migrants, seeking a better life, risk their lives to get to Europe.

There was no shortage of hypocritical tears shed by European governments following this latest catastrophe in a long series of which has already claimed thousands of lives. But what have these governments ever done to ensure that such catastrophes never happen again? Their only answer to migrants is: "keep out" - except for the richest ones, of course. There's no electrified fence surrounding Europe. But the fleets of speedboats patrolling its coasts, the impossible hoops citizens from poor countries have to jump through in order to get a visa and, for those who are lucky enough not to be turned away, the cost of this visa - all that is just as effective as an electrified fence and, in some respects, even more pernicious. If

How many more must drown?



anyone is responsible for the deaths of these 360 migrants on October 3rd it is the European governments, including all present and past British governments, which have never given those seeking shelter in Europe, whether from poverty or civil war, any choice but to risk their lives.

And yes, the Lampedusa victims, past and present, must have been really desperate to undertake such a horrifying journey. Many paid thousands of dollars to traffickers who moved them across the Sahara, mainly to Libya, where they were detained in camps until they paid another \$3,000 or so, only to be crowded into unseaworthy crafts

which more often than not sank before they reached European soil. There are reports of rape and torture from the camps in Libya. "If I die on the way, then I die. I would rather die than live in poverty" explained one 20-year old survivor.

What kind of world is this, where anyone should have to take such risks in order to flee what they see as an economic fate worse than death? It is a world that needs to be changed and freed of its endemic poverty and of its borders which only serve to protect the interest of the profiteers who live off this poverty! ☐

• **"We're all 'health tourists'!"**

Back in July, health secretary Jeremy Hunt had made a fool of himself when it turned out that his own department's figure for the estimated annual cost to the NHS of what the government calls "health tourism" was just £12m - or 0.01% of the total NHS budget. So, Hunt had to go back to his abacus and, following a new audit, another figure has now been produced of up to £1.8

billion pounds - 150 times higher than the original estimate!

The trick lies in what they categorise as "health tourism" - which, in and of itself, doesn't actually mean anything. So all sorts of "foreign" patients have been lumped together under this label. On closer examination, however, almost 80% of this figure is accounted for by tax-paying foreign workers and

fee-paying foreign students, who certainly do not come to Britain for health reasons, but definitely pay one way or another for their access to the NHS.

But never mind. For the government, any lie will do, so long as it allows them to blame foreigners for the dire state into which *its cuts* are driving the health service!

• **"Super-priority" visas for the wealthy**

Cameron announced a new visa system to attract rich Chinese businessmen and tourists. They will be offered a 24-hour "super-priority" visa service. Apparently, the purpose of this scheme is to attract wealthy tourists who have been bypassing Britain while travelling across the rest of Europe, because it isn't party to the Schengen visa agreement which covers most of Europe. The

government wouldn't want British luxury shops and hotels to miss out on the potential profits they could make from such customers!

The timing of Cameron's announcement couldn't be more significant, however. It comes just as his government is preparing another turn of the screw on foreigners, with Theresa May's new bill which seeks to create a "hostile

environment" for immigrants through tighter controls on bank accounts, checks through landlords and maybe NHS fees. And, obviously, none of this will apply to Cameron's wealthy guests. But isn't this the only purpose of immigration controls - to keep the poor out? And isn't a large bank account the best passport to have in this society?

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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