

WORKERS' fight



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

"RECOVERY"?? FOR WHOM??

How many times have ConDem ministers been hailing the advent of a "recovery" which, they claimed, was to be credited to their austerity policies? Except that each time so far, their own official figures have been just as stubborn in calling their bluff.

Eventually, however, government statisticians seem to have found a way of tricking their figures into showing something like a small increase in national production (GDP), over the past year. But what this "economic growth", as ministers call it, really means - and, above all, who benefits from it - is an entirely different matter.

What's in a number?

There are facts which they just can't ignore. For instance the output of the production sector is still 12% below its 2007 level - as if a "recovery" could be only based on services! But, never mind. This doesn't stop Osborne and Cameron from gloating about the "dynamism" of the British economy compared to the rest of the world. Of course, they wouldn't miss this chance to wave the Union Jack, especially in the run-up to a European election!

But even the figures of the OECD, the same body which, we are told, promises the British economy a bright future, tell a very different story - by ranking the British "recovery" somewhere between Portugal's and Spain's, but way behind Germany's and France's. The truth is that the estimated overall 1.9% growth in Britain's GDP is artificially inflated by several factors. Among them, for instance, there is the huge amount of public funds awarded to private businesses, in the form of subsidies and tax rebates.

But the main factor in this so-called "recovery" seems to be the housing



market. Over the past 2 years, house prices and private rents soared 4 times faster than inflation. The fact that last year, almost 40% of all house buyers paid cash, shows that many houses are bought as an investment. This means that yet another speculative housing bubble is building up, just as in 2007, with the same risk of financial implosion. Talk about a "recovery"!

Our collective strength will "recover"

Of course, when the ConDems hail their economic record, what they have in mind is how well their capitalist masters are doing - and they are doing very well. Share prices and company profits have more than recovered since 2008. And if they have recovered so well, it is thanks to companies increasing their parasitism on public funds and their exploitation of workers.

Because, for the working class, wages haven't "recovered", but indebtedness has: it is back to an all-time

high! So working class households are paying record interests bills to the banks, with a reduced income! Jobs and conditions haven't "recovered" either. No matter how much the government cuts benefits to pressurise the jobless "back into work", there are no new real jobs on which one can make a living. Casual, part-time, zero-hours non-jobs on the minimum wage - and sometimes below - cannot be a substitute for real employment. The result of this policy is just more poverty.

In any case, the working class cannot just rely on the dubious promise of a "recovery". It may or may not happen, no-one can be sure. But the one thing we can be sure about is that the capitalist class has now got used to having an easy life during the crisis and that, whatever happens, it will want to keep the screw as tight as it is now. This is why, if the working class wants to recover the ground lost over the past years, it will only be able to rely on the "recovery" of its collective strength. ☐

World War I *War of words and politicking*

Six months before the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, hostilities have already broken out between the Tories, represented by Education secretary Michael Gove, and Labour, represented by Gove's opposite number in the shadow cabinet, Tristram Hunt.

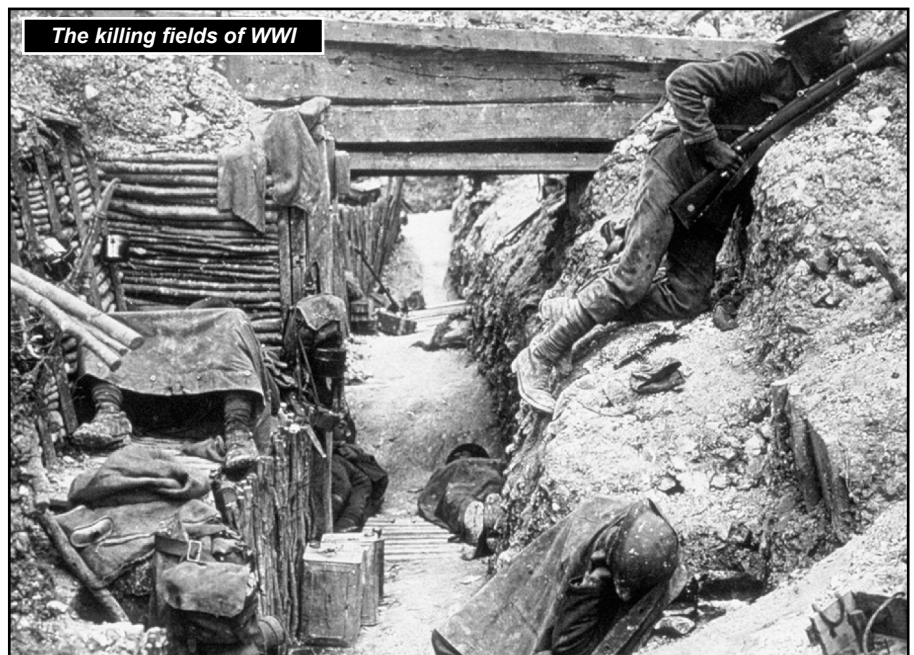
On 3rd January, Gove published an article in the Daily Mail, entitled: "Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?" The tone was set. For Gove, "the First World War may have been a uniquely horrific war, but it was also plainly a just war", due to the "aggressively expansionist war aims" of the German elites "and their scorn for the international order". Never mind the fact that, in 1914, the "international order" was dominated by the aggressive expansionism of the British and French colonial empires and that, for British capital, this "just war" had no aim other than to protect and, if possible to expand, its looting of the planet's resources!

Significantly enough, Tristram Hunt replied the next day in the Guardian by raising the Union Jack. "The left needs no lessons on 'the virtues of patriotism, honour and courage'", said Hunt, glorifying the servility of trade union leaders whose "appeals ... to oppose German aggression... led more

than 250,000 of their members to enlist by Christmas 1914, with 25% of miners volunteering before conscription. Typical was John Ward... the leader of the Navvies' Union. To "fight Prussianism", he raised three pioneer battalions from his members and, commissioned as a colonel by Lord Kitchener, led them to battle in France, Italy and Russia."

class interests, is a cause for pride! Worse even, he also seems to forget that the British army's incursion into Russia during the war was aimed, not at so-called "German aggression", but at crushing the workers' revolution which was then unfolding in Russia.

For the working class, the fact that these two parties are compet-



Apparently, for Hunt, the fact that union leaders led workers into the killing fields of WWI by luring them into thinking that defending the interests of British imperialism was defending their own

ing for the mantle of British "patriotism" over a war which left more than 16 million dead a hundred years ago, is a dire warning against their policies for today and tomorrow! □

• **Blame it on the loony tunes**

Nigel Farage is having a hard time. It's not easy to be the leader of a loony party with loony policies when you want to look respectable in order to be electable. His latest embarrassment was caused by town councillor David Silvester stating that the recent floods were God's punishment for the legalisation of gay marriage! The only way out which Farage managed to find was to blame this outburst on the fact that Silvester was a turncoat from the Tory party!

Farage has now pledged to purge UKIP of "extremist, nasty and barmy" views. He's got his work cut out since the whole UKIP manifesto

is full of them - like compulsory uniforms for taxi drivers, repainting trains in the national colours, and making the Circle Line back into a circle, not to mention a host of xenophobic and racist views. But Farage denies any responsibility for them, blames his "idiot" predecessor and promises to re-write the whole lot - after the election... So he's still canvassing the barmy vote, then?

• **Energetic profiteering**

Energy supplier SSE announced it is on course for profits of £1.5bn this financial year, an increase of 8.8% on the previous year. Between them, the "Big Six" suppliers, dominating the gas and electricity market, have increased their profits fivefold in the

last 5 years, all at the expense of customers, who have little choice but to pay their inflated prices.

Far from being content with this bonanza, SSE is threatening to cut its investment in windfarms, because it didn't get the amount of state subsidy it was hoping for. And it is complaining about having to pay the very minimal 'social levy', which is supposed to mitigate the effect of the companies' rapacious practices on the poorest and most vulnerable of their customers. In SSE's opinion, the taxpayer should foot the bill for this. After all, SSE is a private business whose job is to fleece the customers and please shareholders, not to worry about the consequences.

Floods and hot air

An exceptionally prolonged spell of wet weather has brought flooding again. A December tidal surge on the east coast - the largest since 1953, which killed 300 people - flooded part of Hull city centre and caused houses to collapse into the sea in Norfolk. In January, attention shifted inland and especially to the Somerset Levels, a flat former marshland drained for agriculture, where houses flooded and villages have been cut off for a month.

Somerset farmers who've been hit hard have demanded more dredging of rivers by the Environment Agency, forcing Environment Secretary Owen Paterson to announce an urgent dredging plan. Yet even if it might have prevented the recent flooding, which is doubtful after such high and sustained rainfall, more dredging is at best a partial measure, which by getting more water downstream faster, might worsen the flooding of downstream settlements.

Paterson admitted that dredging can only work as one of a series of policies aimed at slowing down the



run-off of water from where it falls, over whole river catchments. These would include planting woodlands to lower groundwater levels, reinstating natural wetlands along rivers and allocating land to store flood water in lowlands like the Somerset

Levels. But there's one major obstacle to this - the narrow interests of individual property owners. Only land held collectively could be used and managed rationally and scientifically for the benefit of all. □

NHS: National Health Slowing

How can a wait of 3 weeks - just for an appointment with your GP - be justified? Yet such waits are commonplace. And now the National Audit Office has produced official figures to expose the growing waiting times for NHS hospital appointments - and that in some hospitals, they are 3 weeks longer than their records show. Yes, apparently one in four hospitals are deliberately falsifying their records by starting the clock at the wrong time, or creating pauses in waiting times for patients.

The NAO found this was the case in 26% of the hospitals it checked. Jeremy Hunt, the ConDem Health Secretary, of course, denies this. But he can't very well argue with government auditors. And anyway what we are talking about is a "maximum wait" set at 18 weeks. Yes, almost 5 months is considered an acceptable wait for a diagnostic procedure, or specialist consultation, or an operation... but what if you have a rapidly spreading cancer? Too bad?

Fire cuts: how did Boris get away with it?

On 9 January, 10 fire stations in London were closed. 580 firefighters' jobs have been cut and 18 fire engines put out of use. The firefighters' union, the FBU, challenged these cuts in the High Court in December and lost. Today, stations have big "this fire station is closed" signs and who knows how response times to emergencies will be affected? Boris Johnson, who's behind these cuts, claims "not at all". Yet there is no way that the 6-minute maximum can be met from the reduced number of stations which are - for the time being - still open. Already, before the

closures, the FBU reported that the number of fatalities from fires was going up in London.

In the meantime firefighters are still taking sporadic and isolated action against threatened cuts to pensions - leaving the station closures to the Appeal Court. Of course, losing 50% of your pension if you're unfit to carry on working till 60, is unacceptable. But firefighters are not on their own facing cuts. Are these fearless fighters afraid to call on the rest of the working class to fight alongside them - against cuts which affect everyone? Surely not!

Letter from Sussex

Management at Eastbourne District General Hospital recently dismissed union claims that A&E hours may be slashed. But no-one believes them.

"Concentrating" services at Eastbourne or Hastings hospitals - i.e. closing them - goes back to 2006, when management proposed doing it to Maternity Services. The outcry forced them to back down, supposedly for good. A few years later, head of East Sussex NHS Trust, Kim Hodgson, stepped down, with a £175,000 golden handshake. Perhaps, some thought, in response to the Maternity fiasco.

But "concentration" reared its head again, in Stroke Services, Paediatrics and Emergency Surgery. Maternity was also "concentrated" at Hastings - but only temporarily, we were told. Then, the other week, elderly macular degeneration patients (who can't see properly) were told to switch from Eastbourne and Hastings to the relatively unfamiliar Bexhill Hospital. Perhaps thinking we can't remember properly either, management announced that Maternity Services at both Eastbourne and Hastings was "not an option". To cap it all, we hear that the same Kim Hodgson is in charge of Colchester hospital, where staff are alleged to have been bullied into altering patient records. No wonder management is neither believed nor trusted!

crisis watch

The World Economic Forum (WEF) met in Davos this January - in the Swiss Alps - bringing together top businessmen and politicians, including Cameron and Osborne. And, this time round, due to the on-going crisis, the main topics of discussion were supposed to deal with the main risks facing the world economy.

Ironically, one of these issues was meant to be global warming - which was certainly not improved

• 85 holding billions to ransom

In January, the charity Oxfam issued a report which warned of the dangers of the growth in inequality. It showed how half of the world's wealth is now owned by just one percent of the world's population. And out of that 1%, just 85 people own £65 trillion - as much as 3.5 billion people, classified as poor.

It also showed that over the past 30 years, including since the beginning

• What's "middle" about their "middle class"?

The business media has long claimed that, despite the crisis, the poor countries' "middle classes" would provide lucrative markets and a new lease of life for capitalism. But what do they really mean by "middle class"?

A recent report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) sheds some light on this. Leaving out the 3 billion people of these countries (about half of their populations) who earn less than

Davos isn't part of our world

by the festival of private helicopters bringing all these people to the 5,000 ft-high Davos resort... The "durability of the recovery" was also on the agenda - which implies, of course, that there's been one in the first place! But then, the recovery they're talking about, of course, is that of capitalist profits - at the expense of the working classes.

Which is probably why they also felt the need to talk about the

growing gap between the rich and the poor. And what did they find? That the biggest threat to their system is actually this increasing inequality. They are not proposing to give their wealth away, as a solution, of course. But they are worried at the prospect of workers and the poor organizing themselves to close that gap and settle accounts with them. So they should be! □

of the crisis, the wealth of the richest has increased: in 1983, the share of the national income of the richest 1% was 10%, but by 2011, it had gone up to 22% - more than doubling at a time when the working classes of the world were facing record unemployment and loss of income. Yes, the richest manage to do very well out of the crisis.

Not only do these rich people steal

most of the value created by workers' labour, but today they are leaving them an ever smaller share of this value. This means that any "recovery" for the struggling working class majority will involve recovering the loot which has been stolen by these thieves. And the sooner the better.

£1.20 a day, the ILO considers this "middle class" to include the 1.7 billion people earning £2 a day or more, among whom just 18% earn more than £8 a day - i.e., just over half the adult rate of the dole in Britain. In short, this "middle class" is really overwhelmingly poor!

So, all the talk about the poor countries' "rising middle class" is nothing but a ploy designed to conceal the poverty spread by capitalism over most of the

planet - a ploy which is not very different from the politicians' insistence on describing all workers here as "middle class". It's all about blurring the line between the poor and the rich, the exploited and the exploiters. But no matter how hard they try, this won't stop the exploited and poor from rising one day, to rid the world of the capitalists' rotten system!

• Minimum impact

George Osborne has backed a rise in the adult minimum wage to £7 per hour. In doing so he is only lining up with others in the cabinet, who've been calling for it. Like Business Secretary Vince Cable, who would like workers to spend more in the shops.

So Osborne plans to restore the "real" value of the minimum wage to what it was before the crisis, reversing ConDem policies that have pegged rises below inflation, with a cumulative 10% increase. But he favours doing this over two years, with no guarantee that inflation won't destroy its value. And even this modest rise is still opposed by the bosses' CBI - which may also have called for higher wages last month, but only from companies that are doing well.

Workers certainly need much higher wages - urgently - but they obviously can't expect anything from the politicians' economic tinkering. They can only rely on their collective muscle.

• We work, they profit

According to the "High Pay Centre" think-tank, executive pay has risen by 450% in the past 12 years, compared to 16% for workers on "average" wages. Surely,

enough of an indictment!

In a recent report, it portrayed those deciding on top pay as a clique, scratching each other's backs, adding that companies with the biggest pay gaps between bosses and workers had a higher turnover of workers, more absence through sickness and more strikes.

This is not the first attempt to change the bosses' behaviour by using this kind of argument.

But companies behave like this for a reason - they are out to make extra profits, full stop - and paying low wages is a function of that aim. So they will only change if they are forced to - by the working class waging a general, conscious fight for its share of all society's wealth.

• 99p world

A 99p shop in Wrexham made the national news, after advertising a closing down sale with prices of 50p. Word got round and after a few hours, with shelves emptying fast, the manager suddenly announced the sale was over and tried to close early. Some shoppers queuing with their purchases refused to leave. Police came, but arrested no-one and the shop eventually re-opened offering "buy one, get one free" on everything.

Predictably there was much insulting comment on the story, suggesting that the number and behaviour of shoppers prompted the manager to cancel the sale. But the reason the sale was suddenly cancelled was that the shop's lease was renegotiated at the last minute, so there was no need to clear its stock. What this small incident shows however, is the desperate penny-counting that confronts the poor all the time - and the contempt for the same poor shown by the very businesses that thrive on poverty.



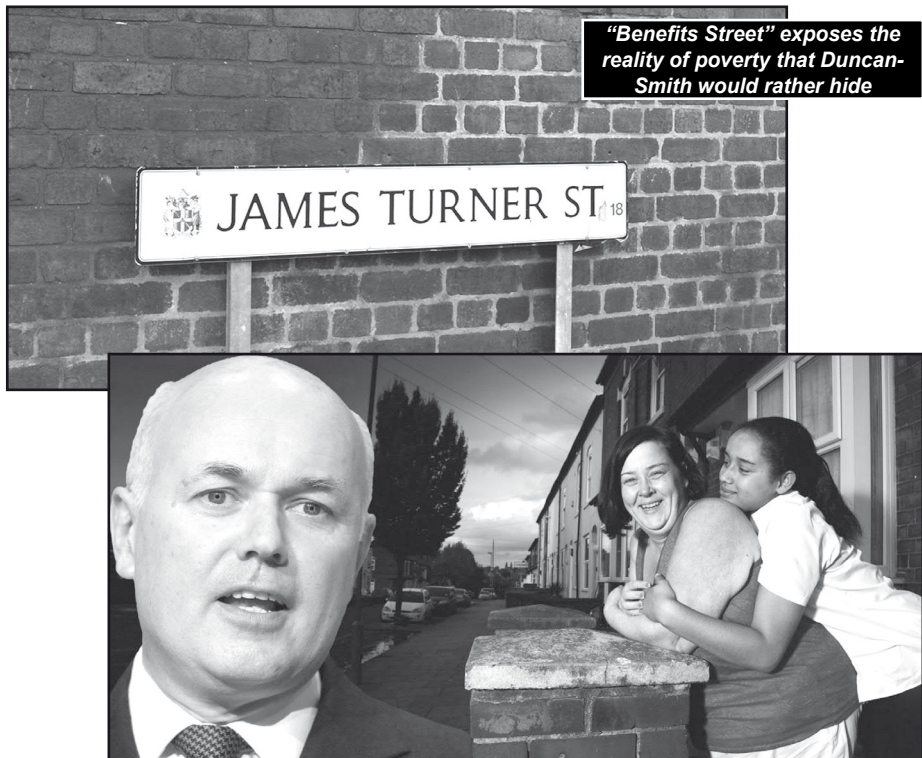
**Benefits Street:
an indictment of capitalist parasitism**

crisis watch

If Channel 4 chose to broadcast its documentary series, "Benefits Street", it wasn't to give a voice to the poor - neither in Birmingham's James Turner Street, nor anywhere else for that matter. The media is not into that. This was primarily an exercise in sensationalism, with a dose of unhealthy voyeurism, which could be used by the government and media in their on-going campaign to portray benefit claimants as "parasites, cheaters and skivers".

Nevertheless, at least this series put the spotlight on the hidden face of this deeply unequal society. It showed how one can be cornered into poverty, for all sorts of reasons - lack of real jobs, poor health, low level of education, lack of affordable nurseries for single parents, etc. It exposed the fact that, contrary to what ministers keep claiming, living on benefits cannot possibly be a "chosen way of life" - if only because, it's not actually "living", but barely surviving! And it highlighted the deep flaws in a society which, instead of offering some hope, let alone a decent life, to its poorest members, is pushing them further into poverty.

What this series did not and could not show, is the real function of the welfare state in this capitalist society



"Benefits Street" exposes the reality of poverty that Duncan-Smith would rather hide

- which has nothing to do with the welfare of the working class, but everything to do with the interests of the capitalists. Indeed, the NHS provides the bosses with a workforce which is more or less fit for work, in-work benefit makes it possible for them to keep wages at a very low

level and out-of-work benefit allows them to maintain a permanent reserve of jobless at their disposal, while keeping the working class on its toes. In fact, the parasites "living on the welfare state" are not benefit claimants, but the capitalists themselves! □

• **"Compassionate" cuts?**

So what did Iain Duncan Smith, the Tory ex-Army officer with a large mansion, have to say about "Benefits Street"? Apparently, it exposes the fact that the benefits system has become a "trap" - according to him, being on benefits pays more than being in work these days. Being a good Christian, it breaks his heart to see this - and so he's been implementing what he calls a "compassionate solution". By savagely cutting benefits he's trying to ensure that even a starvation wage "pays more" than benefits alone!

Yes, Duncan Smith is trying to starve the jobless out of the benefit system and into work. And what work would that be exactly? As if there was no crisis and no massive under-employment! And as for the jobs that are out there today, what do they pay? Can temporary, part-time, minimum wage, zero-hours jobs allow anyone to make ends meet? Aren't a large number of people in work receiving benefits, precisely because work doesn't pay? But then, that's not the government's problem. All they really want is to cut the welfare budget.

• **Jumping on the bandwagon**

Predictably, the tabloids leapt on Channel 4's Benefits Street, with headlines about "scum", "thieves", "drug addicts", "scroungers", "cheats" and "chancers". The Mail, Express and Sun even took it upon themselves to single out and discredit certain of the people who featured in the programme. Predictably too, these papers didn't relay how this series highlights the injustices of the system, nor the predicaments people find themselves in, as a result of poverty. Instead, they just sought to reinforce the worst prejudices.

However, among all the sensationalism, some characters emerged who were not featured in the programme: those who rent out derelict houses on James Turner Street, mostly paid for out of housing benefit: the "respectable" landlords - among them, a police chief and a Tory millionaire! In other words, the real scroungers!

• **Benefits of electoral tourism**

The government has announced that from this January, migrants from Europe would have to prove they have been

living in Britain for three months before they can claim Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). Never mind the fact that workers from Europe already had to prove they were "habitually resident" in this country to claim JSA, which effectively meant they had a three-month wait anyway.

It was also announced that JSA for EU migrants would be limited to 6 months and that, from April, EU jobseekers would not be able to claim housing benefit. But migrants can keep their JSA if they can prove they have "genuine prospects of finding work" and those who've previously had a job in Britain can claim housing benefit.

So, for all the fuss, these "new curbs on benefit tourism" mostly already existed. And anyway, the government can't impose the two-year wait to be eligible for the dole demanded by Tory Eurosceptics (never mind the 5 years touted by UKIP), nor make other major changes, as this would break reciprocal EU treaties. But, with the campaign for the European elections in full swing, xenophobic demagoguery is now on the agenda for all the main parties.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Better throw out this suspicious package!**

At the time of writing, Royal Mail workers are voting over a new agreement on wages, terms and conditions. The leaders of the postal union (CWU) have recommended the deal in order, they say, to avoid putting the newly privatised RM in a bad position vis a vis its "competitors".

It's a 3-year deal on pay, offering 9.06% in total with 3% this year backdated to last April. It offers a so-called "legally binding" guarantee, that terms and conditions will

remain unchanged until a "review" in 2019. It includes a compulsory arbitration mechanism (de facto no-strike clause), which is all the more problematic given many unresolved issues, especially on Deliveries.

Of course we hope a majority will vote "no". We've every reason to be suspicious of CWU leaders, whose boss-talk is nothing new, and who, despite militant strikes over the years, have made deals with RM costing tens of thousands of jobs and drastic cuts to our conditions. This



time too, they went into talks armed with a strike vote. And now they've squandered it for an agreement which ties our hands in exchange for a mere 5-year conditional guarantee on jobs. The deal may go through, helped by high abstentions. But this only means that the necessary fight is postponed to another day.

• Share slump coming...?

RM shares are among the top 100 traded - having hit the FTSE100 - with a (so far) high of £6.07 - having started at £3.30, as we remember! The Financial Times thinks all is well now: so who told it that we'd already "agreed" the so-called 9.07% pay rise and the £200 lump sum before we'd even received our postal ballot paper? Was it Moya? Or Dave? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 14/01/14]

• What's this nonsense?

The CWU said if we don't vote for the agreement, it'll put RM in a bad position in front of the competition. It's what RM has said every time we had a strike. So why this boss-talk from the

CWU? What next? Will they ask us to say "yes" to a pay cut "for the sake of beating the competition"? Following that logic, any strike which threatens the profits/operation of a company is bad. Never mind that this is the point of a strike! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 28/01/14]

• Creeping casualisation

Why are temps already routinely used in parts of RM, like deliveries/driving? Some are on 3 month contracts, if they're lucky. It's unacceptable. [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 28/01/14]

• How do they work that one out?

How dare Romec argue, that after losing contracts elsewhere, it's justified in cutting engineers' jobs in RM, due to a

"surplus"? And on top of it, it's ignoring all the protections we've fought for over the years. So we're voting for strike. [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 28/01/14]

• We prefer to strike

And we Romec cleaners are also voting for strike. Negotiations over the new duties allocations completely broke down. Nobody wanted to work weekends so managers decided they'd just allocate duties and ignore seniority. And just like for the engineers, they also won't respect the agreement on the "surplus of workers" they say exists (which surplus?! They're playing very dirty. And they've picked the wrong opponent. [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 28/01/14]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• BMW's Christmas bad joke?**

The shine is wearing off BMW's "early Christmas present" to agency workers. Not only have the contract numbers being talked about dropped from 700 to 450 contracts here, but these are only to be given out at the rate of 50 a month (and no sign of any yet). Or so we hear. And then there's the substandard pension arrangements... [Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford 28/01/14]

• This is top priority!

Nearly February, and no word on pay. The only acceptable reason for this would be the necessary increase in our demands, for instance insisting on all contracts to be issued at one go and connecting them to the existing pension scheme. But if that were the case, Unite officials would have told us, wouldn't they? So what's going on - or not? [Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford 28/01/14]

• Highway robbery

BMW is now bussing workers here daily from Hams Hall. They have been told this is for 19 months, but some are looking for permanent accommodation round here. As if the unpaid travelling were not bad enough, those who work for Gi are taking a pay cut too - from a lower base. Yes, BMW and Gi are treating this secondment to Cowley as a "new assignment" and putting them back on starters' rates. These mates should of course be on the same rate for the job as we are - never mind the fact that they have 3-4 hours travelling or the higher costs of Oxford to contend with! [Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford 28/01/14]

• BMW wants us to work our breaks?

Switching off the break warning buzzers in Assembly can result in you losing a few minutes of an already too short break. If we wait for the manager's signal before leaving the line, that is... But why should we? And why hurry back? Let the line



run on, without us, if that's the way they want it! [Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford 28/01/14]

• Building 50: like dancing the conga...

With 890 cars in the WiP, 100 engineers over from Munich and numbers on the line swelled by 50% (as half the new third shift is being trained up), working in Building 50 is a tad congested. In an area for 4 workers, 4 more are training and two engineers look on. No wonder dazed new starts are wondering what sort of madhouse they're in! [Workers' fight bulletin BMW Oxford 28/01/14]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• A strike ballot ... over what?**

Ford's latest pay deal for British workers, offering a 3.75% rise in year one and 0.5% above inflation in year 2, which was turned down overwhelmingly in a "consultative ballot" last year, is now subject to a postal strike ballot. This should be complete by 10 February. But we're amazed to discover that, according to the union Unite, "workers are demanding commitments to job security in line with ... counterparts in other EU countries and improvements in the pension scheme!"

• Ford pre-empts Unite bureaucrats

The joke of all of this is that in fact Ford already responded to the demands of Unite officials. It announced the day before the strike ballot began, that it is going to set up a "Joint Ford of Britain National Pension Forum" - a talking shop in which union bureaucrats can happily

It's news to us. Especially since only 2 years ago, these same union officials agreed job insecurity (a 2-tier workforce and exclusion of new starts from the occupational pension scheme) and pension reductions - the latter in exchange for a no strike deal and a bribe, payable in instalments to active workers only, leaving existing pensioners high and dry, with no allies to oppose the pension cut.

The hypocrisy and cynicism of this just boggles the mind. But at

spend their two-pennies-worth while seeking a common understanding with Ford bosses. Same goes for the "Joint Ford of Britain Future Outlook Forum" being offered to union officials so that they can "share" all kinds of little secrets with Ford as well as the proverbial steak and



least it's a reminder that we need to dispense with these union bureaucrats and force company bosses to negotiate directly with elected representatives from our own ranks, who are fully accountable to all of us! In the context of an all-out strike, of course!

chips... The question for these officials is how they will now dress this up as something new, which they can agree to and avoid the strike that they recommended... Because one thing is for sure, they have no intention of leading one.

• Serve us some of that!

Ford's increasing shareholders' dividends by 25% (3rd increase in 3 yrs). It's the only one of Detroit's Big 3 paying a dividend. Share prices jumped after CEO Doolally said he'd stay on to "serve Ford". They like him - thanks to the \$32.9bn he squeezed out of a shrunken, wage-cut workforce since 2006 and from the "One Ford" efficiency cuts... 25% increase for shareholders? And only 3.75% for us? They're

joking! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/01/14]

• Fowl run refurbishment?

We wondered what all the DEP managers, including Rottweiler were doing prowling around the Chicken Farm (aka Tiger engine assembly) last week... Are they planning improvements? Like a total replacement assembly line with seats attached and sirens which go off every hour, signalling a tea break? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/01/14]

• The retirement fiddle

Many of us who applied for the special retirement packages were not given them, despite having very long service. It's a disgrace and we demand that the full package be offered once more, with just service and age as criteria. We petitioned to this effect. "Grade for grade" allowed favouritism and the excuse of a relative labour shortage was used against us. Injustices were done. These must be redressed. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 21/01/14]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• How could this happen?**

A track worker was hit by an East Coast train last Wednesday, at Newark Northgate. We need to know why our workmate ended up in hospital, badly hurt. Were short cuts in safety to blame? [King's X Workers' Platform 28/01/14]

• Backed off

Us East Coast guards were so fed up with all the things East Coast was trying to impose on us that we put our feet down. On top of the deal we'd agreed over our holidays, they wanted even more! So, many of us just refused to work our rest days (which are meant for "rest" after all)... That got management's attention. Suddenly all those concessions they wanted from us, melted into thin air! That's all it takes! [King's X Workers' Platform 14/01/14]

• Rage against the machine

Just when we thought it was not possible for East Coast's EPOS handheld tills to get any worse, along comes the latest model, with a string of problems. For instance, when using the EPOS in Coach B, if a passenger is unlucky enough to want to pay with a card, the machine struggles to get a wireless signal (which is strongest at the other end of the train, in 1st Class). So we wait and wait and wait... until finally the passenger gives up. So much for technology! [King's X Workers' Platform 14/01/14]

• They can't stretch us

First Capital Connect's current timetable includes the extra 12-car services. So, more carriages, more passengers, more rubbish - but no more cleaners. How are we supposed to do all this extra work in the same time? Grow an extra pair of



hands each? [King's X Workers' Platform 28/01/14]

• It's a long story

Some time back, East Coast produced a story booklet for passengers. Now they've brought out another one. But this time, it has several stories in it, not just one. Is this to give passengers something to read during the longer delays? And will they be printing a 500-page novel next time? [King's X Workers' Platform 14/01/14]

South Africa

At the time of writing, 100,000 platinum miners in Rustenburg, South Africa, have already been on strike for a week, for a pay rise for all to a minimum of R12,500 a month (£683.58). This includes workers from Lonmin Marikana where the massacre of 34 striking workers by police took place in 2012, as well as workers from Impala Platinum and Amplats (Anglo-American). But this time the strike is legal and led by AMCU (Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union), the union which was regarded as a "usurper" at the time of the massacre and denounced by the ANC government-backed National Union of Miners (NUM), which had refused to back the workers' demands.

In the meantime AMCU has displaced the NUM as the main union on these mines and on many other mines, too. It is now representing workers in the gold sector, demanding a R12,500 entry-level minimum wage as well. However their planned gold mine strike has just been declared illegal by the courts - for the time being.

The platinum bosses latest offer

The miners are out, fighting again



of 9% was turned down. Said the union representatives: "they must not come with percentage offers, but table an offer based on rands and cents!" And they're certainly right to demand a concrete amount in cash which, over time, has the effect

of reducing wage differentials, and right to refuse productivity bonuses. This used to be a union principle in Britain as well, even though it has gone out of the window along with much else. But it's never too late for us either! ☐

Speculation wreaks havoc in the poor countries

In the last week of January, the Argentinian national currency suddenly lost 16% of its value in a matter of just two days. This was explained away by blaming the "profligacy" of the Argentinian government and its "unaffordable" social programmes.

However, Argentina isn't an isolated case. Over the past months, the currencies of a number of so-called "emerging" countries have been nosediving: the Argentinian peso was the worst affected, with a 35% loss against the dollar, followed by the Turkish lira (22%), the South African rand (19%), the Brazilian real (17%), the Chilean peso (15%), the Indian rupee (14%) and many others.

What has been happening is that over the past years, following the sharp reduction in interest rates in the rich countries, a form of speculation, known as the "carry trade", has reached a record level. This involves borrowing large amounts of money in the rich countries where interest rates are low and lending them to poor countries where interest rates are much higher. These loans are then used in the local economies, mainly in real estate.

However, after several years of fat profits made this way, two factors started to reverse this flow of speculative capital: first the fear that the real estate bubble created in some poor countries might burst;

and second, the fact that the policy of the US Federal Reserve Bank is likely to result in a rise in interest rates in the rich countries.

Back in 1997, a similar mechanism had caused a major financial crisis, albeit limited to South East Asia, with drastic consequences for the populations. The difference today, however, is that this is already affecting most poor countries - not just in South East Asia - and that this is taking place against the backdrop of a 6-year long world crisis. And this may mean that this time, the criminal irresponsibility of these speculators will aggravate the world crisis itself even further. ☐

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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