

WORKERS' fight



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

UKRAINE, BETWEEN HAMMER AND ANVIL

At the time of writing, Russian forces have occupied the mostly Russian-speaking Ukrainian province of Crimea, while armed gangs of far-right Ukrainian nationalists headed towards the province.

No-one can tell what will come out of the present deadlock - whether it will end up in the secession of parts of the country or whether it will result in yet another bloody civil war, reminiscent of Yugoslavia, in the 1990s.

But the one thing which is clear, is the hypocrisy of the US and EU governments which are now falling over themselves to condemn the Russian intervention in Crimea. As if these governments had no responsibility for the present situation in Ukraine!

The great powers' manoeuvres

Ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the western powers have tried to attract Ukraine, the 2nd largest among the former Soviet republics, into their respective spheres of influence.

Predictably, US oil majors have been busy building up a stake in the country's natural gas resources. But the primary objective of the US has been to detach Ukraine from Russia's political orbit in order to reduce its regional influence - as part of a "great power" rivalry with Russia which never ceased, despite the end of the Cold War.

Leaked discussions between US diplomats, posted on YouTube, revealed their links with Yulia Tymoshenko's right-wing "Fatherland" party, whose leader is now heading Ukraine's self-proclaimed government. They showed how the US was already preparing Yanukovich's succession long before he was ousted and how they saw the "Fatherland" party as the best possible choice from the American point of view.



Protest in Kiev back in December

As to the EU, it was primarily interested in Ukraine's economy, but not to the point of inviting the country to join. EU speculators were buying huge tracts of maize-producing land in the country, while EU companies were looking with great interest at its skilled, low-paid workforce, but that was it. Last year, eventually, the EU did invite Ukraine to sign an "association pact", which involved 4 other former Soviet republics. But it involved such drastic conditions that, at the last minute, Yanukovich's government refused to sign.

The threats to the population

This refusal sparked off the protests, last November. After two decades of corrupt regimes, the protesters wanted to get rid of a regime which appeared as the only obstacle to the opening up of Ukraine to the rest of the world.

But, waiting in the wings, were forces which had a far clearer agenda. The main opposition parties were there to represent the interests of the "oligarchs". Next to them, the nationalist

far-right - including some aspiring fascist groups - were using the opportunity to raise their profile, peddle their poisonous demagoguery against all minorities and arm themselves.

Today, the provisional government led by the US favourite, includes 3 members of this far-right, while its armed gangs have occupied police stations and taken over the buildings of political groups deemed "unpatriotic".

Whether these far-right groups manage to whip up nationalist feelings to their advantage as a result of Russia's invasion of Crimea remains to be seen. But in any case, they represent a deadly threat for the Ukrainian population - a threat that western politicians do not even care to mention.

And against this threat, the population and working class of Ukraine can expect nothing from the posturing of the west nor from the Russian army. It has only one option: to unite its ranks and get organised in order to impose collectively a policy which is favourable to its interests. □

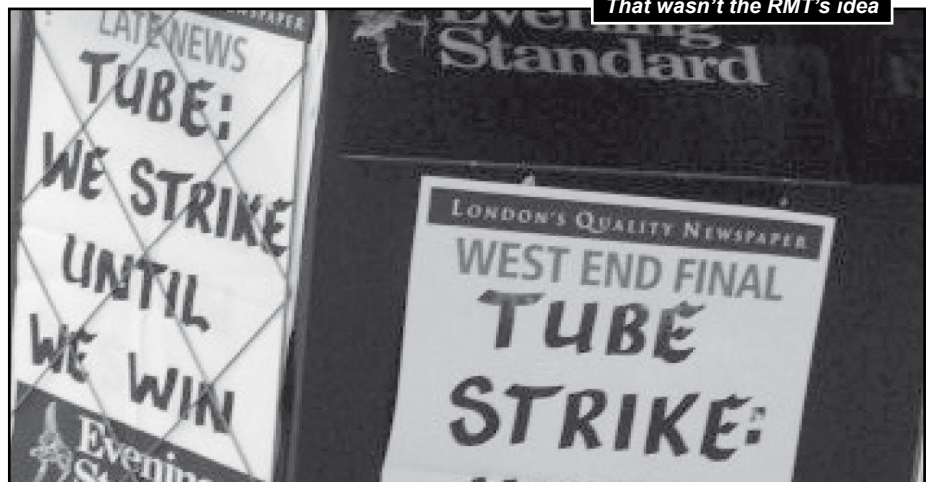
Jobs mustn't go down the Tube!

After London Mayor, Boris Johnson announced 950 jobs cuts on the tube and the closure of all ticket offices, the RMT called two 48-hour strikes.

But after the first successful strike, then next one was cancelled, a day before it was due to start. So what happened in between? Did Boris and Transport for London bosses cave in and promise not to close the ticket offices after all?!

No, but the union leadership claimed a "victory" anyway, saying that after negotiations behind closed doors with ACAS, the mediation body, they had "received proposals that halt the implementation of the cuts" ...

In fact, what really happened is that TFL only withdrew the notification of pending job cuts and will now negotiate with the RMT for 2 months



(till 4th April) to decide which jobs will be chopped, "station by station". Unless the union leaders were planning a compromise deal from the word go, it is hard to understand why they gave up the battle before it

had even been fought. Clearly, this isn't a victory and clearly TFL could get away with some if not all of its planned cuts, unless a real fight is resumed. ☐

• Banks' parasitism goes on

Barclays' shareholders got the same dividends in 2013 as in the previous year. But bonuses to top staff increased by £200m, to £2.4bn! Barclay's CEO says that this "incentive pool" is necessary "to make sure we have the best people in the firm." Sure! The same "best people" who caused the longest financial crisis in history! Earlier this year

the bank announced 10 to 12,000 job cuts, including 7,000 in Britain, under the pretext that profits had dropped from £7bn to a "meagre" £5.2bn. And it's not just Barclays. Government-controlled Lloyds, which has cut 35,000 jobs over the past 5 years, has also decided to award its top chief executive a £1.7m bonus this year!

So now we see the same practices of greedy profiteering via speculation, which led to the crisis, back with a vengeance, paid for by massive job cuts. Really, it's only the direct control of the population over the banks, with the help of bank employees, that can stop the bankers' organised plunder and the threat they represent to society.

• Soaring dividends, sinking society

In 2014, UK companies will be expected to pay £100bn in dividends - up 25% from 2013, or £20bn! Vodafone's exceptional payout of £16.6bn, following the sale of its stake in US telecoms group Verizon, makes up a big part of this increase. Nevertheless the total amount is huge and shows how well the bankers

and big businesses are doing in the crisis - mainly, of course, by turning the screw on the working class.

These meaninglessly large figures can be brought into perspective, though, when compared to the latest round of expenditure cuts due to be implemented by Osborne, between now and 2018 - which come to a

total of £25bn. Wouldn't just small part of these dividends be more than enough, not only to avoid any cuts in welfare and healthcare, but to create jobs, improve existing services, and fund new ones?

Proof, if it was needed, that the capitalists who caused the crisis could be made to foot its bill.

• Gas and hot air

Ed Davey, the Energy Secretary, felt he had to be seen to object to the overpricing of energy for domestic consumers. He singled out British Gas and made threats (however empty) that the regulator might decide to break up the company, because of its domination of the household gas supply market and whopping profit margins on gas, in particular.

British Gas felt very hard done by at this "political interference" to its right to profiteer as much as it wants. It be-moaned the fact that it had a 6% drop in profits for its residential energy supply business last year, for which it blamed wholesale prices and government levies.

Drop or not, however, British Gas still managed to screw a £571m profit out of domestic customers last year, to make a

£1bn overall profit. And even this is only half the story. British Gas' parent company, Centrica, which is also a gas producer, made £2.7bn profit last year. How hypocritical can these spongers get?

• Flashing Ferraris!

The number of Ferraris being sold in the UK is greater than anywhere else in Europe. In the last year, 677 cars were sold in Britain. These cars sell for around £150,000, meaning that it would take something like 11 years for someone on the minimum wage to buy one, without eating, of course!

And yes, the wealthy are so rich that they can waste their money on such fancy, tailor-made cars, despite the fact that they are completely useless - after all, what's the point of having a car that can drive at over 200 mph, when the speed

limit is 80 mph, even on a motorway! What are they for, then? Only to show off their ill-gotten gains!

• A price to make you sharder

Britain tallest building, London's Shard, will finally open its hotel, the Shangri-la for room bookings in September. It is the 3rd European hotel of a chain which already has 81 hotels and 34,000 rooms. The Shard hotel boasts 202 rooms. But don't take your wallet out just yet. The price of the rooms will be as high as the building.

Starting at £450 a night for those with a "tight budget", it offers suites for up to £3,250/night - equivalent to 3 months on the minimum wage! Not quite the cheap hotel then? Shangri-la means "paradise" and for the owners of this chain, it sounds just heavenly...

Beneath the murky waters

Ministers quoted figures which deliberately played down the damage caused by the floods. But a few estimates give an idea of their scale: 500,000 damaged homes, 6,000 under water for 2 months, a million suffering power cuts. And then there is the extensive damage to infrastructure.

Rather than do anything, ministers denied the problem. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles tried, but failed, to lay the blame at the Environment Agency's door, suggesting on the Andrew Marr programme that the EA had advised

the government not to spend more money on clearing rivers. No mention of the £100m cut from the flood defence budget, which saw flood prevention schemes cancelled, nor budgetary rules that cut river maintenance, demanding £8 of value protected for every £1 spent. Or that the EA is busy cutting its workforce to reach 75% of its 2009 level by October 2014.

As for long-term flood prevention, it's out too, thanks to the "bonfire of regulations" which freed farmers from subsidy conditions requiring them to combat soil erosion. Soil is

degraded for short-term profit, and water runs off faster, silting up rivers!

Eventually the government's line shifted to blaming "global warming" - implying it was out of their hands. Never mind that the Environment Secretary claimed last September that climate change "*is something we can adapt to over time and we are very good as a race at adapting!*" Not as it turned out! The Committee on Climate Change estimates that £3bn worth of damage was avoidable, had the right measures been taken early enough. □

the floods

• Natural disasters and man-made consequences

Obviously, extreme natural events like record rainfall, earth-quakes, typhoons, etc., can't be avoided. But does this mean, as ministers imply today, that nothing can be done against their consequences?

In fact, the whole history of mankind has been an on-going fight to master nature. From the conquest of fire by early man to the use of the energy encapsulated in atoms, or the treatment of diseases, human society has always managed to produce the techniques required to resolve the problems it was confronted with. And the same is true for anti-seismic building techniques invented against earth-quakes or for flood-defence

strategies.

The real issue, in this society, is that these techniques all require investment without offering short-term profits to the capitalist class. In the case of the floods, large-scale public works would be required to shore up defences, homes would have to be relocated out

of floodplains, specific farming methods would need to be used to retain water in the soil, etc.. But in a system in which the profit-motive is everything and private property sacrosanct, there is no space for the necessary rational planning and public funding. The real disaster is the profit system!

• Flood politics

When the government eventually discovered the floods in January, North Wales and large parts of the eastern coast of England and parts of Scotland had already been experiencing extreme flooding since the beginning of December, without ministers bothering to say - let alone do - anything about it.

It was only when the ConDems' very own electoral strongholds in the wealthy

south-west of England were hit, that anything changed.

All of a sudden, ministers felt they had to be visible on the ground. Not that

they did very much even then, of course, apart from breathing a lot of hot air at the floods and trying to blame others for their own lack of action!



The floods in North Wales, back in December

• Scape-goating EU workers

Cameron has found another gimmick to pander to anti-EU prejudices: EU workers who come to work here will have to earn more than £150/week for 3 months (the equivalent of 25hrs/week on minimum wage) before being able to claim in-work, top-up benefits of any kind. And never mind if unlucky EU workers are working part-time or on zero-hours contracts, for the minimum wage, like so many workers here, British or otherwise! This will be enough to deny them "worker" status and, therefore, in-work benefits! As to those who are unemployed, they will face a stringent residence test and have to wait for 3 months, before they can claim JSA.

Of course, the bosses who pay workers peanuts when they can get away

with it, irrespective of their status and their nationality, and who are in the habit of sacking workers whenever they please, will be free to carry on without any restrictions from the government. Which is why these discriminatory measures are against the interest of all workers, whatever their nationality, and should be resisted as such.

• The cost of xenophobia

The ConDems have been losing out to UKIP in most by-elections since 2010. The Lib Dems got less than 5% of the vote and lost their deposit in eight by-elections. They only just held on to Eastleigh, but their share of the vote dropped from 46 to 32%. UKIP was close behind with 27.8%, pushing the Tories into third place.

But UKIP's effect is not limited to affluent areas. In the most recent by-election, in the mainly working class constituency of Wythenshawe in Manchester, UKIP came second with 18% of the vote, the Tories third with 14.6% and the Lib Dems a distant fourth. UKIP also came second in by-elections in Rotherham, Middlesbrough and South Shields, all safe Labour seats, with the Tories nowhere in sight.

Ironically, the relative "success" of UKIP's ultra-nationalist and quasi-racist demagoguery in these by-elections is entirely due to the ConDems' own anti-EU and anti-immigration rhetoric! Otherwise, today, UKIP would just be another Monster Raving Loony Party!

• **Behind the fall in joblessness**

Official unemployment fell again in the last quarter of 2013, prompting ministers again to claim success for their "long-term plan". They hailed the highest number of women working (more than 8m), since measurements began in 1971. But this seems to have been owing to a rise in the numbers of women over 50 in work, mostly because they cannot afford not to work. And, as the

figures show, because the bosses can get away with paying them less: women in this age group earn on average £15,000; women over 60, £11,000. Hardly a sign of improving times!

Predictably, ministers didn't boast about the fact that youth unemployment remains high and that their apprenticeship scheme which was meant to reduce it, is failing.

• **More hassle for the jobless**

For many years, anyone claiming Jobseeker's Allowance has been required to record what they have done to look for work in a booklet and show it when they sign on. Usually Jobcentre workers have been too busy to demand evidence. Now comes a change of emphasis

- a larger booklet has been issued to jobseekers. Each time they sign on they write down what they are going to do before the next signing - be that fortnightly, weekly or in some cases, for the longest out of work, daily.

This might drive some people

Although apprenticeship vacancies posted online in August-October were up 24% on 2012, there were 50% more applicants - 12 per vacancy! Above all, of nearly 870,000 apprenticeships, 392,000 were taken by over-25s and 294,000 by 19-24 year-olds. Only 184,000 went to youth under 19, which is fewer than in 2009! What a strange way of fighting youth unemployment!

to take any kind of non-job, where some are available. But above all, the government certainly hopes that more jobless will have their benefit stopped, for failing to comply. And that more of them will just give up claiming benefits to escape this degrading, bureaucratic hassle.

• **No money, no rights**

Last year, after the introduction of more draconian rules, the number of people who had their Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) stopped, shot up to nearly 900,000 - the highest figure since JSA was introduced in 1996. Of those who appeal to the Social Security Tribunal, however, 58% are winning their claims. In other words more than half the decisions made to strip claimants of their benefits are wrong, according to the

government's own rules.

It's a similar, but far more brutal situation for sick and disabled people who are judged "fit to work" and thus deprived of their benefits. Some have died within weeks of being declared fit - most recently, a mentally ill man, who starved to death after his benefits were stopped. Over 40% of appeals against such decisions are succeeding.

So, to put a stop to this state of

affairs (according to leaked documents), the government is considering charging people to make appeals. How is someone who's just lost benefit, i.e., their only means to live, meant to afford a fee? This is a plan to deprive claimants of their only existing defence against the relentless drive to rob them of their benefits.

• **NHS - health on the shelf?**

It's no surprise that the Coalition government has asked Stuart Rose, the former M&S boss to "advise on improving the NHS". Back in 1984, just 5 years after Thatcher's Tory government came to power, the then top boss of Sainsbury supermarkets, Roy Griffiths, was invited to head an "NHS Management Enquiry". He suggested the introduction of general managers and a switch from clinicians being in charge of most decision-making to having "business-trained" bosses taking over. The Tory Lord Fowler, who was involved at the time, today admits that this was crucial to introducing the internal market and that it launched what he

calls a "cultural revolution" in the NHS. Perhaps more aptly called a "counter-revolution", it was responsible for opening the health service to profiteering...

Rose's job will be to advise on overhauling poorly performing hospitals (specifically the 14 failing NHS Trusts which have a high mortality level) by recruiting "better talent at the top" and yes, you guessed it "instigating a seismic shift in culture at grassroots level". Does that mean reappointing doctors and nurses "in charge" and eliminating the profit motive then? Somehow we don't think so!

• **A thorny question for Rose**

One additional note: "Sir" Stuart Rose also sits on the board of Bridgepoint, which is a private equity group with a major shareholding in the private health group, Care UK. And Care UK just "happens" to be already considered as a possible candidate to take over one of these 14 failing health trusts which are under his review - that is, the George Eliot NHS

Hospital Trust in Warwickshire. Sir Rose says it's no problem - he will just close his ears whenever such issues are discussed: he'd "committed to recuse (himself) from any relevant health discussions at Bridgepoint European Advisory Board meetings". Cross your heart and hope to die?

• **Simplified pensions, simple poverty**

The government is finalising plans for its "single tier" pension, which will replace the basic and second state pension, from April 2016. And, at face value, it will be an improvement: the level of the full basic pension will go up from £110.15 to £147/week and those who want to top their pension up to that level with additional National Insurance Contributions will be able to do so - that is, if they can afford it!

Predictably, however, the aim is to make savings. The number of qualifying years to get the full pension will increase from 30 to 35 years. Moreover, workers who have been contracted in to the second state pension and have already accrued a pension worth £147, will have to carry on paying contributions for no extra benefit when they finally retire - when they might, for instance, have gained a pension of £200 a week under the old system.

Above all, the big question remains: how is this £147 (or less!) to pay for everything a pensioner needs? It's less than the £250/week paid by a full-time job on the minimum wage and everyone knows that this means poverty!

17 million sacrificed to capitalist greed!

World War I

A hundred years ago, on 1st August 1914, the world's richest countries threw their troops onto the killing fields of World War I. A 4-year long nightmare started. The war killed 7m civilians, directly or indirectly. Of the 65m soldiers involved, 10m were killed and 21m injured - of which many became "living dead", having been exposed to poisonous gas - the "weapons of mass destruction" of the time.

Imperialist rivals tear the world apart...

Today's politicians dare to recall Britain's "just" role in WWI, hailing this country as a champion of "democracy" - against the "totalitarianism" of the German Kaiser. Of course they would, just as politicians have done after almost every war since. Never mind that in 1914, "totalitarian" Germany had universal male suffrage while only a third of those fighting for "democratic" Britain had the right to vote! Never mind either, that one of Britain's main allies was the Russian tsar, Europe's most brutal dictator!

In fact, this war was all about the rivalry between the richest imperialist powers over their colonial empires and protected markets. The two main powers of the time - Britain and France - felt threatened by Germany, which had the most dynamic economy, but the

smallest colonial empire. In 1907, they ganged up with Russia against Germany and the war drive began. Britain's military expenditure reached half of the government's budget while the war industries and the armies were put on high alert. Once the protagonists felt ready for a confrontation, they used the first pretext on offer to begin the war. And all hell broke loose.

After four years of butchery, Britain and France were able to share out Germany's African colonies and parts of the territory of its former ally, the Ottoman Empire. Central Europe was freed from Germany's economic influence by breaking it up into a myriad of small states, ruled by dictators hand-picked for their servility to the victors. British and French capital had achieved their aim. As a French anti-war novelist wrote later, the soldiers "thought they'd be dying for the motherland, when in fact they were dying for its industrialists".

... before uniting in a class war

But the rivalry between the warring powers was far outweighed by their fear of the unfolding proletarian revolution in Russia. Plans for invading Russia were made in November 1917 and when the November 1918 armistice was signed, British and allied forces had already occupied the three main ports of northern Russia

and the Baku oil fields. Following the armistice, however, the former enemies joined their forces against the Russian working class, under the hypocritical pretext of "conveying supplies to the population" ("humanitarian" posturing, already!). The British, French and German armies attacked the soviet Red Army on all fronts.

The revolutionary wave which was then spreading across Europe, from Finland to Hungary and Germany, further strengthened the new alliance. The British Chief of General Staff declared: "We might have to build up the German army, as it is important to get Germany on her feet again, against the spread of Bolshevism".

However, with social unrest on the rise, there was also a risk that this revolutionary wave might overrun Britain. Besides, the perspective of yet another war was causing indiscipline among British forces. Eventually, in April 1919, prime minister Lloyd George announced Britain's withdrawal from Russia in these terms: "I would rather leave Russia to the Bolsheviks until she sees her way out of it, than see Britain bankrupt. That is the surest road to Bolshevism in Britain". The international working class had finally defeated the imperialist powers' plans to crush the Soviets. □

• The killing fields of the war

When the war broke out, a hysterical, jingoistic campaign was launched to recruit volunteers, backed up by the now notorious poster featuring Field Marshall Kitchener. With the official labour movement trooping behind the Union Jack, no-one mentioned Kitchener's brutal past in Sudan or South Africa. There were 2.5m volunteers. But this was hardly due to "patriotic enthusiasm", at least not in the working class, where unemployment was the army's main recruiting sergeant: volunteering guaranteed the jobless a small lump sum plus an income.

The volunteers were later described as "lions led by donkeys". In fact they were led by ruthless, class-ridden, glory-seekers, unwilling to accept that they were dealing with a new type of warfare. While the arms manufacturers were lining their pockets with state-subsidised super-profits, soldiers were used as infinitely expendable cannon fodder. So squalid were the conditions in the

trenches, that disease probably claimed more victims than bullets, shells and gas.

This war saw countless examples of "battles" in which tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of lives were wasted to allow officers to claim a "victory" in which the stake had no real military value. In Britain's case, the best known case of such gratuitous butchery was the so-called "battle of Passchendaele", at the end of 1917, in Belgium. Rather than wait for American reinforcements, which would have shifted the balance of forces decisively, British army generals chose to go on the offensive for "glory's sake". Lloyd George the then prime minister, was to write later in his memoirs that "Passchendaele was indeed one of the greatest disasters of the war ... No soldier of any intelligence now defends this senseless campaign" - a belated admission for the 250,000 British soldiers killed.



BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• A "choice" they don't give us**

Bosses are trying to catch up production. Hence the "Volume Protection Overtime" which was slapped onto assembly workers on Late shift during the last week of February. Then they said they wanted to run production on up to 36 Saturdays! But now we've heard even worse: changing our shifts on Assembly - without so much as a by-your-leave and without precedent!

This (imminent) change would mean 4 day shifts from 0630-1700 (10½ hours long); and 5 consecutive

night shifts starting at 5pm and ending 3.15am, lasting 10¼ hours! So that makes a 42-hour and 52-hour week respectively, if you include dinner break...

Hang on. Isn't 45 hours/week the most we can be required to work? And isn't that far too long already? It may be that bosses plan to average out our working hours over a time period, exclude unpaid breaks and claim they're within the "rules". But what kind of a rule is it, that says it's fine for us to work till 3.15am, for 5



consecutive night shifts lasting 2¼ hours longer than the recommended "safe" 8 hour limit - which, incidentally also limits 8-hour night shifts to 3 consecutive nights, max...?

• Is the FT supporting car workers' pay claims?

As the Financial Times pointed out in a recent article starting with Vauxhall Ellesmere Port, the lowest-paid 30% of car workers have seen the value of wages fall 7.5% in five years through wage freezes and short-time working. Automotive production has risen by nearly half over the same period, yet the total wage bill is more than £1bn down on its previous peak in 2004. Not at the expense of the highest-paid directors, mind, whose average real

pay has gone up 34%! The figures do not include BMW Mini, which declined to provide details. Too embarrassing? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 25/2/14]

• Our pay, why the delay?

It is now nearly 5 months since we expressed a preference for a one-year pay deal with no strings attached. The deal should have come into force on January 1st, so it is now two months overdue. How can BMW bosses be "too busy to negotiate"?

As far as we know, we're the only people who do any work in this factory!

[Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 25/2/14]

• BMW: plenty wealthy

The contrast between the millions available to flood the plant with robots (at the cost of many of our jobs) and state of the art machinery, while claiming empty pockets as far as our wages and pensions are concerned is a bit much. Yes, we know that BMW has the money to give us all a decent pay rise, give permanent contracts to all agency workers and guarantee the pension fund. And that's the least we expect. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 25/2/14]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• Listening to themselves**

We were in no doubt that the CWU and Royal Mail management were talking with one voice in promoting the national agreement. And now these "partners" are "listening" to us... with one ear.

In the union newspaper, Voice, the CWU shows us pretty pictures of managers and union officials, going around the Delivery Offices together, "interviewing" workers and writing a "checklist" of "our views". This circus is not going to resolve our issues. We know that they listen to us only when we talk with our feet. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/02/14]

• No to this wage cut!

Oh, so the union would like us Quadrant workers to accept the 2.6% pay rise? An offer also "agreed" by the union leaders on behalf of our fellow-low-paid cleaners. They said they're going to talk more with management over job security and canteen services... and we're supposed to trust them to do this? If their 2.6% "recommendation" is anything to go by, that's hardly confidence-inspiring! And by the way, the latest measure of inflation - not the government's low CPI, but the RPI

- is 2.9%, up from 2.8%. If we accept this offer, it's a real wage cut! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/02/14]

• Romec the "feartie"

Romec backed down in front of cleaners' threat to strike (we voted 94.55% yes) against their attempt to ignore seniority and allocate duties without our agreement. If you stand up to a bully the bully falls down. Seniority will now be respected and we've got a proper re-sign for 38 duties.

Only trouble is they say that's a surplus. How do they figure that? Do we need another strike vote? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/02/14]

• Feartie mark 2

Good for the 94% of Romec engineers who voted to strike over the bosses trying to mess with job allocation, TUPE and MTSF (MSA). Now Romec has backed down and agreed to stick to the old agreement(s). Or so we're told... However, Romec still wants to cut our numbers significantly. And haven't we got a view about that? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/02/14]

• Shall we change our shirts?

We thought it was just a temporary measure when RM got a private security



company to provide men in nice suits to sit in reception areas. But now they're there every day and of course at the refurbished HQ at 185 Farringdon Road.

So it seems the RM bosses don't want us blue-shirts there, at all, during office hours? We don't convey the right "image" in front of fat-cat shareholders? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 11/02/14]

• We do the job, they get the bonus... or not

We've read that HQ big shots like Moya and fellow execs are promised a big additional wad of RM shares: up to 90,000 more for Moya Greede!

Only, to get them, they must meet certain "targets", by 2016... and since we've never seen any of that lot around here trying to meet targets with their own hands, we presume they'll fail? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 25/02/14]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Vote rigging?**

Dagenham workers were somewhat astounded at the result of the strike ballot over their pay deal, because everyone thought that the vote for industrial action was a sure thing. But out of 3,966 votes counted, 1,613 or 40.6% apparently voted for strike. So, there were almost 60% for acceptance.

This seemed very strange, for 2 reasons. First, because the in-plant shows of hands across most of the 6

British units was overwhelmingly for refusal of Ford's offer. And second, because for once, the full-time union officials recommended a "yes" for strike. Of course, this recommendation may well have been a vote-killer, given that so many workers do not trust the union machineries as far as they can spit.

But it also transpires that maybe as many as 600 workers didn't get their ballot papers and thus were



denied a vote. This could well have swung the vote. So now we are waiting to see if a challenge to the ballot result goes ahead. But even if it does, it seems we'd be better off striking out on our own - in more ways than one.

• Accidents waiting to happen

Usually if there's an accident or serious injury in any Ford plant, there's a safety stand-down straightaway. But it was 2 weeks before we were told, officially, about the 2 severely injured contract workers working on the new Panther site, who had to be flown out by the air ambulance, and we don't even know how they're doing! Yes, Ford subcontracts cheap corner-cutting companies just as Ford itself cuts corners (and blames us when things go wrong). "Profit before safety" speaks a lot louder than Ford's hypocritical invocation of safety rules, after the event. Blood on their hands. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/3/04]

• 'Sick' sick pay

No matter if we're seriously ill or if we've got broken bones, Lineside (Ford's logistics subcontractor) won't pay us sick pay. How sick is that? The Joint Works Committee has never spoken up on this (surprise, surprise) - so if we want it to change we'll have to take matters into our own hands ... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 04/02/14]

• Profits galore

Ford's again crying about the state of its balance sheet, i.e., claiming Ford of Europe (FOE) is losing money. But in the US, Ford's making record profits (the best ever!) and increasing dividends. For us making a difference between FOE and Ford US means nothing. One

Ford, One profit, One share missing - Ours!! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/02/14]

• Ford like fiat!

But then Ford isn't the only one, its counterpart in Italy operates in exactly the same way. Fiat is planning to register the holding of its newly created Fiat Chrysler Automobile group in the Netherlands and set up its tax domicile in Britain. What's the logic behind its three different offices? None, except to benefit from the low corporate taxes in Britain. In this system, the likes of Ford and Fiat have a thousand ways to ensure their profits are highest. Let's not be fooled by the trickery of these crooks! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/02/14]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Common cause**

On the railway, too, ticket offices are being targeted for closure, or have had their opening hours reduced. FCC hasn't even got a ticket office on King's X any more and plenty of stations are unmanned most of the time. Wouldn't this be a good opportunity to join forces with our workmates on the Tube and fight all these job cuts together? [Workers' Platform, King's X, 25/02/14]

• New con from ISS

ISS has come up with a "new" pay offer, but they're not offering more money - just bringing forward the staged rises. So cleaners get £7.55 p/h in April and £8.15 p/h in a year's time. It's still way below what we need and too long to wait. Even this ConDem government, no friend of workers, plans a minimum wage increase because it's been so far out-stripped by inflation. Before we know it, the minimum wage will have caught up with our minimal wages again! [Workers' Platform, King's X, 25/02/14]

• Don't divide us

It is only ISS workers in London who are offered this increase. Our mates up the line were offered a very small rise supposedly in line with inflation. Another reason to reject their offer! [Workers' Platform, King's X, 25/02/14]

• We're sick of it

And what about our other demands? Most of us don't get proper sick pay, just the legal minimum - i.e. nothing at all for the first 3 days and then around £12 per day, before tax. And most of us aren't in the railway pension scheme either. Pensions from the scheme ISS was forced to set up aren't going to amount to much. ISS just ignored these issues but we can't! [Workers' Platform, King's X, 25/02/14]

• Got them on the run?

The result of the FCC drivers' strike ballot was a resounding "Yes" with 83.7% in favour of action. When the vote was first announced, management suddenly went very quiet. Before that, they'd been sacking drivers willy-nilly and ignoring



objections to rosters. They'd been getting too big for their boots. We hope they are now quaking in them. [Workers' Platform, King's X, 11/02/14]

• TUPE or not TUPE?

TUPE legislation protecting terms and conditions if we're transferred from one employer to another, due to privatisation, re-franchising, etc. is being watered down - some changes came in this January and more are to come. But TUPE only ever gave limited protection, as those of us transferred from BR to GNER and then to ISS, know all too well! Our only real defence against the worsening of our conditions is collective action. [Workers' Platform, King's X, 11/02/14]

South Africa

During February alone, 11 "illegal" miners were killed while trying to dig out gold ore from abandoned mines in South Africa's Witwatersrand gold belt. Five bodies were pulled out of disused shaft in Roodepoort on the 26 February. But this follows two found dead on 16 February when 25 men emerged from an abandoned mine on the East Rand, after authorities were alerted that there were as many as 200 trapped below. It seems they'd been deliberately "buried" by a rival mining gang who threw rocks to close the entrance. Since they faced arrest on emerging, most chose to stay behind.

These miners spend up to 6 months underground, only coming up when food and water run out. Many die, from rock falls or carbon monoxide poisoning, if they are not murdered by rivals. With real unemployment running at probably double (at least) the official figure of 25%, digging up bits of ore (a gram of gold

A miner's life... is cheap



The rescue of a miner at the Benoni mine

sells for £20) is a way to scrape a living - especially if you come from an outlying country like Zimbabwe, like many of these "illegal" miners. The authorities call this "organised crime". Which is ironic, since the big mining

companies like Lonmin, whose "legal operations" not only kill miners underground but have them shot when they strike like in Marikana in 2012, aren't accused of any crimes! ☐

Scotland

What is really at stake in the coming Scottish referendum? Since the 18th century, Scotland has retained its own educational and legal institutions, which guaranteed comfortable jobs to Scottish professionals and politicians. But they also wanted full access to the public purse which was administered from London.

In the 1930s, the Scottish National Party (SNP) emerged as a splinter of the local Tories, to express these aspirations. Sixty years later,

• Scottish punt, £, or euro?

After Cameron told the Scottish Nationalists in the SNP that there was no way an independent Scotland could retain the use of the British pound, both the SNP and Cameron's Coalition held symbolic cabinet meetings in Aberdeen. Their idea was, apparently, to try to outbid each other in the run-up to this September's referendum over Scottish Independence.

For a world without borders!

devolution gave aspiring middle-class Scots more cushy jobs in the new Scottish political institutions, but still no overall control over state funds - which is what the coming independence referendum is really about.

Workers have absolutely nothing to gain from Scotland's independence. National borders are merely outdated remnants of the past, whose only purpose is to protect the vested interests of rival capitalist classes.

Cameron knows he's playing a strong hand: unless Scotland can keep the pound, it will be stuck in limbo financially and economically, since it will not qualify for adopting the euro (which requires a 2-year qualifying period in which an aspiring member successfully maintains its own currency).

Of course, the more Cameron says

Adding yet one more national border would be a step back into the past. The future belongs to a world without borders where all human and material resources can be pooled together to cater for the needs of all. The only "independence" which is in the interest of the working class - of all working classes across the world - is independence from the capitalists, by getting rid of the profit system, once and for all! ☐

on the issue, the more Scottish voters may want to distance themselves as much as possible from the "English" ConDems - and with good reason too! But they won't achieve that by supporting the independence project of the SNP, a party which is just a Scottish version of the ConDems. They'll have to find another way!

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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