

WORKERS' fight



No 63 - 12 April 2015
price 30p
<http://www.w-fight.org>
contact@w-fight.org

ISSN 2040-400X

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

FIGHTING WILL GET US WHAT VOTING CAN'T!

The last leg of the election campaign started last weekend with the various parties launching their manifestos. With less than four weeks before E-day, it's finally dawned on them that they have to offer voters something to vote for, rather than just someone to vote against.

So, the main parties are now throwing "shopping lists" of promises at the electorate. All of a sudden they've realised that the working class makes up the majority and they're all branding themselves "the party of working people" - including Cameron's Eton boys' club!

As if whatever they might say or do, could make us forget their record in office - whether over the past five years for the ConDems or during the previous 14 years of Labour governments. No, the working class doesn't have such a short memory!

Poisonous smoke and mirrors

Cameron's pledge to extend the "Right-to-Buy" scheme to housing associations and force councils to sell more properties is just a con. It will only increase the catastrophic shortage of homes that workers can afford to rent.

The real beneficiaries will be mortgage lenders, with more business to boost their huge profits, and private landlords who will be able to blackmail even more prospective tenants into paying extortionate rents! Cameron's large rebates are only disguised subsidies to the capitalists - just as his "Help-to-Buy" scheme was a disguised subsidy to bankers and builders.

But what really exposes Cameron is his pledge to cut social security spending by £12bn by 2020, while promising to the bosses that they will no longer have to pay NI contributions for workers under 21. In other words, the poorest and most vulnerable will pay, to boost the bosses' profits! So much for the "working people's party"!

But then, what does Labour have to



London bus drivers during their last strike this year

offer on these issues? On the housing crisis, nothing - no pledge to cap private rents nor to launch the large-scale programme of public housing which would be necessary to meet the needs of the 4m currently on housing waiting lists. On welfare, nothing either - Labour said they will only repeal the bedroom tax, but won't reverse the ConDems' other cuts! And Miliband's insistence on "fiscal responsibility" is just a way of saying to the capitalists that Labour will continue the ConDem agenda of making the working class pay for the crisis.

We need real change

And what about the immediate issues affecting the working class, such as the minimum wage or under-employment? Both parties pledge to address them, but neither is willing to really do anything, because this would mean denting the profits of their capitalist masters!

Whichever way we vote and whoever gets into Downing Street after May 7th, the men in government will still be there to serve the interests of the capitalist

class - by making the working class pay for its crisis which, for all Osborne's boasting, hasn't gone away.

But after 8 years during which the bosses got into the habit of having a free ride on our backs, by slashing our jobs and driving our wages and conditions down, we need real change. Not only do we need to stop the capitalists' attacks, but we need to start regaining some of the ground lost.

We won't achieve that with a ballot paper. Parliamentary "democracy" is only a game of musical chairs between representatives of the capitalist class: faces may change in government, but the class interests they represent do not. This is a system designed for, and run by, the capitalists, to defend their interests.

So, if we, workers, want to see real change, we will have to take matters into our own hands after May 7th. Lest anyone forget, nothing would work without our labour. It is high time we used our collective strength to remind the capitalists that this society is ours, not theirs! □

Real economy

The last time Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation was around 0% in the UK was decades ago. But although inflation is supposed to reflect price changes in basic goods, the prices of a number of basic household items went up at the beginning of April: council tax, water bills, car tax and stamps all increased.

The trick is in how the ONS

• Empty pockets, empty shops!

Retail chain BHS, which had been making losses for the past few years, was sold for only £1 to an unknown group of investors called "Retail Acquisitions" this March. The day after the acquisition, its new owners announced a "review" of almost third of the stores, which might result in partial or full closure - putting the jobs of many of the group's 11,000 workers at risk. This comes after several

• A measure of the rise in poverty

Official figures published in March reveal that five million people are now claiming housing benefits in Britain. Despite the fact that the Con-Dems made it more difficult to qualify for housing benefit, the number of claimants has increased by half-a-million since they came to power.

This increase is not just a reflection of the falling standards of living of the average household caused by the crisis. It also reflects the fact that the poorest have been harder hit. This is illustrated by figures produced by the New Economic Foundation, based on a

Inflated Claims

calculates CPI inflation. For instance, the CPI index does not take into account private rents, mortgage interest payments or council tax - especially the steep rise faced by those low-income households that lost council tax benefits due to the government's 40% cut in local council funding. But it does cover things which are totally irrelevant to 99% of the population,

BHS stores had already closed over the past 18 months. In fact, the BHS closure is only part of a long series of retail closures. Retail stores across the country are facing cut-throat competition and have been closing down at a record rate. Three times as many shops closed in 2014 than in the previous year.

This crisis in retail does not stop the government from claiming that Britain

like stockbroker fees! Besides, CPI calculation assumes that households spend 1/3rd of their income on recreation, alcohol and restaurants, every month, and less than 1/3rd on housing, water, fuel and transport - which is hardly the case for working class households! In other words, if inflation is at 0%, it's certainly not 0% for the working class. □

is on the road to recovery and that this recovery is "consumption-driven". But if this crisis shows anything, it is that consumption in basic consumer goods is actually falling. In fact, sales of food fell by 1.6% during the three months to February 2015 compared to the previous year. If this is "growth", it is only growth in poverty!

measure of inflation which takes into account the differences in consumption for different levels of income. According to these calculations, for instance, the real earnings of the poorest 10% of the population fell by 15% between 2010 and 2013, while the earnings of those on median incomes fell by 10%.

But of course, the likes of Duncan-Smith who dare to pretend that living on benefit has become a "lifestyle", won't admit to the fact that it is their system and their policies which are responsible for the rise of poverty!



• Apple's "people's watch"

Apple products were never cheap enough to be affordable for the majority. But exactly who is the new Apple watch meant for? It will cost between £236 and ... £11,467! The high-end models are made in 18-carat rose gold and have a sapphire display. In a briefing note to employees, Apple claims that the watch is "not necessarily defined by a price tag or elitism, but rather meticulous focus on usefulness and utility"! Really? A gold watch worth £11,467 does not define elitism? As if someone on the minimum wage could afford to spend 10 months' wages on this "utility"!

• Big Business never had it so good!

The FTSE 100 - the share price index of Britain's 100 largest companies - passed the 7000 points barrier in March, breaking all previous records in its 41-year history, just a couple of days after Osborne's Budget. In other words, in addition to profits regaining their pre-crisis level, market operators are now expecting

them to go even higher.

The fact is that the largest companies have been doing well, not despite, but because of, the crisis. First of all, they have used it as a justification to slash hundreds of thousands of jobs and degrade working conditions, thereby increasing their exploitation of workers. Second, they've benefited from billions of pounds from the state, to "help" them out of the crisis. And, lastly, they have been taking over their lesser rivals, thereby becoming even bigger and increasing their market shares.

In other words, the same crises which spell disaster for the working class are just an opportunity for the capitalist class to make even more profits!

• Debt: explosive pile-up

8 years after 2007, one would expect that the world's debt mountain, which nearly brought the whole financial system down, would have been cut to size. But it hasn't been.

Current estimates show that, over these 8 years, the planetary debt mountain has increased by £37,000 billion

- i.e. by more than twice the annual GDP of the US. For every pound of worth produced on the planet, there is £2.86 worth of debt outstanding!

This reflects different things, though. For instance, the £5,000 billion increase in household debt is not due to a shopping frenzy, but to the general fall in living standards. By contrast, the £17,000 billion increase in companies' indebtedness does not mean that they invest more - in fact, they invest less - but that they borrow, either to speculate, to buy lesser rivals, or just to increase dividends, but in any case, not for anything socially useful. As to government debt worldwide, it's increased by £15,000 billion - including in Britain where, despite Osborne's boasting, it went up by 50% - meaning that the cuts imposed on the working class were just used to make the wealthy even wealthier!

In other words, the capitalist classes are using indebtedness to line their pockets. But, by the same token, they're stoking up explosive ingredients for yet another financial crisis!

Osborne's economy-pie?

Osborne says we "all" need to make efforts to help the economy recover, by making "£30 billion further savings by 2017-18". And where are these £30bn to come from? "£13 billion from government departments [and] £12 billion from

welfare savings." In other words, more austerity for the working class.

And what "efforts" will the rich have to make? In Cameron's words, "£5 billion from tax avoidance, evasion and aggressive tax planning." £5bn represents only 5% of the

... And his serial lies

The budget speech on 18th March was just an opportunity for Osborne to kick off his party's election campaign from the Commons. And for the occasion, he lied on just about everything - on the deficit, the debt, economic "growth" and unemployment.

• Budget deficit

Osborne claimed that, compared to 2010, the deficit - i.e. the gap between what the government receives in taxes and what it spends - was down "by more than half". In reality, according to his government's own figures, the deficit has gone down by less than 40%. What's more, the 2015 budget deficit is expected to be the second highest in the EU, as a proportion of GDP! But, of course, Osborne stopped short of mentioning this.

• Public debt

Osborne could not hide the fact that the public debt is now reaching 90% of GDP. But he lied by omission, when he failed to recall that in his first budget, in 2010, he had promised to bring the debt down to 67% of the GDP by... April 2015.

• Tax "giveaways"?

Osborne's budget tax "giveaways" will not benefit those who needed them the most - the low-paid - nor are they designed to.

The income tax basic rate threshold will rise from £10,600 today, to £11,000 by 2017. This means that basic rate taxpayers will gain a maximum of £80 - or £1.50/week. Meanwhile, the higher rate threshold will be increased from

• "Freedom" to be conned

Osborne made a great fanfare over his "pension freedom" rules that came into force on 6 April. Anyone with a pension pot can now cash in the money at 55.

This may mean more "freedom" for those with large pension pots and other savings on which they can live. But what about the majority of workers whose pension pots are often too small to provide a decent pension? For them this "freedom" is a con. The finance sharks can be expected to try to use it either to force borrowers to pay off their debts or to get them to buy financial products based on speculation. Either way, using

• Economic "growth"

Predictably Osborne made as much as he could of the 2.6% growth in GDP recorded in 2014 - even though this so-called "growth" is mostly due to the artificial housing bubble that the government has generated by throwing

£42,385 to £43,000. In other words, the taxpayers who are in this band will gain up to £326 - or £6.30/week - that is, more than 4 times as much as basic rate taxpayers! As to the nearly 5 million households earning less than £10,600 a year, they will get no "giveaway" at all! The more you're in need the less they give you!

this "freedom" will end up in tears.

What happened in the 1980s should be a warning. Thatcher offered tax incentives to transfer out of the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS) and occupational schemes, into individual pensions. Five million took advantage of this "freedom", the lowest-paid soon finding themselves with worthless pensions. A public inquiry blamed salesmen, but the big finance sharks made a fortune out of this, even after paying out compensation. Now Osborne is providing a whole new wad of potential cash for the same sharks - and a new scandal is waiting to happen.

Budget

annual estimated £100bn of tax evasion/fraud by companies and the wealthy.

In other words, vicious cuts on jobs and austerity for the working class, and a mere symbolic donation from the capitalists! □

billions at the housing market, something that he, of course, didn't mention. However, this didn't stop him from boasting that "within 15 years" Britain "will have the potential to overtake Germany and have the largest economy in Europe"... no matter that, for the time being, Britain comes only third in the European economic league, far behind Germany which has a much larger population and... higher growth rate!

• Employment

And who did he think he was fooling when he claimed that "over 1.9 million new jobs have been gained. How many of the jobs are full time? 80%. How many of the jobs are in skilled occupations? 80%."? Three assertions, two lies. All statistics show that more than half of these "new jobs" are casual and/or part-time, that there are a record 1.8m workers on 0-hour contracts - which are not "regulated" as Osborne claimed - and that 15% of workers are now self-employed, among whom many live at, or below, the poverty threshold!

Growth, thanks to immigration

David Cameron and George Osborne might like to boast about the tiny amount by which the country's GDP is growing, but they are less inclined to say thanks to those who are helping them talk up the Tory role in "saving" Britain's economy. Apparently "blaming" immigrants rather than thanking them, which is what they should be doing, suits their electoral agenda far more.

The government's Office for Budget Responsibility says that the increase in inward migration to 298,000 in the last year allowed it to upgrade forecasts for Britain's economic growth, adding as much as 0.6% to the potential output of the British economy. This adds almost a quarter of the entire economic "growth" figure for the year - which is 2.9%!

But we can't expect these bigoted politicians, who blame the poor for being poor and incite xenophobia, to come clean.



NHS

Just last month health chiefs signed a deal to hand over £780m - the largest NHS privatisation deal ever - divided among 11 private health companies in order to handle the huge and ever-mounting backlog of tests and procedures. Yes, a backlog created by years of NHS cuts, but specifically the £20bn cut during the last 5 years of ConDem rule.

• *Virgin "Care": contradiction in terms*

Virgin Care deserves a special mention - this creation of the pop-icon of British business, Richie-Rich Branson. He named his company as a tribute to his "inexperience" - so it's co-incidental that its parent is located in the tax-free off-shore British Virgin Islands. "Virgin" is totally experienced in many things, but especially in ripping off public money.

Are we meant to believe that, after 5 years of operations, Virgin Care doesn't make any profit, when it provides 230

• *Social care: parasitic outsourcing*

After it emerged that around 160,000 social care workers are receiving less than the minimum wage, one of the companies employing them came under the spotlight. A leaked internal document of MiHomecare discusses how to limit the damage of an HMRC investigation into wage underpayment at its branch in Penarth near Cardiff. It estimates that over 3 years it might have

• *"Foreigners" save the NHS!*

Staff shortages are obviously the main cause of all of the NHS's problems. And it's not just a question of numbers - but of permanence of tenure and adequate training/experience. But despite the funding crisis, scandalous amounts are spent employing temps! It's estimated that £2.5bn a year is spent on agency



Blatant privatisation

And of course, the provision within NHS regulations which allows such a bounty to be handed over to companies like Care UK, Virgin, Circle, Vanguard and others - some of which already have abysmal records in delivering healthcare - was part of the Health and Social Services Act the ConDems rushed through within 12 months of their

NHS and social care services (employing 5,500 workers) and paid its director a cool £300,295 in 2013/14? But of course, no profits means no corporation tax. Virgin Care claims it continues to need to borrow from a holding company - so even when, or if, it does have to register its profits, it will still not have to pay much (or any) tax as the loans are corporation-tax-deductible! Before winning part of the new £780m deal, it had just won £500m in contracts to run 20

underpaid 44 workers by as much as £80,000 and suggests reducing this liability to £8,000 by acknowledging the practice known as "clipping" - scheduling appointments with no travel time between, so they have to be cut short - even though this would mean admitting that councils are being overcharged!

MiHomecare may be a cowboy outfit, but it is owned by the much bigger

staff. And the NHS is paying agencies twice as much as they pay their own nurses - and four times as much as they pay a consultant.

What sense is there in this? But then, staffing levels have never kept up with needs. And training places have also always been wanting. So the NHS has come to rely on foreign workers. 1 in 4 nurses comes from abroad. Today 26% of doctors were trained overseas. And since last September 80% of all midwives recruited were foreign-trained. But instead of providing many more training places, successive governments (despite impassioned pledges!) have cut training. So out of 54,000 applicants for training in 2011-12, only 29,092 found placements. 8,000 nursing trainee places were cut between 2011 and 2015.

Never mind. The executives of the Hospital Trusts this year organised overseas trips to "recruit": one spent £46,000 on a trip to Madrid to recruit 20 nurses, retaining only 11 on the job after 1 year; another took a £100,000 trip to Athens recruiting just 39 Greek nurses; and yet another went off to a 4-star Irish spa resort, but failed to recruit a single nurse... It leaves one grabbing for an oxygen mask. Only there aren't any available.

coming to power. But the Act was so unpopular that they had to make hundreds of amendments to it. So, as happened with Rail, the government figures that if it runs down the health service enough, privatisation, offered as the only "solution" may be easier for people to swallow. Except that we're already wise to that trick... ☐

primary care centres in England.

Of course Virgin isn't alone. This partying tax-free at NHS expense by registering off-shore is also enjoyed by Circle (Guernsey-based), Spire (Guernsey) Bio Holdings/Bain Capital and Optum (based in the Cayman Islands) and many others. In fact, it applies to the majority of these shark-companies which are preying on public funds tax-free. And all Labour, Tory and LibDem agree to it.

Mitie group which grew by taking majority stakes in smaller contractors and is now, among other things, the main operator of immigration detention centres. Mitie and its subsidiaries are typical of a galaxy of outsourcing companies which are now living a parasitical life on public funds, on the backs of low-paid workers and vulnerable people they are supposed to "care" for.

Letter from Sussex

Eastbourne, suntrap of the south and one of the very healthiest places to live; that's how they like to promote the town. Over the last few weeks, though, that healthy reputation has taken a knock.

First, Eastbourne was judged to have the tenth most unhealthy town centre in the country, due to all the fast food joints, tanning parlours, bookmakers and payday loan shops. Next, Eastbourne General and Hastings Conquest hospitals were slated by the Care Quality Commission, for having unsafe maternity, surgical and pharmacy departments and excessive waiting times. The worst problems were understaffing and a culture of bullying, making staff afraid to speak out. The NHS trust head ruled out any resignations and his answer to the bullying claims is that staff should "take possession" of their concerns.

What exactly does that mean? If it means getting up and doing something, then the arrogant head of East Sussex NHS Trust may have just given some dangerous advice. Don't we all know the best way of dealing with bullies?

Better the angel they know

So 103 businesses signed a letter to the Daily Torygraph saying that a Conservative-led government, has been good for business. No surprise there.

Cameron duly called them "job creators". A truer description would be "job slashers", who are responsible, with the Con-Dems, for the increase in disguised unemployment - jobs so badly paid that those in work actually have to rely on top-up

• Cameron shy?

Cameron seemed to have gotten camera shy over a face-to-face debate with Milliband. The result was this ridiculous session in which he and Milliband grilled each other through TV presenter Jeremy Paxman.

For the next debate, Cameron insisted on sharing the stage with as

• Thinks we're green?

Grant Shapps, the Tory party chairman, claimed for months that he had never had a second job while being an MP. Then, when it transpired that he had had one, he had to retract... saying that he had mixed up his dates and the overlap was only a short time - a whole year, to be precise. But he denied, for 3 years, the

• Labour: false promises to workers

For the benefit of the 700,000 workers on zero-hours contracts, Milliband has claimed that a Labour government would "ban zero-hour contracts for employees who are in practice working regular hours. This absolute new legal right to a regular contract will apply to workers after just 12 weeks." Wait. Will they ban these exploitative contracts altogether? No. This nice sounding sound-byte already has a loophole built into it for the bosses: who's to say they won't sack

• Cameron: absurd demagoguery

Over the past months, Cameron has been going out of his way to overbid on UKIP's crass demagoguery. But his own ministerial departments keep exposing his rhetoric as ridiculous.

First, there was the issue of the alleged "negative effects" of EU immigration. However, a report compiled by the Home Office last summer concluded that the effects of EU migration were "largely positive" - and its publication was delayed because Cameron found it too "pro-European".

Now, Cameron has been caught out on his claim that the EU has acquired too many powers over Britain's domestic life. A report commissioned by his government in 2012 - which William Hague hailed at the time as the "most

welfare benefits in order to live.

Having cut workers' real incomes together with investment, while paying the lowest corporation tax in the EU next to Ireland, Cameron's fan club threatens more job slashing if there's any hint of the tax on profits going up just 1% again - something Labour timidly suggested.

Many household names are among the signa-Tories: the CEOs of Britvic, Dixons, Carphone, Talk Talk,

many others as possible, so he rejected a one-way, then two-way, three-way and four-way debate, finally demanding a seven-way debate! He obviously wanted to minimise the time he had to scare away potential voters!

existence of his multi-million internet company, and that he'd published books under the pseudonym "Michael Green", going to great lengths to hide it all. He even threatened one of his local constituents who revealed his secret identity, with legal action. No wonder he wanted to be so discreet. The Tories in

workers after 12 weeks under the pretext that they've failed their probationary period?

For the 1.2 million workers on the minimum wage in 2014 (350,000 were below even this legal minimum) Labour's promise of an £8/hr minimum wage in 5 years' time is an insult. It amounts to a miserly 4% increase per year and, by 2020, it would result in just 40p more than if the ConDems' current rate of increase was applied.

extensive analysis of the impact of UK membership of the EU ever undertaken" - found not one single example of powers that should be "repatriated" to Britain from the EU. But if it had not been for the scandal kicked up by a House of Lords Committee chaired by a pro-EU Tory, Cameron would probably have kept this report on its shelf, indefinitely! Yet another case of cheap scaremongering!

• No country for young (black) men

Three and a half years after the killing of the 29-year old Mark Duggan in Tottenham, the police has been let off the hook... for a second time! The unnamed police officer who shot Duggan refused to appear before the Independent Police Complaint

Election blues

Greene King (a tax-avoidance King), Prudential, Whitbread, Compass, Ladbrokes, etc., etc., etc... Yes, naturally this government has been good for them and bad for the majority of working people. Of course, Labour will not threaten their profits and they know it. But for them, two birds in the hand is worth more than one in the bush... obviously. □



government were "selling" us their austerity cuts and advising us to accept getting poorer. While he, as "Mr Green" was advising the rich how to get "Stinking rich", in a book series of that name! He's definitely rich and he definitely stinks...

And anyway, whatever legal changes they make to zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage, these may well remain a dead letter - because they won't actually do what's needed to impose them on the bosses. After the introduction of the minimum wage, didn't Labour prosecute just 7 companies for breaking the law in this respect - over the whole of 11 years?

Commission for investigation. So now murderers can refuse to be questioned? This "justice" system, which puts some people behind bars for years for crimes they never committed, lets known murderers free... just because they wear a police uniform!

In fact, this state of the wealthy minority uses the police to protect itself from the anger of the majority whom they exploit. So they deploy armed surveillance officers, firearms officers and intelligence gathering activities in poor black neighbourhoods, as part of quasi-military operations like the "Operation Dibri", in which Mark Duggan was killed. No wonder riots erupted in cities across England, in the summer of 2011, in response to his murder!

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Solidarity with the bin men on strike!**

Solidarity with the Barking and Dagenham refuse collection drivers' strike! They were out 18,19,20 March and will be out again on the 7&8 April. The council decided to cut their wages by £1,000/year - while at the same time employing 4 new managers on 6-figure salaries! The union GMB's survey found that 75% of locals supported their strike - and no wonder! We wish them a speedy victory! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 2/4/15]

• No perpetual motion

Anyone for 5-card stud? Pontoon? Chess or Bridge...? Because there's plenty of time. Puma machines went on strike on Sunday and the stoppage has been spreading ever since! So we can only sit around and drink tea... We're not surprised one bit. Management decides there should be no time for machines to get basic maintenance and runs them 24/7 (with a small break once a week) so machines have every reason to collapse, just like us. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

• Compulsory rest period

Seriously, although we don't mind getting to have some rest and talk with our mates, we do mind being sent all over the plant to look for work. But when managers tried loaning out overlap-pers when they came in this week, they found that wherever they went, the work there had ground to a halt too! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

• More than a cog in the machine!

But we do wonder, what's wrong with the machines and why is it taking so long to repair them? Didn't they accept all those orders from Thailand? Managers think they needn't answer, since we're only a pair of hands to them. But the truth is, they are incapable of dealing with anything - whether it's breakdowns or explanations! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

• But they're good at passing the buck

Now they're probably blaming our mates in maintenance and tooling for not doing their work. We're sure if management could "lower" themselves to listen, our mates could tell them where the real



problems are! Yes, we're talking about the chronic undermanning across the plant and stinginess when it comes to spending on up-keep of machinery, let alone the upkeep of our conditions and facilities. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

• Ford closed prison

The money the company has chosen to spend of late makes this "factory" more like a prison than ever. Expensive new security measures (double set of locked doors) in DDC, new IDs for the old plant and, as we predicted - electronic tags..? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

• Any animal can do the job?

Instead of getting rid of the clock altogether there are new mini-sized ones. But the clock-face where we have to read the time, is positioned about 8 feet above them... Are they planning to employ giraffes? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/3/15]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Not to mention this non-union cowboy...**

We hear BMW has also been quietly replacing Gi workers with others from Formel D, which supplies so-called "self-employed" contractors to car plants among others. This self-employment, though bogus as far as being their own bosses is concerned, means they are not invited to join the union either. Already last year BMW was using Formel D to make up the numbers on Saturday shifts, sometimes after they'd just worked a night or a late. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/3/15]

• New start swindle: what's going on?

The EU agency regulations which finally passed into British law in October 2011 after delays stretching over many years by the government, on behalf of cowboy operators like BMW, was meant to put a stop to wage discrimination. After 12 weeks work all workers, whether permanent or agency, should receive the same wage for the same work (though not the same rights regarding pensions and bonuses). So how come, three years on, agency workers are now having to wait 2 years before they get equal pay? And this without a word of explanation from BMW, Gi or union officials? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/3/15]

• What the experts say

According to US and Canadian Occupational Health research, walking on concrete all day is equivalent to "the impact of a hammer pounding the heel at every step". It causes musculo-skeletal disorders with long-term damage to the spine as well as giving us chronically sore feet. The research says workers' should ideally NOT be walking all day on concrete. But if they do, measures ought to be taken to minimise wear and tear. This should include anti-fatigue mats, shock-absorbing shoes and the chance to sit down and rest our legs. But since chairs are banned from the line; some of us have issues with the shoes and, now, BMW has "forgotten" that worn-out mats need replacing, what's left of BMW's "concern" for our well-being? [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 9/4/15]

• BMW claws back

The current shift system came in nearly a year ago. Remember the bribe BMW tossed in to get it preferred in the ballot - a £40 per month supplement? Well, that was for a year, and there was speculation at the time that the shifts might not last this long. But they have - so we're about to get a pay cut wiping out January's rise! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/3/15]

**• Three strikes and you're out!**

Owing to overcrowding in the car parks and "safety concerns", security staff have been given a new role as traffic wardens. While we're hard at work, they're busy too - looking for cars parked "illegally", using cameras to photograph number plates ("compiling the evidence") and slapping on warnings which are so sticky-backed that we can hardly get them off our wind-screens. And, yes, if we're considered to have committed 3 parking offences, we're out (of the car park, that is!)

Not that it's our fault that there's such congestion. After all, BMW have always refused to lay on buses that could collect us and take us home - as they do at their German plants by the way. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 24/3/15]

King's Cross railway station (London)**Virgin, a balloon full of hot air**

When it was announced that Virgin-Stagecoach was taking over the East Coast train line, this meant it would effectively have a monopoly over all London-Scotland services, since Virgin already owns the West Coast mainline. There were a few noises about this being referred to the regulator, but then... that was that.

Virgin Trains East Coast boasts that it will bring in new modern trains, better services, even extra workers and extra trains running

to extra destinations, etc. Yet their first train on the Sunday they took over was a... rail replacement bus, thanks to engineering works.

Then, a day later, having put down just 10% of the cost, that aging capitalist pin-up, Richard Branson turned up to play to the gallery, posing as a train driver and then pushing a refreshments trolley a few feet, while making sure the cameras were clicking - and finally, he offered himself as a tweeted selfie-star...

The workers on EC were given



new name badges and lanyards in lieu of a new uniform. And now a couple of trains have been painted. But when it comes to the extra workers promised, surprise, surprise, it won't be happening any time soon...☐

• Where's our strike?

We're waiting to hear what RMT officials intend, regarding the strike of EC on-board catering and guards. They're still meant to be organising the extension of the ballot to everyone up and down the line. But not to ALL of EC - or all RMT members, why not?! Of course, if our workmate, Mark Doughty (sacked for telling passengers why the service was bad), gets reinstated, that's one thing. But it doesn't resolve any of the issues which caused his dismissal in the first place - issues which affect us all, whichever company we work for. And over which we'll have to fight! [Workers' Platform King's X 9/4/15]

• ...we all need it!

And let's be clear. Agreeing to take action isn't about liking or disliking an individual. This whistle-blowing scandal exposed the scandal of understaffing, equipment failure, ticket disparities, and the downgraded, 3rd class service the company wants us workers, whose pay and conditions are also third class, to present as first class. PS: in theory (yes, but not in practice!) whistle-blowing has statutory legal protection... [Workers' Platform King's X 9/4/15]

• We should be in this fight!

As for the strike ballot the RMT has just announced on First Great Western (our sister intercity express) over the

cuts coming with the new Hitachi trains (guards, dining car, dispatch,) - well we'd like to see it "throwing its full resources and industrial and political clout behind the fight to stop this attack" (as Mick Cash boasts) - but they choose to ballot only FGW?! [Workers' Platform King's X 9/4/15]

• No pay, no stay

We hear GN driver managers have got a sweet 8% pay rise to keep them from leaving for EC and Crossrail. Thanks for showing the way, guys. Now we - drivers and frontline staff alike - can threaten to leave en masse so we all get a pay rise like theirs! [Workers' Platform King's X 9/4/15]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• We will bite**

What about EC Deliveries night shift? Managers are totally knife-happy! They wanted to cut 9 jobs - but the union argued them down to 6. More and more work's going to be left for earlies - and they'll try stretching our working hours even later into the pm. Stretch too much and we go "snap"! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

• F-t fits better

Honestly, there are vacant duties everywhere in HMP... so why the mini Processing fit-up now? Coz mates are leaving on EVR? Whatever the reason, RM is going to fit us up with OT! Well, some of us may need OT to cope, but wouldn't it be better if part-timers got full-time jobs? Or if we had new mates in here, so we can continue having the good laughs we had with those who've gone? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

• HMP up-side-down

In fact, you don't need to be good at maths to know how many full-timers

and part-timers are doing the work in here. Is RM still claiming that the ratio of F-Ts to P-Ts is 75 to 25%? Certainly on lates it's the other way around... We know that some of our mates have been asking for full-time jobs for more than 15 years! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

• Oh, Moya goodness

How nice of Moya Greede to visit us last week. Well, she really came to visit the underground railway... and, surrounded by her entourage, she waved at us from a distance, like the Queen...

In fact, we hear she's freezing her pay this year... so she'll get barely the £1.2m she got last year. That's heart breaking... we feel almost embarrassed to get our 2.8%! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

• No worries, not your fault

More seriously, we're getting the 2.8% late... the union sent us a letter explaining that the pay rise will be implemented on 24th April, back-dated to the 6th... The reason? "Uncertainty over the



inflation review clause and the fact that the company had not programmed their payroll systems early enough". Signed: Dave Ward. No reason for you to apologise, Dave... [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

• We're not for sale!

It seems from a new (unofficial) leaflet about Romec's proposed sale to Cofely that "Royal Mail has already made up its mind to get rid of Romec." And we're told that the transfer to Cofely will not even protect the shitty conditions that we have now! So, with all of that, as the picture on the leaflet suggests, isn't the right answer an ALL-out strike - RM and Romec - but with a lot more than the 2 people on the "CWU official picket" shown in their photo!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 9/4/15]

Yemen

Since March 26th, Saudi Arabia has been bombing Yemen. 150,000 Saudi troops have been deployed along its border in an effort to contain the Shia Houthi militias which took the Yemeni capital Sanaa, last September, and which have now occupied Aden, the strategic southern harbour.

The Houthis have been portrayed by the media as Iranian puppets. But at a time when Iran is about to normalise its relations with the US, why would it stir up a conflict with the US's closest partner in the region? In reality, the Houthi insurgency started in 2004, mainly in response to Saudi meddling in Yemen: Saudi funds were sustaining the corrupt regime of then president-dictator Saleh and financing a Salafist campaign to convert local youth to this version of Sunni Islam.

In 2011, the "Arab Spring" brought large numbers onto the streets against Saleh's 33-year rule. Saleh went, but he was replaced by his deputy, in a settlement supervised by an army establishment linked to Saudi Arabia and the US. The new regime was soon discredited - which is why the Houthis eventually managed to sweep across the

Another imperialist-backed war

west of the country, apparently with the support of a section of the army.

The Saudi regime feared a Houthi victory that could have bolstered the opposition of its own repressed Shia minority - which makes up 25% of the population along the border

forces, and which has promised its "logistical and intelligence support".

Meanwhile, the Yemeni population is caught between the bullets of its home-grown militias and the bombs of imperialism's regional strong man. □



Protest against the bombings in Sanaa

with Yemen. So, with this operation launched with 9 regional allies, Saudi Arabia is defending its own domestic interests. But it is also defending those of the US, which has had a military presence in Yemen for years, fighting local "al-Qaeda"

Our other recent publications:

Class Struggle n°104

Spring 2015

- Britain - voting won't change anything, only the class struggle will!
- Greece - after Syriza's victory, towards a confrontation?
- South Africa - Numsa, from red union to red party?
- South Korea - the iron grip of the chaebol's "democracy"
- USA - 2014 elections: distrustful, dissatisfied and fed up!

price: £1.50

In our pamphlet series

- #94 - Middle East: blowback from the Iraq war

price: £1.00

Get your copies from the Workers' Fight activists you know or send us your order by email.

USA

Barbarism in the world's richest country

For communists, crime is a social disease. Yet, even in the richest "democracies" of this capitalist society, it remains a justification for revenge, by means of the death penalty. Two cases in the US last month demonstrated the barbarism and absurdity of this penalty.

74-year old Cecil Clayton killed a police officer in 1996. At the time, he was mentally incompetent, having had 1/5th of his frontal lobe removed following a work accident. 19 years later, he was Missouri's oldest death row prisoner and suffering from dementia. But never mind. Instead of providing the care

he needed, the state executed him.

In the second case, Anthony Hinton's death sentence was repealed - but only after 30 years on death row in Alabama for murders he denied. He'd been convicted thanks to flawed ballistic evidence which he was unable to challenge because he couldn't afford to hire an expert. 30 years later, the state ballistics team confirmed that he was innocent and he was released. But Hinton lost 30 years of his life - and might even have been executed - just because he was not been rich enough to defend himself! □

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

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

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.