

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

# THE PROFIT VIRUS KILLS THE NHS!

As winter approaches, alarm bells are ringing across the NHS and some NHS establishment figures have decided to go public.

Writing in the *Guardian*, Christopher Smallwood, who chairs St George's NHS Trust in South London (where the Channel 4 series "24 hours in A&E" is filmed), gave this warning: *"The NHS is heading for a real smash, and practically everyone running a hospital knows it. Hospitals are at 100% capacity .. and the onset of winter could be a nightmare."*

The cause of the problem is well-known and long-standing: under funding. Despite Osborne's hypocritical pledge to "ring-fence" the health budget, *"the past 5 years have seen the smallest increase in health spending... since the second world war - 0.8% a year"*, says Smallwood. And this, when, at the same time, operating costs were increasing by more than 5 times as much!

## **A disaster in the making**

As a result, NHS hospitals have massive deficits. *"Two years ago"*, writes Smallwood, *"a quarter of hospitals recorded deficits... and 90% expect to be in deficit by the end of this year."*

This has dire consequences, adds Smallwood: *"spending is cut, vacancies are left unfilled, staff-patient ratios are relaxed, and hospitals cut their capital programmes, which means fewer operating theatres and MRI scanners... Waiting times for cancer treatment and in A&E departments, are now missed routinely... The queues will go on lengthening."*

And this is coming on top of the destruction of NHS resources: 500 GP surgeries, 51 walk-in centres and 66 A&E and Maternity wards were closed over the 5 years up to last April!

At the time, over 140 doctors published an open letter in the papers, to



# Hands Off!

protest against the deterioration of the situation, denouncing the fact that *"patients have been left queueing in ambulances and NHS trusts have resorted to erecting tents in hospital car parks to deal with unmet need."*

More recently, the government's attempt to force junior doctors to work even longer hours (they may sometimes be already working up to 90 hours) while earning less, caused a storm. They are now having a strike ballot - something very unusual for them, but reflecting their justified anger!

## **Cuts or bounty for the profiteers?**

Of course, together with the overworked NHS staff, patients are the first victims of Osborne's policy. This year, NHS waiting lists went over 3m - a 6-year high!

The government's policy is based on a report produced by NHS head, Simon Stevens, which acknowledged that, by 2020, the NHS would need £30bn/yr more. However, Stevens' trick was to combine an £8bn/yr budget increase

(by 2020, meaning nothing after inflation) and £22bn/yr in "efficiencies", meaning cuts in jobs and healthcare. Never mind that the NHS' main problem today is precisely that it has too few people to do the work and that it cannot offer enough treatments for those who need them!

But some are benefiting from this policy. Today, a whole private "health industry" is blossoming, mostly funded by the NHS budget, which would never have seen the light, if it had not been for the artificial underfunding and cuts imposed on NHS hospitals. The subcontracting of NHS work to private operators, first introduced by Blair, was generalised since, under the pretext that NHS hospitals couldn't do this work - since they didn't have the funds!

Never mind that this sleight of hand is extremely costly, since the NHS has to pay for the shareholders' dividends!

Ultimately, in the NHS as everywhere else, Osborne's cuts are designed to allow the capitalist class to milk public funds, at the expense of the working class as a whole! ☐

## World crisis

The International Monetary Fund is warning against the possibility of yet another ugly episode in the world economic crisis - this time caused by a slowdown in the growth of the emerging economies.

Following the 2007 banking crisis and the euro-zone sovereign crisis in 2011-12, the emerging economies became the next hottest gambling hub for wealthy speculators. In return for hefty interest rates, they lent large sums to these economies, which went straight into the most profitable sectors - especially luxury property development. Speculators made huge profits out of this, but they also left these countries with a gigantic £2 trillion debt.

But this speculation spree couldn't last forever. China, for instance, is littered with brand new ghost towns where no-one can afford to live. As a result, the speculators began to realise that the time for easy profits was

### • *Hunger games*

The last decade has been a roller coaster between life and death for the worlds' poor. From 2001 food prices had been increasing because of high oil prices. Then in 2007, when the property bubble burst, there was a flurry of speculation in the more lucrative food "commodities". This made food prices shoot up, reaching record levels by June 2008 - thereby driving 150 million more

### • *They've got millions to waste!*

According to a report by the consultancy Bain & Co: the personal luxury market of items like bags, jewellery, etc., has been hit. What? The better off, not so better-off any more!?! Fat chance.

No, according to Bain, it's because they wanted better value for money and were not prepared to accept the price hikes of

### • *British state terrorism*

Shaker Aamer was the last of 16 British citizens imprisoned without trial in Guantánamo Bay. He was finally released last month. While working as a charity worker in Afghanistan, he had been kidnapped by "bounty hunters" and sold to US forces as a "terrorist". This was in the aftermath of 9/11 and the US were badly in need of scapegoats. So Shaker Aamer was promptly labelled as an "Al Qaeda fighter" and locked up in the Guantanamo concentration camp.

The British state always denied any responsibility in this affair. But in a telegram sent shortly before Shaker Aamer's arrival in Guantanamo, the then foreign secretary, Jack Straw, said that he had "no objection to American plans to transfer UK detainees from Afghanistan

## Towards phase 3?



over and many have been withdrawing their funds - which was one of the reasons for China's recent stock market crash.

Today, as the emerging economies' growth rate slows down, they are reducing their demand for goods

people to the verge of starvation.

Food-producing countries like India banned food exports to keep local prices down. For countries like Bangladesh, which relied on India for food imports, this was disastrous. The price of rice doubled when the share of rice imports coming from India fell from 95% to 3%.

Today world food prices are falling

the past 3 years: up by 30-to 50%, for their Louis Vuitton bags, etc. But, despite the slowdown, that market still represents a cool £180bn.

However, saving the millions doesn't extend to luxury cars and the fine art market. There, no more counting the pennies - the billions of them, no more haggling.

to Guantánamo Bay". What's more, according to Shaker Aamer, a British Intelligence officer was present when he was being tortured in Afghanistan.

Of course, this shouldn't come as a surprise. From Kenya and Northern Ireland to Iraq, the British state has a long record of using torture and other terrorist methods against the population.

### • *Failed Saudi prison contract - the tip of the iceberg*

The British Ministry of Justice just pulled out of a contract to provide the prison service of Saudi Arabia with training and advice. This was rather unexpected. The Foreign Secretary and a spokesman for Cameron had both indicated that the contract should go ahead - despite controversy about assisting a prison system

- thereby depressing world trade and threatening the world economy with another recession. The prediction that the emerging economies would pull the capitalist world out of its crisis is proving to be what it has always been - a myth! ☐

due to a reduction in oil prices. Surely this should mean that people should find it easier to eat? Instead, this capitalist system operates in such a crazy way that falling food prices could further impoverish the poor countries whose populations depend on the agricultural sectors of the economy - meaning that more people may be threatened with starvation as a result!

Nope, that market has gone up: and together with personal luxuries, amounts to £700bn!

While these few individuals spend that much on luxuries, Osborne's entire budget is around the same - £734bn - for a population of 63 million! And he dares to talk about "excessive" public spending..?

associated with barbaric punishments, including lashings, stoning, beheading and crucifixion.

But this contract was only the latest in a long line, signed under the government's auspices. Many come under the Foreign Office's Overseas Justice and Security Assistance policy and are not made public. Government departments have long promoted Saudi Arabia as a "priority market" for British companies. They are encouraged to bid for lucrative Saudi government contracts in areas including defence, building on £4bn worth of arms sales since Cameron became prime minister. One may only wonder how many of these weapons ended up in the hands of Saudi-funded fundamentalist militias, including Islamic State?

## The inflating bubble

The average house price in London is now nearly £500,000, with 10 London boroughs recording annual rates of growth of over 10%. This is more than two-and-a-half times the average house price countrywide (£197,000), and more than four times the rate of growth in north west England (2.5%). Yet in north east England, prices go on falling!

While on the one hand, ever more people cannot afford to buy a home, even with a loan, on the other, rich investors are chasing a limited supply of houses as an investment rather than somewhere to live. Reflecting this, buying in cash is at its highest since the estate agency Hamptons started measuring it in

### • Soaring rents and slum landlords

With house prices continuing to boom and no increase in the social housing stock, the only choice open to many is private renting. That means paying extortionate rents: they rose 2.7% in the year to September (but 4.1% in London), the fastest rate for 3 years. But high rent doesn't mean you get a decent place to live.

The Citizens Advice Bureau says private rented housing is a "health hazard"

### • The return of sub-prime mortgages

The explosion of sub-prime mortgages, lent to people who were less able to repay them, was a symptom of the wave of reckless speculation that caused the financial crisis. In Britain subprime is coming back, with a number of specialist lenders now tailoring offers to people whose credit histories would normally rule them out for mortgage lending. These companies all claim to consider cases carefully on their merits, rather than deciding on the basis of a computer credit check, with varying levels

### • Government plans - to make things worse

Cameron's government(s) have so far only succeeded in "energising" the housing market - boosting a speculation bubble by making the housing shortage worse. Current plans offer more of the same. The Housing Bill now going through parliament includes extending "the right to buy" to housing association tenants and financing new replacement homes by forcing sales of the highest-valued council homes. Both measures would deplete the supply of social housing in London, where the shortage and competition for building land are worst. One analysis estimates that were the bill passed, there would be nearly 22,000 fewer social rent homes in London by



2006, accounting for about 40% of sales in England and Wales in the

for as many as 740,000 families. It estimates that private landlords are taking £5.6bn a year in rent on properties that do not meet legal standards. Yet £1.3bn of this comes from housing benefit, i.e., councils are paying for substandard accommodation.

In theory, slum landlords should be prosecuted. But few are. Andrew Panayi, in north London, was ordered to pay back £70,000 in rent charged on

year to the end of March. And the bubble is still growing... ☐

one substandard basement. Zuo Jun He was fined £30,000 for renting a 5-person flat to 12 people in Watford. But only 2,000 landlords have been prosecuted for infringements in the last 8 years. Meanwhile, letting double rooms to strangers, even to share a bed, is on the rise. The shortage is acute and many landlords are milking it.



2020.

Cameron even pledged to scrap current planning requirements which require a quota of affordable rented homes in any major housing development, substituting instead, a compulsory quota of "properties for sale to first-time buyers". But by washing their hands of social housing and staking all on promoting home ownership, they are mortgaging future housing provision to a market as dangerously volatile as ever.

### • Housing associations now in trouble

Meanwhile, a reclassification of housing associations as public bodies, could put their future in question. They are currently the biggest builders of affordable

and social housing in Britain, thanks to the fact that they have been able to borrow without restriction, using their own housing stock as a guarantee.

But now it is likely that they will be under pressure from austerity-Osborne to reduce their borrowing, since it will be counted as public debt. And at the same time, they will be depleting their housing stock, thanks to the government's extension of "tenants' right to buy" to housing associations. This means they won't find the resources nor surety to build new homes and that may well scuttle the last little housing crisis lifeboat. The disgrace is that these former charitable institutions were left to shoulder virtually the entire social housing burden in the first place.

## Housing

## Politicians

Poor Jeremy Corbyn! It was clear right from the start that he was going to be hostage to the parliamentary Labour Party's so-called "austerity-lite" and Blairite majority.

### ... on Syria

So on the issue of whether or not to back the bombing of Syria (before this vote was dropped, albeit temporarily, by Cameron) he was in a predictable pickle. Between 50 and 100 Labour MPs let it be known they'd back a British military intervention. Since there were quite a few Tory MPs who shied away from this, Cameron needed

### • **JC: from peace-symbol to nationalist**

Having stuck, so far, to his opposition to Trident, Corbyn was made vice president of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on 17 October. No doubt it was a thank-you from CND, because his election boosted their membership - with a sign-up rate of 200 a month reported mid-October.

Corbyn's distinctly non-pacifist shadow defence secretary Maria Eagle was unimpressed, saying his statement that he'd not authorise the use of nuclear weapons if he were prime minister, was "unhelpful". But this did not stop Corbyn from committing Labour to a "review" of its Trident policy,

### • **Cameron's "Brexit" panto**

Of course Cameron has to be against "Brexit" or British exit from the EU, like it or not. This is the position of the Bank of England Board, enlightened business and most City leaders. But having to lead the "stay in" campaign places Cameron in a quandary: many Tory voters are stuck in the "little England" of the provinces and have been protesting against such enlightenment by switching, or threatening to switch their votes to Ukip.

So everything seems to rest on Cameron proving that he is adequately renegotiating Britain's terms of membership, so that (1) Britain can opt out of committing to "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" and win the right to club together with others to block EU legislation; (2) the lucrative single market is established "for real"; (3) non-eurozone members (currently 9 including Britain) cannot be outvoted by eurozone members when rules are decided for the single market (the so-called "emergency brake") and (4) Britain should be able to ban EU migrants from claiming in-work benefits for four years.

Apart from the anti-migrant rhetoric, which panders to the worst of his electorate's prejudices, these issues are unlikely to rock any boats in the EU. But Cameron is going to have to make out that he has beaten a giant to win his "stay in" vote - even if he has only slain a mouse.

## Corbyn's u-turns multiply...

35 Labour MPs to vote with him - so he could take his pick, in fact.

By choosing right-wing Labour MP Hillary Benn as his shadow foreign secretary, Corbyn was already signalling his surrender. Corbyn, the "life-long" pacifist let it be known that Labour would back military intervention as long as a UN resolution passed in favour, first! "JC" must have breathed a sigh of relief when Cameron decided to cancel the vote.

### ...on fiscal policy

But Corbyn didn't manage to emerge unscathed from the fiasco over backing

which is to be headed by ... Eagle. It's not hard to guess what its findings will be!

Worse, by far, was how Corbyn submitted to ignorant nationalism when faced with the fictitious allegation that China's "dumping of cheap steel" was responsible for the steel bosses' job slashing. Corbyn said if he were PM he would go to Beijing in person to stop this - after apparently visiting steelworkers in Scunthorpe. But this nationalistic nonsense only diverts attention from the steel bosses' profiteering. By joining in, Corbyn shows the limits of his own horizon.

### • **Labour's Boris Johnson**

In the run-up to the London mayoral election, the Labour and Tory candidates look

like twins who've swapped clothes. While Tory candidate Zac Goldsmith, a millionaire, is talking about the influence of big business on government policy, Labour's Sadiq Khan, the son of a bus driver, declares that he's "unashamedly determined to be the most pro-business Mayor London has ever had."

Khan began his political career with the union machinery of full-time officials and has the backing of the GMB, Unite and Unison leaderships. So now we know, that's where you learn to be pro-business! Well, at least he's honest about it and we need have no illusions. He's on the other side.

### • **In his dreams**

£1m of taxpayers' money will be wasted this month to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the battle of Agincourt - a battle that took place in 1415, in Northern France - at the Tower of London. It took Cameron and his nationalistic agenda to pull this obscure event out of its dusty cupboard.

But what is there to celebrate (let alone to be proud of!) in the slaughter of around 6,000 French soldiers - including prisoners who were massacred in cold blood - and this only to serve the bloodthirsty ambition of the then English King Henry V, who was seeking to enlarge his kingdom at the expense of his main European rival, the king of France?

Surely, such barbaric events are best left to the museums and libraries, where they belong. But short of being able to impose his whims on the EU, maybe Cameron believes that celebrating an English "victory" like Agincourt would suffice?

### • **Delboy for Xi**

It was a little ironic to see Cameron - the arch-anti-communist bowing before the Chinese president Xi Jinping when he visited in October. Even if we all know that China's "communism" was all wind and no guts at all, Cameron certainly doesn't. Anyway, like any good second-hand-car-salesman he got "deals", that is, various investment undertakings from China and claimed the "UK is now

China's biggest partner going into the 21st century" to the tune of £40bn-worth of projects. However it turned out that this was a con, true to form, and included existing business agreements.

But most amazing was the announcement that made Cameron appear as responsible for a deal for China's state-owned General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGNP) to build a £6bn new Hinkley Point Nuclear Power Station... by 2033, as well as provide new reactors for Sizewell. Yet in reality, this deal was struck by Paris-based EDF (which has a 66.5% stake in the first plant, Hinkley Point C, with CGNP taking the remaining share). All Cameron was required to do was rubber-stamp it!

CGNP will build and operate its own facility at Bradwell in Essex, trialing a new reactor design. Worrying or not as this may sound, all the usual suspects (Laing O'Rourke, Balfour Beatty, Cavendish and... G4S) are already lining up to bid for contracts, because whether these reactors eventually get built or not, they are going to rake in the bounty, for sure! And never mind that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors warned that "the UK lacks the necessary construction skills to deliver critical programmes such as Hinkley Point" - who cares if this all (literally) blows up in the faces of a future generation? (PS: disposal of toxic nuclear waste still not solved...)

## Tax Credits cuts - the issue...

The House of Lords set a cat among the pigeons at the end of October when it voted against George Osborne's tax credit cuts, i.e., the top-up for the very-low-waged so that they can just about survive to slave another day. Choosing not to kill the bill outright, they voted 307 votes to 277 for the cuts to be put on hold pending an independent analysis of their impact and 289 votes to 272 for the 3.3m affected to be given "full transitional protection" from the cuts for at least three years.

In his post-election budget, Osborne had boasted that his deficit reduction plan would cut £12bn off the welfare budget - of which £4.4bn would come from tax credit cuts. So 3.3m working families were due to get letters just before Xmas cutting their credits by an average of £1,300. The level at which working tax credit would start to be withdrawn was to fall from



poverty-level income of £6,420/year to pauper-level of £3,850/year. Similarly, child tax credits would also be cut and limited to 2 children.

No wonder even Tories (like Boris Johnson and new MP Heidi Allen) criticised publicly the Bill's "lack of compassion" (tax credits have been vital

## Welfare cuts



in reducing "in-work poverty") and in the Lords, joined the vote against. No doubt this is a division of labour between "nasty" and "nice" Tories - the latter having the task of trying to keep Cameron's "workers' party" flag flying - so that the votes they intend to capture from UKIP don't go up in smoke. □

### • ... an unjustifiable justification

Osborne's welfare cuts were accompanied by some of the most hypocritical rhetoric he has uttered so far, eg., that tax credit cuts are "needed" in order to achieve his "low tax, low welfare, high wage economy"! Given that Britain has the second lowest corporation tax in Europe (at the lowest level since its introduction) it already has a "low tax" economy. And it's certainly becoming a "low welfare" country. But "high wages"? How, by cutting the incomes of

3.3m+ already low-paid workers, do you achieve a "high wage economy"?

But in fact it's precisely a "low wage" economy which Osborne is delighted to offer the bosses: when wages go down profits go up. As for the so-called "national living wage" coming in next April, this is hardly a boost. At just £7.20/hr - only 50p above the present minimum wage, and only for over-25s, it's certainly not going to turn its recipients into "high wage

earners"!

Even the illiberal Institute of Fiscal Studies said it'd be "arithmetically impossible" for the increases in the minimum wage to outweigh the £12bn cuts in welfare. Cameron and Osborne are not very good at arithmetic. Osborne now says he'll "lessen" the impact of the tax credit cuts in his Autumn budget. We shall see.

### • Cut the "Lords" instead?

After his defeat by the House of Lords, Osborne furiously accused it of acting "unconstitutionally". But, ironically, this defeat was the government's own fault. By using a procedural trick to avoid any debate on its bill in the Commons, it gave the Lords the constitutional right to oppose it!

Of course, when the Lords vote in favour of government bills, democracy is never in question. But when it doesn't, it is

"unelected" and thus "undemocratic".

Sure, this amazingly large upper chamber is undemocratic, with its 707 appointed life peers (only 201 are Conservatives), 88 hereditary peers and 25 Anglican bishops. Almost everybody agrees it should go. Even the pro-Tory Economist magazine wrote: "*Bad as the tax credit plan is, it is hard to cheer its defeat by a chamber of losers, crooks and self-appointed holy men.*"

Now the debate about reforming the House of Lords has been reignited. But to legitimise a second house (like the US Senate) means creating a rival to the Commons, able to halt legislation, instead of just delaying it. So, unaccountable elected MPs will continue to shriek about "democracy" whenever the unaccountable unelected Lords upset them - and the status quo will prevail.

### • More cuts in store

Osborne may have temporarily failed to get his £4.4bn tax credit cuts through, but this is not stopping him from going ahead with the remaining £7.6bn of welfare cuts he announced in July. And they are just as shocking, since, once again, they will target the most vulnerable.

In particular, Osborne wants to "save" £1.4bn by cutting the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for the disabled. Around 500,000 workers who are currently unfit for work, but are expected to get better at some point in the future, the so-called "work-related activity group" will see their derisory £102/wk allowance cut to a shockingly low £73/wk! The aim of the

exercise being, obviously, to make life so unbearable for these workers that they'll take the first non-job on offer, even if they aren't really fit to do it!

Then, on top of these welfare cuts, £20bn worth of "savings" will be shared out between the other departments. Local councils, in particular, will once more be targeted - meaning more cuts to local services and probably more job cuts. So, no, Osborne's cuts frenzy hasn't been stopped by the Lords' votes on tax credits. It will take a lot more than that!

### • Welfare: Osborne's bogeyman

Osborne is so desperate to get more welfare cuts approved that he is prepared

to resort to any old excuse. The latest is that without these planned cuts, national security might be compromised and global terrorism encouraged! Really?! With the £70 savings made on the back of a disabled person, or the £40 a week from family tax credit? Whatever next?!

What about cutting spending on expensive drones killing villagers abroad and destabilising whole regions? In 2014, £640m was spent on buying just 8 drones...

There is a serious security threat though - and it comes from Osborne and his masters, the bosses. It is a threat to the security of all workers... and it needs to be fought as such.

## Job cuts

News of large-scale redundancies have been resurfacing in some industries. But is this any surprise when the crisis is still there and, according to the International Monetary Fund, is actually getting worse? So, predictably, companies, which were already reluctant to invest so far, are now trying to protect their profits at all costs.

Some just scale back their activities, while others go so far as to declare themselves bankrupt. Although for some of the latter, this may well be just a trick to avoid paying redundancy money - as in the case of fashion retailer USC, a subsidiary of Sports Direct, which went into administration, giving 200 workers just 15 minutes notice before sacking them, only to be immediately bought back by another Sports Direct subsidiary! Either way, the result is redundancies and site closures.

When this happens, union leaders' standard response has been to go cap in hand to the government, requesting from Osborne that he should organise - and, if necessary, subsidise - the rescue of the over-indebted or allegedly bankrupt company. But while this certainly fits in with the union leaders' "responsible" policies - i.e. "responsible" towards the interests of British capital - this is a dead-end for workers.

### • Ineos' subsidised profiteering

Taking advantage of the EU's sanctions against Russia, the petro-chemical giant Ineos has just bought 12 North Sea gas fields from a Russian investment fund, for £490m - a very good deal for Ineos, according to experts.

Two years ago, however, Ineos was crying poverty. Workers at the Grangemouth refinery were told that in order to keep their jobs they would have to agree to cuts in their pensions, shift premiums and real wages. Eventually Unite agreed to a sell out, while Osborne came to Ineos' "rescue" with a £230m loan on such

### • Oil - slick profits feeding on job losses

Since last year big names such as BP, Shell, Chevron and Conoco Philips, all involved in the North Sea oil business, have cut 5,500 jobs, and a further 60,000 dependent jobs have gone as a consequence. It is estimated that a further 10,000 jobs are to go over the next year.

As of September 2015, the industry employed 31,000 workers

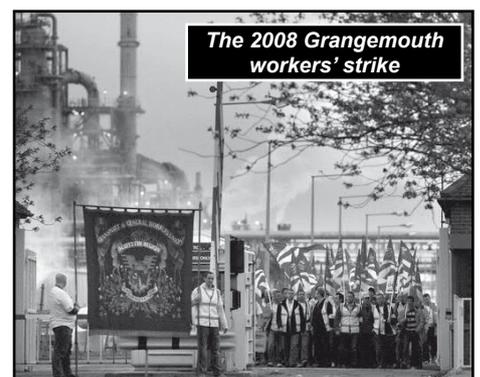
## Redundancies, factory closures: bosses and shareholders should pick up the bill!



Not that Osborne wouldn't be prepared to provide subsidies to the bosses, of course. He does that all the time. But these never saved one single job - nor was this ever their purpose. There's no shortage of examples: from the state-subsidised job cuts at Ineos' Grangemouth refinery, in 2013, to the £1.3bn subsidy awarded by Osborne to the North Sea oil companies in his last budget, despite the fact that they'd already shed thousands of jobs - with more job cuts anticipated.

But while the working class can't expect any support from the bosses' ever-compliant state, there is a

solution. Indeed, it is not as if companies and shareholders were really hard up. With all the wealth that they've squeezed out of workers' sweat over the years, they could pay for all available work to be shared out between all available hands, while guaranteeing a decent income for all. But imposing this on this profit-hungry capitalist class will take more than the spineless union leaderships have to offer. It will take the working class majority mobilising all its collective strength against this capitalist system, which is, and always has been, incapable of catering for its needs. ☐



have shared out the work available at Grangemouth, without any redundancy or loss of pay for anyone - and without any government subsidy!

advantageous terms that it amounted to a subsidy. However, although all of this was meant to "save jobs", just 2 months later, Ineos came back with the announcement that there would be 200 redundancies after all!

Then, within just another few months, Ineos found £300m to invest in gas transport and storage on the site! And today, its "magic wand" has produced another £490m to expand its gas empire. However, of course, Ineos has no "magic wand", but it does have assets and lots of cash. And with all this wealth it could easily

directly - but 375,000 if taking dependent industries into account. The effect of the job cuts on cities like Aberdeen, is already showing. Two years ago, it was named one of the three happiest places to live, but now the high street and station area are dotted with empty shop-fronts.

The oil companies have been using falling oil prices as an excuse for

axing jobs. They say this, while making profits: Chevron reported £1.3bn in profits last quarter, with similar figures for BP [£85m] and Shell [£65m]. And that's not counting the much fatter profits they made during the years when oil prices were so high. So isn't it time for the shareholders to cough up what's needed to keep the jobs?

## Steel meltdown?

The steel industry is in turmoil. Two big steel producers - SSI UK and Caparo UK - are under administration, with SSI closing down its large Redcar site and Caparo shutting five sites in the Midlands. Meanwhile, Tata Steel will close its Scunthorpe site and two others near Glasgow.

In total, over 4,000 workers - more than 20% of the industry's 18,000 workforce - have been made redundant in less than two months. And this is not counting the thousands of workers employed by companies supplying these steel mills.

Predictably, the leaders of Community, the industry's main union, rushed to request from Cameron a rescue package for... the steel bosses - including better protection against foreign steel and subsidies both to reduce their energy bills and to make up for the high pound. The steel industry's lobby group, UK

### • A Chinese red herring

The main explanation of the steel crisis given by everyone - from the bosses and politicians to union leaders - is that China is "flooding" the world market with under-priced steel.

However, this is little more than a red herring. The world price of steel started falling after the 2008 banking crash, losing 75% of its value since. But over that whole period of

### • RBS: Reducing Banking Staff

After creating the current economic crisis and then getting governments to pick up the tab, the big banks are continuing to cut jobs. In 2008, RBS was bailed out for £45bn. This didn't prevent the 100 private executives of the bank who stayed on, from shamelessly threatening the government with resignation if they were not paid £1m each in bonuses

### • Airline profits take off, jobs and condition crash

International Airlines Group (IAG), the parent company of British Airways, has just posted a 33% rise in operating profits, with IAG boss Willie Walsh awarding himself a £6.4m paycheck.

But how did Walsh make these mega-bucks? Through a decade of cutting jobs, pay and conditions, in the name of "competitiveness". In 2001-02, BA slashed a quarter of its workforce. In 2009, it cut another



Steel, couldn't have argued the steel bosses' case better!

But isn't it ironical that no mention was even made of the fact that all these 3 companies are in fact very wealthy? Outside Britain, Caparo has an empire of very profitable businesses. Thailand-based

SSI is South-East Asia's largest steel producer. As to the even larger Tata conglomerate, it also owns Jaguar-Land-Rover and employs around 620,000 workers worldwide! And these giants need rescuing? On the contrary, they need to be read the riot act! ☐

time, China's exports to the entire world have always been very low, around 1% of the world's production! This is hardly a flood!

Besides, who mentioned the fact that China mostly exports raw steel, whereas the British steel industry produces mostly more technologically advanced, finished products? In fact, China actually buys 15% of Britain's steel exports - a bounty for

in 2010!

As for the RBS workforce, they were not so lucky. Since the bailout, the government as the majority shareholder has cut 90,000 jobs. The latest round was announced this March, with 4 out of every 5 of the jobs in investment banking being lost, amounting to 14,000 job losses. RBS has also been cutting

Britain's steel companies!

So, rather than being undermined by China's "mischief", it may well be that these British-based companies are scaling down their production in anticipation of a sharp reduction in China's imports of their steel products, as a result of its own economic difficulties. China is such a convenient scape-goat!

jobs another way: by closing down bank branches. Last year alone it closed down half of its branches and by the end of this year it will have closed 3 out of every 4. And all this to prepare the sell-off of the government shares. Who said "nationalisation" necessarily helped the working class?

1,700 jobs at Heathrow, claiming workers were paid more than at Gatwick. And today it is threatening to sack Gatwick cabin crew unless they accept a massive pay cut - amounting to up to a quarter of their earnings. At the same time, it's Spanish sister airline, Iberia, has cut 4,600 jobs since 2012.

This is mirrored across all the European airline giants. Air France, which has cut 13,000 jobs since

2004, has planned another 2,900 sackings. Meanwhile, its operating profit increased 263.6% in a year - a record for at least a decade! Likewise Lufthansa has been attacking workers' conditions after cutting 3,500 jobs in 2012 - resulting in a 41.5% increase in operating profits. But then, of course, what they all mean by "competitiveness" is that workers should work harder to make shareholders fatter!

## Social issues

Official education regulator, Ofsted released a report which is hardly flattering to Cameron's 3m apprenticeship programme. It says that most apprenticeships are in low-skilled sectors - such as administration, retail, customer service and care. What's more many apprentices were found to have little or no formal training, while some of them did not even know that they were on an apprenticeship programme!

According to Cameron, apprenticeships are supposed to offer young workers a chance to acquire skills and, eventually, a proper job. Except that official figures show that only 25% of apprentices are under-19 whereas 42% are over 25 and almost 10% are over 50!

In fact, another report published last summer by the Institute for Public Policy Research noted that

### • Meet Scrooge in Whitehall

Osborne justified his cuts in tax credits by saying that these are subsidies to "bad bosses"! However, judging from the number of "bad bosses" in Whitehall, this was just the pot calling the kettle black!

Recent figures on wages paid by government departments show that the worst offenders are the Department for Environment, Food

### • Yodel - an "obliging" employer?

Delivery firm Yodel is recruiting 7,000 drivers for the increase in parcel deliveries around Christmas. However, only 800 drivers will be directly employed by Yodel, while the rest will be on precarious self-employed contracts. And they will be expected to deliver "anything up to 150 parcels a day"!

Dick Stead, executive chairman of Yodel, described these non-jobs as "flexible and perfect for those who want to fit work around families, or who have retired, but want to remain active and earn some

### • Education under the axe

The president of the Association of School and College leaders (ASCL) has warned that the British school system is facing a "perfect storm" in the coming five years. Schools are facing acute shortages of teachers for core subjects like maths, science, and English - so much so that teachers are increasingly expected to teach subjects for which they have no training. Meanwhile the

## Apprenticeships - not for the youth, nor for a job!



almost 2/3 of apprentices had been employed by the same company before becoming apprentices - meaning that they were really in basic on-the-job training, repackaged as apprenticeships. What's more, their

wages ranged between £2.94 and £6.24/hr. In other words, the one and only benefit of this apprenticeship programme - for the bosses, that is - is that it provides them with a pool of cheap labour! ☐

and Rural Affairs and HM Revenue & Customs: in both cases, cleaning and security staff wages can be as low as 6.50/hr. In the Transport and Justice departments, the lowest paid are on £6.85 and £6.67/hr respectively. As to the Foreign Office, which pays some of its workers as little as £7.05/hr, when they sent Hammond a letter raising the issue

of their pay, they were sent a threatening notice!

Of course, none of this should come as a surprise. There never was such a thing as a "good" or a "bad" boss. Bosses are by definition profiteers, bent on exploiting workers. And this government's agenda is to defend their interests.

extra cash."

"Perfect to fit work around families" or "to remain active after retirement"? How can earning peanuts on a casual, precarious basis, be "perfect" for anyone? How cynical can these bosses get? Apparently there's no limit, when it comes to covering up their attacks against workers' conditions! Soon they'll claim that workers really want to be exploited and that they are only obliging, as a "service" to them!



government has launched a teacher recruitment drive in Jamaica!

A "Yougov" poll revealed the extent of the crisis: teachers' morale is so low that more than half of them are considering leaving the profession within the next two years. The main reasons mentioned included "volume of workload" (61%) and "seeking a better work/life balance" (57%).

Of course, this teacher shortage is only one of the consequences of the cuts in education, together with rising class sizes and shortages in education materials. But what does this government care? According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, its education policies will result in a 7% cut in spending per pupil, over the next parliamentary term!

**King's Cross railway station (London)**

**ISS workers want action**

ISS workers at King's Cross who clean Virgin, Hull and Grand Central trains have had enough. Managers expected us to use a heavy battery-powered backpack hoover (weighting up to 13kg), which couldn't even suck up the dust!

In fact it was just designed to reduce our numbers, which they already started doing by cutting one worker from each cleaning team. At the same time they are cutting tankers (who fill the water tanks) and changing their way of working, despite the already visible consequences: trains half-cleaned or without water for toilets or catering. We have refused to co-operate

with these unsafe and back-breaking plans.

But then we found out that an RMT union official had "agreed" that the back-breaker hoover was "safe" to use, without bothering to ask our opinion! And since we still refused to use it, management sent letters threatening the sack unless we had a certified medical condition and invited us to individual meetings to try to force the issue. In the meantime they employed temps to carry the hoover, despite the "redundancy situation"!

So we decided to take collective action and go for strike. Our experience has taught us that this is the



only language ISS can understand. But it was only after two delegations to RMT HQ asking for the union's backing that we got the officials' pledge to organise industrial action. We are determined it goes ahead. We demand: no job cuts, no unsafe new ways of working in tanking, no backpack hoovers, no cuts in breaks, make agency workers permanent!

**No fight, good fight?**

When an on-board worker, employed by Virgin Train East Coast was sacked, unfairly accused of losing a passenger's kindle, the union waited for a dismissal, an appeal, then a directors' review of the case, before finally organising a strike ballot, 8 months later! As if directors would go against their own management's decision, no matter how wrong, without a real threat from the workforce.

Then the RMT leaders decided to stop the vote, 2 days before the

deadline for returning the ballot papers. Apparently an agreement had been reached. The details are still not clear to anyone except that the worker in question did not get his job back, only financial compensation. As if this could compensate for a lost job!

But the RMT leaders didn't bother to ask our opinion nor give us a clear explanation of what they'd decided behind closed doors. Had they bothered, they would have found

that many of us were longing for some form of fight back, regardless of this settlement staged behind the scenes, because we've had more than enough of VTEC's heavy-handed tactics and we would have loved an opportunity to show it. But, apparently, boosting our collective self-confidence against the company wasn't on the RMT leaders' agenda. What are they so afraid of? That we might prove too militant for them, maybe?

**• Leadership on strike?**

What's the RMT's campaign against the anti-strike laws mean, if the leadership behaves as if these laws were already passed? Like the way they've cancelled ballots or chosen not to have them, substituting "referendums" - even when we have made it clear that we want a fight? And where is the proposed fight over the dangerous maintenance cuts and outsourcing leading to cracked rails (on a high speed line!), as well as the continued use of old rolling stock? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

**• They're letting us down**

2 recent cancelled votes relate to sackings - first, the Network Rail signaller where the ballot was overwhelming to strike to get his job back - and then just this last week, Virgin Train workers' strike ballot to get Edinburgh's Jamie Farrell reinstated, after he was unfairly dismissed for losing a passenger's Kindle: it was interrupted before it was even finished. For us it was about more than individuals. It was about curing managers' sacking

sickness which affects us all! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

**• We hope they win**

On the other hand, the 48-hour DLR strike has gone ahead! It shut virtually the whole line on Tuesday. It would be good to visit this strike to lend our support, but also to find out what their magic ingredient was, so that we can borrow some... [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

**• ...and us too!**

When we refused to use the backpack hoover, first we didn't expect that an RMT official would OK it, and second, that agency workers would be forced to use it instead. But if management threatens us - and that includes the agency workmates, we will threaten them. We've already decided to go on strike - and to include in our demands that agency workers be made permanent. We so obviously need more workers. Introducing equipment which hurts us physically and risky "new ways of working" to achieve job cuts? We cannot allow it. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

**• To the GTR managers...**

You really had us laughing with your "Q&A" letter on pay. You seem to be at a "loss to explain" why we want to reject the 2.5%. Well, try an experiment: live on £18-£25k in London. And try not having a pay rise equal to the real rise in the cost of living, like at least the past 8 years, which cut our real take-home pay (2012-2013: 2.3% a year, 2014: 2.7%). Our time has now come! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

**• ...and re your "profit and loss"**

What's not "at a loss" is GTR profits. So don't expect us to be taken in by all that la-la-la that the biggest rail franchise is making this 2.5% offer at the "absolute limits of affordability". Your own statements to Go-Ahead shareholders say profits increased 11.1%. And of course we don't need to remind you of all the juicy government subsidies you get from the whole network (£22.6m from South-Eastern alone)! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 4/11/15]

## Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

**Profits and pay: Ford and Fraud**

Ford workers here in Britain (there are around 8,500 directly employed), just like the Ford workers in the USA, are awaiting a pay rise as part of our renewed contract, in the context of Ford's "outstanding" (in the words of CEO Mark Fields) third quarter profits of £1.2bn - almost double, compared to last year.

Of course, although Ford speaks of a "One Ford" strategy for its auto operations, for the purposes of pay negotiations, it regards its operations in different parts of the world as completely separate entities. Never mind that all of the value that us workers produce in Ford factories

(and many are employed by subcontractors) is all mixed into the overall profits that the company quotes. So Ford Europe and more specifically, Ford UK claim losses of £2.9bn since 2012, when the last pay negotiations took place. How convenient!

The "final" 2-year offer Ford made on 5 November is a 3% increase in pay in year 1 and inflation plus 0.5% in year 2 (2% guaranteed). It's a bit more than the insulting 1.1% initially offered, but certainly won't cover cost of living increases. And worst of all, the temporary and 2-tier workforce remain, as well as the policy of outsourcing, meaning that



the demand for "equal pay for equal work" is contemptuously ignored.

The last national all-out strike of Ford workers in Britain was in 1988 - for 2 weeks - against a "derisory" 4.5% offer (recommended by the full time union officials!) in the context of Ford boasting of "record profits" - just like today. Today, again, we expect a lot more for our blood, sweat and tears.

- **Detroit deal**

Is it a coincidence that Ford US workers are also offered 3% in year 1? Their 4-year deal gives a 4% lump sum bonus year 2 and 4 and 3% in year 3. The biggest difference is the £6634 "signing bonus" which includes £664 profit sharing. Whereas we're offered a signing bonus of 2% of annual pay (£500-£800 minus tax)! But despite the record profits, Ford US is keeping 2nd-tier workers and is creating a 3rd tier of temps on even lower pay! For 2nd tiers it will take 8 years to reach "equal pay for equal work". Let us hope the brothers and sisters stand firm in demanding an end to 2-tier, no cuts to benefits and an integrated pay rise - instead of these one-off "bonuses"! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/11/15]

- **And very colourful too!**

It was a surprise to see the very first new Unite Branch Bulletin! And nice to know the new head of "The Family" is a "socialist" too. That was news. And BTW, could a few words be added in the next one to correct where it said that "Bernie Passingham (RIP) "won" pay equality for the sewing machinists, with their help"? Other way round. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **Job zero**

So the Panther (brand-new engine assembly line) is being flooded with workers now, on permanent days and with 12 hours mopping... even if Job 1 is meant to be on for next week. Yup, it's at a total standstill engine-wise. Doesn't look as if much will be moving, except for our polishing cloths ...[Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **Bend and flex: it'll give you a sore back**

Welcome to the temporary brothers and sisters who're "taking over" Puma. So now you've had the pep talk: "don't sneeze, don't cough, don't go sick"! Ask, and you may, however, get permission to go to the toilet ... if you can find one! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **Our luxury loos...**

Indeedy. How're we meant to take a pee in this factory when the toilets are all in such a bad state?! Sometimes the doors don't lock; seats are broken or not even there. And this is especially bad in the women's loos. At least the men have the "no touch" option, but we don't! Without spotlessly clean and usable toilets, we just can't work here for hours on end. It's the very least we expect. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **Could it get any worse??**

If we're meant to be here 8 -12hrs at a stretch, surely we need proper facilities? Like a good-food canteen. Just look at the current pay offer: Ford intends to "discuss" catering subsidies! Which can only mean one thing - it intends to cut them. Yet this failing restaurant (despite an outrageous 27% price hike) quite obviously, needs a great big subsidy boost! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **So 27% on pay "isn't a lot" either?**

Actually we see in the Unite bulletin that Ford told the union officials that the 27% rise in subsidised food prices "isn't a lot". So Ford intends to balance this out with the massive 1.1% in our pay packet? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **What about pensioners?**

Talking of the pay rise we need - pensioners have been left out of a straight raise this time, despite the relative loss suffered since increases were calculated according to CPI - after we got sold out by Unite's full-timer, Roger the Bodger Maddison, in 2013/14... Pensions need raising - from right now! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **Worn out**

It's not surprising that the Chicken Farm lines keep breaking down - Ford's been pushing production like it's going out of fashion. The mini-shift has been producing as much as the full shifts - we make 900 engines a shift! And the line machinery is simply knackered - just like us. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **The pay gap**

Lineside's pay offer of 3% on basic in the first year and 2.1%+ inflation in the second - maybe looked a lot better than the initial 1.1% Ford offer. But let's keep in mind that there's still a very long way to go (to fight...) before we on LineSide catch up! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

- **We need some easy chairs (or beds?)**

Talking of lousy facilities for the workforce - it's worth repeating how bad it is on the sparkling new Panther: state of the art technology and tacky sh\*t for us! No place to sit or even put down a cup near the (moving!) line and open, unrestful, rest areas with plastic chairs which are about as cheap as you can get! Just where are we meant to go to relax? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 28/10/15]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**

**BMW: "making cars... cheapskate"**

BBC2's live broadcasts from BMW's Oxford Mini plant in "Making Cars Live" (20-21 October) may have shown how production of cars, entirely to order, is organised - and may have been of some interest to those who could stand the petrol-head excitement of the "Top Gear" presenters. But in 3 hours over 2 nights it said nothing about those of us who make these cars nor the conditions we work in. Yeah, "one car is finished every 68 seconds" (how many times did they repeat this?), but no mention that for us it means repeating the same action around 56 times an hour! Nor any mention of the programme of job cuts, through

time and motion studies, which set such impossible targets that BMW hasn't yet dared implement it in full.

So no surprise that we weren't asked to talk about what it's like to work here... Cameron's British "flagship" factory wouldn't want it known how it's relied for years on in-house agency temps; that current agency, Gi pays lower rates for the first 2 years (under a "derogation" agreed by the union leadership, but never agreed by the rest of us!); that many of us had already worked on production for 10 years+, for a succession of agencies, on de facto zero-hours contracts, before being offered permanent contracts last



year!

Presenters made a huge deal over "just in time" but didn't mention that when parts don't arrive, we can be laid off - with the hours debited to our "working time accounts" to pay back whenever it suits BMW! Or that the marvellous logistics is run by subcontractor Rudolph and Hellmann which pays its new recruits the minimum wage...

• **"Building cars live"...**

Apart from providing 3 hours free advertising for BMW on prime time TV, this BBC2 programme did show that building cars at 54 per hour is not so easy, especially on the current moving line which can carry us away from our workstations if there are delays. Nice to hear one manager acknowledging the difficulties, too. He wasn't always so understanding and sympathetic,

though. Years ago a Manpower office worker went round shaking hands on his last day, but let his fist do the talking with this guy! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 21/10/15]

• **It's never that good**

The most striking thing to some of us watching our own areas in Assembly, was how uncharacteristically clean and tidy it all was. Strictly for the cameras of course! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford

21/10/15]

• **Central casting**

Team briefings following BBC2's Making Cars Live announced that the cameras will be back again for another one. Managers invited volunteers for "acting roles", which says it all. Looking as thrilled as a BBC presenter while knocking ourselves as usual - that sure is an acting challenge! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 4/11/15]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**

• **Yes, address sleuths are needed!**

On top of 14,000 Xmas casuals for England, RM's also recruiting 2,100 seasonal, temporary "address detectives"? What? Isn't this one of the more difficult jobs, which RM got rid of, along with the many senior mates who did it? They had to know all about national, international codes plus world geography, but mostly, they had knowledge which comes from accumulated experience. Quite how RM imagines temps can do this job is anybody's guess! But we wish them very good luck - not to mention the needed training with a permanent job at the end of it! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 21/10/15]

• **Another Royal Mail flop?**

So now the finger scans are circulating around, although not everywhere on packets is using them yet. And as we said before, these spying devices will be used to count the number of bar-coded packets we each sort. But

there's another aspect: it'll provide RM with a chance to talk "efficiencies" - i.e., job cuts, AGAIN!! That is, of course, if we let them! Plus, we should add a third aspect, which is that this device is not actually suitable for anyone with hand or finger problems - arthritis and the like - nor is the laser light so "good" for our eyes... [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 21/10/15]

• **They can kiss the bride**

We're continually amazed by the new strings we keep discovering, attached to the union leaders' supposedly "ground breaking" agreement with RM, of which the finger scans are only the latest. Is this "ring" meant to signify our engagement? Fortunately we're not married yet - we can still break it off... and claim compensation? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 21/10/15]

• **Dear Santa**

On flats, we're already thinking about the chaos RM is preparing for Xmas and we're prepared to write a collective letter to Santa, to ask for a quiet festive



period... Still, we know that there's more chance of Santa existing and living in the North Pole (postcode: N1?) than RM planning ahead! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 21/10/15]

• **No more public "service"**

So the government's now boasting that it has now completed "the biggest privatisation of a generation"... On the 13th of October, 499 years of public ownership finally ended, with the remaining 14% of RM shares sold for just under £600m. We workers get 70 shares each, having been given 1% for "free" (as if!). RM's profits keep going up, but never fear, the government's regulator is near - ready to ensure that private businesses get their chunk! And guess what will inevitably happen to the share price...? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 21/10/15]

## Iraq

Twelve years after the event, Blair finally used an interview on the CNN channel, on October 26th, to express his "contrition" over the occupation of Iraq. However, his "regrets" only concerned the fact that the Iraq war has destabilised the region, although he did admit that today's ISIS militia is probably a by-product of this war - something that no other western leader will do..

So, Blair apologised "for the fact that the intelligence we received was wrong" - as if he could have been in any doubt at the time, after his famous "dossier" was exposed as a fraud. He also apologised "for some of the mistakes in planning and, certainly, our mistake in our understanding of what would happen once you removed the regime". But Blair also insisted that he had no regrets regarding the invasion and occupation itself - let alone the consequences for the Iraqi population, which says it all!

## Blair's bogus apologies over Iraq



Remorse is certainly not what motivated this bigoted Catholic's media "confession". In fact, it's more likely to be the forthcoming publication of the Chilcot enquiry report on the Iraq war. This report should have been published long ago. But it was held up by the redacting of anything that might upset the US

authorities. However, Cameron has now announced that he will get it published by next summer- maybe because he sees it as a convenient banana skin to throw under Labour's feet, given that, other than Corbyn himself, most of today's Labour MPs backed Blair's war!

No-one should expect any revelations from this report, of course. The commission's 5 members all belong to the Privy Council and can be trusted to put the interests of the British state first. Nevertheless, Blair's apologies are probably designed to shield the British state from any blame, by taking upon himself all responsibility for what he calls the "mistakes" that were made - "mistakes" which are all open secrets anyway. But this "confession" should fool no-one. Blair was just a cog - even if a willing one. He is a criminal, but so are all of the characters at the top of the state of British capital, whether at the time or today. ☐

## Refugee crisis

The critical situation in the Middle East, Horn of Africa and Afghanistan is, if anything, getting even worse. 218,000 refugees fled to Europe from these regions in October alone - almost as many as in the whole of 2014. And then there are those who do not make it: so far this year, 3,440 people have drowned while trying to cross the Mediterranean.

The UN reported this year that life expectancy in Syria has dropped by 20 years. The population that remains in Syria is destitute and facing an increasing risk of death by bombing, thanks to the deadly power games of the US, Europe and Russia. By stepping up their intervention, they only fan the flames even further.

### Cameron's "Compassion"

As for Cameron's "magnanimity" - allowing 20,000 Syrian refugees into Britain over the next 5 years - only "deserving" candidates will be selected, from camps in Lebanon and Jordan. The Home Office has instructed councils to remove all "luxury" items from houses the refugees will move into... like fridges and cookers! They'll be given vouchers to be exchanged in certain shops against basic goods, rather than money to buy what they need. They will not be granted "asylum", but "humanitarian protection", which means that after completing

their application process (which can take a year) though allowed to work, they'll have to wait 5 years before being allowed to apply for the right to remain.

The government's "compassion" was demonstrated by its treatment of Syrian and Palestinian refugees who landed on the RAF "Sovereign Base Area" in Cyprus last month. Britain considers this its "own soil" yet argues that the responsibility for the refugees lies with the already overstretched Cypriot authorities, and is in the meantime, incarcerating them behind barbed wire while providing only minimal humanitarian assistance.

### Phony Calais 'Crisis'

A few months ago stories of how migrants from Calais were "flooding" into Britain were all over the press. This was deliberate scaremongering by the media and ministers, with the help of Eurostar officials, in order to justify the xenophobic stance of the government towards all "migrants" and refugees.

The fewer than 5,000 refugees stuck in appalling conditions in the camp nicknamed the "Jungle" at Calais are a tiny contingent, compared to the hundreds of thousands still fleeing across Europe. They are not particularly attracted by Britain. They simply have no other options. 16 were killed (crushed by lorries or hit on the tracks) between June and mid-October. Recently two Iranians drowned in the Channel trying to swim to

a boat. What would it really take to welcome these 5,000 desperate refugees? Just a bit of humanity - precisely what politicians lack most!

### Pondering to the right

Across Europe, governments have been using the refugee crisis to overbid the political parties to their right. The Hungarian government is competing with the far-right Jobbik party by sending the army against migrants and building a barbed wire wall along its border with Serbia. The Austrian and Slovenian governments are now adopting a similar policies.

Angela Merkel, who initially agreed that Germany would take in 800,000 refugees, has hardened her stance after the German far-right started capitalising on the issue. She warned Afghan and Balkan migrants not to enter, arguing that they should return home to rebuild their countries. As if Afghans weren't fleeing an ongoing deadly insurgency and grinding poverty imposed by the imperialist powers! And as if Balkan migrants weren't trying to find a way out of a region which has not yet recovered from the civil war 20 years ago - for which the EU countries and the US bear responsibility!

Yes, the world's richest continent could easily make space for these refugees in search of a decent life, whose numbers, in reality, represent less than one thousandth of the EU's population!

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](mailto:contact@w-fight.org), or by postal mail at:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.