

WORKERS' fight



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

CAPITALISM IS UNAFFORDABLE!

Just as Osborne was bragging to his audience at the Davos summit about how well he was doing with the economy, the government-controlled bank, RBS, was issuing a very different assessment.

In a note addressed to its wealthy customers, RBS warned that 2016 will be "cataclysmic year", in which share prices could fall by another 10 to 20%. And the bank added: "Sell everything except high-quality bonds. This is about return of capital, not return on capital. In a crowded hall, exit doors are small."

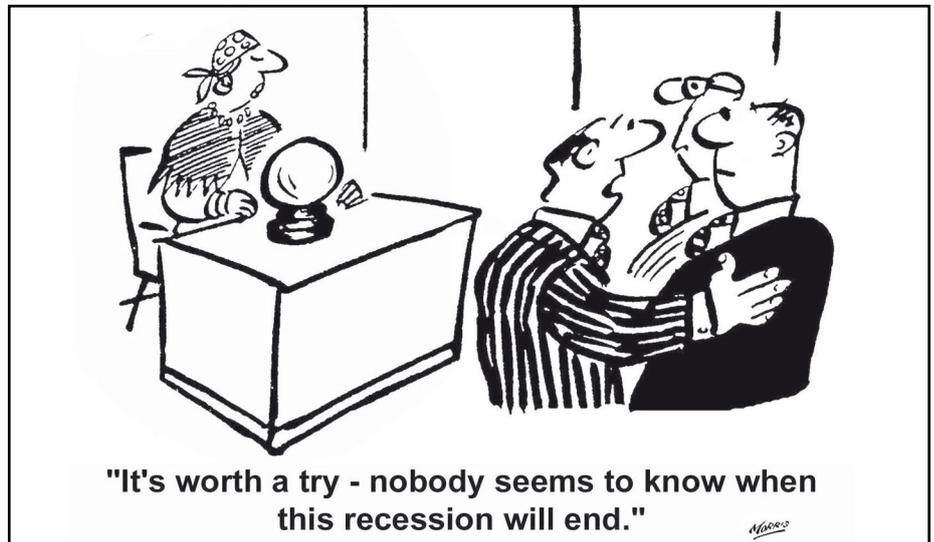
This probably says it all, as to the confidence that the capitalists have in their own system today. Whatever their politicians may say to allay the fears of the voting public, they themselves, have to admit that the crisis of their own system is as threatening as ever.

On-going tremors

2016 began with another spell of frantic gyrations on stock markets. So much so, that by mid-January, the combined value of Britain's 100 largest companies was down 22% from its last peak in April 2015, while the world's largest stock markets were showing a similar trend, with falls reaching 17% in the US, 25% in Japan and almost 30% in Hong-Kong.

No-one seems to agree on the causes of this financial chaos - except that it is the result of "uncertainty" among investors, which pushes them to get rid of their shares.

Some experts blame this "uncertainty" on the drastic fall in the world price of oil and other commodities and others on the risk of over-indebted poor countries going bust. Others still, point to the fact that the big companies' indebtedness is now back to its pre-crisis level, with this difference: that instead of funding new investment, they used the funds they borrowed to line shareholders' pockets.



In short, after years of heralding what they called a "recovery", the experts of big business are admitting that the planet is now littered with speculative bubbles.

In fact, some of them, like economics Nobel prize winner, Robert Shiller, point to the fact that, in some respects, shares have never been more overvalued than they are today, except on two occasions - just before the 1929 crash and on the eve of the so-called "new technology crash", in 2000!

Preparing for the future

The same causes being likely to produce the same effects, the implication of Shiller's assessment is that threatening clouds are hovering in the murky sky of this capitalist world. Of course, due to the built-in anarchy of capitalism, none of its experts can say when this threat will come to a head, nor whether it will take the form of a minor storm, or that of a hurricane.

But can the working class afford to wait for the disaster to happen?

Already, in major industries like steel and oil, massive job cuts are underway. Car manufacturers like BMW and Ford and construction equipment firms like JCB, are threatening to cut jobs or blackmailing workers into agreeing to pay cuts, allegedly to "save jobs".

But haven't we seen it all before, in the aftermath of the banking meltdown, 8 years ago? At the time, workers were caught unawares. This allowed the bosses to ride roughshod over the working class, cutting jobs, wages, conditions and public services - while shareholders were making a killing out of increasing the exploitation of workers' labour.

This must not happen again. This time round, the working class must be prepared to confront the capitalists' attacks. It may not be able to rely on union leaders, who have consistently failed to organise any kind of resistance. But it can rely on its collective strength and on the fact that, without its labour, nothing would work in this society! ☐

Housing

Cameron's Housing Bill talks of "regeneration" by demolishing "sink estates" as he calls them. But if they are "sinking", it is because neither his government nor that of his predecessors invested in maintaining or renovating them, let alone building collective facilities for the tenants.

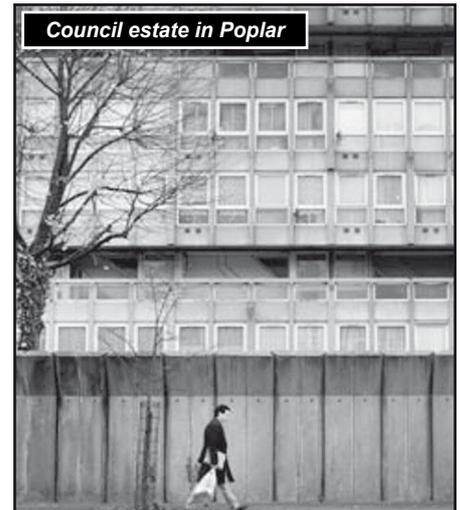
But what about the inhabitants of the "regenerated" estates? According to data obtained by the Greater London Assembly: 7,326 social rented homes and another 1,389 in the "affordable" category will be lost in the capital through estate regenerations that already have planning permission. And where will the

Cameron's social cleansing?

displaced tenants and owners go?

In the same Bill, a proposed amendment which would have forced landlords to maintain their properties to a decent standard was rejected - predictably, since many MPs are themselves landlords, including 39% of Tory MPs.

The message is clear: kick the poorest out of city centres, unless they can manage to rent privately, but even then they would have no guarantee of a decent home! Some tenants have rightly tried to organise against this, but it is an attack on all workers and should be treated as such. ☐



Making a catastrophe out of the housing crisis

This new Bill is in fact an all-out attack on social housing and threatens to turn the housing crisis into a catastrophe. If passed, it will limit new social housing tenancies to a maximum 5 years. It will allow social rents be increased for "high-income" tenants - to be defined by regulations - or in particular areas. The promised "right to buy" for housing association tenants is there too and, to fund it, a duty on councils to sell their highest value vacant properties.

While shrinking the stock of social housing, the Bill requires councils to promote "starter homes" - yet another version of so-called "affordable" housing for home ownership. They will be available to first-time buyers under 40 at a discount of 20% of market price, which will be funded by choosing sites where builders can be exempted, among other things, from providing infrastructure improvements. An indication of the "affordability" of these "starter homes" is given

by the fact that their discounted price will be capped at £450,000 in London and £250,000 outside - neither of which is "affordable" for most.

These measures are aimed at the Tories' high-earning natural supporters who have been kept off the property ladder by uncontrolled house price inflation. But they are also window dressing for a housing policy which aims to reduce the right of working people to decent housing and even consign that right to history!

Welfare state

• **DWP: Department of Worst Punishments**

Universal credit - which combines job-seekers' allowance, employment support and housing allowances, income support as well as child and working tax credit - is designed to rob the poorest. Over two-and-a-half million families on in-work benefits, for instance, could lose £1,600 a year. Single parents will be £3,000 a year worse off. What's more, most of those depending today on weekly or fortnightly payments, risk getting into arrears due to the 5-6 week wait for universal credit: in the Tameside borough of Manchester, where the first pilot was introduced in 2013, it has produced a chronic debt cycle. Nevertheless, all those on benefits will be forced to 'transition' to universal credit by 2020. Many will be automatically switched over if they have had to notify any change in their circumstances.

The DWP specialises in kicking people when they're already down. Dawn Amos, suffering from a chronic respiratory disease, was denied attendance allowance (Osborne's version of disability benefit) on the day she died. In another case, the grandparents of severely disabled Warren Rutherford, were subjected to the bedroom tax because they used an extra room for medical equipment and an overnight carer. When a court granted their appeal against this tax, the DWP dragged them to the Supreme Court to reverse

the ruling!

The DWP has nothing to do with giving the working class "work and pensions" - but everything to do with making savings for the capitalists by harassing the poorest in its ranks.

• **"Simplifying" the way workers are robbed**

From April this year, there will be a new "simplified" flat rate state pension, replacing the basic pension which was previously topped up by the additional pension and other benefit payments, depending on one's National Insurance Contributions (NICs). To receive the full amount, of around £155/week, workers will need to have paid NICs for at least 35 years, when previously, this was 30 years! And if NICs have been made for fewer than 10 years, workers do not qualify for a state pension at all!

But many haven't earned enough for much of their working lives, to have paid NICs in the first place. So the lowest-paid workers will simply not receive a state pension! Besides, private sector salaried staff who were part of a "contracted out" pension scheme which allowed them to pay lower NICs, will now have to pay higher contributions - meaning an effective pay cut!

The government has plenty of money when it comes to bailing out the capitalist class, but when it comes to pensions - deferred wages - workers are tricked in

all sorts of ways. So no, this not a case of the government 'simplifying' pensions - it is simply a means to rob workers of more money!

• **The scroungers and their morality tales**

In 2011, Cameron brought forward the date by which women's retirement would become the same as men's, from 2020 to 2018. By 2018, the retirement age for both women and men will be 65 - as opposed to 60 and 65 respectively today - and this will be increased to 66 by 2020. With all due hypocrisy, this was presented as a measure in women's favour, since they will be treated equally!

On top of that, the DWP has made a mess of it, by failing to inform women who would have been pensionable in the next couple of years according to current law. As a result, those who were born in 1953-54 may discover that their right to a pension will be delayed by up to 18 months, compared to what they expected.

Of course, any pretext would do for the state to make savings and no-one should be surprised that they dare to use gender equality. But, as far as workers are concerned, gender equality should mean something else - in today's conditions, it would require that all workers, women and men, should be able to retire early enough on a decent pension, so as to be able to enjoy their retirement!

Doctors giving Hunt another dose

Junior doctors are to stage their second 24-hour strike - on 10 February. Despite further negotiations after their first strike in 40 years, Health Secretary Hunt, behind the NHS Employers, still insists on making them pay for his cuts to the NHS budget.

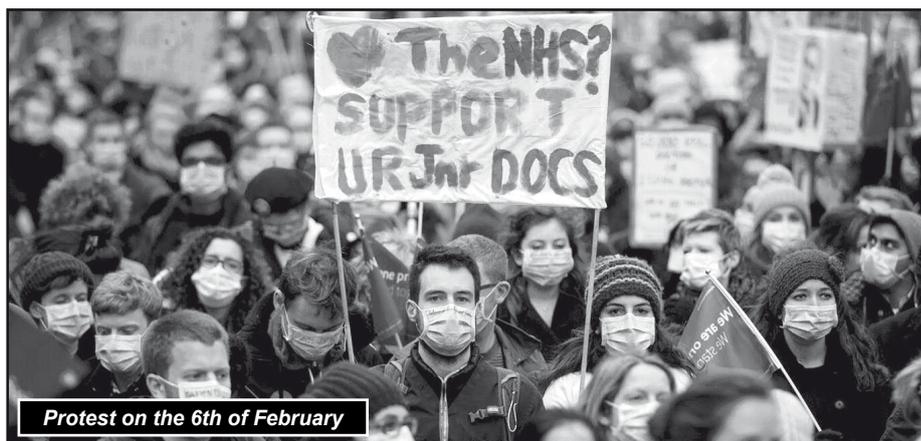
It looks like a deadlock. Hunt has said the new contract will be imposed, like it or not. The minimal concessions are: unsocial hours' payments would start at 9pm instead of 10pm on weekdays, but he still wants Saturday to be a normal working day until 5pm, with a +33% rate between 5pm and 9pm and on Sunday! The night rate all through the week would be +50%, including Saturday and Sunday night. So 60 unsocial hours paid at premium rate, instead of 90.

But there are also other cuts

• Don't dial 111

How do you cover for an understaffed and underfunded NHS? You start a "helpline"! "NHS Direct" was launched in 1998 under Blair to substitute for GPs "out of hours" and overcrowded A&Es. It was staffed by trained health workers (usually nurses) and after a shaky start it at least provided some help. But in 2013 the ConDems withdrew funding (700 jobs cut!) and the "NHS Choices" 111 call centre, staffed by cheaper, (zero-hours?) untrained staff was set up. Well-named - since patients faced with no GP service and inaccessible A&Es had no other "choice" than to phone it.

However, in December 2014, baby William Mead died after both the GP out-of-hours service and a 111 call centre, failed to pick up that he had septicaemia. His parents were repeatedly told he just had a cough. The report into his death, published this January, criticised the lack of trained staff in 111 call centres. But it's



Protest on the 6th of February

- like no guaranteed paid breaks beyond 20 minutes in every 12 hours and only (impossible) "time in lieu", if they are missed. Ironically, A&E doctors are hit hardest and will lose on average 4.3% of their pay. No wonder over 50% of A&E vacancies

not just lack of training. Last November, a 22-year old "NHS Choices" employee, Emma Alsopp, was found hanged in a toilet during the last of a run of four 12-hour night shifts! Her father said: "At the 111 centre there were never enough people...". Staff said they dreaded coming to work.

Indeed. That says it all. None of this would ever happen in a system run according to the needs of patients and workers, rather than "efficiencies" and profit.

• The NHS is falling down

The latest NHS stats, comparing November 2015 with November 2014, show 34,000 A&E patients kept on trolleys for over four hours; 200,000 operations delayed; and waiting lists growing by 1,100/day. The number of patients delayed in hospital on the last Thursday in November (5,600) was the highest on record. The number of patients waiting longer than 62 days to start first

NHS

at training grades are unfilled and dangerously long waiting periods are "normal" for patients.

So, yes, junior doctors have every reason to fight back in the face of these attacks and all workers have every reason to support them. □

treatment for cancer was up 14% year-on-year, with 83.5% starting treatment within 62 days, 1.5% below the target of 85% - a dangerous wait for urgent treatment, by any standards!

The government's "ring-fencing" of the NHS means isolating it from the cash it needs: annual increases are the lowest in its history, at 0.9% until 2020, compared to 4% previously. To plug the NHS Trusts' £2.2bn deficit, Hunt has come up with an "extra" £1.8bn - but only for those showing they're making cuts, including in "headcount", on pain of dismissal of the whole Trust board.

Yet Britain's NHS is already lagging behind - coming 13th out of 15 EU members in terms of health spending as a proportion of GDP. Its historical efficiency relied on staff goodwill allowing it to spend less to get more. But that has long ago reached its limit. Hunt's new contract for junior doctors is a cut too far. Let us hope they continue to refuse surgery.

The on-going fight for women's rights

In early February, a young Northern Irish woman was put on trial for taking pills to cause an early abortion. Pro-choice campaigners responded by staging street protests. In fact, 200 women had already defied the law by signing a letter saying they had taken these pills.

Bizarrely, this prosecution was brought under legislation dating back to... 1867, despite the fact that the 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act allows for abortion in cases where the mother's life could be at risk or where she could become a "physical or mental wreck".

Even the abortion laws in poor countries like Brazil or Colombia - recently under review due to the Zika virus and its role in foetal malformations - are hardly worse than in Northern Ireland!

Only a few doctors in NI are willing to take the risk of a jail sentence (up to 14 years!) by carrying out what may still be considered as an illegal abortion. Consequently, the number of legal abortions halved to just 23 in the last 2 years, while an estimated 2,000 women travelled to mainland Britain - but, of course, they need to be able to afford it. A

Abortion

crazy situation, given that Britain still insists on Northern Ireland being fully British!

But these archaic laws are still defended tooth and nail by the churches - while politicians won't dare to challenge their reactionary influence. Fortunately, some women are determined to fight to have the right to control their own lives. And we should stand fully in solidarity with them - all the more so, as here in Britain, there are attempts to curtail the already inadequate access to free abortion! □

European Union

Their attack on EU workers is an attack on us all!

Cameron's politicking over his EU reform - for the sake of the "in/out" EU referendum ratcheted up several notches prior to the draft deal offered by Donald Tusk, president of the European Council on 3 February. Of course there's nothing much in it. And anyway the issues are to be thrashed out behind closed doors at yet another EU "summit" in Brussels on 18-19 February.

But, returning from his European grand tour, Cameron has been using all the cards in the pack. And especially on the one issue which gets his backbenchers so red in the neck, i.e., immigration. So the trusty old race, sorry, "migrant" card comes into play. Cameron promised to deliver a 4-year wait for in-work benefits (i.e. no tax credits for low pay) for any migrant worker slaving away in a zero-hour job.

Cameron's balancing act

Cameron has a big pain in his red neck over this EU referendum. He must wish he never promised it. Because the Tory party - like Labour, for that matter - has always been split on the issue. Can he rise to this abject occasion? He must please British bosses who want to stay in, out-Ukip potential Ukip voters who want out, by doing enough anti-immigrant nationalistic flag waving - and sing patriotic lullabies to his own ranks...

At least 4 of his cabinet ministers want Brexit: Iain Duncan Smith, of Work and Pensions; Theresa Villiers



All workers have the same interests

But how far does this go? No-one should be under any illusion. Once the bonfire of workers' rights starts, there's no knowing where it will stop, if it's left to burn! For instance, does Cameron's "reinforced subsidiarity" mean that Britain will opt out of the Working Time Regulations? Will it opt out of the (very lenient)

Temporary and Agency workers' regulations too?

Regardless of the outcome of the EU referendum, the bosses are targeting working class rights. So British, foreign, temp or permanent, the only way to stop them is if we organise to fight them at every turn, as workers, together. ☐

of EU-dependent(!) Northern Ireland, Employment Minister, Priti Patel and Chris Grayling, "leader" of the House of Commons. So the first PMQs after the Tusk draft, was a real test of party discipline. But apart from Boris Johnson's nearly obsequious request for assurance that EU law wouldn't be allowed to infringe on laws made by the "British parliament", the 50 or so Eurosceptic MPs held their tongues.

Once the deal is done however, they'll be able to campaign for Brexit - and the vote itself will be a "matter of

conscience". If Brexit wins, Cameron may find himself under pressure to resign as PM, even if he's said he won't. Which is why those with ambitions to jump into his shoes sooner rather than later, may well switch from "in" to "out" (Gove, Johnson and others). All of this doesn't bode well. The free movement of labour may be something the bosses all want, but while this lousy capitalist system remains, free movement is also something workers need. The "Fortress Britain" of the Brexit lobby isn't in our interests.

Is the British state above all laws?

Leigh Day, a prominent London law firm, plus individual solicitors, who had all brought charges against the British army for their criminal treatment of detainees during the occupation of Iraq, have been referred to the Independent Solicitors Disciplinary for alleged "misbehaviour".

In its bid to discredit Leigh Day, which has brought a series of successful claims against the British army for war crimes in Iraq, the MoD has produced all sorts

of spurious allegations. For instance, it claimed that Leigh Day "acted improperly" by holding a press conference in 2008 to put pressure on the Labour government to order an independent inquiry - which it finally did in 2009 (the Al-Sweady inquiry). Even more absurdly, the MoD blamed the firm for offering its services to people in Iraq itself! Well, where else, given the many thousands of Iraqis who have suffered at the hands of the British army?

Now the government wants to get Leigh Day (and any others who may venture into such murky waters) to pay for the Al-Sweady inquiry since "the public, and the soldiers who have been subject to malicious lies, would expect nothing less". True, the soldiers and public have certainly been lied to - but by the politicians and generals who ran the show during this bloody war and who should be put on trial for it. But of course, no laws apply to them, do they?

Zika: another virus feeding on poverty

The World Health Organisation has announced that the recent increase in microcephaly ("small head") cases in newborn babies, linked to the Zika virus, constitutes an international public health emergency. The virus, which may have infected 3 to 4 million people in South America by the end of this year, has already been found in 1.5m cases in Brazil. And these are probably

underestimates, as the vast majority of the population has no access to basic health provision or tests.

In fact, this virus has been able to spread rapidly due to the poor infrastructure in these countries. The mosquito larvae grow in stagnant water, which is widespread in poor areas, due to the lack of drains and sewage systems, while the absence of

water supplies means that water tanks are used instead of running water. Secondly, the virus can be found in the blood and has also been transmitted by intimate contact with body fluids and sex. However, in these countries, the vast, poor population has no access to health information, nor contraception.

Like in many past pandemics, the Zika virus feeds on the miserable living conditions of the poor!

Turning victims into criminals

Fifty-two thousand people crossed the Mediterranean Sea to get to Greece in January - more than 35 times as many as in January 2015 - and more than 250 people drowned. But the only response that Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council, managed to offer was that the refugees should be incarcerated and screened for 18 months over "security concerns" after reaching Europe.

Of course, it's far easier to imply that the shadowy figure of a terrorist

could be hiding behind each refugee, than to do anything to really help them out. As to Cameron, his position is just as cynical, but more hypocritical, when he pledges to "help" Syrian refugees to go back in order to rebuild their country - this, at a time when the RAF is helping to bomb Syrian villages and towns into the ground!

There could be solutions to the refugee crisis, though. The rich European countries have the means to transport all the refugees coming

• **Fortress Schengen**

The Schengen area - formed in 1985 to abolish border controls between its members - includes 26 European countries. On the 4th of February, however, six of its members - Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden - reintroduced border controls.

As for Greece, it is under threat of being expelled from the Schengen area if it fails to control its own borders with non-Schengen countries. As far as the Schengen area leaders are concerned, the refugees who are rescued off the Greek coasts should either stay there or be sent back to Turkey - despite the fact that this country already shelters 2.2m refugees!

To avoid the collapse of the Schengen area, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands are pushing for a new system of EU border guards funded by all member states. Of course, the Schengen area was never designed to serve the interests of the populations anyway, whether in or outside Europe. It was merely a device aimed at consolidating a sphere of influence around the rich EU countries. And now, the only solution to the refugee crisis these rich countries can produce, is to turn the Schengen area into a fortress!



Refugees at the Turkish border

• **Scandinavia: dangerous overbidding**

The Scandinavian countries were, so far, relatively open to refugees compared to the rest of Europe. But now, they are turning the screw on foreigners and, for the first time, planning massive expulsions.

Thus, Sweden, Norway and Denmark have re-introduced border controls. Sweden announced that 80,000 asylum applicants are to be deported and that police forces would be doubled to enforce expulsions. Finland plans to deport another 20,000 asylum seekers. As for the Danish government, it has given its border police powers to confiscate valuables worth in excess of £1,000 from refugees - thereby giving credit both to the idea that, somehow, the refugees are well-off and that it would be too expensive to help them!

What is significant about these measures is that they were taken by very different administrations: the Swedish government is a coalition between the Social-Democrats and Greens, whereas Norway, Denmark and Finland are run by right-wing governments. But beyond their political differences, all these politicians make the same calculation - that these reactionary measures will shore up their electoral support against the rise of the xenophobic far-right. The odds however, are that on the contrary, this will only reinforce the xenophobic thugs.

• **Targeting refugees**

While Cameron keeps claiming that migrants in general and asylum seekers in particular, are a "burden" on Britain's public services and jobs, he has allowed some companies to make fat profits on their backs for a long time. Among these is G4S, Britain's largest security services company. In addition to the host of prisons it runs, it is also responsible for "housing" asylum seekers, both in high security deportation centres and in more "open" housing while they are still being processed. It is in this latter capacity that G4S and its subcontractors Jomast were caught red-handed, displaying the same despicable contempt for refugees as Cameron does.

In Middlesborough, in particular,

Refugee Crisis

from Turkey by setting up a shuttle service and organising their accommodation across Europe. With its 500-million strong population, the continent could easily cater for a refugee population of a few million and give them a chance to build a better life for themselves!

But no, the rich countries leaders have created hell for these populations. But instead of paying their debt to their victims, they only want to criminalise them. □

Jomast placed refugees in its properties in various working class areas, but "just happened" to paint their doors red, thus making the occupants an easy target for abuse - or worse. When one refugee repainted his door, Jomast had it painted red again!

And then there is Clearspring Ready Homes, which houses newly-arrived asylum seekers. It forced them to wear brightly coloured wristbands which would identify them to agencies providing them with food, vouchers, etc., but also identify them to racists. So the choice was between being an easy target for thugs, or starving.

When these stories came out there was an enquiry and these companies have since halted these practices. But it says something that this can happen while politicians vociferously condemn Nazism and the Holocaust and sanctimoniously say "Never again": because it recalls what happened under Fascism when Jewish people were compelled to wear a yellow star.

The Many and the Few

The great abyss between the rich and the poor has never been so great. Sixty-two individuals now possess as much personal wealth as 3.5 billion of the poorest in the world, who, according to Oxfam, have become 41% poorer in the past 5 years alone. In the same period, Britain's 100 richest increased their wealth by £57bn!

In fact, this dizzying wealth is being made on the back of deepening poverty. To make "savings" for themselves, the bosses have thrown millions of people into unemployment. This year, for the first time ever, the number of unemployed workers in the world will increase above 200 million, without counting the huge section of the working class which is "employed" in all sorts of non-jobs. At the same time, the employed and unemployed are pushed into further poverty as governments cut social spending to subsidise the capitalists.

In this crazy world, the poor bake the pies, and the rich steal them and get fat... with a lot of help from their governments!

Fat cats corner

The big oil companies are using the 70% fall in the price of oil as a pretext to slash jobs. Shell and the oil service giant Schlumberger are cutting 10,000 jobs worldwide each and BP 4,000. In Aberdeen, where 65,000 North Sea oil related jobs were cut last year, BP is now planning another 600 job cuts, with more to come from the other oil giants.

Predictably, Scotland's SNP administration rushed to the oil giants' rescue. Its "Energy Job Taskforce" is paying them £5,000 for each apprentice they take on - on the apprentice minimum wage of £3.30/hr! - to replace the workers whose jobs have been cut! As for the Unite

Oil giants: can pay, must pay!

union leaders, they called for the oil majors to be granted tax breaks to "save jobs", while going so far as to "advise" them to make "efficiencies" - such as getting offshore crews to work 3 weeks at a stretch, rather than 2!

Yet it's not as if these companies were short of cash. BP paid £4.6bn in dividends last year, Shell £2bn and Schlumberger £1.7bn! What's more, they have no problem finding cash to swallow lesser rivals: Shell acquired BG Group for £36bn and Schlumberger took over Cameron International for £8.7bn! Isn't it time they were forced to return some of their huge accumulated profits to the workers who produce them? ☐

**TfL : Public brand, private profits**

Transport for London recently made an announcement that it will be taking over the inner suburban lines of the private railway companies. Of course, they won't be confiscating the present franchises, whose owners have been creaming off public subsidies for years, but will wait until they expire. TfL will then gently take over from Southern and South-eastern to run services from London Bridge, Cannon Street, Charing Cross, Moorgate, Victoria and Waterloo.

So, if it's publicly owned, it will be "not-for-profit", right? Just like the ads all over the Underground announce: "*TfL does not make a profit from fares. All income is reinvested to run and improve services for customers and users.*" Well, not quite. Under the cloak of "public" TfL ownership, there's a whole range of profiteering subcontractors operating TfL Buses, the DLR, TfL Rail, Crossrail (starting 2019) or the Overground. Take the latter, for instance. TfL has actually

subcontracted its running to a company called London Overground Rail Operating Limited (LOROL). LOROL is co-owned by two private companies: MTR of Hong Kong (which will also run Crossrail), and Deutsche Bahn AG of Germany. Last year, LOROL made a £4.17m profit, and paid out £3m in dividends. If this "income" is "reinvested into the service", it is only into the "service" of these companies' shareholders!

• Safe haven for delinquent banks

Both the FCA, the City "regulator", and HMRC have now officially decided to turn a blind eye to HSBC's tax evasion operation.

Six years ago, a whistle-blower leaked files concerning thousands of bank accounts discreetly stashed away in the vaults of HSBC's Swiss subsidiary. The details of 9,000 British tax evaders were passed on to the FCA. But it sat on its hands until some newspapers unearthed the scandal, last year.

In January, however, HMRC admitted that it had closed the case after having pursued just one criminal prosecution out of the 150 potential cases it had earmarked - thereby leaving all but one of these 9,000 tax delinquents to get away scot free. As to HSBC itself, the Swiss authorities ordered its local subsidiary to pay a £28m fine for its "organisational deficiencies". But neither the bank, nor those of its directors who organised this massive tax evasion, will face prosecution!

That leaves only one real criminal prosecution resulting from the scandal, in Switzerland - against the whistle-blower himself! He was given a 5-year jail sentence in November, for espionage and violating banking secrecy - in his absence, after France granted him asylum...

• Yes, Mr Banker!

The past year saw Cameron's government selling a series of public assets on the cheap. It raised £26.4bn by selling off, among others, a final 30% stake in Royal Mail together with shares in Lloyds, Northern Rock Mortgage Assets, RBS and Eurostar. And there are plans for more, including the privatisation of Channel 4.

The irony in this is that, under the pretext of "fixing public finances", they actually offered very nice profits to their capitalist buyers. For instance, last August, Osborne sold a small part of the 75% stake held by the government in RBS - just 6% - and yet managed to make a £1bn loss - or, to put it another way, this was a £1bn gift to the capitalist class.

In fact, £24.2bn out of Osborne's £26.4bn sales in 2015 concerned banking assets. And, judging from the RBS scandal, these sales were just a continuation of the banking bailout - in another form.

• Tax free paradise? Just Google it

So, it turns out that the "major success" of Osborne's tax policy in his dealings with Google, was in fact, a great deal for Google. Instead of paying the £1.6bn it owes (its estimated total unpaid tax over

the past 10 years), Google gets away with refunding a mere £130m - bringing its tax payments since 2005 to the grand total of £200m! When its estimated profits in Britain for that period were £7.2bn! It's not for nothing that its shareholders have just been promised a £3.5bn bonus!

While letting Google (and many other business giants) get away with paying so little tax, Osborne forces 400,000 disabled and poor to pay the bedroom tax - for an annual income of just 1/3 of what Google owes! Any logic in this? Yes! That of a government bent on doing the bidding of the rich. In this rotten system, the majority of workers and poor are subsidising the few wealthy - but only until they decide enough is enough.



BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Pay offer? No, a pay cut!**

Instead of the pay rise due on 1 January, BMW announced in the last week of January that it is cutting the Friday night shift from the regular working week until February 2017. The company claims that, due to market uncertainties, it needs flexibility and will reserve Friday nights for extra compulsory shifts as required, along with Saturday mornings.

We will be paid for a 35-hour week instead of 37 hours, but supposedly "compensated" by a payment equivalent to 2 hours basic pay per week. But to get this

"compensation" we will have to work six extra unpaid shifts over the year! The payment will not compensate for the loss of the Friday night shift premium, which will leave those on the main production grade about £14/week worse off even if they do qualify for the payment. The minority of agency workers will lose even more, since the compensation is not available to them at all!

Ironically, there will be no vote over this pay cut, on the grounds that it is only an "adaptation" of the existing shift pattern! All this, with the tacit blessing of Unite officials



who agreed it behind our backs. As if cash-rich BMW, whose profits add more than £400,000 an hour to the fortune of its controlling family, could not afford to maintain full pay for all its workers! Many of us consider that the union leadership, already deeply compromised by years of partnership with the BMW bosses, has crossed another line.

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Drunk on its record profits**

We see Ford's BOASTING that it actually made a £179m profit in Europe, part of its £7.5 BILLION profit globally, and expects to make an even bigger profit in 2016. Shareholders got an additional \$1 billion bonus on top of dividends; how much did we, the harassed and sweating, 3-tier, subcontracted, workforce get? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/2/16]

• Next time we lead...?

In fact this is no surprise! Ford fed us an obvious lie that they were losing £1.5 billion in 2015. But, as usual, FNJNC union officials decided to use this as an excuse to imitate a doormat in front of Ford bosses and avoid recommending a strike! First, when they submitted the timid pay claim and then, when they told us to vote for Ford's lousy offer. Does this leave the union full-timers with egg on their faces, or



wot? With leaders like donkeys, we have to find lions in our own ranks ...[Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 4/2/16]

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Payback time**

Look at all the recent pay offers here: Rail Gourmet: 1%, Virgin East Coast (VTEC) 2.5%, and the less said about the 4-yr GTR deal the better (works out to 29p/h at best)! The excuse is "low" inflation, but so what? Our problem is "low" wages, which don't pay the bills! [King's Cross Workers' Platform 27/01/16]

• The usual trek was needed

So ISS workers yet again had to go to Unity House to find out what was going on with our strike ballot! But only reps were allowed in. Why? Aren't we all part of the union? Nevertheless, our visit seems to have worked. We're now promised that ballot papers will arrive without any further delays! [King's Cross Workers' Platform 13/01/16]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Good news, yes, but...**

So this is it! Finally Romec will be fully back in-house. While that may be good news, it certainly doesn't give us back our former RM Ts&Cs. No - we're told nothing changes! As the Romec boss said in his letter to us, "it's business as usual"! But that precisely, is the problem - we don't want "business as usual" here in Romec! We want much better!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 27/01/16]

• How can we vote for this?

Just look at the agreement: how can we vote on it when it packages everything - good and bad - together? We get to be part of RM, BUT must accept a derisory pay offer of 1% for 2015 (de facto pay cut), 1.5% for 2016, 2% for 2017, which won't uplift cleaners' low pay?

And a 2-tier cleaning workforce: new starts on the min wage, (3yrs "progression" to max. pay) - goodbye "equal pay for equal work"? Redundancy pay capped at a max of 2 year's salary? Cleaners' and engineers' bonus schemes gone, replaced with incentive



schemes relying on "overachievement"? Engineers to improve 15% on current "productivity" while tracked on GPS? And why's nothing said about the famous "shares"?

So, while it's "yes" to being back in RM - on this "Agreement" we can only vote NO! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 27/01/16]

China

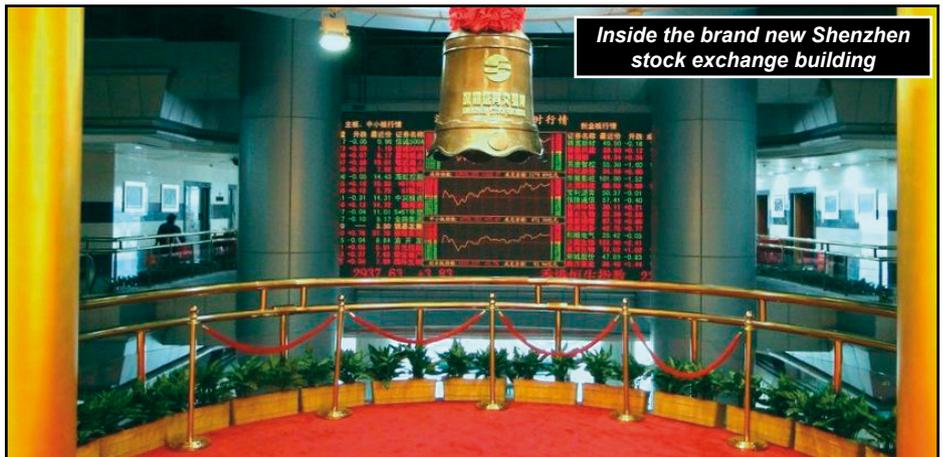
A limping capitalist "tiger"

Less than a year ago, Osborne was still trumpeting that China would be pulling the world out of the crisis. Well, no more. This autumn, the same Osborne was warning against economic "headwinds" coming from China and blaming China for, among other things, the job cuts in the British steel industry.

In fact, the Chinese economy has been sliding down the slippery slope for a long time. The crunch came in the form of a series of brutal falls on China's stock market. And, so far, massive injections of fresh cash by the central bank - equivalent to nearly £100 billion - have failed to stop the meltdown.

So what's happened to the Chinese "tiger"? Of course, there was the world crisis. A sharp reduction in orders from western companies caused a wave of bankruptcies and plant closures. What is more, China's ability to export was hampered by protectionist measures introduced by some of the rich countries - like the US, for instance, China's biggest export market, which slapped a 277% duty on a whole range of its steel products.

But there was another, more vicious factor. After the 2008 collapse, the craze among western big business was to lend money at extortionate



Inside the brand new Shenzhen stock exchange building

interest rates to "emerging countries". In China, which was their main target, huge infrastructure projects got off the ground on the back of this massive inflow of speculative capital. Whole new towns were built for a so-called "new middle-class" which only existed in the dreams of western speculators. Soon, China was littered with a host of ghost towns and other white elephants. Having pocketed fat interest payments for a number of years, western speculators finally decided that China was becoming too hot for them. Last year, they pulled out massively, taking £500 billion out of the country. This has left China's

finances in tatters, with a mountain of debt and caused the meltdown of its stock markets over the past months.

Today, by an ironical twist, it is China's economic slowdown which is threatening the world economy with a boomerang effect. The reduction in world trade, which, so far, had been partly concealed by China's ever increasing imports, is coming back with a vengeance. But, in addition, the massive flows of speculative capital roaming the world in search of a quick buck are now inflated by those which have fled China - thereby threatening to destabilise the whole planet's economy even more brutally. □

The working class fights back

Just like here, the Chinese working class is at the receiving end of the capitalists' attempts to preserve their profits against the crisis of their system.

Job cuts, for instance have been massive. Since 2013, 890,000 jobs have been slashed in the coal industry and 550,000 in steel. And there's worse to come: six sectors have been earmarked for a 20% cut in production in 2016, including coal, iron, steel and cement, which could result in up to 3.6 million workers losing their jobs! But this is only the tip of the iceberg as countless over-indebted firms in every sector of the economy have gone bust.

But the Chinese working class hasn't taken these attacks lying down. 2,774 strikes have been recorded in 2015, twice as many as the previous year. Among them, 36% were in construction and 32% in manufacturing. In most cases

these strikes were over unpaid wages - in some cases following the announcement of a plant closure and the failure of the employer to pay his due.

Given its resilience, the Chinese working class deserves all the more respect, as it has to face a repressive regime which throws working-class activists in jail as soon as they try to organise any kind of action. And it is this resilience that workers in Britain should keep in mind when they see union leaders joining Cameron in blaming China for job cuts in British steel plants and calling for protectionist measures against Chinese steel imports. The Chinese workers are not the enemies of the British working class, they are their best allies. Both working classes have the same common enemy - this capitalist system which has long passed its sell-by date!



Women strike inside a handbag factory in Zhongshan

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.