

# WORKERS' fight



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

# WE WON'T PAY THE BILL FOR THEIR MESS!

By ruling that May has to go to Parliament to trigger the Brexit process, the High Court has thrown a spanner in the works. And even if she wins her appeal against this judgement, it won't be easy to just brush it aside.

Besides, what are the pro-Brexit politicians complaining about? Didn't the Leave campaign want to "reclaim powers from Brussels for Parliament"? So, why do they want to leave these powers in the hands of Downing Street alone?

Not that giving a say to Parliament would be any more democratic than the opaque process planned by the government, of course. Both are institutions of the capitalist class. For the working class, both are equally opaque and neither of them represents its interests.

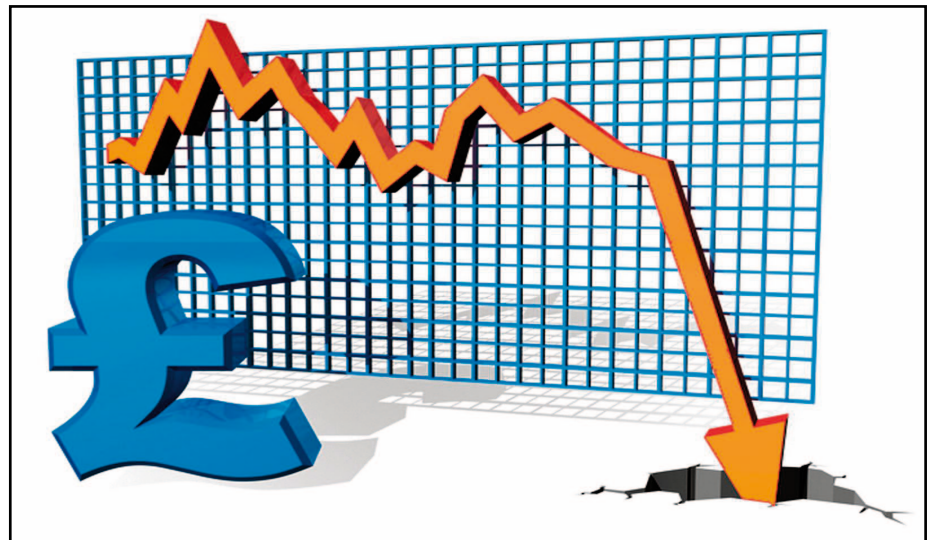
## ***Behind May's fears***

But then tossing a coin between two bad options under a flood of lies, without the means of measuring their consequences, was no democratic choice. Yet this is exactly what the referendum was, just like the presidential election in the US at the time of writing and, in fact, like most elections in this society.

The ballot box is only there to pull the wool over workers' eyes by claiming that they're having a say when, in fact, there's no way for them to use their ballot paper to defend their interests.

As to Parliament overseeing the Brexit process, it would mean that a Tory majority elected by only 24.4% of all registered voters would oversee a process which was endorsed by only 37.5% of these voters!

Is this why May is so worried about giving MPs a say? No. Rather, it's because it would put the floodlights on the in-fighting within her own party. The Tories remain just as deeply split over this issue but also others as they were when Cameron decided to



call the referendum, in an attempt to appease his Eurosceptic right-wing!

So, not only would going to Parliament over Brexit expose and probably exacerbate these Tory divisions, but it would make the government dependent on the support of at least a section of Labour MPs. And if the Tories are to remain in power after the next general election, they need to avoid both at all cost. So, ultimately, this is all about electoral politics, no less but no more!

## ***Grapes of wrath***

Meanwhile, even before Brexit comes into force, the working class is under attack. While Osborne's planned welfare cuts are imposed on the poorest, Hammond is preparing to present the working class with the bill of his ballooning deficit.

At the same time, the pound's fall is pushing prices up and real wages down. And while May makes secretive deals (at what cost for public funds?) with big manufacturers, there is no guarantee that this will make jobs any safer.

That Brexit was bound to cause more financial instability in a crisis-ridden world was no big secret. In fact, this started long before the referendum itself. But never mind. In their obsessive search for votes and internal rivalries, the Tories took the risk.

Of course, the capitalists can rely on the fact that whatever happens, May and her ministers will subsidise them or even bail them out.

Even Corbyn and McDonnell, have now apparently decided that they have no reason to oppose Brexit, are bending over backwards to try to convince British bosses that Labour would do a much better job than the Tories at defending their interests in the Brexit process.

But the working class cannot rely on any of these politicians to defend its material interests in the chaos created by Brexit. Against those who are already starting to present it with the bill for their mess, it can only rely on its collective strength and on its fights to make the bosses pay out of their accumulated profits. □

**Brexit watch**

The recent ding-dong between Tesco and Unilever, after the Anglo-Dutch multinational Unilever announced a 10% price increase for a whole range of its home brand products, was a good illustration of the scenario that the Brexiters consistently denied in the run-up to the referendum.

Since the vote itself, the pound has lost 17% of its value against both the dollar and the euro. But the fact that it was going to happen was plain for all to see. In fact, the pound started falling from the very day in February that Cameron announced the date of the referendum. At the time, major institutions like US bank Goldman Sachs already expected sterling to fall by around 20% in case of a Brexit win. And they have been proved right: over the 10 months to October, the pound has lost 24% of its value against the euro and 21% against the dollar.

What this really means for the

### • **Behind the Singapore crash**

The latest fall in the value of the pound started on 7th October. Within minutes of the opening of the Singapore currency market, the largest in Asia, the pound suddenly fell by 10% against the dollar and the euro. Thereafter, the so-called "flash-crash" spread like wild-fire to the rest of the world.

Then the "experts" stepped in. Some claimed that this crash was triggered by faulty programs driving the computers used by investment funds in their speculative operations - but then, why had they failed at this point, since these programs are used all the time? Others blamed

### • **Just another lie**

Brexit supporters, including the likes of Liam Fox and David Davis, claimed that the fall in the value of the pound would herald a new era of expansion for manufacturing and export expansion for Britain, thanks to British goods being cheaper on foreign markets. Except that none of this has actually happened: Britain's trade deficit almost doubled over the summer, while its industrial production fell.

The point is that British capital has so little trust in its own system that it does not invest in increased production - quite the opposite, in fact, since productive investment is still going down. As to the cheap pound it may well make British products cheaper on foreign markets.

## **Why should the working class foot the inflation bill?**



working class is inflation. The Tesco-Unilever clash is just the visible part of the iceberg. Overall, prices are now expected to increase by 4% over the coming year, instead of the 0.7% initially predicted. And since a huge proportion of basic consumer goods are imported, the real increase for working class households is likely to be even higher - far higher, in any

case, than average wage increases.

And this means that the working class has got a task ahead - to use its collective strength, across all sections, in order to force the bosses and their politicians to increase wages automatically, in proportion to price rises, without any delay, in real time. □

the "tough" stance taken by some EU leaders in response to May's speech at the Tory party conference, in which she sounded as if she was opting for a "hard Brexit" - as if they hadn't taken such a stance before!

But wasn't the prospect of Brexit, taking place against the backdrop of a worldwide crisis with no end in sight, bound to add to the general financial instability? Weren't jittery speculators likely to react by betting on a fall in the pound and getting rid of those they held? Despite the denial of the Leave campaign, this was all predictable.



But, conversely, it makes foreign components used by British manufacturers more expensive. And, in some industries, this is not a small matter: in the car industry, for instance, foreign-made components make up around half of the cost of a car manufactured in Britain.

In any case, the result is there. The Brexiteers' promise of returning Britain to its long-gone "grandeur" as the workshop of Europe turns out to be just another mirage.

### • **Always a silver lining for the rich**

Who benefits from the falling value of the pound? Investors in British companies who pay dividends in dollars or euros certainly do. The fall of sterling in July-September added £2.5bn to dividend

payouts and is forecast to add a further £3.1bn this quarter. Even a pound stabilised at \$1.23 over the whole of next year would mean an extra £4bn on dividends. A rate of \$1.10 would mean £8.3bn more! Investors could get an £11.7bn bonanza in 2017 if the pound reached parity with the dollar. So not only are those with plenty of money to invest set to make a killing, the worse the pound's crisis gets, the more they will make!

And who pays? According to one of the heads of a large London-based investment company, "there will be a battle over who bears the brunt of the extra costs... In the end, it will probably be shared by the supplier, retailer and the consumer". Except that, unlike the wealthy, working-class households won't have gained a premium on any dividend!

## Divide and rule

Anti-immigrant xenophobia hasn't died down after Brexit. Politicians are busy fanning its flames to boost their own political profiles. Amber Rudd, May's home secretary, even went so far as to announce that employers would have to publish the number of their foreign workers - implying that they were supposedly "stealing" British jobs. Never mind that numerous reports have exposed this to be a lie, or that some industries (like the food industry) are having manning problems due to fewer EU workers wanting to come to work in Britain.

In any case, big businesses objected, arguing that this move would damage the UK economy. They got May to slap Rudd on the wrist, forcing her to claim that it had only been

### • **Brexit, Man-xit, Birm-xit...**

Immigration lawyers hired by the City of London have come up with another post-Brexit scheme. It is designed to provide migrant workers - both cheap and skilled, who are essential for business - without this requiring the present "free movement of labour".

They argue that big cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle should be allocated regional work visas to allow companies to recruit foreign workers under a new, tighter, but local, border regime. London's Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, is campaigning for such a visa for London!

However, in order for this to be effective, restrictions would have to be placed on the mobility of foreign workers within the country.

They and their families would have to be prevented from moving out of a particular city. Their visas would have to be checked every time they have to go on a journey, when renting flats, going to the doctor, taking mortgages, etc...

And what next? A "pass" system,



a "suggestion." These same capitalists never objected to Cameron's policy of stoking up anti-migrant prejudices. But when politicians

reminiscent of the passes imposed on black people in Apartheid South Africa?

### • **The land of justice**

So far this year, 700 British solicitors have applied to register with the Law Society of Ireland, against an average of only a hundred in previous years. This has everything to do with Brexit, of course. According to an official with the English Law Society, this may be "a useful insurance policy. No one knows actually what Brexit is going to look like!"

In fact, London's biggest law firms are worried that their most important clients, most of which are large companies operating across several European countries, might be tempted to look for some other legal firm in the EU to represent their interests there. By getting their solicitors to register in Ireland, these firms are just making sure that they will retain the right to represent their current clients in front of EU courts, whatever happens with Brexit.

Behind this, there is serious money: out of the 5 biggest London-based law firms, known as the "magic five", 4 have

push this policy to the point of interfering with their businesses, as Rudd proposed, they do object. And they make sure they are heard. □

revenues over £1bn. Justice may be blind... but it still has to keep the cash flowing!

### • **The Stump is growing?**

The tallest building of the City of London was expected to be 288m high, with 88,000 square meters of office space. Construction started in 2008 but it was brought to a halt by funding problems in 2012, leaving behind an unfinished, building of only a few stories, which came to be known as the Stump.

But thanks to cost cutting and a new building design which is 10m shorter, a new consortium, led by the French insurance giant Axa, bought the site in 2015 and construction is now expected to be completed by 2019, if another bout of financial chaos does not upset funding once again, especially in case of a hard Brexit.

Will this building be finally completed and how high will it be? The future will tell. But wouldn't it be ironic if, after Brexit, the tallest building in the City of London ended up being French?

## • **McDonnell's "people's Brexit".. for the bosses**

Speaking at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers last month, shadow chancellor John McDonnell left aside Labour's official Remain policy to declare that "Labour in government is the only party that would be prepared to take the necessary measures to make a success of Brexit." But McDonnell added that contrary to May's "bankers' Brexit", he supported "a People's Brexit". So what did he really mean by that?

First, said McDonnell, "Labour will fight for all British businesses, not just financial services, to have single market access". So it's a Brexit in which Labour intends to be a loyal servant of British

capital as a whole, but which would include free trade with the European Union.

Second, went on McDonnell, "Labour will take back the economic levers of power currently in the hands of the EU, such as State Aid rules". But this is just endorsing the tired, old lie which says that much of what has gone wrong in the past in Britain should be blamed, in some way at least, on the EU, rather than on the British capital and their government. As if, for instance, the privatisation wave, which started in Britain long before anywhere else in Europe, could be blamed on the EU!

Third, McDonnell pledged that Labour

would introduce "an industrial policy worthy of that name" and "provide the support our strategic industries like steel need". This will be music to the ears of union leaders, who have long begged for state intervention to contain the discontent of their members. But, above all, it will be music to the capitalists' ears, since this "support" is just another way of subsidising their profits on the back of the working class!

So in fact, McDonnell's "People's Brexit" turns out to be old Labour's fairy tale claiming to reconcile workers' and bosses' interests - as if these interests could ever be anything but opposite!!

## Refugee crisis

The few dozen "unaccompanied children" from the Calais refugee camp, who finally arrived in Britain at the end of October were paraded in front of the media and boasted about by Theresa May, as if the British government was some kind of virtuous paragon.

Never mind that they only got here because the High Court intervened against Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, who'd adamantly refused to admit them, even though they have a right to asylum under British immigration law!

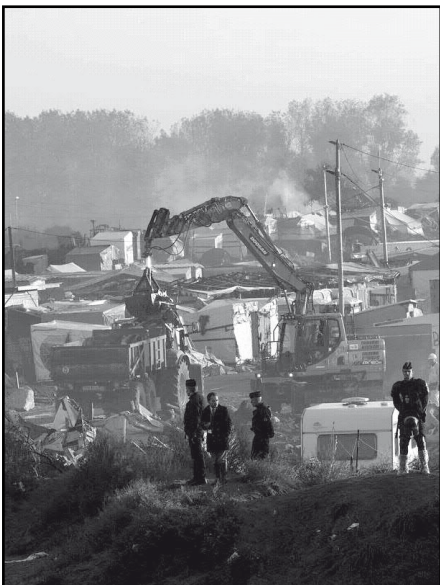
And never mind Britain's leading role in causing the wars and deprivation which have led to this, the worst refugee crisis since WW2 (with an estimated 65m displaced persons worldwide). When Syrian refugees in their hundreds of thousands tried to reach Europe last year on foot or by sea, Cameron initially refused to take even one!

### A cynical token gesture

In fact it was only after the shocking pictures of the body of 3-year old Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach last September, appeared

## • Bulldozers can't "demolish" a refugee crisis

The Calais "Jungle" refugee camp, which existed on and off for 17 years, is no more. Bulldozed and burnt, most of its residents were removed by coach to various centres around France. Others, mainly unaccompanied children, were left on-site, in shipping containers, until the following week, when they too were



## Crocodile tears over the refugees



in the press, that Cameron's government announced a Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme, allowing 20,000 "selected" refugees from camps in Turkey to settle in Britain.... over a period of 5 years! Up to March 2016, just 1,602 Syrians had arrived - 600 of them despatched to desolate parts of Scotland!

Unlike Britain, not only have the other rich European countries taken a fairer share, but so have many much poorer Middle Eastern

countries. Germany, for instance, took one million; Sweden took more (163,000) than any other, in proportion to its population. As for poor Turkey, it is home to 2.2m refugees while tiny Lebanon shelters 1.5m - over 10% of its population.

If all 7,000 Calais refugees - adults and children - had been taken in by Britain, the population would have increased by 0.0001% ! Just one refugee per 8,000 members of the population... How could that be a problem? ☐

### The "Le Touquet" scam

Following in Cameron's footsteps, May's refusal to take in the Calais "Jungle" refugees, led to calls for the Anglo-French "Le Touquet agreement" to be repealed. This is the agreement which allows the British Border Force to carry out passport checks in France, before passengers cross the Channel.

It goes back to 2002, when Blair's Home Secretary, David Blunkett, was waging a cynical campaign against asylum seekers, accusing them of being a burden on Britain's public services. On the other side of the Channel, his ambitious opposite number, future president Nicolas Sarkozy, was busy whipping up anti-migrant prejudices. It wasn't too difficult for them, therefore, to reach an agreement clearly designed to be a weapon against asylum seekers.

Indeed, the whole point of this agreement was to stop asylum seekers from setting foot on British land, which would have allowed them to have their asylum requests examined. In other words, this was just a devious way for the British government to break its own laws and deprive asylum seekers of their statutory rights. Illegal and revolting? Yes, but every government has got away with it so far!

removed to orphanages in France. But to prevent them "escaping", since they'd expected to be taken to Britain, two British Home Office officials accompanied each coach.

These children were all entitled to come to Britain: some of them, because they have relatives living here and the rest, under the so-called Dubs amendment, passed in May - which states that lone refugee children are entitled to asylum. But 6 months after this amendment, only one in four councils has any kind of provision to receive these child refugees - despite extra funding from the Home Office.

And what about the adults? Even if they already "qualify", because of relatives residing in Britain, or would have the simple right to asylum under international law, they aren't admitted. Applications are subject to such long bureaucratic delay (and error), that trying to cross the Channel on the back of a lorry, seems their best option. And this is why the end of this Jungle is just the beginning of another Jungle, somewhere else.

## More tent cities to come

Just a week after the Calais demolition, news came of yet more migrants drowning off Lampedusa. On 3 November, two rubber dinghies carrying up to 300 refugees capsized with only 31 survivors - which brings the total drowned this year in the Mediterranean to 4,220 - the highest so far recorded.

In fact, many of the young men in the Calais camp were survivors of such perilous journeys. Escapees of civil war and famine will keep finding ways to reach a safer place no matter what authorities do. And isn't it far better to pitch a tent outside a Paris tube station like Stalingrad (named after the WW2 battle!) even in winter, as several

thousand refugees did, until their eviction, this same week?

But trust the Daily Torygraph newspaper to twist the story and portray the fight against this eviction as "bad" rival refugee gangs fighting each other! Like the Jungle refugees, they're now being taken to centres where they'll hopefully be given a proper roof over their heads. But there can only be short-term solutions for this situation, unfortunately, until the day when the divisions between rich and poor people and rich and poor countries are abolished - by the overthrow of the rotten capitalist system which lives off this inequality. □

## • In the media gutter...

To find examples of the way the media has whipped up anti-migrant feelings one never has to go far. On the day of writing, for instance, the front page of the Daily Express newspaper says: "COMING TO YOUR TOWN? ALL councils could be forced to house asylum seekers as numbers swell" and there follows an article on how councils may be forced

to take refugees - something which is voluntary up to now... according to the manager of the private security company, G4S, which the councils subcontract to house vulnerable asylum seekers...! He had a conversation with someone at the Home Office, which apparently is enough for an Express headline.

But is it even true that "numbers

## Refugee crisis

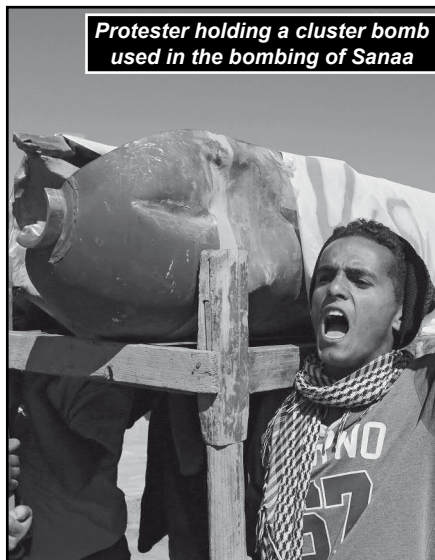


swell"? Quite the contrary! There have been barely 1,000 refugees accepted in 2016 out of the 4,000 which should have been admitted under the VPR scheme alone and as for the few hundred children, now allowed in from Calais, half already have relatives to go to. But never let truth get in the way of prejudice!

## The British state has blood on its hands, once again!

As long as 18 months ago, a Saudi-led coalition launched a bombing campaign and a blockade against Yemen, claiming an estimated 10,000 victims, according to the UN, including 4,000 civilians. Meanwhile 14m people are threatened with starvation. But the coalition carries on targeting agricultural sector production and essential facilities like Yemen's only milk sterilizing factory.

This is only collateral damage for the Saudi Air Force's most important arms suppliers - Britain and the US. In fact, Whitehall has approved £3.3bn worth of arms exports (including cluster bombs whose debris has been found in villages bombed into the ground)



## The state of world poverty

According to a World Bank report, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (on less than £1.56 a day) across the planet decreased between 2012 and 2013 - as it has ever since 1990. Yet their absolute number has increased. And although the Bank says its aim is to abolish extreme poverty by 2030, it's falling very

short of this target: in 2013, 767m people were living in extreme poverty or 10% of the world population, which is much more than the entire population of either Europe or the US! What's more, as the World Bank points out, even when people become less poor, they remain exposed to natural disasters, which push them

since the intervention began.

Last month, Labour finally moved a very tame motion which called on the government to withdraw its support for the aggressors, pending a UN investigation. It didn't even explicitly call for an end to the supply of arms, unlike Corbyn during the PMQ session earlier that week!

But even that proved to be too much for Labour MPs: 102 of them (almost half) decided to abstain or stay away.

What do these politicians care for the lives of millions in Yemen (a country so far away from their little island) as long as their cushy seats are safe?

back over the edge.

Does it mean that today's society with its highly sophisticated scientific and technological knowledge is still incapable of eliminating poverty? No, it only shows that the resources of the planet, which are in the hands of the capitalist profiteers, are in the wrong hands!

**Cuts watch****The snake that bites its tail**

In September, the pro-government Office for Budget Responsibility admitted that the deficit would overshoot its original £55bn forecast for 2016, by £17bn. The OBR blamed this on stagnating VAT receipts and a collapse in corporation tax receipts to their lowest level since 2009.

But is it any wonder? Since 2009, every government has been cutting the rate of corporation tax, so that it has fallen from 28% down to 20% today! As to VAT receipts, their stagnation merely reflects the fact that the standard of living of the working class majority went down the drain after the beginning of the crisis and has still to recover, while welfare cuts and rising labour casualisation have only made matters worse.

Ironically, ever since 2008, every

### • **Hypocritical cuts on children's backs**

The government has been forcing some of the poorest councils: Sandwell, Doncaster, Slough, and Birmingham to hand over children's services to new, private, supposedly non-profit trusts. This was allegedly justified by sub-standard ratings by Ofsted.

Ironically, however, the government is planning a reform of children's services through the new 'Children and Social

### • **Teaching? No future!**

The government's schools minister, Nick Gibb was forced to admit that these days, schools aren't able to retain teachers and that 30% have left within 5 years of starting their teaching careers. Actually a You Gov poll painted an even worse picture, with over 50% considering leaving within the next 2 years - some to teach overseas, some to change to the private sector and others to leave the profession altogether.

The complaint of many teachers - besides larger and larger class sizes, thanks precisely to the loss of teachers - is that they are expected to "teach to exams". In other words the imparting of knowledge for knowledge's sake is nigh on impossible, because of the many tests and examinations pupils need to prepare for. And the government has just added one more - with its grammar schools initiative, the old "11 plus" selection test will now become much more widespread. Well done!

### • **Bus services: run down for 30 years**

30 years ago, bus services outside London were deregulated. Before that, council bus companies and metropolitan passenger transport executives provided



cut in jobs, conditions and social expenditure has been justified by "deficit reduction". And all this, just to go back to square one today, with an even larger deficit! But, this time

round, at least, the working class knows what to expect: it will be asked to foot the bill again, that is, if it allows the capitalist class and its politicians to get away with it! □

Work Bill' which will inevitably degrade standards. If adopted, it would give the Secretary of State for Education the powers to exempt local authorities from some of the statutory duties they have towards children as a result of nearly 3/4 of a century of legislation. It would also allow local authorities to request an "opt out" from these duties. So for instance, independent reviewing officers

could be removed from monitoring 'low risk' children in care, or the assessment process for the placement of children with friends or family could be relaxed despite the obvious risks in both cases.

Given the precarious financial position of most local councils, this law could open the way for privatisation of children's services throughout the country.

urban services and the National Bus Company and Scottish Bus Group's local branches provided the rest. Around 1986, they all became limited companies, ready for privatisation. County councils retained a commissioning role and supported unprofitable services with grants, but were banned from subsidising fares, which meant big fare rises. Privatisation did not happen everywhere, but to date, only 12 council-owned bus companies remain. The largest being in Edinburgh, Nottingham and Cardiff.

In the 1980s, Thatcher claimed that competition would reduce fares and get more people using buses. But over the past 2 decades alone, fares went up by 156% compared to 77% for retail prices, while the number of bus passengers outside London went down by a third. As to competition, deregulation led to the emergence of the bus giants: by 1997, Arriva, Stagecoach and First controlled about half of the whole bus industry's turnover, changing and dropping whole services at will. And they continue to do so, especially when councils withdraw their subsidies, as Oxfordshire did this summer, pulling the plug on 50 services at a stroke. The last thing they serve is the interests of the public.

### **Letter from Sussex**

Back in April, non-emergency ambulance services for Sussex, Kent, Surrey and north-east Hampshire were subcontracted to Coperforma. Immediately there was a huge increase in patient complaints. Transport for dialysis and chemotherapy failed to arrive and hospital staff worked past their shifts to treat patients arriving late, often by taxi.

We've since learned that Coperforma itself had immediately subcontracted to four other companies. One was LM Langford, set up by a Matthew Quigley, who has bankrupted a string of ambulance firms. Then, as now, his company failed to pay ambulance drivers. It is now in administration. Quigley and Coperforma are threatening legal action, each accusing the other. There's no doubt that both are guilty! But Quigley, who has changed his name to Curran, continues to set up new companies, one of which even tried to buy bankrupt LM Langford!

The GMB union pushed for its members to be paid, demonstrating outside the office of the GP who chairs the Clinical Commissioning Group. Eventually they were paid, but by the CCG, not Curran nor Coperforma!

## Homelessness: back to the 1930s?

Homeless rough sleepers in Leeds claimed a victory against the council's bid to evict them from Park Square, near the city centre, in October. This square was the second site where they had pitched their tents, in order to demand action from the council against homelessness. The council went to court to get an injunction against the camp, but on the day of the hearing agreed to allow it to relocate to the site of a swimming pool on the edge of the town centre - for a further six weeks.

Similar homeless campers, all demanding proper homes, have been taken to court by councils in Manchester, Nottingham and Bristol since last autumn. With private rents

### • Housing costs up and away

It's official: house prices are now 10 times the average salary in 122 local authorities in England and Wales, or about a third of the total. The ONS figures which show this, based on median prices and salaries, point to the widening gap between the poorest and richest areas. In Burnley, Lancashire, the median house price of £78,000 is less



soaring, inadequate social housing and cuts to council budgets, the social crisis in Britain is recreating the "Hoovervilles" of unemployed US

than 4 times the median salary. But in Westminster, a house costs 23 times the median salary. Significantly, only 5 of the 122 authorities mentioned above are in the north of England and none is in Wales.

Private renting follows the same pattern too, as private landlords set rents proportionally to the inflated

## Housing

workers in the 1930s. These rough sleepers are right to organise themselves, and right to resist attempts to hide the problem away! ☐

market value of their properties. 14 of the 15 least affordable local authorities for renting are London boroughs and the 15th is Sevenoaks, which is only just outside London, with rents at nearly 60% of median salary. In other words, these figures show how the housing crisis is spreading in ripples far beyond London.

### • IDS: I Didn't Say that

Was Ian Duncan Smith suffering from amnesia when he launched a campaign against the benefit cuts planned by the government? These are part of the rolling out of Universal Credit (UC, which replaces a host of welfare benefits). He declared that they were "too harsh"!

As if IDS wasn't behind every single benefit cut during his 5 years in

### • The life-expectancy gap

A recent report by the Office for National Statistics shows that on average men in the UK live in 'very good or good health' for 63.2 years and women for 64.6 years. But these figures hide discrepancies. For instance in London's Richmond-upon-Thames, where inhabitants have an average income of £41,600, women live in good health for 70 years. While in Tower Hamlets, where average income is £30,805 (despite the fact that wealthy Canary Wharf falls within the same borough), the corresponding figure is 55.9! Likewise, in poor, de-industrialised Glasgow, men

government as Work and Pensions Secretary! In fact UC was his personal brainchild, and this, despite being warned that it would leave claimants seriously short (at least £1,000/yr) when it replaces tax credits. Did this prevent him from singing the old refrain that "work should pay" rather than benefits?

Many benefit claimants do work,

live on average six years fewer than the national average.

A 2015 study published by researchers at Imperial College London showed that the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor areas is widening. This hardly comes as a surprise. Workers are increasingly subject to casualisation, low pay and long working hours - with, among other deleterious effects, more stress and less rest. Cutting the benefit system down to the bone makes matters even worse. And now, with the economic effects of Brexit, the poorest will be hit even harder.

## Welfare

but work doesn't pay. Wasn't that why the tax credit system was introduced in the first place? To subsidise the same Scrooge bosses who invented today's zero-hours contracts - helping create "in-work poverty"? And now UC cuts will push the low-paid into penury. But don't expect IDS to denounce himself - or indeed the greed of his friends, the capitalist perpetrators!



**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• BMW must be stopped!**

The union leaflet distributed on Monday 31 October rightly accuses BMW of trying to rob our pensions and invites us to opt for action to defend them. The problem is that only half of us with contracts belong to the BMW Occupational Pension Scheme (BOPS): half of us are enrolled into defined contributions promising us very little, particularly if there's a stockmarket crash not long before we retire. Keeping BOPS open - and opening it to (past and future) new entrants - offers the best chance for us all to get a proper pension. [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 2/11/16]

**• More the merrier**

Three cheers, too, that for once Cowley is not being balloted on its own. This ballot is a reminder that the production "triangle" gives us allies against BMW's attacks, including in two plants, Swindon and Hams Hall, dedicated to supplying this one. [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 2/11/16]

**• Indefensible wealth speaks for itself**

BMW wants to dump defined benefits because it involves long-term commitment to our pensions. But of all the car giants BMW's value is second only to Toyota's thanks to its bulging balance sheets.

BMW's leading shareholders, Susanna and Stefan Quandt, would not just be on the Rich Bus with the other 60 richest in the world. As the 8th richest family, they'd be sitting near the front! Yes, BMW could easily afford to provide us all with final

salary pensions. [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 2/11/16]

**• And unfortunately for BMW...**

By coincidence, as if to underline the hollowness of BMW's plea of poverty, Manager Magazin produced its annual German Rich List in October. And the "winners"? With a combined wealth of £26.5bn, the BMW heirs, Stephan and Susanne Quandt, top the list for the second time! And they recently inherited another £10bn, from their late mother, tax exempt! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 5/10/16]

**• Cruising for a bruising**

BMW's press release said ending BOPS was meant to "protect the cost competitiveness of the UK as a manufacturing base". So it plans to make thousands of us poorer in retirement to protect its exceptional profits from any anticipated impact, and expects we'll agree "for the greater good of BMW's shareholders". Well, we won't! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 2/11/16]

**• Drip and slip**

At PBS whenever there's any kind of blockage on the line, the wax builds up and spills on to the floor. Some painful falls on the resulting skating rink have resulted lately. You wouldn't think some solution for catching the drips would be beyond BMW, or are they waiting for someone to get seriously hurt? [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 5/10/16]

**• How new starts are shortchanged**

BMW/Gi's sabotage of the Agency



Working Agreement works quite simply. Workers starting here are not given a contract. They bank on the fact that no-one starting a job wants a confrontation the moment they walk through the door. New agency workmates can be subject to lower wages for a whole 2 years as opposed to the 12 weeks which the Agency Workers Regulations set out. And if they even get through those 2 years, they start another 12 weeks "probation", during which Gi can sack them for lateness and sickness. Time to put a stop to this! [BMW Oxford Mini 02/10/16]

**• Not just junior doctors under attack...**

Hunt's wrecking ball has NHS Oxfordshire in its sights. On present funding levels there will be a £200m gaping hole in Oxfordshire's Health Budget - that's 20% of Oxon's budget - by 2020. To meet it, plans are being pencilled in to close 5 community hospitals. Already a GP practice in Bicester is about to go and Deer Park Medical Centre in Witney will close next March. That is, unless users start protesting loudly. [BMW Oxford Mini 02/10/16]

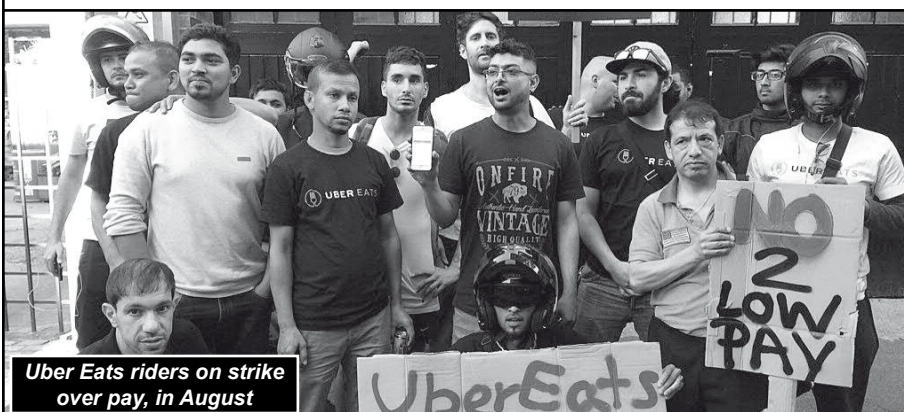
**National Living Wage...in Dickens' England?**

For the 4.5 million workers on the so-called national "living" wage of £7.20, things are set to look even gloomier. Their wages are predicted to rise more slowly than the post-Brexit cost of living. This is because

of the way this "living" wage was designed by Osborne: it doesn't actually increase in line with inflation, but only according to predictions based on how much average wages may increase. The fact that

the government's own economists are predicting lower-than-expected pay rises just goes to show that they are now convinced that the economy will be depressed by Brexit, something they'll never admit publicly.

So much for Theresa May's good words on becoming prime minister, promising "ordinary working families" that she will "make Britain a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few." Well she's just shown how much hot air that was. And for the working class, this means the task ahead is clear: using its collective strength to demand a reliable system indexing all wages to the real cost of living.



Uber Eats riders on strike over pay, in August



**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**

**Ford fairy tales**

Jim Farley, President of Ford's European division, writes in the company's in-house magazine that the biggest problem at the moment is the "uncertainties surrounding Brexit" and the impact on sterling's exchange rate against the euro. Since Ford cars sold here are almost all imported from Europe, a weaker pound "hits (their) profit margins". But this is not the whole truth. Farley doesn't mention that Ford hiked its British prices by 1.5%

in October, ostensibly to counter the effects of Brexit. Nor does he mention how Ford halved its investment in the Bridgend Engine plant, threatening hundreds of jobs, apparently also to anticipate future losses...

Ford of Britain Chairman Andy Barratt says that "the best way out of [currency fluctuation] is to sell our way through it." After a previous career in Ford's sales division you can hardly expect him to say anything else! He aims to up car sales to half



a million in a year. But he also adds that the new "EcoBlue" transit diesel engine - which Dagenham workers know as the exploding Panther - is not only unaffected by VW's "dieselgate" but has a rosy future... Revealing himself as just one more Delboy..! □

**• Avoidable injury**

We were shocked that a workmate hit her forehead on the Panther assembly line. She was bleeding so badly that she couldn't even go to the Medical immediately, and they didn't come either. That's one problem. The other is that we don't get safety helmets for jobs with such risks. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 26/10/16]

**• Medical attention needed**

We also heard about the mate who had a stroke. This made us think about the fact that all shift-workers are meant to have annual medical checks under the working-time regulations - and that includes checking for high blood pressure which is a stroke risk-factor. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 26/10/16]

**• Hands off our Lion-heart!**

OK - for us in the Den, we now have some reassurances (as far as one can

ever trust Ford!) that we'll stay on the present shift pattern till December shutdown. Then it's going to be double-day shift. It gives us time, we guess, to adjust our lives. But we still do not accept that anyone should get a pay cut! Plus, our troubles aren't over: now a manager is trying to hassle one of our stewards - yet again! It's petty, vindictive and stupid and we're just not going to tolerate it. [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 26/10/16]

**• What chaos!**

So we had these 2 down days this week on Panther, on Monday and Tuesday. Is it that we've been over-building? Is there no demand for the new engine? Or could it be that management has decided to organise the production of 4 different engines across two plants and 4 machine shops with a workforce which has not been enlarged sufficiently for us to work either normally, or predictably? [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 26/10/16]

**• Never mind their issues - what about our's?**

We heard that Panther Phase 2 is on hold till all outstanding "issues" for Phase 1 are sorted. But there are so many "issues" that what happens next is anybody's guess! And our issue is when do we regain our lost (3-shift) pay? We need it now! But why shouldn't every single one of us be on this rate - since we're all on the same crazy job-merry-go-round! It's nonsense that we're all on different rates - and for exactly the same work!

PS: this "Panther" engine happens to be Ford's prestigious new "EcoBlue Diesel" that it has been boastfully displaying at all the motor shows. Never mind that it has head, gasket and overheating problems which still aren't fully ironed out! And may never be, at this rate! [Workers' Fight Bulletin Ford Dagenham 26/10/16]

**Nissan deal: where's the workers compensation?**

It seems that Nissan - the biggest car manufacturer in the country - has been offered a deal by Theresa May in compensation for losses which it might incur due to Brexit. This has been enough for CEO Carlos Ghosn to withdraw his threat to disinvest and agree to build two new models at the Sunderland plant - securing 7,000 jobs - for now...

While no-one knows the exact terms of the deal, bosses of other companies are lining up for similar reassurances: that either their tariff-free access to the EU market will continue, or they will be compensated accordingly. Given that Business secretary Greg Clark also made visits to other car companies - including Toyota headquarters in

Japan, and some closer to home like Jaguar Land Rover, Honda and BMW - no doubt they will be expecting a helping hand too...

Unite the union is backing the companies' demands for compensation, but has said nothing about

compensation for the workers - who are not only being asked to pay for Brexit, but who are owed compensation for serial cuts in jobs, pay and conditions, over the past several years, while their bosses got government handouts!



**Nissan factory in Sunderland**

## Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

**Pensions: don't delay our fight!**

The government wants to close the defined benefit (DB) Royal Mail Pension Plan (RMPP) in April 2018. Everyone is to be switched to a (poorer) defined contribution (DC) scheme. RM is in the meantime demanding that its pension contributions are reduced from 17.1% to 10%. The government has just

closed the DB scheme for Post Office workers - who were left on their own to take token strike action against this by the CWU leadership earlier this year.

The RM DB scheme was already cut in 2008: converted to "career average" (CARE) and closed to new



members, who were placed in a DC scheme. So this is the second attack. Some union activists have produced an unofficial bulletin to rally the troops, referring to 2008, when RM decoupled pension negotiations from the pay negotiations and got away with the pensions' cut. They argue that this time, pensions must be linked to the new 2018 negotiations on pay and conditions, for the sake of maximum workforce "unity", ensuring that the third of RM workers who're now in a DC scheme, will join the fight. But does that mean waiting till 2018 to start the action? And surely "unity" isn't a tactical matter, but achieved by building support on the ground..? ☐



Swindon's sorting office

- **Hardly a cliff-hanger**

So after months of rumours circulating about drivers' night shift hours changing, now we hear managers saying we can expect an announcement on the issue any time "soon"(?). Do they think if they keep us in suspense we'll be "pleased" when we finally hear the result?

They couldn't be more wrong. We don't want to hear anything about our shifts being changed to such an ungodly hour, for managers' convenience! We suggest they go and fetch Moya Greed and her big shareholder-cronies to come and drive the vans. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/11/16]

- **Rage against the machine**

Yes, we know that the Swindon packet-sorting machine is delayed, doesn't work with all packets and can't recognise certain bar-codes... but what we really want to know is what's going to happen to our jobs, particularly for us on the CSS machines - if and when? We know RM will use any excuse to cut jobs, so we want to prepare for this one! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/11/16]

- **Sad becomes tragic**

We had yet more goodbyes to say this last week when a number of our workmates left/retired. We wish them well. And we also wish RM would replace them. This is getting to sound like a broken record - but when we find

ourselves confronting a floor full of yorkies piled high and we know we can't even begin to deal with them - the exodus of more of our mates without permanent recruitment to replace them, isn't just sad, it's a disaster! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/11/16]

- **"Experience is the mother of wisdom"**

Yet, in its infinite wisdom, RM has gone for another wave of EVRs in December, the time of the year when it gets the busiest! Not that the rest of the year is an easy walk.

So, as per usual, we're heading towards a chaotic Xmas. We thought that after all this time, RM would have learned the lesson - but as another well-known saying goes, "greed is the mother of all evils"! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 3/11/16]

- **A bird in the hand...?**

So financial commentators are telling us to hang on to our RM shares for two more years. If we sell now, we will have to pay tax; in Oct 2018 the proceeds would be tax-free. But with or without tax, who can tell for sure how much they'll be worth in 2 years time? In fact, not a single "wise" financial commentator can say what tomorrow will bring! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 20/10/16]

- **These boots are made for walking... out!**

Apparently 250 of our mates in Luton/Leagrave were due to strike Wed 19th

October, over management suspending workers and heavy workloads. Sound familiar? There aren't enough hands in here either, not to mention managers asking for trouble. So yes, we stand in solidarity with these mates. The sound of boots is the only thing RM understands! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/10/16]

- **We EC-HO that!**

Yes, and in EC managers are driving us to the point where it could be boots outside over here too! Because we've lost drivers and walkers to the point where we can't manage in "normal" hours. Managers overstep the mark on a daily basis. Some resistance-organising on dayshift is urgently needed. We're fed up! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/10/16]

- **Their problem, not ours**

Really, these managers are crazy to think that we'll take our breaks just when it suits them! Now they want us to take them at the beginning of the shift! All because they want to have all hands on deck when it gets very busy - and for hours on end... Quite obviously, it's precisely when it gets so busy that we get tired, and need our breaks! And by the way, the rushes and lulls in the mail traffic which cause these hyper-busy periods are entirely management-made. We refuse to compensate for them. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 19/10/16]

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

**Virgin sharks**

When Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) advertised 78 new drivers' jobs, they had 15,000 applications. This only underlines the difficulty of finding a decent job these days. But although VTEC drivers' wages are above average, no one knows what kind of contract is awaiting them.

Indeed, guards, station and catering staff on the East Coast line are currently in dispute against a threat to cut 195 jobs or almost 10% of the workforce. And this is in the context of an existing shortage of

hands, with all sections on the line demanding recruitment!

The new Azuma trains, to be rolled out in 2018, would have an option for drivers to release doors, instead of guards. So, it's not hard to figure out that the new drivers' contract is likely to introduce Driver Only Operation, in order to get rid of the guards, as some other rail companies are currently trying to do.

And Virgin certainly can't claim poverty or pretend it is cash-strapped: Virgin Rail Group's profits



increased by 28% over the year ending in March, while it doubled its dividends to shareholders. Which means that all of us, Virgin workers, whether on the West or East Coast lines, should unite across grades to make Branson pay! ☐

**• All together at last?**

Looks like the RMT and ASLEF are finally coordinating strikes for drivers on Southern? They're both balloting from this week (2 Nov until 18 Nov). And that surely means coordinating with the guards, who've turned down the £2,000 bribe and are due to strike 22-23 Nov and 6-8 Dec! While they're at it, what about including the many of us in the rest of GTR - and VTEC - facing job cuts, ticket office closures and restructuring, if not DOO...? [Workers' Platform King's Cross 3/11/16]

**• Highest fares in the world**

On the subject of passengers - and given the strike announcements in "the run up to Xmas" why not give them - since their interests are the same as

ours' - a free ride on all trains for several weeks? It might take some organising, but would give these greedy companies a well-deserved kick in their coffers.

**• ... and make it a number 1**

Mind you, if this new Consumer Rights Act does what it says, Virgin may well be coughing up for passengers anyway! And fast, since they agreed to pay compensation direct into accounts. It will now cover delays of 15 min or more, dirty/defunct loos, poor wi-fi, understocked buffets, etc, etc. Plenty to choose from!

**• Can't work, won't work!**

VTEC managers are unbelievable! We just had a mini strike to say NO to their "delivery plan". But nonetheless they're trying to push it, with so-called "sample"

December rosters - which would totally disrupt our lives! When we're still in dispute with them! We've agreed to nothing - even if the Company Council union reps are still "discussing"... (should they be?). Then there are the ridiculous "trials", to simulate the situation after their job cuts, with a couple of us "pretending" we aren't there, sitting it out, while the others do the work! You could not make this up! [Workers' Platform King's Cross 3/11/16]

**• We have to shout louder**

In fact it's obvious that VTEC didn't hear us first time round and that a 24-hour strike wasn't enough. We can't wait; we must hit them where it hurts, in their pockets. [Workers' Platform King's Cross 3/11/16]

**Hands off rail jobs!**

Britain's largest rail freight operator, DB Cargo, is making 893 job cuts (out of its 3,400-strong workforce) citing "the decline in coal and steel." But its parent is DB Schenker Rail (income: £3.3 bn), a subsidiary of DB Schenker Logistics (income: £17.5 bn euros) - itself a subsidiary of Deutsche Bank, Europe's 4th largest private bank! So there's no shortage of money there!

Yet rail unions - RMT, ASLEF, Unite and TSSA - accepted that the company was struggling, asking the government for a "rescue plan" and "protection for coal and steel." On public funds? Hasn't this company piled up enough wealth off workers' backs? So if they claim there's no longer enough work for all 3,400 workers, the existing work should be shared out between them, with

no loss of pay!

Of course, the bosses will not concede this willingly. But it could be the objective of a collective fight. And such a fight is all the more on the agenda today, when rail workers are facing similar attacks in

Southern, Great Northern, Virgin Trains East Coast, Scotrail, and the London Underground. Workers across these companies would have everything to gain by joining ranks together in a common fight against the bosses' attacks on jobs.



**Southern Rail picket at Selhurst Depot, in August**

**Middle East****The deadly chaos of western-made wars**

During October, fighting intensified in the Middle-East, especially around Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, and Mosul, Iraq's 3rd largest town.

**From the siege of Aleppo...**

In Syria, government and Russian forces have focused their bombing of Aleppo on the eastern part of the city, while the US and its main western allies, France and Britain, stood on the sidelines, leaving the dirty work to the Russian air force. By a cynical twist, this part of Aleppo is currently occupied by the al-Nusra Islamic fundamentalist militia, which was funded and armed, at various points by one or another of the West's main regional allies - Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates and Turkey - in order to weaken the Syrian regime.

Among the population of this large town, those who haven't managed to escape early enough, either to other parts of the country or to Turkey through the nearby border, have been holed up for months now, living a dangerous life, mostly in underground shelters, without regular supply of food, drinkable water or medicine. As to the alleged efforts of the western countries to broker a "humanitarian cease-fire" in order to contain the fire they helped to start and to provide a breathing space for the population, they have essentially been party to a sort of diplomatic show business. This allowed them to claim in front of their respective public opinions that they were doing something to stop this massacre. Predictably, it has resulted in total failure.

**... to the offensive to retake Mosul**

Meanwhile, on 18th October, an offensive was launched to retake Mosul from ISIL. It involves the Iraqi army and various militias, each defending its own particular agenda: from the Shia "Popular Mobilisation Forces", to the Kurdish peshmergas, the Turkish-trained private army of



**Iraqi troops in the suburbs of Mosul**

the city's former mayor, and others.

At the same time, although still in the background, thousands of troops have been sent by the Turkish government to occupy a military base, north of Mosul. Their presence is obviously designed to keep in check the Kurdish peshmergas and make sure that they leave Mosul in due time. But - who knows, given the increasingly dictatorial turn taken by president Erdogan's regime - it may also be aimed at asserting Turkey's long-standing territorial claim on this part of Iraq!

As to the western powers, US, British and French drones and warplanes are in full control of the sky, providing air cover to the advancing troops and bombing ISIL positions. However, this is hardly reassuring for the population of Mosul, given for instance, the air strike which killed 15 women and injured 50 others "by mistake", during a funeral, in the Kurdish town of Dakuk, on 21st October!

**An unending bloody war**

Not only are the populations of Mosul and Aleppo subject to the deadly "mistakes" of the western forces,

but they have every reason to fear the success of the current offensive which, despite what we are told by western leaders, will not amount to anything like a "liberation".

The rule of the fundamentalist militias may be ruthless, but so are the so-called "liberators" who have re-occupied towns like Fallujah and Ramadi in Iraq: in both cases the victors took their revenge on the inhabitants, with numerous arrests, torture and killings, under the pretext of eliminating those who had co-operated with the former occupying force.

So, the Middle-East is sliding even further into bloody chaos and not just in Aleppo and Mosul. In Baghdad, suicide attacks keep claiming a bloody toll, both in working class areas and in the high-security centre of the town. Meanwhile, shortly after the offensive towards Mosul had begun, ISIL launched an offensive against the suburbs of the Kurdish town of Kirkuk. No matter what western leaders may say about the "progress" of their operations, the population of the Middle-East is still paying the cost of a full-blown war with its blood. ☐

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:

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