

WORKERS' fight



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

It's not the EU we must leave, BUT THE PROFIT SYSTEM!

Thanks to Jeremy Corbyn's support, Theresa May finally got MPs' backing to trigger the Brexit process. Well, almost, since she faces 287 amendments to her bill, which must still be endorsed by the Lords. But then, she shouldn't complain. Didn't she want Parliament to be "sovereign"?

She has now produced a White Paper entitled *"The United Kingdom's exit from, and partnership with, the EU"*, outlining a strategy for negotiations. It guarantees that May will give MPs a say on all issues and that she will *"put the final deal that is agreed between the UK and the EU to a vote"*. Except that this is precisely what she said she would not do, given the overbidding of Brexiters within her own party!

Fairy tales and truth

In fact, this White Paper is an exercise in wishful thinking, underlining the advantages Britain has within the EU, which she wants to retain for British business. So much so, one could wonder what's the point of leaving in the first place!

So the Paper describes what a "leading", "world class" economy "Great Britain is" - presumably to convince the reader that it's fit to stand on its own feet. But then why was Britain's trade deficit growing for so many years? You won't find the answer in this White Paper: but the truth is that British capital's addiction to making a quick buck on financial markets starved the economy of productive investment.

But there's much more that this White Paper conveniently "forgets" when it hails Britain's "greatness" compared to the rest of the world. It doesn't mention that while Britain has more super-rich and bankers earning over £1m/yr, it also has the greatest inequality and the worst poverty among the rich European countries!



It says nothing about the abysmal state of Britain's infrastructure, the antiquated, over-expensive railways and the chronic housing shortage. There's nothing about the dire state of the NHS, nor that it has fewer doctors and hospital beds per inhabitant than any other rich European country.

Because this would mean acknowledging an uncomfortable truth: that for decades, successive governments cut social expenditure and public investment, to feed the parasitism of British capital. Something May continued, cutting public spending by £3.5bn, while awarding companies £6.7bn in tax cuts!

Enough of this system!

Yes, it is the capitalists' parasitism which has meant the degradation of living and working conditions. Contrary to what politicians have told us for years, this had nothing to do with the EU, nor with immigration.

It had everything to do with the greed of a capitalist class which keeps squeezing more profit out of our labour and out of public funds, with politicians' help. The Brexit process promises to

be just another exercise in ensuring this exploitation can carry on: May's White Paper says: *"we have already (given) clarity about farm payments and competitive grants"*. So those currently in receipt of EU subsidies will be compensated: "paupers" like the Duke of Westminster and the Queen will still get their £407,000/yr and £730,000/yr!

Except that because this money will now be paid by the Exchequer, it will mean more cuts in social expenditure!

And there's worse coming. May's White Paper will consider *"how employment rules need to change in order to keep pace with... growth in self-employment; the shift... from hiring to contracting... and the new business models such as on-demand platforms."* In other words the Brexiters want underpaid, non-jobs to become the norm!

So, no, the working class has nothing to expect from Brexit, nor from a profit system based on exploiting its labour ever more viciously. It has no interest in raising more borders - and every interest in getting rid of the profiteers! □

Social

In December, Education Secretary Justin Greening announced a new school funding formula due to start in 2018. This is supposedly meant to better redistribute public funds between schools. So, on the one hand, 9,000 schools will face a cut in their already inadequate budgets while, on the other, 11,000 schools are expected to gain a very small increase of less than 5%.

But there's a catch: these 11,000 "lucky" schools will also face a funding cut anyway! This is because, at the same time, the government is also looking for £3bn worth of "savings" across all schools - meaning an average 8% cut in funding per pupil, according to the

• Jobcentre closures – not a done deal

By March 2018, the government plans to have closed 78 Jobcentres out of 714, cut up to 750 jobs and forced thousands more claimants to travel further for their appointments. Among the more drastic proposals are the closure of half the Jobcentres in Glasgow! Employment minister Damian Hinds had the cheek to say the changes will better reflect a reality in which more people claim benefits

• Being poor is a crime!

Melanie Woolcock, a single mother, was sentenced to 81 days in jail for the "crime" of not being able to pay her Council tax, after losing her job due to bad health!

The Council didn't give a damn about her financial situation, nor the consequences for her teenage son of having his mother thrown

• BA's chickens come home to roost

Cabin crew members in the Unite union are escalating a pay dispute with British Airways, with 6 days of strikes between 5 and 11 February. Their strikes in January forced dozens of cancellations, although BA leased planes and crew from charter airline Titan, to provide cover.

The strikers are members of the "mixed fleet" crews to which BA has recruited all new cabin crew since 2010. Basic mixed fleet salaries start at just £12,192 (half of the estimated "living" wage) plus £3/hour "flying pay" and allowances making up an average of £16,000. In other words, hardly enough to live on, especially not in London or the South-East.

Ironically, BA started its mixed fleet as a new, lower-paid tier, to work a mixture of long- and short-haul flights, in reaction to an 18-month dispute in 2009-11. Then, the average salary of existing cabin crew was £29,900 (long-haul, with benefits)! Those strikes began in opposition to 1,700 cabin crew job cuts and a 2-year pay freeze and continued against victimisations. Mixed fleet was BA's attempt to get round its failure

School funding: robbing Peter... and Paul



National Audit Office. This, of course, means further cuts in staff, with increasing class sizes, less choice in terms of curriculum, fewer extra-curriculum

activities, etc., that is, a degraded education. Is this what the government calls redistribution? Yes, redistribution of poverty... ☐

online. Besides the fact that claiming "online" simply isn't an option for many who fall on hard times, JSA claimants still have to renew their claims in person every fortnight!

These closures are part of a wider cost-cutting exercise by the DWP, which includes closing and merging many "back offices", while a further 80 Jobcentres are to be moved into premises shared with local authorities,

allowing the DWP to sell the buildings. The civil service union, PCS has promised to oppose office closures, while focusing on preventing compulsory redundancies rather than the job cuts themselves. In other words, it's leaving the real fight to those on the ground - who, along with the growing number of "job seekers", have every interest in subverting the plan.

in jail. They decided to accuse her of "culpable neglect", implying that she wilfully neglected to pay. After she spent 40 days in jail, an appeal review found that she used all her money to pay for food, utility bills and rent and had nothing left for her council tax. They eventually let her go.

Yes, this is how this rotten system works. Super-rich companies like Google don't pay taxes, but none of their bosses risks jail. But as soon as poor people find themselves in debt, the system wastes no time in ruthlessly punishing them.

to defeat the existing workforce. What goes around comes around!

• Osborne joins the gravy train

George Osborne has certainly not fallen on hard times since May sacked him from the government! On top of his MP's salary (£74,000) on the backbenches, he has been paid more than £600,000 for speeches to banks and financial institutions. One of these, BlackRock, last month recruited him as an adviser for one day a week - for a salary of more than £200,000!

BlackRock is the world's largest fund manager. Osborne joined its aptly named boss, Larry Fink, at the World Economic forum in Davos last month, where he gave one of those expensive speeches to private dinner guests of HSBC. BlackRock's Investment Institute, a sort of research unit, will get Osborne's advice on areas such as European politics and economic reform in China. Nice work if you can get it. And ex-Chancellors certainly can: Pimco, one of BlackRock's biggest rivals, employs Gordon Brown on a similar basis!

Letter from Sussex

The in-house kitchen at Amberstone Hospital (north of Eastbourne), had become a major provider of hospital meals, supplying about a quarter of the Sussex NHS trust. This was exceptional, given that these days, most hospital meals are outsourced.

Around a year ago, a £1.5m expansion of this kitchen was announced and the usual costly management consultants engaged. New bosses appeared on site, who turned out to be connected to catering giant Apetito, which already has many hospitals locked into PFI contracts. Hints about impending kitchen closure began; no doubt in the hope that long-serving staff would quit rather than be eligible for their redundancy pay. Meanwhile, the expansion budget was slashed to £0.5m, the big ovens and chiller-freezers were mothballed and replaced by mobile units rented from private contractors.

Amberstone is now spending £45,000 a month on buying food in, from private contractors: twice the previous cost... Staff have just been told that there is now a choice between becoming purely a distributor for private contractors or total closure - while the Trust Chair, who is responsible for all of this, is "busy" taking a holiday in the Bahamas!

Trump: the true face of imperialism

The capitalists and stock market sharks gave a warm welcome to Trump: the Dow Jones, the New-York share index, broke through the 20,000 mark for the first time in its history, at breakneck speed! Understandably too, given Trump's promise to cut corporation tax from 35% to 15%, reduce public spending and cancel "regulations" - especially the meagre safeguards workers have!

As for the rest of Trump's measures, they were in keeping with his pandering to the most reactionary prejudices during his election campaign. But, in fact, each one of his announcements,

disgusting and cynical though they are, only reveals the true face of the rich powers' order, which all past and present US leaders have been enforcing - with the active complicity of the lesser European powers, like Britain.

The only difference is that when he voices his hatred for foreigners and refugees, Mexicans and Muslims, when he celebrates the use of torture and calls for a big increase in military spending, Trump is boasting loudly and proudly, what his predecessors kept secret. For instance, not only did Obama's benevolent speeches conceal the largest number of deportations

After the US election

ever carried out under a US president (almost 3 million!), but also his failure to close down the CIA's largest torture camp, Guantanamo!

And there is logic to Trump's madness. It is designed to get the American people to feel that they are under siege and should line up behind the wars waged directly or indirectly by the US government across the world - against the populations of the poor countries and for the benefit of US multinationals. Whether the American working class will allow Trump to get away with this, however, is another question! □

• Building walls, dropping bombs, stoking prejudices

Among Trump's measures, several specifically target migrants. For instance, his wall along the border with Mexico and his threat to cut federal funding to local authorities which fail to detain undocumented migrants. And then there is his 90 day order which denies entry to the US for anyone coming from, or born in, 7 Middle Eastern/African countries. All refugees are banned for 4 months and Syrians banned indefinitely! All this, using the worn-out cover of the "war on terror". For now, of course, this ban has been declared illegal by the courts and temporarily suspended.

In any case, significantly, visitors from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which are notorious for funding Islamic fundamentalist militias and where most of the 9/11 terrorists came from, weren't on Trump's list. But then, these medieval monarchies are close



allies of the US!

By contrast, out of his list of 7 countries, 4 of them (Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Libya) have been, or are still, being bombed by the US Air Force. As for the other 3, Yemen is being bombed by a US-backed coalition led by Saudi Arabia; Sudan has been devastated by decades of civil war in which the US has been intervening by arming proxy

militias; and Iran was pushed into an 8-year war with Iraq, at US instigation, and has been subject to stringent US sanctions ever since.

So one way or another, each one of these 7 countries, has been made to pay with its blood for US state terrorism. But never mind, this won't stop Trump from treating their citizens as "potential terrorists"!

• A real threat for women's rights

Trump has passed a decree banning US federal funding for overseas NGOs that provide abortion counselling. In addition, he promised to sign into law a bill which would ban US health insurance companies from offering policies covering abortion. In 25 states the sale of such policies is already restricted, in 5 it is banned. A 2016 study found that only a quarter of abortion patients were able to use their insurance to pay for an abortion.

It is no coincidence, therefore, if Trump has chosen Mike Pence, a notorious anti-abortionist as Vice President. While he was governor of Indiana, Pence signed 8 bills limiting the right of women to terminate a pregnancy, cut funding for family planning and tried to pass a

law requiring that remains from abortions or miscarriages should be buried or cremated like a human being. Pence became the first serving Vice President to attend an anti-abortion demonstration in 44 years when he spoke at a Movement for Life rally in late January. The protesters who joined the Women's March on the day of Trump's inauguration, were right: against these misogynist bigots, they have a fight on their hands!

WORKERS' fight

Public Meeting

**SYRIA AT WAR
between the militias,
the imperialist powers
and their regional stooges**

Saturday 11 February 2017, 1.45pm,
Wesley's Chapel, Kwanglim room
49, City Road - EC1Y 1AU
tube: Old Street

Brexit watch

During the referendum campaign, one of the main arguments of the "Leave" camp was that they wanted to "free" Parliament from Brussels' alleged "stranglehold" and restore its "sovereignty". As it turned out, however, May wasn't prepared to allow Parliament to exercise its "sovereignty" over the Brexit process. And it took 4 months of legal proceedings before the Supreme Court finally stated the obvious: that May couldn't have her cake and eat it and would, therefore, have to seek Parliament's approval before triggering the Brexit negotiations. In and of itself, of course, the Supreme Court's ruling couldn't change very much. Since Jeremy Corbyn had announced that Labour wouldn't put any obstacles in the way of May's Brexit drive, the Commons' vote was a foregone conclusion. And, in fact, only 114 MPs voted against triggering article 50 of the Lisbon treaty.

• What "putting Britain first" means

Theresa May tried to make political capital out of being the first foreign leader to visit the "great" man, Trump. But, in fact, she bent over backwards to please him, while nevertheless claiming that her visit would allow them to "lead together again". "Lead"? "Together"? What a joke!

Let's not forget how Blair wagged his tail to please Bush, in the name of the so-called "special relationship" and followed the US obediently into Iraq. May has stepped into Blair's shoes. And rather than having secured Trump's support, as she claims, she's just been begging for the crumbs that the US might be willing to leave to British business out of their looting of the world!

So, when May signs a £100m deal on behalf of BAE with Turkey, or underwrites the sale of weapons to be used in Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign against Yemen, she conveniently turns a blind eye to the fact that both regimes are dictatorships. Of course! But aren't they also close US allies, who are willing to buy a few weapons from Britain, on top of their huge supply of US war machines?

This is what "putting Britain first" means: tail-ending America's belligerent policy across the world, acting as British capital's saleswoman and... producing a lot of hot air!

• Beware of May's plan B!

In January, facing a floor of EU diplomats, May stated that if Britain couldn't leave the single market and at the same time have tariff-free access to it, she would trigger her plan B.

And what is this plan B, which is supposed to terrify the EU so much? Britain will set "the competitive tax rates and

May's real agenda



Nevertheless, this is not the end of the story. At the end of February, May's Brexit bill will be debated in the House of Lords, in which she doesn't have a majority. And the odds are that she will have to make some concessions in return for its support - like, for instance, being more transparent about what she does during the negotiations.

But that is exactly what May hoped

to avoid, because the last thing she wanted was to be caught in the cross-fire between her party's warring factions, while exposing herself to the criticism of the opposition parties. Above all, she wants to hide from the public and the working class in particular, that, in these negotiations, the only interests she intends to defend are those of British capital! □

polices that would attract the world's best companies and biggest investors." In other words, she claims that what British bosses would lose due to Brexit, could be regained several times over by transforming Britain into a European "Singapore" - the tax-haven city-state in Asia - and turning the screw on workers' conditions!

But this is what past and present British governments have been doing for decades, anyway. Wasn't the previous government planning to cut corporation tax down to 17% by 2020 - the same rate as in Singapore? As for turning the screw on workers in the name of boosting "competitiveness", this has always been the case, because that's what the bosses' greed requires!

May's plan B is to go even further down that road. And, in order to ensure that British capitalists retain their fat profits and dividends despite Brexit, the working class will be expected to foot the bill - that is, if it allows them to get away with it!

• City jobs threatened

The consequences of Brexit could soon be very painful for hundreds of thousands of workers employed in financial services. The chief executive of the London Stock Exchange has warned that the vote to leave the EU could cost the City of London up to 230,000 jobs, if the Government fails to provide a clear plan for post-Brexit operations, including full access to the EU market.

Of course, the big financial firms will not let Brexit stop their profits from flowing. They will set up shop in any European city which offers the "right" environment. But City workers will pay with their jobs. Another "benefit" of Brexit?

Letter from the North East

For many workers here in the North-East, 2017 will be another harsh year with job losses, wage cuts and reduction in social provision. AEI cables in Birtley is making 140 workers redundant; NOV Mission Products (US-owned oil and gas supplier) has cut the workforce from 500 to 230, reduced wages and hours; while Axon Energy Products Group in Gateshead has gone into liquidation, so not only will workers lose their jobs, but they risk losing their pensions as well.

As if this wasn't bad enough, Labour-run Sunderland city council has decided to cut the funding of Wearside Women in Need by £586,000 from June 2017. This would make Sunderland the first major city not to provide any refuges for women fleeing domestic violence. At risk are 4 refuges accommodating 173 women and 107 children as well as projects which give support to homeless people, women forced into arranged marriages and with mental health problems - despite their proven success.

Meanwhile, local councillors have been instructed by the Labour leadership (under caring Jeremy Corbyn!) not to resist central government cuts to their funding, by setting any "illegal" budgets.

So, 2017 looks like it will *also* have to be a year when workers realise that only our independent and united resistance on the ground will prevent the continued erosion of our rights and standard of living...

Another bailout for the bosses?

The pro-Brexit "experts" (close to Michael Gove!) at Civitas (a so-called "independent" think-tank) are already busy making elaborate rescue plans for those businesses which might be affected by Brexit. They have published a report which suggests that the government could offer around £9bn in subsidies and aid in order to "help" these businesses in the absence of a good enough post-Brexit deal, within WTO regulations. And how will the government, which has been howling about its budget deficit, pay them? The same report suggests that these costs could potentially be covered by putting tariffs on imports from the 27 EU countries!

What a solution! And who will the

• Falling living standards

In fact, working-class people are already paying - before "Brexit" has even happened - as they face fast-rising inflation. This December it was at its highest in 2 years, with the CPI (the government's preferred index) reaching 1.6%, compared to 1.2% in November. RPI (the retail price index) was even higher, at 2.5%. But both averages are



cost of higher tariffs be passed on to, if not the working class? But of course,

this is not these "Brexit experts" problem. □

under-estimates, compared to real price rises faced on high streets for products like food and petrol, for instance. Falling consumption levels are also reflected in retail sales volumes, which fell by 1.9% in December 2016, compared to the previous month. That was the biggest drop since April 2012, and far worse than expected.

This inflation is in part fuelled by higher import costs due to the devalued pound, a direct consequence of the Brexit shambles. One can only imagine the cost that a further devaluation in the pound and import tariffs (which look more and more likely, given the current course of government politicking), will put on workers' everyday budgets.

• Corbyn's electoral backsliding

After the referendum last year, it took Corbyn several months to clarify his stance on Brexit. In November, he said that Labour would "not challenge the referendum", nor "call for a second referendum". Instead, the party would try to influence the negotiations with the EU, "to make demands on rights, protections and market access", supposedly to protect workers' interests.

Corbyn's argument is that Labour cannot ignore the "will of the people". Never mind that 62% of all registered voters did not vote for Brexit, meaning that the Brexit vote is hardly representative of the "people's will"!

Besides, didn't Labour campaign for Remain? Corbyn's U-turn, suddenly seeing the "Brexit light", is so obviously opportunistic: by choosing to side with the winners, he hopes to avoid antagonising those Labour voters who opted for Brexit. But what does Corbyn really expect, after having displayed such spinelessness? As if being a turncoat was the best way to gain support!

• Planet Davos

Every year, heads of state and top bosses of the world's richest companies rub shoulders at the Swiss resort town of Davos under the auspices of the World Economic Forum. This gathering of the billionaire Mafiosi and their political puppets, who are causing war, poverty and global warming, pretends to discuss world peace and prosperity... over champagne and caviar in some of the world's most luxurious hotels. These people live on another planet. But they're plunging ours into chaos.

And look behind the scenes: while political invitees get in free, corporations like Barclays, HSBC, BP, Facebook and Google pay £477,000 a head, for their delegates to

attend! And everyone literally "descends" on Davos in private jets and helicopters - as did Theresa May and Sadiq Khan, this year. Yet a London-Davos trip in a private jet costs £7,860! This is not included in their freebie. So guess who will be picking up the bill!

• An economy that works for the richest

According to Oxfam's latest report on global wealth inequality, the 8 richest people in the world own as much wealth as the poorer 50% of the world's population (3.6 billion people, that is)! Oxfam published this report to coincide with the start of the Davos World Economic Forum to draw attention to the ever-widening gap between rich and poor. And

especially so, since this same Davos Forum had 4 years ago, expressed its fear that "inequality" and the social unrest it could bring with it was a risk to their economic system. But nevertheless, things have got worse....

Oxfam now has an online petition, calling on 1,810 billionaires to "help build an economy that works for everyone". Of course charity, even with large contributions from billionaires, can't alleviate worldwide poverty and Oxfam knows this. However, like most such institutions which operate within this capitalist system, it's hardly going to call for it to be overthrown - which is the only way to fix the problem.

Bahrain

The government enthusiastically supported the Bahraini monarchy's token reforms - allegedly designed to improve its human rights record - while it spent millions training its police force. Never mind that this country is a dictatorship, plain and simple, where activists were detained, tortured or killed during the pro-democracy demonstrations in 2011. Recently, three Shia men were executed

Dictatorship and a British naval base

after having "confessed" under torture to killing a police officer.

May's endorsement of Bahrain should come as no surprise, however. First of all, Bahrain is a satellite of Saudi Arabia - which is, itself, a very profitable business partner for British companies. And having good relations with the Saudis requires one to have good relations with Bahrain. Second, this

island-state, which is already home to the US Vth fleet and regional command, will soon host a new British naval base, currently under construction. This will be Britain's first permanent naval base east of the Suez Canal since 1971. So no wonder the British government doesn't care about the Bahraini monarchs' brutality - there's power, profits, politics and a strategic base involved!

King's Cross railway station (London)**Southern dispute: divided we fall...**

After calling off its strikes against Driver Only Operation (DOO) on the basis that it was always unsafe, drivers' union Aslef has now agreed with Southern Rail bosses that trains can operate without a guard in "exceptional circumstances".

So what about the guards, who've been fighting DOO on Southern since last April? Their RMT union officials were excluded from the talks, despite their common interest. Both Aslef and the TUC (which was presiding), went along with this exclusion,

allowing Southern effectively to "divide and rule". Now RMT leaders call this a "shocking betrayal" - and yes, it is.

But they are just as guilty of the narrow sectionalism which has led to this separate deal, as Aslef. Didn't they call strikes on different days, thus keeping drivers and guards away from each other? Neither did the RMT try to extend its fight beyond guards on Southern, despite job cuts and ticket office closures in sister companies.



However, it's not too late to revive unity in rail workers' ranks. Nothing prevents guards from addressing the Southern drivers, who, despite their leaders' capitulation, are unhappy with DOO and the cuts being implemented all around them.

Second anti-union bill dispatched

The ink had scarcely dried on the new Trade Union Act (which imposes even further restrictions on an already severely compromised right to strike), but 50 Tory MPs had already decided to back a new anti-strike private member's bill. "Inspired" by the strikes on Southern Rail - Chris Philp, MP for South Croydon, on the Southern route, proposed a ban on

strikes in public services (affecting transport workers, NHS staff, firemen) unless first approved by a High Court judge. There would also have been a commitment to run 50% of services!

Apparently at least some of the MPs present in the Commons on the day, realised that the strikes on Southern were actually supported

by a large section of their electorate who were rather angry at the company and the government. And maybe they felt it would be unwise to further provoke the strikers.

In any case, they chose to avoid being seen supporting such a bill. So it was quietly dispatched into oblivion by 206 votes to 127, before it could even be read.

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Siege mentality?**

BMW seemed to be aiming for its own "Trump effect" on Wednesday lunchtime at Gate 1, sending Plant Protection to supervise exit and entry to the plant at changeover and take the details of anyone ducking through the cycle gate without a card. Now we can't help each other through the turnstiles because one activation disables our cards for 20 minutes, BMW bosses want us to regard anyone without a card as a suspicious nuisance or threat. When the only nuisances are them! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 1/2/17]

• Pensions: a sham consultation

BMW's HR boss, Shankly, sent a letter saying BMW would end the consultation on closing the final salary pension on 24 January. That's after 126 days, as it happens - originally the consultation was meant to be 60 days. Ample time, says Shankly, for us to ask the questions we need to. Yes, but often nobody could answer them! What kind of consultation can be closed before those affected know what the proposals mean? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 1/2/17]

• Out in the open!

As for the negotiations, despite a new postal strike ballot being announced, everyone is apparently "sworn to silence" about what exactly the union committee proposed to BMW in November. BMW has still not responded to this proposal, and that seems to have prompted Unite to call the ballot. So if Unite is seeking backing for its proposal in this ballot, when do they plan to tell us what's been proposed? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 1/2/17]

• Our patience has run out

Tony Murphy's letter expresses "bitter disappointment" that BMW has been "playing us along". Just disappointment? What about anger that this super-rich company after quite deliberately sabotaging the final pension scheme (by closing it to new entrants) is now trying to close it as "unsustainable"? In the new ballot, at least, we should have a chance to express that! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 1/2/17]

• We're up for it - are they?

It's weird - every pay deal, a Unite official addresses us at a mass meeting. Usually the objective is to get a yes vote



for another bum deal. Now they want us to back industrial action, the first in this plant since before some of us were born - yet in 4 months they haven't once called us together! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 1/2/17]

• They can afford it

The Quandts who own around half of BMW may not have figured amongst the 8 richest men who own the equivalent of the poorest 3.6bn people on the planet. Nonetheless the Quandts' (much understated) wealth is mind boggling: equivalent to the wealth of mineral-rich Bolivia and its 6m population or nearly double the wealth of 46m Ethiopians. And since theirs is less than half the wealth of BMW, isn't it strange that the bosses are saying that they can't afford to go on paying into our 40-year-old defined benefits (DB) pension scheme? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford 15/1/17]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Ford's latest "redundancy situation"

We all knew that the Puma (ZSD 2.0, 2.2 and 2.4l turbo diesel) engines - first made in Dagenham in 1999, would cease production by 2017/18. In fact assembly went down to single shift last year - although machining (of heads blocks, cams and cons) was still shipping frantically to Thailand, despite the fact that the old worn-out machines couldn't produce to specification.

We also knew that Thai bosses were unhappy with the "rubbish" they were receiving. So when we were told in December that there was an order for machine parts from Argentina which would keep us going another 4 to 5 years, we didn't believe it. We were right not to: come mid-January, and we're told Puma is going lock, stock and barrel to South Africa! Is there any special



redundancy package being offered to senior workers, however? Not at all. Only 60 VRs are offered - and worse, Ford will only make up one temp to permanent for each worker who leaves. We can't accept that!

Ford CEO gets sanctimonious over Trump

After being told by Trump he was his "best buddy" for bringing investment back to the USA from Mexico (but Ford had made this plan before Trump's presidency was even on the horizon) within days of the coronation, CEO Mark Fields has now categorically distanced himself from the White House. The 90-day ban on anyone coming into the USA from 7 Muslim countries, forced Fields to issue the following statement:

"Respect for all people is a core value of Ford Motor Company, and we are proud of the rich diversity of our company here at home and around the world. That is why we do not support this policy or any other that goes against our values as a company. ... We will continue working to ensure the well-being of our employees by promoting the values of respect and inclusion in the workplace."

Is this the same company we work for? It's hard to recognise! Then again, Dearborn, where the historic Ford factory is located, has a population comprising 41.7% Arab Americans who provided a large part of Ford's workforce - mostly coming originally from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen... Which kind of puts Fields' magnanimity into perspective.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

Pensions : alright for some!

In the first week of January, Royal Mail officially announced its intention to cut the pensions of 90,000 RM workers, by switching them out of their current defined benefit pension scheme to a DC (defined contribution) scheme - with no guaranteed pension sum. Many workers already lost out in 2008, when the final salary-based scheme was turned into a career average scheme and when all

new starts went straight into a DC scheme. So this is pretty much the last straw!

RM claims that the £400m/yr it pays in contributions to the pension fund is "simply unaffordable" and that a £1.8bn pension fund surplus will run out by 2018. All it needs to do, however, is to increase its contributions - and the fund won't run out. This is something it can well



afford. After all, it paid out £220m in dividends last year. And has no problem paying £200,000 a year in pension contributions for CEO Moya Greene - or her annual pay packet worth over £1.5m!

• No more job cuts!

Another 200-300 MP jobs to go on "voluntary redundancy"? How can that be? There can (surely!!) be no agreement on any VR - that is, the loss of full-time jobs! But one mandatory condition for any more of us to leave on VR has to be that all part-timers are offered full time jobs!

Why should part-timers have to eke out a living, by doing several jobs, or relying on exceptional OT? What's more, there's a definite shortage of hands across the board at present. (Here, and in other offices.) So, new sorting machine or not, how can anyone call this a

"redundancy situation"? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 1/2/17]

• Nobody Adam and Eve's it

Actually we're pretty shocked that HMP Screws think that they can dispense with so many of us! Or that they imagine that a new packet-sorting machine can take over all these human jobs!

But maybe even they don't fully believe it: they're talking about a "gradual" release of workmates. Yeah, we can safely bet that this machine, like all others, is going to introduce chaos. And more hands will be needed to put things right, than we even have at the moment! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 1/2/17]

• Born again union leaders?

Re our "future": has anyone seen the CWU video on "the challenges of 2017"? We started yawning in the very first minute, as Terry Pullinger tried hard to convince (himself?) that RM and us workers have the same interests... On and on, he went, worrying that "RM is shifting away from our agreements, which are meant to be based on mutual interest", warning us that RM is "seemingly favouring just chasing profits and feeding shareholders". We know he wasn't born yesterday, so he must somehow have managed to get himself "reborn"?! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 1/2/17]

100 years ago

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Russian revolution, in February 1917, right in the middle of World War I. During its course, the Russian working class, with the support of large sections of the peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie, overthrew the hated dictatorship of the czar. Eight months later, the Russian workers were to complete their task by expropriating the capitalist and landowning classes and taking over political power, for the first time in history.

The following description of the first days of these events, in Petrograd, the then Russian capital, is an extract from the "History of the Russian Revolution", written 13 years later, by Leon Trotsky, who played a decisive role both in the success and the consolidation of this revolution.

"On February 23rd, under the flag of "Woman's Day," began the long-ripe and long-withheld uprising of the Petrograd working masses. The first step of the insurrection was the strike. In the course of three days it broadened and became practically general. This alone gave assurance to the masses and carried them forward. Becoming more and more aggressive, the strike merged with the demonstrations, which were bringing the revolutionary mass face to face with the troops...

A revolutionary uprising that spreads over a number of days can develop victoriously only in case it ascends step by step, and scores one success after another. A pause in its growth is dangerous; a prolonged marking of time, fatal. But even successes by themselves are not enough; the masses must know about them in time, and have time to understand their value...

Towards the evening of the 25th, the Vyborg side [the city's largest industrial suburb] was wholly in the hands of the insurrection. The police stations were wrecked, individual officers had been killed, and the majority had fled... On the morning of the 26th it became evident that not only the Vyborg side, but also Peski almost up to Liteiny Prospect, was in control of the insurrection...

The workers gradually concentrate, and move from all suburbs to the centre. They are stopped at the bridges. They flock across the ice: it is only February and the Neva is one solid bridge of ice. The firing at their crowds on the ice is not enough to stop them... On this day about forty are killed and as many wounded... The struggle arrives at a decisive stage. Will the mass ebb before the lead and flow back to its suburbs? No, it does not ebb.

A new relation of forces was mysteriously

The February revolution in Russia



Working class women started the revolution

implanting itself in the consciousness of the workers and soldiers. It was precisely the government's offensive... which transformed the new relation of forces from a potential to an active state... The worker approached the soldier more boldly... The authorities said that the revolution intoxicated the soldier. To the soldier it seemed, on the contrary, that he was sobering up from the opium of the barracks. Thus the decisive day was prepared - the 27th of February...

In the morning the workers streamed again to the factories, and in open meetings resolved to continue the struggle... But what would that mean today? The general strike had issued revolutionary demonstrations by immense crowds, and the demonstrations had led to a collision with the troops. To continue the struggle today would mean to summon an armed insurrection. But nobody had formulated this summons. It had grown irresistibly out of the events, but it was never placed on the order of the day by a revolutionary party... But the insurrection, not yet so named by anyone, took its own place on the order of the day...

There is no doubt that the fate of every revolution at a certain point is decided by a break in the disposition of the army. Against a numerous, disciplined, well-armed and ably led military force, unarmed or almost unarmed masses of the people cannot possibly gain a victory. But no deep national crisis can fail to affect the army to some extent. Thus along with the conditions of a truly popular revolution there develops a possibility - not, of course, a guarantee - of its victory...

One after another, from early morning, the Reserve Guard battalions mutinied... The revolutionary pressure of the workers on the barracks fell in with the existing revolutionary movement of the soldiers to the

streets. During the day these two mighty currents united to wash out, clean and carry away, the walls, the roof, and later the whole groundwork of the old structure. One after another came the joyful reports of victories. Our own armoured cars have appeared! With red flags flying, they are spreading terror through the districts to all who have not yet submitted... Now the revolution is standing up to its full height... The czarist garrison of the capital, numbering 150,000 soldiers, was dwindling, melting, disappearing. By night it no longer existed...

During the 27th of February the crowd freed all political prisoners from the many goals of the capital, without bloodshed... It is impossible to say who thought of leading the mutinous troops to the Tauride Palace [the seat of the czarist regime's token parliament]. This political line of march was dictated by the whole situation. In the Tauride Palace various centres are already created, or at least sketched out - among them the field staff of the insurrection... Towards the evening of the 27th, a stream of soldiers, workers, students and miscellaneous people flows toward the Tauride Palace. Here they hope to get information and instructions. From all sides ammunition is being carried by armfuls into the palace, and deposited in a room that has been converted into an arsenal. At nightfall, the revolutionary staff settles down to work. It sends out detachments to guard the railway stations, and despatches reconnoitring squads wherever danger lurks. The Tauride becomes the temporary field headquarters, governmental centre, arsenal, and prison-fortress of the revolution, which had not yet wiped the blood and sweat from its face..." □

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

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

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