

WORKERS' fight



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

THE REAL ENEMY IS CAPITAL, NOT THE EU

As we go to press, on the eve of the Commons' "meaningful vote", May's withdrawal deal looks as good as dead.

So, after over two years of horse-trading - with Brussels and the warring factions of her own party - May has apparently produced a dead duck! Was it worth two years of nationalistic posturing, politicking and economic chaos?

A host of fake options

What happens next is anybody's guess. The only certainty for the working class is that none of the options offered by politicians, all claiming to represent the "national interest", can deliver anything positive.

On one side, "hard-Brexiteers" hail, against all evidence, the wonders of Britain going it alone and reclaiming its past imperial grandeur as a "world power". But in today's world, this is a dangerous delusion, for which workers would be made to pay dearly: only a drastic increase in the exploitation of labour and brutal cuts in social expenditure would allow British capital to make up for losing its free access to the huge EU market.

On the other side, are those wanting a "good" Brexit, offering a "good" way of remaining in a "reformed" EU. They want British capital to keep as many of the benefits it enjoyed, thanks to EU membership, as possible.

Except that there's nothing "good" for the working class in these options. Whether Britain is a "partner" or a "member" of the EU, the aim is the same: the shoring up of the profits of British capital. It's not for nothing that British companies are rushing to set up on the Continent today - they want to ensure that they have their cake and eat it, and they can!

For the working class, however, there is no "cake" on offer.

This is why, if and when May resolves



the stand-off between Westminster factions by "giving a choice to the people" in the ballot box, this will be another fake choice - between options in which workers have no stake, just as in the 2016 referendum and in the 2017 general election.

A question of balance of forces

Ultimately, the Brexit saga serves only to fuel the nationalist illusion that British institutions are better for workers than those of the EU.

This is exactly the same illusion that Corbyn is trying to feed in his campaign for a general election, in the hope that Labour will win. But what for?

In his 2017 manifesto, Corbyn insisted Labour would remain "business-friendly" and only ask the capitalists to pay a "little more" in taxes. He offered to negotiate a "better" Brexit than May, for Britain's "national interest".

So under Labour, the state will be "nicer" to workers and having "regained its independence from the EU", will introduce reforms.

But what if the City objects? Would Labour order BMW to make all the agency workers at its Oxford plant permanent? Or force JLR to cancel its 4,500 job cuts? It wouldn't, because Corbyn respects the capitalists' control over the economy.

And what about the free movement of labour, the main positive change that came with the EU, as new blood reinforced workers' ranks here? The political establishment doesn't want workers' confidence to be reinforced by this kind of freedom. But Corbyn is also against free movement. Workers would be subject to "labour market regulations" - i.e., no free movement any more!

No, the working class cannot expect anything from Corbyn. But what it can do is to mobilise its ranks - across all divisions - in order to tip the balance of forces in its favour and challenge the dictatorship of capital itself. Changing MPs' faces cannot change anything for the working class. Real change only becomes possible when the capitalists fear for their profits! □

Brexit watch

Whatever the outcome of the next few weeks of Brexit debates and votes, British big business and finance has covered its back. The bosses won't allow self-seeking (or plain stupid!) politicians to ruin things for them! So most have already restructured their operations well in advance of the anticipated Brexit damage.

Indeed, City banks have opened offices in Europe so that either way, they can carry on generating their profits. And the London Stock Exchange has already shifted trading in EU bonds to Milan. All speculative activity involving countries other than Britain itself, will switch to Italy from March. It may deprive London of much of the action, but after all, it's the money that counts, not where it's hoarded...

OK for the bosses, though

In fact, maligned or not, May's EU Withdrawal Bill did, more or less, meet all the bosses' "red lines": its extensible "transition period" guaranteed they'd be able to buy and sell goods across the huge Single Market, for another 2 or 3 years at least, without having to face tariffs or border controls.

• Brexiteers looking to Singapore

On his recent trip to Singapore, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt took the opportunity of singing the praises of the "Singapore model" as the example for a post-Brexit Britain to follow.

In his speech, he stated that it was the "British legacy" of colonial rule (lasting from 1819 to 1963) that fostered "the rule of law, clean administration, independent courts and the English language" which "have all been part of Singapore's success"! It's true

• Imperial dreams... and threadbare reality

Brexit is Britain's biggest moment since World War Two, according to Gavin Williamson. This defence secretary reckons that Britain can become a "true global player" by opening new military bases overseas. He even claimed that the government is looking at new options for military bases in the Far East and the Caribbean. It seems some ministers will try anything to woo the Tory xenophobes

• Away with the ferries...

As a result of the potential disruption at the Port of Dover in the case of a 'No-Deal' Brexit, the government this month handed out £108m in contracts to three companies for alternative ferry services. Of course, since there is only 'potential' disruption, the government didn't seem to mind contracting only 'potential' companies. One of these, Seaborne Freight, which is due to offer passenger ferries from Ramsgate to Ostend beginning March 29th, has no ferries, and in its two

No good deal for the working class



So, although the big companies would definitely have preferred to avoid the absurd disruption caused by Brexit to their operations, one way or another they're getting all the guarantees they wanted: whatever happens, they'll have a lot of time to adapt.

But where does this leave the working class? Even before any deal is agreed workers are already paying the bill! Ford, BMW, Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover, have all implemented short-time working, extended shut-downs and job cuts - blamed on the "uncertainty caused

by Brexit". Several plant closures are threatened and Nissan has aborted a pay deal.

Our side is with our own class

Contrary to what Corbyn or labour argues, there's no "good" Brexit. Leaving the EU was never a way of freeing society from capitalism, the ultimate cause of society's dysfunction. Workers have no side to take over Brexit, except the side of their own class, along with their fellow non-British workers who collectively reinforce their ranks! □

that the British Empire did indeed leave behind a legacy which formed the basis of the "Singapore model" - that of brutal repression! Singapore's regime helped amass the bosses' huge profits by cracking down on workers' mobilisation by force, imprisoning activists and dismantling all unions not run by the state.

Yes, Hunt and his Tory Brexiteer chums, as well as their friends among the bosses, would welcome imposing

Singapore's oppressive conditions on workers in Britain! Especially in the context of the precarious, low-wage economy that has been the norm for decades. And yet, these politicians talk about the economic boom that will result out of the Brexit mess? Here in the real world, in the midst of a prolonged economic crisis, it's already clear how this system has nothing except more misery to offer the working class.

and imperial nostalgics threatening to derail May, even a chorus of Rule Britannia!

In the real world, fortunately, Williamson's department is struggling to pay for its existing commitments, with the National Audit Office finding a £15bn funding gap in the defence budget over the next ten years. The shortfall is mainly due to the £31bn cost of Dreadnought, the renewed nuclear submarine and

missile programme. This has already taken £600m from a £10bn Treasury reserve, yet is not expected to be operational for at least 15 years. No-one really has a clue how much the Dreadnought vanity project will have cost by that time. But it's unlikely that a whip-round of Williamson's "Make Britain Great Again" admirers would plug the gap, let alone pay for his neo-colonial fantasies!

years as a company has never run a service of any kind.

The announcement of these contracts was probably meant to make the government seem serious about the prospect of a 'No-Deal', but this time they have been caught out in their Brexit games. It turns out that all the politicking around Brexit is as unsubstantiated as Seaborne Freight's claims! Whatever the Brexit 'outcome', private profiteers (and yet more sharks!) are set to make a packet! Where's our share of the £108 million for not owing any ferries?



A hostile environment for all workers

The 29th March is meant to be red-line day on the "freedom of movement" of all European workers (including the British). Depending on whatever extensions and transitions are finally agreed, of course, with May still clip-clopping back and forth, Cameron-like, at the time of writing, claiming to have extracted one concession or another...

Meanwhile, Home Secretary Sajid Javid is finding yet more ways to outbid his predecessors in office. But at the

same time as trying to "out-hostile" May and Rudd when it comes to the environment for immigrants, he still has to ensure the bosses get the workforce they need.

So for instance, he refuses to be drawn on the proposed £30,000 minimum salary for selected migrant skilled workers and its extension to all EU workers. Even if it would aggravate the finances of a cash-starved NHS, already struggling to pay the wages of essential

foreign workers.

Small wonder that Javid has suddenly become so vociferous over the tiny number of refugees risking life and limb to cross the Channel in rubber dingies. Anything to avoid the main subject at hand, namely what happens to the skilled workers and professionals propping up the NHS, social services, schools, universities and vital research and development, after Brexit?

• The "hostile environment" in the NHS

As part of the government's "hostile environment" policy, hundreds of migrants are refused NHS treatment because they cannot afford to pay extortionate charges imposed on them. Since 2015, non-EU migrants and visitors to Britain can be charged upfront for treatment, at 150% of its cost!

Although urgent medical treatment is meant to be provided for free, regardless of immigration status, some NHS trusts have

still refused life-saving treatment. For example in the case of Elfreda Spencer, a 71 year old Jamaican woman diagnosed with advanced blood cancer in 2016, Imperial College healthcare trust demanded an upfront payment of £30,000 to begin a course of chemotherapy. When her family, unable to afford it, offered to pay in monthly instalments, they were refused, and she was forced to go without treatment for an entire

year. Of course, during this time the cancer progressed to a terminal illness.

The government claims that these upfront charges will save £20m for the health budget. But this accounts for less than 0.02% of the £110bn NHS England expenditure for 2017/18! For May and her hostile government it nevertheless makes the point in front of her xenophobic gallery, no matter how lethal the consequences.

• EU workers taken hostage

In its no-deal Contingency Action Plan published at the end of December, the European Commission has called on EU governments to grant temporary residence permits to the 1m British citizens living in the EU so that they have time to secure long-term settled status. The Commission has also declared that British citizens won't need visas for short-term visits to the EU. But in line with its anti-migrant overbidding, the British government's policy

paper, also published in December, guarantees nothing to EU citizens in Britain.

It states that in the event of a no-deal scenario, only EU citizens who have lived in Britain before the 29th of March 2019 would be able to apply for long-term settled status. And they will have to apply before the 1st of January 2021. Then, the government's new immigration system would be implemented, which proposes, among other attacks against EU workers,

a "consultation on a minimum salary requirement of £30,000" for 5-year visas.

Of course, the salary threshold will be a matter of "consultation with businesses and employers" before it is implemented. But whatever the final salary threshold is, Home Secretary Javid has already achieved his aim: to reassure the xenophobic factions of the Tory party that in him, they can find a champion of anti-migrant, anti-working class policies!

• Sajid Javid's major xenophobic incident

Home Secretary Sajid Javid's declaration of a "major incident" in the English Channel when several refugees who'd taken to rubber dingies in order to get to Britain were "rescued" (and then promptly arrested), might have been comic, if he hadn't deliberately been orchestrating anti-migrant hysteria for the benefit of the Nigel Farage-type Brexiteers in his party. And to make it sound really serious, he then called in the navy's HMS Mersey, cannon and all, to "discourage dangerous crossings"...

Yet how many refugees have actually crossed the Channel this way? In fact, according to his own figures, this "invasion"

involved 539 refugees over the whole of 2018, 227 of whom were stopped by the French police! Compared to the 549 refugees who reached Spanish coasts during last weekend alone, this was nothing - and certainly nothing compared to the hardship which is pushing millions of people from Africa and the Middle East to risk their lives in order to try to find a safe haven in Europe.

Nevertheless May and Javid considered it expedient to make a show of their anti-migrant stance. But they merely show themselves up as enemies of the working class which has no interest in harbouring such divisive prejudices and fears.



Corbyn's electoral calculations

Corbyn has refused, so far, to put Brexit into question. According to him, the only good deal for Brexit is a deal negotiated under a Labour government. He argues that the Brexit referendum was the expression of the "people's will" and, therefore, can't possibly be put into question. No matter that only 37% of all registered voters actually voted for Brexit. Which is hardly an expression of the "people's will"!

But Corbyn goes further than this. He also argues that because of the EU state aid rules, a Labour government wouldn't be able to "use state aid in order to be able to develop industry in this country" and that the EU would prevent the implementation of Labour's renationalisation policies.

These, of course, are outright lies. First, according to Corbyn the EU has been a driving force in past and present privatisations. But it was under Thatcher that

entire sectors of the economy were handed over to private companies - decades before there was any talk of privatisations in the rest of Europe! And second, Corbyn pretends that the EU would prevent state funding to reach industries or economic sectors that need it. As if the EU has been preventing the injection of public funds directly into the pockets of private railway operators in Britain since their privatisation, more than 20 years ago!

NHS/Social

May's 10-year NHS fraud

Never mind the dreaded Commons' "meaningful vote" on her EU withdrawal deal, just a week beforehand May launched a great diversionary "10-year plan" for the NHS!

And it was "historical", just like everything else her government does! But actually, it's just a rehash of the plan announced last June. Nor is it a "10-year" plan - since it's only guaranteed for the first 5 years.

Her claim is that "Up to 500,000 lives could be saved through 85,000 fewer premature deaths a year", and "150,000 heart attacks, strokes and dementia cases"...

As if a government which can't even put enough resources into the NHS to avoid another meltdown this winter can say how many lives it will "save" over the next decade? Who does she think she's fooling?

Given £20bn would be injected, but not before 2023, this means an increase



of only 2.3% over and above inflation over the next 5 years. As for the technology which is meant to revolutionise healthcare, well this country has fewer scanners and doctors per head than any other rich country! But what we will get is GP consultations via an android phone app - even if a hand can't pop out to feel our lumps or take our blood pressure...

And not a word on the real problem - the 11,000 full-time NHS vacancies in England alone, a situation already affected by Brexit, which can only get worse. Something the 114 EU doctors, nurses and health assistants working at the Liverpool Children's hospital, where May chose to announce her "plan", could not fail to notice! ☐

• Moving goalposts

Many A&Es currently only manage to meet the 4-hour maximum waiting limit 50% of the time. So NHS bosses want (yet again) to "shake-up" the system and force out patients with more minor ailments, who are usually only there because they can't get a GP appointment! A&E managers claim this is the main

problem causing them to fail to meet their targets. So now those patients considered to have "non-urgent medical needs" will be advised to go back to square one - the GP surgery, a walk-in centre (never mind that most have been closed down!), a pharmacy - or face a long wait in A&E.

Apparently this is meant to put the

A&Es back on track. But of course the real and only problem is a lack of human and material resources! Instead of admitting this, NHS bosses aim to simply restrict emergency access to those who need it! And as for their four-hour wait: that is far too long in a medical emergency, anyway!

• 'Missed Appointments': their cynical blame-game

NHS bosses have found other ways of blaming patients for the NHS's inadequacy. According to NHS England's chief nurse 'Patients missing appointments cost the health services almost £1bn last year'. She argued that this could fund a million cataract operations or a quarter of a million hip replacements and therefore, people should 'use the health service responsibly'.

That's ironic. If anything, the NHS bosses have been handling the services irresponsibly for decades now, with dangerous and often deadly consequences.

It apparently hasn't occurred to such NHS officials that when patients have to wait 18 weeks for an appointment at best and a year or two at worst that it's highly likely they will miss them! Not only that, it is not easy to reschedule appointments,

given the long queues in the booking system. It is impossible to get through on the phone! And in many cases, the booking system itself has been subcontracted, making the problem even worse. But of course, blaming the patients for the health service's failure helps to obscure the fact that "our" (!) NHS is being systematically and consciously destroyed from the top.

• The government's barbaric practices

In November last year, the Huffington Post exposed the Home Office's barbarism towards Mary Adenugba Johnson. Fourteen years ago she had been trafficked from Nigeria to Britain and forced into prostitution. After more than 3 years of living hell, she was helped by refugee charities to freedom and managed to rebuild her life in Britain - only to be threatened by the Home Office with deportation!

This is not an isolated case, by far! The Women for Refugee Women charity organisation has exposed the Home Office's practice of regularly holding women who have been victims of sexual trafficking in immigration removal centres.

But the Home Office is not the only government department under this spotlight: early in January, the Foreign Office was shown to extort hundreds of pounds

from women victims of forced marriage for the cost of their repatriation. The Foreign Office even has a special emergency loan available for women over 18 who have no means to pay - with a surcharge of 10% added if they don't repay within 6 months!

Yes, this is the government's high-profile "law and order" agenda: tough on the victims of crime, especially when they happen to be women, and poor!

Social care facing Brexit shortfall

Social care employers expect an even worse staffing crisis than is expected in the NHS, after Brexit. The referendum result already halted the previous steady increase in migration of social care workers into Britain from Europe over the five years to 2016. So jobs are already

harder to recruit to, even while the immigration regime is still unchanged - an early negative Brexit "dividend"!

Indeed it was only thanks to EU migration in the first place, that social care providers coped with rising need at all, in previous years. Since the government so far insists on curtailing free movement of labour, Brexit threatens to make it impossible to maintain already inadequate

staff levels. This, at a time when social care accounts for about 40% of councils' budgets and faces a national funding shortfall of £3.6bn. And that's the real issue. Even if the providers manage to recruit, they pay workers a pittance, wherever they may come from. When caring for the elderly and infirm is a job which deserves the very best working conditions and wages!

UN report exposes abject poverty

When parliament debated the UN poverty report for the first time on the 7th January this year - only 14 MPs bothered to turn up. Amber Rudd, Work and Pensions Secretary, was absent. The report's author, UN special envoy on poverty, Professor Philip Alston, said that the government seemed so focussed on Brexit that it was treating poverty as an "afterthought". He would not dare accuse it of a deliberate and calculated attack on the poor, of course!

His report, dating to last November, exposes the fact that 14 million people are living in poverty, a fifth of the population, with 1.5 million destitute and 3.7m using foodbanks. He was shocked at the foodbanks: "their mobilisation resembled the sort of activity you might expect for a natural disaster or health epidemic." The level of child poverty, in particular, was "not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster". He also criticised Universal Credit



and its sanctioning system as harsh and arbitrary, and damaging to claimants' mental health. No wonder, therefore, that the

Economy/Social

government ignores the report. They, nor the "harsh and arbitrary" capitalist system they promote, can have any answer to it. □

• So who's friends with whom?

One of the UK government's largest IT contractors, French company Sopra Steria has put UK visa applicants arbitrarily at risk of deportation. As part of the immigration office's plans to overhaul the visa application process post-Brexit, the contractor recently began operation of its £91m contract by opening visa centres where applicants have their biometrics scanned and documents checked. Even though this is a mandatory stage in the application process some of the centres in cities such as Sheffield and Leeds haven't been opened yet, forcing

applicants to travel to other cities just to finish the application process!

The only free centre in London is overcrowded with applicants who wait for hours for their appointments. Other centres in the city charge more than £100 (sometimes double or triple that amount) just for booking an appointment! People who paid £600 for next-day decisions might have had to wait more than a week. The only service not to report any problems (yet) is for the super-rich, who can get a team at home to process their documents ... for £9,100(!).

This is not the first time Steria has caused a mess. When it got contracts for handling the tech requirements of hundreds of government bodies, including the NHS, it cut jobs using methods that staff described as 'cruel and impersonal'. It also mislaid for crucial periods, paperwork which included test results for cancer, potentially threatening lives. Now Steria's cost-cutting could result in deportations. In this rotten capitalist system, all that matters is doing work on the cheap and making profit - no matter what consequences for people. □

• Legal aid cuts: a law unto ourselves

2019 sees the 70th anniversary of Legal Aid, hot on the heels of the NHS's 70th, last year. And just like the NHS, Legal Aid has suffered cuts since 2010, with a budget now almost £1bn lower in real terms. It still offers legal advice and representation for those who otherwise cannot afford to pay for it, but while 785,000 cases involved Legal Aid in 2010-11, in 2017-18 it was down to 140,000.

These cuts are having devastating consequences. Under the 2012 act which 'restructured' Legal Aid, the number

of cases not covered was expanded, to include many in Housing, Family Law, Immigration, Employment Law, and Welfare. In Housing and Welfare, for example, the number of cases receiving legal aid fell from 83,000 to 440 in four years. Yet more people are facing eviction from their homes today!

So much for the claimed 'British Value' of equality before the law. If you have money, you can hire whole teams of lawyers to fight tooth and nail for you; as for the rest of us, we're left on our own...

• A white-washed Christmas: another one bites the dust

Just after Christmas, high-street retailer HMV was declared bankrupt, and went into administration. The future of its 125 stores and 2200 employees is still up in the air at the time of writing. In fact this collapse was the last of a year of bankruptcies, profit warnings, shop closures and job losses in the retail sector. Among those closing were Toys 'R' Us, Maplin and House of Fraser, while M&S, Debenhams and Homebase announced shop closures and job losses; Superdry, Carpetright, and John Lewis are just a few of the retailers who gave out profit warnings at the end of 2018.

Retail's problems are often blamed on the rise in online sales. However, even here, there are signs of problems - with online-only clothes seller Asos issuing its own profit warning in December. One thing retailers agree on as a cause of their problems is 'low consumer confidence', or 'cautious' customers... In other words, they are describing what us workers have been feeling since 2008 and beyond - our own bankruptcy is often one missed pay cheque away, and we have to be very 'cautious' if we want to stretch our wages as far as they are needed...

Talk isn't cheap..!

Boris Johnson was paid £94,507 for delivering a 2 hour speech for US company 'GoldenTree Asset Management' - over 3 times the HMRC estimate for the average annual wage! This is in addition to his MP's salary, as well as being paid £22,916 for his column at the Daily Telegraph, for working a grand total of... 10 hours a month!



King's Cross railway station (London)**Carillion No2 and No3...?**

By the end of 2018, two of the largest British public sector subcontractors, Interserve and Amey, were both heading for bankruptcy. These companies provide everything from cleaning, to maintenance, to security, employing an estimated 65,000 workers. And like Carillion before it, Interserve has thousands of government contracts with hospitals and schools, so the consequences of its potential collapse are dire.

The government is so scared to relive last year's fiasco of Carillion, that the Cabinet Office is washing its hands of the potential collapse by making Interserve

sign up to a "living will"! This unusual measure would mean that the work could be swiftly transferred to others, if needed.

Unite and the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) Unions have demanded that the government take "action to protect jobs". Interserve, for instance provides station cleaning - and at King's Cross has already almost halved the number of workers. Of course, all of these subcontractors should be taken back in-house and more hands should be taken on. But demanding this from the



privatised rail companies, or the government for that matter, is just another way of saying nothing can be done. Yet something could be done... A concerted fight could be organised. It's needed! ☐

• Record high train fare for record low service

So this year again, most rail fares were increased by 3.1%, in line with the Retail Price Inflation (RPI) measure, (which is meant to be obsolete according to the government, but with this convenient exception)! And unsurprisingly, this aroused much more anger than usual given the catalogue of delays and cancellations throughout the overcrowded, overpriced and unreliable railway over the past year. And prompted many rail

workers and passengers to join the 40 organised protests across the country.

So how did transport secretary Chris Grayling justify himself this time round? Well, on the one hand, he blamed the fare rises on union wage demands, claiming (falsely, of course!) that the rate at which they were pegged was due to the fact that rail workers were given rises in line with RPI each year. He'd already passed the buck to Network Rail

(his ultimate responsibility!) over the timetable chaos this summer: it had skimped on maintenance and renewals, while Govia Thameslink had failed to train enough drivers.

Of course, isolated protests by either passengers or railworkers won't stop the rail sharks and their government lackeys like Grayling. But if they got together to fight, they definitely could.

• Time to fight!

This is just not good enough! LNER's 2-year pay proposal for all of us (excluding drivers) is apparently for a raise equal to RPI (for Dec 2018=3.2%) or a "minimum amount" (so far unspecified for 2nd year)... But of course RPI (tho' higher than CPI) doesn't reflect real cost of living rises. We estimate that on this basis, the lowest paid would get an increase around £12.50/week or 32p/hour!

But we get barely more than the minimum wage as it is! This wouldn't even bring us up to £10/hour, when the so-called "London Living Wage" is

£10.55/hr (£22,000/yr)! So when do we start the fight? [Workers' Platform King's X 18/12/18]

• That would be a start

Yes, we need to fight for better wages - all round - and for wages which rise with price rises... So, how much would be enough? Why don't we base ourselves on the average official wage(!) which is £30,061.20/yr? This would just about meet our needs... [Workers' Platform King's X 18/12/18]

• Fake train?

Seems there's still neither sight nor sound (in service) of LNER's fantastic

new Azuma train. When did they say they were coming? December? Wasn't it November before that? We'll be lucky to see them at Easter... [Workers' Platform King's X 18/12/18]

• Low expectations a la Voltaire?

We see that the DfT has announced that because that GN/GTR is so terrible, they've changed the rules! So now good equals bad and bad equals good - and it seems that for the ORR, everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds... Yeah, sure! [Workers' Platform King's X 18/12/18]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• They're a sandwich short of a picnic**

What was this all about? RM had the brilliant idea of recruiting "Xmas" casuals AFTER the Black Cyber Bloody Week! Are managers a bit slow or just playing dumb? We need extra hands all year round - but we definitely need them BEFORE the sales madness. As for not having the cash to recruit more workers, well, we know where they can find the money... on Richie Rich's Back and in RM's big shareholders' pockets... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 18/12/2018]

• We won't clear their mess

What a mad system they've put

together! With RM's one late collection per day, HMP looks like a war zone after 7pm, even if the vans don't make it! The yorks just queue up endlessly! There is no way we can clear the workload... and why should we even try? This mess is RM's own making, for them to sort it! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 18/12/2018]

• Going west

We hear from Greenford that they're being flooded with both 1st and 2nd class Packets coming from MP! But what will happen after Xmas, with fewer hands and with all the packets we can expect from the January sales? They expect us to prepare for Black Friday: Part 2? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 18/12/2018]

**• How can "good" work be "casual"**

And by the way, we DON'T agree with the RM bosses making up our numbers with temps. Not outside of Xmas, and even then! But this use of temps all year round happens at many MCs - including Greenford. Whatever happened to the "union" refusal??? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 18/12/2018]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Workers' fight plan needed!

Ford just announced it's cutting jobs in Europe as part of its "Sprint to 6 Reset and Redesign" plan. We've been hearing about this for ages: Ford says Europe's "losing" money; it no longer wants to make small cars; it wants a 6% profit margin... But even now CEO Armstrong isn't specifying how cuts will affect plants. Bordeaux's Transmission was already earmarked for chopping in 2015/6. And here in Britain ever since the Brexit vote, we've been told Ford would "rethink UK operations" depending on Brexit...

As for Bridgend, it's had the axe over it ever since Land Rover ended its engine contract. Ford only wants 500 workers for the new Dragon engine up to 2021. So now Bridgend's meant to make 1000 job cuts. Last year there was even talk of their workers coming to Dagenham!

As for this threat to 150 Transport Ops jobs, it's distinctly odd: doesn't Ford need more workers to move parts/cars (18,000 cars to be stockpiled here pre-Brexit), not fewer? Unite union leaders have huffed and puffed, yet again, saying they'll fight



the cuts "at Bridgend". But there's no way that one small bit of the workforce can or should go into battle, by itself. We need a workers' plan - uniting ALL of us against Ford - asap!

• Tie up the ford bosses?

We see Ford announced the start of its EU "restructuring" last Friday. It's called "Sprint to 6 Reset & Redesign" - meaning they want us to pay for a 6% profit margin with up to £10bn in cuts - as many as 25,000 jobs (!!!) across Europe, before 2020. It also involves that tie-up with VW. So we'd better

start tying up with our car-worker counterparts in Europe - and asap! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 11/12/18]

• They're in the money!

When we see those financial figures and reports it's obvious Ford makes pots of money. But they play us against each other, casting doom and gloom - when they could easily provide work and full

pay for all the workers, currently employed and more - Bridgend, Warley, Bordeaux and other EU plants! What happened to Neighbour's idea of a Ford washing machine factory? If cars are REALLY losing money as they claim, then we can make trains. We don't mind. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 11/12/18]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

Using Brexit to turn the screw

When BMW announced a four-week shutdown of its Mini plants in April, in case a no-deal Brexit disrupts cross-channel trade, the bosses did not say whether they'd cancel all or any of the five-week break they'd already planned for the summer. Any further layoffs, they said, would be announced by the end of November. This came and went, but BMW still refused to commit itself, on the grounds that May's Brexit deal still had to be endorsed. By the time the Christmas holiday began a week early, on 17 December, the Commons vote had been postponed until the new year!

BMW expects workers to "cover" all these layoffs with a combination of

annual leave entitlement and working time account - i.e. extra time already worked and banked. For the majority of us who don't have enough "credit" on our accounts and don't want to give up our annual leave, the only way to be paid during lay-offs is to work extra shifts on Saturdays - as if we didn't work enough hours as it is!

Since BMW forced the system of banked hours on production workforce at Oxford and Swindon 20 years ago, the bosses have used it to screw us for as much free labour as possible. It gives them more production in periods of peak demand like the summer with a minimum workforce. Increasingly they have



taken advantage of it to impose longer shutdowns to install new equipment. So, while the April shutdown will be used to adjust the lines to electric car production, management is making sure everyone will have to pay the hours back, on the pretext of a Brexit which might not even cost them a penny! And even if it did, why should we, workers, foot the bill?

• Bad timing

What's this we hear about an announcement from BMW on the so-called Brexit shutdown, just 2 days before we end for Christmas? That is 12 December when the result of the commons' vote on May's withdrawal bill would be known. As if

that's gonna resolve anything! BMW is playing politics, but it doesn't play it very well. Then again, who does? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 5/12/18]

• Straitjacket not compulsory!

Managers are now refusing to let us take any of the Brexit shutdown as time unpaid!

Presumably there was nothing about this in the September letter for the good reason that forcing us to use only holidays or WTA is a breach of a BMW contract. As for Gi, how can they (legally) impose any such thing on us under our "zero hours" contracts? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 5/12/18]

Public assets squandered for speculation

The biggest privatisation of state assets in Britain in the last 40 years was not gas, nor water, nor telecoms, but land! Since Thatcher came to power in 1979, the state has sold 10% of the land area of the country, about 2 million hectares, to private sector buyers. That is about

the same as the public estate that remains, which is valued at £420bn. But the land sold off is almost certainly worth more than that. In many cases, like the sales of council houses at a one-third discount under right-to-buy, land was sold at below market value. Unlike the much-publicised right-to-buy, this went largely unnoticed because it happened piecemeal..

This sell-off continues though. At the time of writing, the government website includes a page detailing sites for sale, listed by region. Yet none of these need be "surplus to requirements". They could provide public meeting spaces, sports fields, parks or even patient recreational facilities for hospitals, instead of propping up a terminally sick profit system.

France

Today, 8 weeks after it began, where is the French "yellow vests" movement going? On this subject, we reproduce below a translated extract of the workplace bulletin editorial published on January 8th by our French sister organisation, *Lutte Ouvrière*:

"Despite Macron's minor concessions and the Christmas holiday break, 50,000 yellow vests expressed their anger once again on Saturday 5th January... The movement may be weaker, but it is still capable of taking a wide range of initiatives - which is all for the best, since this protest is both legitimate and encouraging.

Up to recently, the government had just offered the protesters a carrot with, among other things, the promise of a wide national debate supposed to lead to solutions to the problems they raised. But by now, it has also opted for the stick, with several provocations meant to raise the tension. Force was used systematically to evacuate the roadblocks. Derogatory terms have been increasingly chosen to describe the 'yellow vests' and... caricature their movement which is after all, the expression of a deep discontent.

Whichever way this movement evolves, discontent can only grow. And for obvious reasons too: while we are in the middle of a crisis and more than six million people are unemployed, capital is proving greedier than ever and inequalities and injustices are increasingly obscene.

The whole of society is blocked because capital is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority... In the name of private property and 'business confidentiality', society is allowed no control over where the money goes. Just as it may not seize and use the wealth which is available, even though there is an urgent social need to invest in housing, transport, health or education... That's what needs to change.

Ireland

As of 1 January, it became legal for Irish women to obtain free abortions up to 12 weeks of pregnancy. That is, a medical termination in a GP surgery or family planning/woman's health clinic, or a hospital termination, after a 3-day waiting period which is meant to offer time to verify an ultrasound scan, but also to "reconsider"...

Of course this is limited "choice", but it's somewhat more liberal than the

The "yellow vest" movement: the anger is still there



"All together"

The "yellow vest" movement expressed the desire of the protesters to have more control over what the state and elected politicians do with taxpayers' money. This is legitimate. But to control what the capitalist class does with the wealth created by the working class is even more important.

This capitalist minority holds the reality of power: car manufacturers like Ford or PSA, have the power to close any of their factories; manufacturing giants, like Sanofi or Renault, have the power to freeze wages in order to please their greedy shareholders; and banks have the power to turn themselves into gigantic betting shops.

A tiny minority alone makes choices that have consequences for the whole of society. The 'real democracy' and the 'power of the people', which the 'yellow vests' call for, will only make sense once this capitalist minority is deprived of all its powers, when the whole population will be able to give their opinion and, above all, to participate in decisions on

how to collectively manage the big companies which dominate the economy.

It is a necessity not only for workers, but for the whole population, because, as we can see, the law of profit and competition crushes not only manual and clerical workers but also many small bosses, tradesmen and craftsmen who, however hard they work, do not live better than the average wage-earner.

The whole future of society is at stake. A world that makes a decent life impossible for those who do not own capital can only be an increasingly barbaric world. And, with the rise of isolationism and nationalism and the resurgence of racism and xenophobia, our world is becoming more and more barbaric.

It is not enough to call for a better distribution of wealth. For there can be no such thing so long as power belongs to the minority that controls these riches. We must collectively take control of the capital of the big capitalist groups by expropriating them." □

The "right" to abortion: not yet an accomplished fact

mandatory permission from 2 doctors required in Britain, or the anachronistic denial of all abortion rights, full stop, in Northern Ireland despite Northern Ireland being regarded as an integral part of Britain - in particular, for Brexiteer purposes!

However, the on-going reluctance of the Irish establishment to catch up with public opinion, reflected in the 66% support for abortion in the referendum last

May, means that abortions aren't yet available, at all, in 4 of Ireland's 26 counties. Nor in 8 out of the country's 19 maternity units. And only 224 out of 3,500 GPs (just over 6%) had signed up to offer them as of 12 January. A combination of "conscientious objection" and a lack of state allocation of resources means Irish women will still have to fight for what they need. □

In addition to this paper, we publish bulletins in several large workplaces in the South East, a journal, "Class Struggle" and a series of pamphlets on topical issues. If you wish to know more, contact Workers' Fight by e-mail, at contact@w-fight.org, or by postal mail at:

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