

# WORKERS' fight



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

# #GetReadyFor a real fightback!

It is the most ironical, if not farcical, of political times. Boris Johnson as prime minister is, in itself, a comical irony. Here we have a man who led the Brexit campaign ostensibly to "win back the sovereignty" of Parliament from Brussels, who promptly, within weeks of getting into Downing Street, prorogues parliament and de facto removes its sovereignty!

What's more, this is someone who's made an art of getting away with breaking discipline and causing mayhem for his own party, but who now threatens Tory rebels with expulsion if they try to oppose his "do or die" Brexit.

Whether or not he is conscious of all these ironies himself, he knows that he is in a very precarious position. He may have fulfilled his long-held ambition to be PM, but at the head of a party with a majority of just one. At the time of writing Johnson has been appealing to Tory rebels not to "support Corbyn" and to allow him to proceed with his "exciting agenda" rather than forcing him to call a general election. However standing at a lectern outside Number 10, he did not sound too convinced of all of this himself!

## **Twin "alternatives"**

Johnson's argument is that by trying to block a no-deal Brexit, MPs will make this outcome more likely. Maybe, maybe not. But all of these "alternatives": Brexit deal, no-deal exit, election, 2nd referendum, etc., just turn the political process around in the same circle it has been spinning in, for the past two years. Will any of them resolve the underlying political problem? Of course not.

After all, the whole shenanigans emanated from an intractable internal problem specific to the Tory



party which is not even new. Yes indeed: the problem of infighting and factions, which came about over disagreements on the EU; whether Britain should be in or out. These fights are historic in fact! But then the issue came to a head when "leavers" overtook the party on its right in 2014 - something they did again in the last EU election this year, in the shape of Nigel Farage's Brexit Party. This threat is hardly likely to go away, and given the current impasse and possible election, it looms large!

## **For an independent political voice**

Of course, one can get upset over politicians who are seen to run roughshod over "democracy". Especially when it's the likes of Johnson who pretends that he is a great champion of the "will of the people" and then seems to spit on it. But the real issue is that the working class has absolutely no say

nor control over society through the mechanisms this system provides. Workers know they don't control production, but neither do they control politicians. If they did there is no way capitalism (based on exploitation of workers) would still exist!

The Brexit referendum itself is a case in point. It wasn't even designed to give "the people" a voice in the first place. From a working class point of view, where was the stake in voting to sort out the Tories' electoral problems under the guise, not only of poisonous xenophobia, but also when it risked splitting and dividing the working class itself? There was none!

But there will always be a way for the working class to avoid falling into the traps laid for it by aspiring politicians such as Johnson: by making sure that it has its own independent, political voice to defend its own class interests. This was never the case during the Brexit saga - and this has to change! □

## Social

## NHS funding: more smoke and mirrors

In an attempt to appear to be keeping his NHS funding promises, Boris Johnson announced that the government would invest an extra £1.8bn of "new money" to upgrade 20 hospitals across Britain. Except that this so-called "new money" isn't really new: £1bn will be raised from savings that health trusts have made last year thanks to... drastic cuts!

And, of course, even if the £1.8bn was "new money", it wouldn't come close to what's needed to upgrade the decaying infrastructure of the NHS. Based on an assessment made 2 years ago, the upgrade planned by Johnson would in fact cost £3.2bn. And when the NHS as a whole is taken into account, there's a need for £6bn, and that's just to address the backlog of essential repairs!

Of course, Johnson also claimed that this £1.8bn "boost" would come in addition to Theresa May's "extraordinary



commitment" of a £20.5bn increase in the NHS budget by 2023. Only, May's boost was also a fraud: most of that went towards covering the increasing deficit of NHS hospitals and it included £6bn-worth of pension costs!

In other words, Johnson's new NHS funding claims, just like Theresa May's "boost", are nothing more than accounting tricks, while the NHS remains underfunded - which has been government "policy" for the past 10 years! □

### • The anti-vaxxers' lies fuelled by NHS cuts

In August, the World Health Organisation stripped Britain of its "measles-free" status due to a significant outbreak of measles (231 cases) recorded in the first quarter of 2019. And while the highly infectious virus can be eradicated by vaccinating 95% of the population, Britain still has a vaccination rate of only 87%.

Prejudices against vaccination led by "anti-vaxxers" and religious institutions have undoubtedly had an impact on the total number

of children immunised against measles. And the recurrent scandals surrounding pharmaceutical companies in their frantic race for profits can only fuel the anti-vaxxers rhetoric.

But while the anti-vaxxers rely on social media to spread their ignorant rants, a study by Public Health England shows that parents still regard GPs as their most trusted source of advice regarding vaccination - and social media as the least trustworthy source.

But after 10 years of cuts, the means available to health services to maintain the effectiveness of vaccination programs has been eroded. So for instance, the District Immunisation Coordinator staff - who coordinated vaccination programs, kept a census of vaccinated children, updated local GPs on new medical advances, etc. - have been cut to the bare bone. One reason why anti-vaxxers' campaigns have gained so much ground!

### • School funding: nothing to expect from either May or Johnson

May said she had ended "austerity". But instead of offering much-needed multibillion-pounds in cash for schools, before leaving she granted a pitiful 2.75% wage increase for teachers alongside her petty cash for "extras". Not only was this a below-inflation pay "rise", but schools are supposed to find the first 2%, while the remaining 0.75% is to come from pre-existing Department of Education budgets. So this measure in fact

loaded an extra £280m of costs onto schools, which can only translate into more cuts.

Can we expect Boris Johnson to do any better? So far, he made a pledge to increase school budgets by £4.6 billion per annum by 2022/23. But this would at best merely compensate for the cuts that have been made since 2010, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. And from another report, by the Education Policy Institute, it seems that

the proposed budget tends to favour grammar schools over schools with disadvantaged pupils. No surprise, considering that a record-breaking two-thirds of Boris's cabinet is composed of ministers who, like him, went to private schools like Eton! Where, by the way, the £45,000 annual fee for each pupil is well above the average wage of a state school teacher...

### • Old-age poverty and pension privatisation

A new study by an Oxford professor, Bernhard Ebbinghaus, shows that the increase in the number of elderly people living in severe poverty in Britain over the past 30 years is among the highest in western Europe. In 1986 only 0.9% of British pensioners received less than 40% of the average income (his definition of poverty), while today, this has risen to 5%. This is almost entirely attributed to the decline in the abysmally low basic state pension compared to the cost of living (£129.20/week) and the means-testing of supplements. So without an additional private pension, it's become impossible to manage.

However Britain's private pensions are woefully inadequate. With the closure of most "final salary" occupational pensions over the last 2 decades, schemes no longer guarantee a percentage of one's former income. Despite

requiring many years of contributions during working life, they pay out an arbitrary sum, which depends on the ups and downs of financial markets.

In Holland and Scandinavia, there's a mix of state and private schemes to "top up" pensions. But Britain's state, alongside Ireland's, Spain's and Switzerland's, doesn't ensure a "minimum living pension". This study points out that "those European countries that had made private pensions an important source of income for the elderly have seen a rise in financial inequality" and that this "shift to increasing privatisation amplifies the already existing level of social inequality". Which also points to an answer.

### • Capita's disability sentences and its benefits bonanza

In July 2018 Victoria Smith, aged 33, died due to a deterioration of her fibromyalgia condition just weeks after being told that she was

not eligible for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the benefit paid to help people with disabilities with daily living and getting around.

The assessment for PIP payments is carried out by Capita - the "outsourcing giant", subcontracted by the government Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) - according to a point system introduced in 2016. In fact it replaces the self-assessed Disability Living Allowance.

Victoria's family took legal action against Capita and won last February, after 8 months! Capita appealed against the judgement, but failed. However its lethal "error" was judged to be an "exceptional mistake"...

This case is one among many. The reassessment for PIP eligibility was introduced in January 2018 by Minister of State for Disabled People, Sarah Newton, precisely with the aim of cutting 1.38 million claimants. The "saving" amounts to £5.31bn per year, with Capita and other private vultures feeding on a good chunk of it.

## Johnson's war cabinet... against the working class

So, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, which is his full name, has finally made it to Downing Street, after nearly two decades of posturing as Tory leader in waiting.

And, predictably, his new government has turned out to be a mirror image of himself: arrogantly privileged, ferociously prejudiced and especially hostile to the working class. So, among Johnson's appointees, 2 out of 3 were educated in the privileged classes' ultra-exclusive (and exorbitantly-priced) "public schools" - like Johnson's own Eton college. Almost half of his government's members graduated (and, in some cases like Johnson's own, apparently, drunk themselves stupid) at Oxford or Cambridge. More than ever, therefore, this is a government at the service of the wealthy, run by the wealthy.

### A long march to power

Johnson's ambition to win the Tory leadership and get into Downing Street goes back a long way - to 2004 when the then Tory leader, Michael Howard, sacked him from his position as shadow Arts Secretary and vice-chairman of the party, for having lied to the media about his private life.

In fact, his two terms as London Mayor were designed to be stepping stones in this direction, by turning him into a national figure. Having achieved his aim, Johnson announced that he would not stand for a 3rd term as London Mayor. He returned to parliamentary politics and grabbed the first opportunity to position himself in the forefront of the national political scene - by breaking ranks with his own party and championing the Leave vote against Cameron, in the 2016 referendum campaign.

Despite the success of his campaign, however, Johnson withdrew from the Tory leadership contest after Cameron's resignation, thereby holding open the door to Downing Street for May. But this was just a waiting game. For all his eccentric blustering and gaffes, Johnson has got political advisers who can use their heads. And they knew that, no matter how much they talked up the Leave vote, this so-called "*Will of the People*" only represented 37% of the registered electorate - hardly a massive base of support! They also knew that, contrary to the Leave campaign's childish boasting, little Britain would be in a weak position in the Brexit negotiations against the EU's much greater economic power and that the promised "post-Brexit future of affluence" would soon be exposed as a delusion. This meant that the Brexit process

was bound to cause massive discontent, both among its opponents and its supporters.

So it was far more expedient for Johnson to get Theresa May to carry the Brexit can for him - together with the discredit which was bound to come with it. He just had to watch and play for time, adding his own flamboyant contribution to the pressure that the warring Eurosceptic Tory factions were putting on May. Eventually, the general chaos caused by these factions' overbidding, came to the point of paralysing Parliament - and by the same token, the Brexit process itself. And this allowed Johnson to come out of the woodwork and to make a successful bid for May's mantle, with the pledge to deliver "*The Will of the People, do or die*" - which is where we're at today.



### The real face of Brexit

Unlike May, however, Johnson did not try to appease his party's rival factions with ministerial seats. Nor did he try to form a government designed to have the widest possible support among Tory MPs. In fact, May's three-year rule had already shown that this policy had only resulted in bringing the Tory factional in-fighting into the government itself. So, instead, Johnson has hand-picked a government of loyalists to his own person, but also one in which the various factions of the Tory right all have some stake.

As a result, the new government includes representatives of the most reactionary, bigoted and/or backward-looking currents smouldering within the Tory right. By the same token, its composition spells out in no uncertain terms, the kind of gutter politics which have been hiding all along inside the Brexit project.

So, for instance, one of Johnson's

## Brexit watch

reactionary assets in his government is Nadine Dorries, whose main claim to fame is her bigoted campaigning to restrict women's right to free abortion even further. Her appointment as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is not just grotesque, it is a provocation against women's rights!

As to Home Secretary Priti Patel, she is one of the very few mainstream politicians who has gone on record relatively recently (on Question Time, in 2011) supporting the restoration of the death penalty, although she subsequently claimed she had been misunderstood. But what she can't deny is her past long career as a professional lobbyist for tobacco companies such as BAT and their particularly unsavoury profiteering. Since an MP is not normally supposed to be involved in lobbying on behalf of private companies, Patel has got herself involved in another kind of (presumably unpaid) lobbying - on behalf of the Israeli state and, more specifically, of its army! In fact, this was the reason for which she was unceremoniously sacked by May, when she decided that offering funds to Netanyahu's army hospitals in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, in Syria, would be a good use for Britain's International Aid funds, apparently without consulting her government peers!

When it comes to their anti-working class rants, though, Priti Patel is neck and neck with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and Minister of State for Business Kwasi Kwarteng. Didn't they co-author a book entitled "*Britannia Unchained*", back in 2012, in which they complained about Britain's low productivity and explained, among other things that "*once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers in the world*". As to Raab himself, his main claim to fame as a Eurosceptic, was his opposition to the EU's "*Social Chapter*" and his demand that the resulting rights for workers should be repealed in Britain, long before anyone talked about Brexit!

More generally, beyond Johnson's personality, what really welds this government together, is the common anti-working class and pro-business agenda of its members and their common nationalist, anti-migrant worker rhetoric. Not only are they making the Brexit broth even more toxic, but to all intents and purposes, this is a cabinet built to wage the capitalists' class war against the working class. Whether it will be allowed to get away with it, will depend entirely on the working class's determination to respond, in kind, to their attacks. □

**Brexit watch****Boris's law and order: no sense of history?**

No surprise that "Prime Minister of the Union", Boris Johnson's idea of a "vote-winning" manifesto featured measures to bolster the police, enlarge the already too-large prison population, lengthen sentences and, the cherry-on-top, reintroduce generalised "suss" laws. Yes, those same "stop and search" powers which had been curtailed by Theresa May, on the grounds that the hostile environment created for youth and in particular black youth, proved counter-productive... As always, Boris prefers to play to the Tory gallery of "Hang 'em, Flog 'em" protagonists - to which his new Home Secretary Priti Patel herself used to belong, before she thought better of it... And of course the hostile environment for foreigners and immigrants can only get worse given Priti's ugly policies.

Actually, when it comes to increasing police numbers, Boris just took over Labour's manifesto pledge,

**• Trump's apprentice**

In August, at the same time as threatening to suspend Parliament, Boris Johnson held a "People's PMQs" on Facebook. Following in the footsteps of Trump, he decided to use this platform to present himself as a 'defender of democracy', standing up for 'the people', against the elite - not to mention a "cool" guy trying to appeal to the youth, with carefully

**• Bolton's visit: not much help for Boris's Brexit**

During his 2-day visit to Britain, on 12-14th August, John Bolton, the White House's national security adviser, tried hard to personify Trump's "effusive" love for Boris Johnson and his apparent enthusiasm for a post-Brexit trade agreement with the US. This was, after all, meant as a crude "up yours" to Obama, who had suggested in 2016 that a Brexit Britain would have to join the "back of the queue". Bolton reiterated Trump's promise of a place at the front of the queue. But nothing actually transpired. Just smiles and promises.

Of course on two issues close to the heart of the sabre-rattling Trump



**Police stop and search black youths at the Notting Hill Carnival**

to increase the numbers by 20,000, back to what they'd been before his fellow Conservatives cut them. Never mind that the causes of crime, which could also be seen as the "causes" of part of the Brexit vote in 2016 - that is, social dereliction and increasing poverty - will grow exponentially if he manages to implement his Brexit, with or without a

staged "accountability"!

However, no amount of tweeting or facebook videos - can hide the fact that Johnson is very much part of that same elite he hypocritically condemns. He is the 20th Prime Minister to have attended the exclusive private Eton College, and joined Cameron's Bullingdon Club crowd while at Oxford University.

administration - the Iran nuclear deal and anti-Iran sanctions and the 5G Huawei contracts - British ministers are seen to be a little too "un-poodle"-like by not fully embracing US "leadership". Trump's exit from the Iran Nuclear Agreement and his ongoing trade war with China may be a sustainable stance for the US, but do not fully fit with Britain's interests, whether in or out of the EU. So it has to play to both sides. Hence the show of willingness by foreign secretary Raab and defence secretary Wallace to comply with Trump's sabre-rattling against Iran under the umbrella of the US-led Operation Sentinel, which saw an Iranian oil tanker

deal, helped by the "exciting" agenda which he claims he has in store: a hot-air screen behind which there can only be more austerity... Boris would do well to recall the 1980s, if not more recent times, when the police stopped and searched a few too many times, and got riots in the streets, in Toxteth, Brixton, Bristol, Tottenham, etc., over and again... □

As for his bluster and tendency to say one thing one day and another the next - this is precisely what appeals to his supporters apparently! Many in the Conservative Party are betting that his hot air, chauvinistic attacks on the EU and outright lies will successfully cover for their devastating policies over the last 9 years.

detained off Gibraltar last month and which has deployed warships to the Strait of Hormuz. But as for the rest, "America First" probably means Britain last, along with everyone else. In 2017, the US accounted for 18% of British exports, and 11% of its imports, while the EU accounted for 45% and 53%, respectively. In the end, under Johnson or whoever succeeds him, Brexit or no Brexit, British foreign policy, will comply with British business requirements and this is most likely to mean continuing to deal with the EU, rather than the US.

**An anti-working class agenda**

Johnson's new chief Brexit negotiator, David Frost, in his previous job as CEO of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was an open opponent of the "heavy labour market regulation" of the EU.

No doubt he disapproves of laws like the EU Working Time Directive, which legally guarantees minimum rest times

between shifts, and certain limits on night work; or the Directives on maternity and parental leave.

In an article he wrote before Theresa May's resignation, he warned that if Britain continued to be tied to EU labour regulation as part of a Brexit deal, that would not be good for "London's" business.

Indeed, Frost and Johnson probably agree that allowing all "British" business

a free hand to attack working conditions is one of the benefits of Brexit for the whole capitalist class. We only have to remember Johnson's idea, raised during the leadership campaign, of creating "free ports" in places like Teeside, Belfast and Aberdeen, where businesses would be 'exempted' from duties and tariffs. And now we can add exempt from labour regulation, too.

**Patel's profitable services**

Shortly after Priti Patel was promoted to Home Secretary, it emerged she was possibly still contracted to work for Viasat, a global communications firm which is currently involved in negotiations over a lucrative £6bn contract with the MoD. And no wonder she preferred to keep quiet about it: this US company which supplies products and services to governmental departments including the MoD and the UK Space Agency, pays her the generous sum of... £5,000 for 5 hours "work" a month! Of course having an adviser so close to government is priceless. No doubt this is also why another company called Accloud, which sells accounting software, mainly in India, gave the same Priti Patel a non-executive director position paid at a salary of £45,000 a year for 20 hours work a month, which she did declare on the MPs' register of interests.

This is not the first time that Patel

**• Old Remainers learn new tricks**

Even before Boris Johnson won the final ballot for the Tory leadership, ministers from May's past governments, who'd opposed Brexit in the referendum, were sidling up to him asking for jobs! So Amber Rudd, a longstanding opponent of no-deal Brexit, suddenly changed her mind to say no-deal should be an option. Not only did Rudd keep her job at Work and Pensions

**• EU citizens: un-Priti says "Leave" means leave...**

Hard-Brexit Priti Patel, who is Boris's says-it-all choice for a Home Secretary, immediately let it be known that the free movement of EU citizens will end, full stop, on 31st October if there's a no-deal exit from the EU.

A "No-deal" Brexit - at least theoretically - would mean there'd be no mutually agreed "legal" framework in place for protecting the rights of EU citizens here, or those of British citizens in the EU. But given the vital role EU workers play in public services etc., the government quickly rushed to reassure them. They could stay. In fact there'd be no change in the procedure conferring "settled status" on EU citizens. The December 2020 deadline for registering for this status would remain in place, especially given that out of over 3m EU residents, 2.6m haven't yet applied! However, after the 31st October new arrivals would need a visa... Except that at the same time, the Home Office has said



has taken advantage of her profitable position close to government. Already back in 2000, she worked for a PR company to clean up the image of the British American Tobacco firm in Burma - where the BAT factory was co-owned by the brutal Burmese dictatorship - in addition to lobbying MEPs against new

but she took over the brief for "Women and Equalities" from the former Defence Secretary, Penny Mordaunt. Another Tory Remainder who got his old job back as a minister of state for universities and science, is Johnson's younger brother, Jo. Boris is not forgetting friends and family.

Nicky Morgan was another surprise cabinet appointment, 3 years after May

visa-free holiday and business trips would be allowed. It's not clear how that would work, but apparently the Boris government is afraid that any attempt to create new legal guarantees for cross-border movement could be used to delay Brexit.

So for now, Boris still claims EU workers have nothing to worry about, while his Home Secretary continues to make anti-immigrant proclamations. Whether either, or both, will be around long enough for their contradictory statements to be tested, remains to be seen.

**• Borders, immigrants, and profits!**

As the government placed more and more restrictions on would-be immigrants, the Home Office has placed more and more of the onus of implementing these into the hands of private subcontractors. Major parts of the application process, from the collection of documents and biometrics (fingerprints and photographs), have been handed over. As of today, there are three main commercial

**Brexit watch**

regulations restricting tobacco use. The rate for her services was then £165/hr...

But if Patel's parasitic career shows anything, is it simply the efficiency of the revolving door between top government and business circles - and how, governments are run by the rich, for the rich! □

sacked her as Education Secretary. She'd voted several times against the government to secure a Parliamentary veto on Brexit.. But new minister or not, she's not privvy to Johnson's whims - if any of this motley crew are! Hours after she told an LBC interviewer that she didn't think a suspension of Parliament was on the cards, Johnson announced that he was doing exactly that!

providers: Sopra Steria for applications made within the UK, and either VFS Global or TLS Contact for applications from abroad. These companies are making millions, thanks to exponentially rising application fees. What is more, they deliberately make it difficult for applicants who live outside major cities, who must either travel hundreds of miles to submit their forms or pay a large additional fee. On top of this, they habitually reject applications for the tiniest of "mistakes"!

Of course, to maximise their profits, subcontractors fail to employ or train enough staff, using and abusing temps from agencies. No doubt this is one reason for the huge queues which form on a daily basis outside their offices and why on several occasions they have bizarrely asked applicants to wait until the small hours of the morning, in order to submit or resubmit applications... And agencies can expect another bonanza as the "No deal" Brexit scenario unfolds, with another 1,000 workers being recruited in order to police the borders after October 31st...

But hang on. Wasn't it Johnson's Leave campaign which, in 2016, threatened that millions of Turkish workers would be coming here to take their jobs if there was no Brexit? Under him, we may now get Brexit. But if this deal with Oyak goes ahead, Turkish generals will decide how many jobs should stay or go!

**Turkish army brass for steel?**

A surprise buyer has come forward for bankrupt British Steel, which owns the Scunthorpe works, after the government increased a subsidy on offer, to a package worth £300m. Oyak, the Turkish Army's pension fund, was confirmed as the preferred

bidder in mid-August. It already controls many industrial plants and mines in Turkey including, jointly with Renault, a car factory with a high strike rate. Oyak has grand ambitions to increase steel production and convert Scunthorpe to burning gas. But first, it says productivity must rise, so Scunthorpe's 3,000 workforce could be cut significantly.

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• All for one and one for all**

Apparently there'll be a postal (strike) vote over the Bridgend redundancy offer. But we have to ask AGAIN, if that is the union plan, why all the other plants are not being balloted as well and all at the same time? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/07/19]

**• This bait won't catch any more fish**

By the way, Ford can forget about using the "bait" of a permanent contract to try to make us temps "obedient" workers. We know they don't deliver. And

given their constant messing about with contracts and multiple tiers, and their refusal to pay equal pay for equal work, perm or temp, we'll just have to work less, if we're paid less... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/07/19]

**• Panther panto**

Funny how the "deep clean" on Panther still hasn't got rid of the smell of a rat... But what was the real purpose of that visit by Ford Europe boss Stuart Rowley last Friday? After putting on a "good" show (they had to bring Lion mates over to make up the mini-shift!), they sent round a letter congratulating us for



"demonstrating cutting edge technology".. "out of box thinking" and "passion for manufacturing" which "impressed Stuart". Hmmm. They also wrote that we showed a "relentless desire to eliminate waste". Like this kind of garbage? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/07/19]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Rail outage outrage**

The 9th August is now being referred to as "Black Friday" after the national grid's failure threw much of the country, including major railway lines into chaos.

LNER and GN out of King's Cross ground to a halt, leaving thousands of passengers and staff stranded. Trains suddenly lost power at 16.30 and were thus backed up along the lines, preventing any resumption of services for hours, even though electricity was restored by 18.30. But it wasn't a "two hours delay" as quoted in the press, for the railway!

Trains from Edinburgh got stuck for over 4 hours at Newcastle (including a diesel HST, which could have run if the line had been clear). Neither staff nor

passengers were given any explanation, just told to get off a stuck electric Mark 4 and to get onto an HST which arrived later. And then wait. A few trains ran to York but there was no way to continue one's journey thereafter.

But even once moving on the London-bound HST, over 4 hours late, our problems were not over. Overhead lines had come down near Peterborough which added another 40 minutes onto the journey and then waiting for a replacement drivers meant additional delays.

So, having begun the trip at Edinburgh at 1700 passengers and staff eventually got to King's Cross at 0230 the next day... Taxis home for staff and



passengers alike had to be found. But that meant another wait and some staff arrived home after 0400 that morning. We had been "at work" for 18 hours! But never mind. Managers still had the temerity to ask us to turn up for a next shift at 1430, claiming we had 12 hours "clear" in between! The answer we gave them isn't printable... ☐

**• Black Friday on GN**

Incredible that GTR's new trains couldn't be restarted after the power outage on the 9th August. The class 700 and 717s shut down even though Network Rail's overhead power lines didn't! 60 affected trains were restarted by drivers but the rest couldn't be: 371 services were cancelled and there were 873 delays.

Apparently a safety mechanism was triggered (why in some and not others?) to "protect the onboard systems and electronics". And nobody knew how to un-trigger it... [Workers' Platform King's X]

**• Tired from the start**

We LNER drivers are finding "fatigue" to be a big problem. With all the roster changes and

constant cancellations of the trains that we have to get to work on, we're already tired by the time we reach King's Cross to start our duties. And that's dangerous. Maybe LNER managers can organize taxis to pick us up instead? Of course, there's always the option of also putting an extra driver in the cab. [Workers' Platform King's X 16/07/19]

**• Generating profits come before generating light**

The 9th of August power outage which affected a million homes, hundreds of trains, Newcastle airport and a hospital in Ipswich, was Britain's biggest blackout for more than a decade. The cause is still "under investigation" at the time of writing, but the National Grid seems to be putting this down to a lightning strike. Two generators went down within seconds of each other: an old gas-fired power plant (operated by RWE, a German company) near Cambridge and the Hornsea offshore windfarm (operated by Orsted, a Danish company) in the North Sea. .

Power to much of England and Wales was lost for 2 hours before back-up kicked in. But the outage should never have happened, according to a government energy advisor: "If

power cuts happen when just two power generators drop off, then something fundamental has gone wrong". In fact the National Grid had only 1,000 MW in reserve as back-up, when it needed 1,300MW.

There is also a problem related to the fact that renewable sources of energy which may be off-grid (like wind farms) aren't visible to the Grid, which can only estimate the electricity they add. When they go out, it's therefore a matter of guesswork as to what is needed to compensate. What's more it seems that there is an underlying problem with the Grid. In the last 3 months there were 3 black-out near-misses. All this is undoubtedly the result of the patchwork of supply and lack of investment - privatisation, in short, which puts short term gain - profits - ahead of long term energy security...

**• A foretaste of post-Brexit blackouts?**

In the light of Brexit, this episode, rare though it might be, should be a reminder that the ageing British national power grid has long ceased to be self-sufficient, and instead relies on international companies based in the EU to provide a large proportion of its electricity. Today, 36% of Britain's energy needs are imported, including 90% of gas and oil. And 75% of electricity supplies are handled by the so-called "Big Six", four of which are European companies. Proof that "Great" Britain has long ceased to be "Great" enough to manage by itself and needs its neighbouring economies - and with no borders between it and them!

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**

**Royal Mail attacks can be stopped!**

This August, the Communication Workers Union announced it would begin balloting Royal Mail workers on the 24th of September for possible strike action. CWU leaders have been increasingly unhappy with the new RM boss Rico Back, who, they claim, is breaking the so-called "4 Pillars" agreement - which had been jointly signed by the union and RM (under former boss Moya Greene) two years ago - without asking the union leaders first.

But in fact, these attacks are nothing new. We should recall how Greene's 4 Pillars Agreement ended the final salary pension scheme (we're still waiting for the hybrid "replacement" scheme), laid the basis for huge restructuring and the so-called "Amazonisation" of

Royal Mail by digitalising parcels sorting, introducing more automation, with Early Voluntary Retirement programs to cut jobs without replacements, using casual workers to fill gaps, etc., etc.! Nevertheless the CWU leadership upholds this 4 Pillars agreement as if it was a victorious breakthrough which has now to be defended at all costs.

In fact, Rico Back's new 5-year plan to transform RM into a "parcels-led, more balanced and more diversified international business" is just the logical continuation of Greene's attacks. So even more jobs will be cut, digital devices will be used to speed up collections and deliveries and delivery walks will get longer! RM's construction of 3 Amazon-like warehouses to process parcels will



be used to justify even more Mail Centre closures. And the bosses have now threatened to stop shortening the working week, as had been promised in the 4 Pillars agreement, if Delivery Offices' efficiency doesn't go up by another 5%.

Whether or not the union officials are willing to do something about RM's new attacks is not the issue. The fact is that the 110,000-strong RM workforce has the strength to stop these attacks and win back the ground lost - and it must!

**• When our hearts stop**

Why do we not have defibrillators on every floor of the main MP building? The suits have them in 185, so what about the workers? What's more, if there were defibrillators everywhere as they should be, they'd provide a vital public resource - since MP is "open" virtually

24/7... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 16/07/19]

**• Open the doors... and the jobs!**

How many doorkeepers are left "keeping doors" these days? One by one, mates have departed and managers failed to replace them. Instead,

they've just made those who remain cover more doors or they've shut the doors for good - or only open them late/for a few hours. Since door-keeping has always been the kind of job we can take when we're older, but not yet ready to retire, this loss leaves us with virtually no options... [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 16/07/19]

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

**BMW's electric Mini: "new car" and old tricks**

Before BMW confirmed that the electric Mini would be produced in Cowley, it threatened workers that the stability of their jobs relied on the location of future electric car production.

But what has this "new investment" in Cowley really meant for the workforce? First of all, the summer shutdown was moved to April, ostensibly due to Brexit, but during this time BMW prepared the assembly lines for the electric car. Workers paid for this with the loss of their summer holidays, and even ended up "owing" extra time to BMW!

The works during April did not set up new assembly lines for the electric car - lines were merely adjusted to produce both the petrol and the electric Mini at the same time. The benefit of this for the company is that production can be changed according to demand. But, more importantly, manufacturing both models on the same line means that where there are more complicated electrical tasks for workers to carry out on the electric version, these have to be done as fast as it takes to do a petrol car. And we're meant to do it without any extra hands!



At the moment 370 cars are made on each shift, of which 5 cars are electric, but BMW is expecting to increase this to 150 electric cars per shift in October. In other words "crunch time" is just around the corner...

**• No to VPO...**

Why should we agree to do BMW's so-called "Volume Protection Overtime"? Usually it's caused by some machine or other breaking down... which is usually due to the lack of maintenance. So much

for them protecting anything properly, except their precious profits... VPO should be renamed Profit Protection Overtime. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 16/07/19]

**• It seems they want a jam...**

If we were to do only the jobs written

down on managers' obsessive process paperwork, no cars would come off the line! Since they care so much about these bits of paper, why don't we stick to what's written down, to the letter..? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Oxford Mini 16/07/19]

**Boom and bust for the car makers in China**

After the 2008 financial crisis, car manufacturers looked to China as a potential source of big future profits and they rushed to set up factories there.. Indeed, between 2005 and 2017, while global car sales rose by 25 million, 20 million of these were in China (with another 2 million in India).

However, 2017 was the high point of this boom in global car sales. In 2018, for the first time since 2008, global sales fell, including in China. So far in 2019, there has been an even greater fall in sales globally, with demand expected to be 5% lower by the end of the year.

So the boom in Chinese car sales ended as quickly as it began, leaving a number of manufacturers facing a loss on their Chinese operations,

including Ford and Peugeot SA, whose new factories are running at a fraction of capacity.

While China is still the single largest consumer car market, its stalled growth leaves the biggest car manufacturers scrambling to find profits elsewhere. And as always, their first move has been to attack the jobs, pay and conditions of all the workers in their factories, whether in China, Europe or the Americas...

## Our history

It was August 14th, 1969, when British Labour prime minister Harold Wilson sent the first troops into Northern Ireland, under "Operation Banner", at the request of the then Northern Ireland prime minister Chichester Clarke. This was ostensibly to help the Royal Ulster Constabulary, a predominantly Protestant police force, quell the near-civil war raging on the streets of Derry and Belfast. It was supposed to be a limited intervention. It lasted nearly 30 years.

In Derry, the "Battle of the Bogside" had been sparked by the Derry Apprentice Boys' march on the 12th August, two days before the troops were sent in. This provocative march is an annual event, to commemorate the successful defence of Derry against Catholic besiegers in 1688, and almost always ends in a riot. But the context in 1969, was the growing fear on the part of the British government of a new challenge to the legitimacy and anti-Catholic sectarianism of the regional institutions on which the British occupation of Northern Ireland was based. This challenge came from the Civil Rights movement - whose stronghold just happened to be Derry's Bogside district. This movement, which demanded the vote for non-rate-payers and decent housing for all, was all the more threatening since it crossed the sectarian divide, organising poor Protestant families in its ranks. It demanded an end to discrimination and the dissolution of Northern Ireland's sectarian institutions.

When the Apprentice Boys' march turned against the Bogside as predicted, barricades were set up. Bogsideers defended themselves

## 50 years ago: the start of the "Troubles"

with stones and petrol bombs, trying to drive back attacks by hundreds of policemen using batons and CS gas. In 48 hours of fighting, a thousand rioters sustained injuries, the police suffered casualties, and this time, failed to gain control. In retaliation, in Belfast, Protestant gangs stormed into the main Catholic enclave



**Battle of the Bogside,  
12th August 1969**

in the west, burning houses and forcing families to flee. The RUC actively aided the attacks: 650 homes were burned out in a single night. Catholic families streamed over the border to take refuge in the Irish Republic, setting up refugee camps. It was at this point that the Irish PM called for UN troops to be sent to Ireland. In response, Britain's puppet Northern Irish PM, Chichester Clarke, instead, broke off relations with the South and called for the British army.

With the advent of the troops, it soon became clear that the army was not there to liberate or even protect, the Catholic ghettos, but to

aid the sectarian forces ranged against them to repress them and maintain order - but "order" meant propping up the anti-Catholic Orange Order! It was this situation that prompted the launching of a new Irish Republican Army (Provisionals) against British military occupation. There followed 3 decades of "Troubles", until the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 bringing what had become a bloody and increasingly self-destructive struggle by Republican forces, to a close.

However, today, due to Brexit, the "Troubles" may again erupt. Guns and bombs are reappearing. Reporter Lyra McKee was shot in Derry in April. There have been several bombs under police cars and sectarian murders. This August, loyalist bonfires burnt Irish flags and pictures of the Republican leader Martin McGuinness (who died in 2017). During this year's Apprentice Boys march in Derry, a band from Larne marched through the city with shirts saying "I support Soldier F", the only British paratrooper being prosecuted over the Bloody Sunday shootings which killed 14 in Derry, in 1972.

Britain may have no economic interest in retaining the North of Ireland, quite the contrary, in fact. It is a drain on resources. But Brexit has re-awakened a perverse, infantile nationalism among both Tory hard Brexiteers and Northern Irish right-wing politicians, who insist on the so-called "sovereignty" and "integrity" of the "United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland" and refuse the only solution to the "backstop problem", which is to reunite the two parts of Ireland once and for all. □

## Kashmir

In August, newly-re-elected prime minister Narendra Modi's far-right, nationalist government repealed Articles 370 and 35-A of India's constitution. These articles were formulated in 1947 when the then Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir was being integrated into India, giving the local legislative assembly some autonomy from the central government and reserving some government jobs and land for Kashmiris. Pakistan has administered the western part of Kashmir - Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir - since the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947-8, but has always laid claim to the rest of the state.

The repeal of these constitutional articles has been a long-standing demand of the Hindu far-right, which saw them as giving "privileges" to India's only Muslim-majority province and Modi included this in his recent election campaign. But doing this now, in the context of the latest lethal tit-for-tat incidents between India and Pakistan can only be seen as an attempt to rally the Hindu electorate behind his right-wing Hindu BJP party for provincial elections which are around the corner.

Anticipating the inevitable protests against this repeal, the government sent 70,000

## Modi's oil on the fire



**Protesters in Jammu city,  
earlier this year**

additional troops into Kashmir, imposed draconian curfews and blocked all forms of communication. Kashmiris have organised protests nevertheless, but these have been brutally attacked by the Indian army. As for the reaction of Pakistan - this is only a matter of time. PM Imran Khan has so far only made calls for some kind of international intervention, including from Trump! But he is too close to the Pakistani army not to be looking for some form of retaliation.

However it should be remembered that

the roots of Kashmir's unresolved "statehood" were planted by British imperialism, which partitioned India into two in 1947 and consciously left Kashmir as a bone of contention between India's and Pakistan's newly independent governments. It has been a volatile powder-keg ever since, which has left the region's population caught in a lethal trap, and treated as dispensable cannon fodder in the on-going rivalries between successive Indian and Pakistani governments. □

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

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