

# WORKERS' fight



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<http://www.w-fight.org>  
contact@w-fight.org

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

## IT'S OUR COLLECTIVE ACTION, NOT VOTING THAT COUNTS!

As the polls predicted, the Conservatives swept up the majority of seats in the 6 May elections. Predictably too, they won the Hartlepool by-election. But this hardly means that voters are giving Johnson a warm handshake!

According to the media, though, voters have forgotten the needless deaths due to coronavirus and the lies and corruption surrounding Johnson's government. Apparently Johnson is being rewarded for "his" magnificent vaccine roll-out. Never mind his refusal to share the huge hoard of vaccines (grabbed by venture capitalist greed), with the poor countries, where Covid victims are dying in their thousands every day.

The truth is that the turnout in these "bumper" elections was typically poor. In council elections the percentage was, at most, in the low 40s.

The exception was the Scottish Assembly election, where a 63.2% turnout was proclaimed an "all-time record" even though 1 in 3 of the electorate *didn't* vote. In reality, as usual, the biggest party in these elections was the party of abstention.

The main reason is obvious: the "lack of a credible alternative". In the name of "national unity" and solemn duty in the face of "war" (against a tiny virus!), the Labour Party went along with all of the government's policies over the past year, citing the "interests of business" even more forcibly. It set its stall (yet again!) very clearly *against* the working class.

As everyone joked, Starmer's only difference with Johnson was over wallpaper.

### **Patronising the working class**

After Hartlepool, all the politicians are talking about how to win "the working class vote". Johnson claims to have got workers' votes by "getting Brexit done". And now Labour is trying to find suitable "working class candidates" to



select for future elections.

Labour Party spokespersons even propose that Starmer's deputy, Angela Rayner, should be leader, because she worked in social care in her previous life and speaks like a "Northerner"! It says it all about Starmer that his reflex after the election was first to sack her and then, when he realised how that looked, to quickly promote her!

That said, behind all this patronising nonsense, lies a real contempt for workers. As if working class people are incapable of judging policies or performance and would be conned into voting for someone by their accent!

So yes, Labour politicians are certainly disconnected with what used to be their electoral base, no question!

### **The "bill" is for workers, unless we act!**

So what next? On Tuesday 11 May, parliament reopened and the Queen read out the government's "levelling up"(!) plans for the coming session.

These are mostly waffle, committing

Johnson to very little. Some of the Bills mentioned are already progressing through the House, like the Crime Bill, granting police even more powers, or the Immigration Bill which removes rights from refugees. Yet on social care, which needs urgently to be taken back into public hands and integrated into the NHS (simple enough!), the government proposes nothing concrete at all.

There are also proposals which give the prime minister new powers to call elections and to bring in ID cards for voting. Opposition MPs present this as Johnson's way to secure another term. They say ID cards would exclude the poor from voting. But if so, this would be enough to make "libertarian" Johnson back down. He has every interest in promoting voter turnout and illusions in the ballot box.

Indeed voting - and the vote of the working class - is certainly the heart of the problem. Because there is nothing the ruling class fears more, than workers deciding to use their collective power on the streets instead of a paper ballot, as a means to oppose the "Queen's" laws. □

**Covid-19 crisis**

On 12 May the number of Covid deaths nationally, had reached 127,640 according to government figures. But on 16 April, the ONS (Office for National Statistics) had already reported over 150,000 deaths. In fact, there have been several changes to the way in which the government counts these deaths. The ONS counts as a Covid death anyone who has Covid written on their death certificate. But in August 2020, the government changed the definition of Covid death in order to exclude anyone who died *after* 28 days of their diagnosis. Never mind that at least 1 in 4 Covid patients spend more than 26 days in hospital, and of course, the longer they are there, the more serious - and fatal - the disease.

This may not do the trick for the government in front of the public here - everyone knows about its blatant mismanagement of the pandemic (120,000 being already catastrophic!), but it does help their international image. The data centres comparing the effects of the pandemic across different countries, like John Hopkins University, use

• **Another inquiry too late**

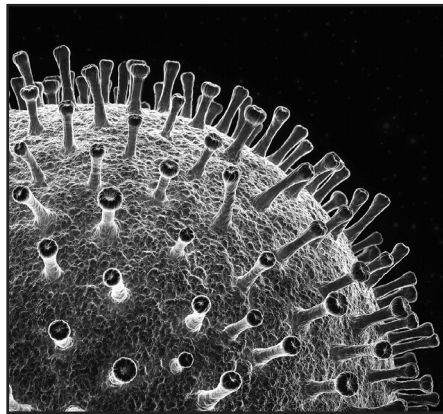
The relatives of those who died from Covid have - understandably - been asking for an inquiry into the government's handling of the pandemic. Johnson has been under pressure to respond. His initial answer was that "his people" are too busy... those who "would need to give evidence to an inquiry are working round the clock"! But after the reopening of parliament, he conceded that an inquiry could take place... but not until next spring!

An alternative "People's Covid Inquiry", organised by the Keep Our NHS Public campaign, is however already underway, chaired by the left-wing barrister, Michael Mansfield. It's taking evidence from expert witnesses, key workers and bereaved families. Whether any "official" notice will be taken of this is another question. But one thing's for sure: next year will be too late.

In the meantime, Johnson is wholeheartedly supporting the Daily Mail's campaign for a memorial dedicated to Covid victims inside St Paul's cathedral. No wonder, since a memorial can't speak...

• **For vaccine internationalism!**

The Russian Sputnik V vaccine is hardly ever mentioned in Britain. It's as if it doesn't exist. Which is very strange. Because it has been proven to be even more effective than the AstraZeneca vaccine. It uses a

**Still fiddling the world's worst death rate!**

the government's figure of 127,000 deaths. So this positions Britain's death rate of 188 deaths per 100,000 people, below Brazil (196), Italy (202), and Belgium (213).

At the time of writing, it is not yet certain that the partial relaxation of restrictions on 17 May and full opening on 21 June would go ahead.

Johnson initially said that the path out of his "miserable, miserable lockdown", as he called it, is irreversible. So it is possible that caution may be thrown to the wind, despite the rapid increase in the latest variant from India. Cases

are doubling every two weeks. very similar vaccine technology in fact - but hasn't so far been associated with blood clots. Trials have shown it to have a protection rate of 91.4%, which is one of the highest amongst all vaccines produced so far.

Why then was this vaccine initially discredited and then literally boycotted? And why was it not ordered by European countries in the face of their acute vaccine shortage? Only Hungary and Slovakia granted emergency approvals. The most obvious reason is protection of the profits of favoured companies whose vaccines are in competition with Sputnik V. But what is really unforgivable in the context of this worldwide Covid crisis, when scientific expertise needs desperately to be shared, is the revival of the politics of the Cold War against a "Russian" vaccine.

• **Fallout from "protecting" the NHS**

When Covid struck last year the first priority of the government's scientific advisors was to "Protect the NHS". It was already on the verge of collapse. And they knew that without drastic measures the pandemic would push it over the edge. There was a critical staff shortage (106,000 vacancies) and a critical care bed and ventilator shortage.

Their drastic measure was to turn the NHS into a Covid service. But today, when the NHS is trying to "become itself again" it

are doubling every two weeks.

There are many uncertainties. For instance, will the new variants that are now beginning to circulate - including the "South African" and "Brazilian" mutants - cause severe infection in people who are already vaccinated? Are they more infectious (it seems so) and are they more lethal?

It is all very well having "the best genome sequencing in the world" as politicians keep boasting. But if identifying the new variants of concern has no consequences, like increasing testing and tracing, isolating the positives, preventing close human contact... what is the point? The government advisors admit: "the number of novel variants entering the country is a direct reflection of international travel and the levels of infection in the rest of the world". The comprehensive answer to new variants is not just new vaccines, but the suppressing of infection hotspots and vaccinating internationally - across all age groups. But that isn't what's happening. ☐

is facing a fallout which could be even more lethal than Covid.

Last year, over 3m patients are estimated to have had surgery deferred, diagnostic tests cancelled or their treatment - including for cancer - delayed. A record 4.7m are currently on waiting lists - the most since records began. More patients will inevitably die of acute non-Covid conditions. Today, there remains a shortage of at least 90,000 staff. And the only answer the government has come up with so far, is to refuse NHS workers a pay rise!

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## Brixton 1981: they made black lives matter

Forty years ago, a violent police crackdown against local black youth in Brixton sparked 3 days of rioting, which temporarily forced the police into retreat. Called "Swamp 81", this was the Met's "saturation policing" supposedly in response - so it claimed - to an "increase in crime". But that wasn't their problem. The police aimed to enforce their control over the black community because it had had the temerity to stand up for itself.

Just one month earlier, over 40,000 local people marched through Brixton to Hyde Park, protesting the deaths of 13 black teenagers in a fire at New Cross - a likely case of arson by far-right thugs. But as they shouted: "13 dead, nothing said". The police turned a blind eye.

In Brixton, where many Afro-Caribbean immigrant workers had been settled for decades, a lot of youth hung out on the streets. This was the start of the Thatcher era. There was high unemployment and it affected black youth

disproportionately. They liked to meet near the station and market area of Electric Avenue. And mostly, like their parents, they just chilled. Anyone who knew anything, also knew that the Railton Road so-called "Frontline" where "ganja" prevailed in clubs and pubs, was a laid-back and peaceful place.

But that wasn't how the hostile, white police saw it. They decided they were going to "take over". So that April, they swamped the area. Cop cars tore up and down at full speed, sirens blaring, stopping to arrest any black youths they could lay their hands on, bundling them into the back of their vans.

On Friday night, 10th April they picked on one youth too many. They'd later claim he'd been stabbed and they were "assisting" him... But nobody believed it. A large group of local people gathered to confront them. Next day, when the swamping carried on, groups of youths blocked the path of police vehicles, pulled the cops out, upturned the vehicles and

## Their society

set them alight. And when terrified ranks of police tried to advance, now with riot shields to protect themselves, crowds of youths threw stones and petrol bombs which sent them into hasty retreat. Part of Brixton round the market and up Railton Road became a no-go area: buildings were burnt. For 3 whole days, this area was "held" until the cops managed to take it back. And then the arrests began.

After the ash had settled, an inquiry under Lord (Judge) Scarman found the police culpable and pointed to "social causes". The area was meant to receive investment for rejuvenation. But 4 years later - and another riot. This time an armed cop shot Cherry Groce, a young black mother, paralysing her for life, having broken her door down looking for her brother. In fact nothing had changed. And why would it? Again in 2011, after a trigger-happy cop shot Mark Duggan in the back, riots against the police in Tottenham spread to Brixton and beyond.

Today, black men are still 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched under suss laws and 5 times more likely to be tasered than whites. Former Aston Villa footballer, Dalian Atkinson was brutally killed in 2016 by a cop "duo" who tasered him 3 times and kicked him in the head because he was "behaving erratically" - in truth, suffering a mental breakdown. Being black and working class or poor puts you in the frontline of police aggression - the target of their "institutional" racism and of course their claim to be doing their duty: defending the private property of the ruling class. □



### St Vincent recalls Monserrat

The eruption of the La Soufriere volcano on the eastern Caribbean island of St Vincent on 9 April, forced evacuations of more than 20,000 people (about a fifth of the population) into emergency accommodation. The consequence of this was another disaster - an immediate rise in Covid cases on the island.

St Vincent and the Grenadines is a former British colony and part of the Commonwealth. But the British government felt no responsibility

whatsoever towards the population. It has begrudgingly handed over the grand sum of just £800,000 in so-called "aid"! To give some idea of the scale of relief needed, 2 days later the UN appealed for a total of £29.2m! Even that would be peanuts for the Treasury.

This pitiful "contribution" recalls the eruption of the volcano in 1997, on the nearby island of Montserrat, a British dependent territory. Labour's international development secretary Clare Short gave a callous response to the homeless islanders' demands for

more assistance - which she lived to regret. After suggesting that they'd next be asking for "a golden elephant", she complained of a "culture of dependency". At the time this took some of the shine off Tony Blair's new Labour government. Eventually it was forced to agree the islanders' right to seek refuge in Britain.

Both of these islands are products of British colonial exploitation, slavery and indentured labour. Yet when it comes to acknowledging basic humanitarian responsibility, British politicians' reluctance never changes!

## Their elections

## Super-Thursday elections: super-hype

Dubbed "Super-Thursday", 6 May saw local and mayoral elections, the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election and the election of the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies all on the same day. Even more seats were up for grabs due to the postponement of last year's council elections.

Hugely exaggerated claims have been made about the results. Never mind that over half of the electorate refrained from voting: despite lock-down and media super-coverage, turnout didn't go much

above 36%.

Johnson's Tories are celebrating a "gain" of 235 English councillors. Nobody cared to recall their loss of 1,330 councillors in 2019! Or that it's their austerity cuts since 2010 which have decimated local services and turned voters off incumbents! Out of these re-elected councils, Tories now control a further 13, while Labour lost 8, along with 326 councillors. But Labour still controls 44 against the Tories' 63 (and 29 are "No Overall Control" - NOC). So

in reality, Johnson's "vaccine bounce" is hardly hitting the ceiling!

Durham Council, held up as symbolic of Labour's failure, wasn't even lost to the Tories, although given media hype, you'd think so! It was lost to "NOC"! Labour still has the most Durham councillors at 58; the Tories have 24. So no, if this election showed anything, it merely confirmed the disillusionment of working class voters in politicians who don't give a damn about them. ☐

### • Voting won't cure Hartlepool's deprivation

Starmer's Labour party lost the "test" of the Hartlepool by-election, failing to win back voters after 2019's "worst result since the 1930s". The Tories polled 51.9% to Labour's 28.7%.

Hartlepool, which voted 70% for Brexit in 2016, is now another brick in the "red wall" of historically Labour-voting northern English constituencies, which have gone over to the Tories. In 2019, Labour only won because the opposing vote was split between the Tories and the Brexit Party.

Today there is no Brexit party. So the Tories took their vote. However, the turnout was only 42% (in 2019 it was 58%). Apparently, over half of voters thought the parties weren't worth choosing between - and for good reason. No politician in office has done anything to alleviate the social consequences of deindustrialisation: unemployment and child poverty have reached twice the national average.

Johnson described Teesside as "one of the great opportunity areas". His new

Teesside Freeport is said to have won the Tories votes. But it now transpires that post-Brexit trade agreements (with 23 countries) include clauses prohibiting manufacturers in Freeport-type zones from participating!

Teesside workers alongside the rest of the working class would do well to seize their own "opportunity" - and kick out all the politicians and the bosses they protect, in order to build a real future.

### • Scotland: the SNP's "indyref2" and social reality...

The Scottish National Party won the most seats (64) and got more votes (a 47% share) in this election than in 2016: it was 1 seat short of a parliamentary majority, but the support of pro-independence Greens will allow the SNP to form a government.

SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon is using this result as leverage to get Johnson to agree to a new independence referendum, claiming it's the will of the majority. In fact if constituency votes are added up, the parties opposed to independence got slightly more votes, even though one of

them, i.e., Labour, got its worst result ever.

However, threatening a break-away by turning up the anti-West-"monster" noise level, has always been the SNP's best means of rallying support. It can appear radical against Westminster's Tories and thus hide its own reactionary agenda. All the more so today, when after 3 terms in power, it needs political cover for its dismal record, which includes systematic cuts in funding for social projects. Hence the scandal over poverty-linked drug deaths: Scotland

has the most in Europe and 3½ times the rate in England and Wales.

So yes, paradoxically, the more Johnson refuses a new referendum on independence, the better for the SNP. Their non-viable, divisive agenda is a great distraction from today's social degeneration. Of course, the working class has no interest whatsoever in the drawing of a border between England and Scotland - or any other borders, for that matter!

### • Northern Ireland 100 years after partition

The 100-year anniversary of the partition of Ireland is no cause for celebration. It carved 6 counties from Ireland's 32, so as to ensure a "British loyalist", majority in the province, to keep it "British" - and under unionist rule for the next 78 years.

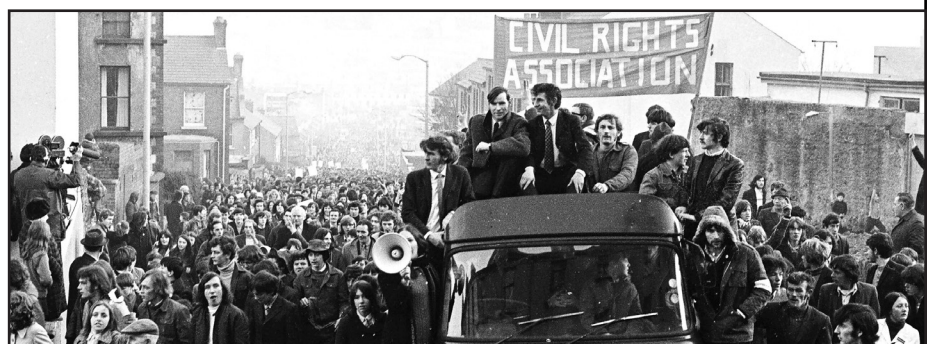
It shouldn't be forgotten that this division of what was Britain's oldest colony, took place in the bloodbath of civil war and unionist pogroms against Catholics. In fact British imperialist politicians, Churchill and Lloyd George, knew that the terms of their Treaty to end the Irish war for independence would split Irish Republican politicians, like Eamon de Valera, from Republican army leader, Michael Collins. Collins signed, seeing no other way out of an unwinnable war. The "Anti-Treatyites" then sought bloody revenge against those who'd "given up" the fight to free Ireland.

And so this entity of Northern Ireland was created, with a population of just 1.2m, but with most of Ireland's industry within its boundaries. A Protestant unionist

ascendancy established a state which discriminated against Catholics in every aspect of their lives. The eruption of the "Troubles" in 1969 as the climax of a Catholic fight for civil rights (which included the poorest Protestants) was inevitable. British troops were sent in and soon turned their fire on the Catholic ghettos.

Today, half a century later and after the 1998 Belfast Agreement ended the armed conflict, a coroner has declared that 10

people shot dead by British paratroopers on the streets of Ballymurphy in 1971 were indeed civilians and not "terrorists". Yes, only *now* acknowledged, and even so, the British state and its army will not be held to account. Which just proves that British imperialist rule, whether direct, or through unionist proxies like Arlene Foster or her successor, lives on in Northern Ireland. It will not end for good, until partition ends.





## Wallpapering over what matters

Stories which "reveal" how government ministers (and Johnson himself) favour friends, family, and donors, especially if asked by text message, scarcely have any shock value these days. Why would they?

Neither does the fact that so many of the 150,000 lives lost so far to Covid, were lost needlessly. Johnson may not have said "*let the bodies pile up*", but bodies piling up was precisely what his policy during the first Covid wave led to.

Yet in the run up to the elections,

the only "sin" that Labour's Keir Starmer could find to accuse Johnson of, was that he might have broken the rules when paying to wallpaper his flat! Starmer called for an immediate independent inquiry!

Besides the fact that wallpaper is the last thing on anyone's mind, official inquiries, even when they aren't over something so trivial, are a proven dead end. Isn't the Grenfell inquiry into the lethal fire which killed 72 people still continuing 4 years later, with no tangible results, while a block of flats with identical

cladding in East London just burst into flames a week ago?

Of course, it's no surprise that Labour doesn't choose to focus on the government's Covid policy. It supported Johnson every step of the way, including when he put opening the economy ahead of people's health and safety.

So yes, who cares about Johnson's wallpaper? It may cover the cracks in his Downing Street apartment but it can't cover up the corruption of the degenerate "profit-before-lives" system he stands for. □

## Their Society

### • Economic recovery they say? For whom?

The economy will grow rapidly this year, says the Bank of England. Of course, given it shrank by at least 10% last year, the predicted expansion of 7.1-7.8% in 2021, will mean it'll still be 2-3% smaller than before the pandemic struck!

So after "*a contraction worse than the 1921 slump after the first world war and Spanish flu*" as the Financial Times wrote in February, pundits are now talking things up. There's even been mention of a possible "*roaring twenties scenario*"! Last month the Bank's chief economist compared the British economy to a "*coiled spring*". Apparently

"consumers" are going to spend the huge savings they've amassed while locked up at home...

Yes, indeed! We're told that "household wealth" has risen to record levels - an amazing £11.4 trillion, the equivalent of £172,000 per person! All thanks to "*a rise in house prices, improved pension wealth and higher savings*". But this "household balance sheet" mostly isn't money which is free for householders to spend: it includes the "asset value" of properties. As for "pension wealth", well, as many as 18% of pensioners are actually living in poverty - that's almost

one in five.

So quite where the spending boom will come from is a mystery. One in three of all households has seen their incomes fall, while workers lost their jobs, or were furloughed on 80% (or less) of their wages. And for many workers furlough is just a stay of execution: a million more jobs are likely to be lost as bosses who took the government's lifeline, cut and run when furlough ends. So no, this "recovery", just like everything else in this class society will mean levelling up for the rich and levelling down for the rest of us.

### • Jersey "fishing war"

On the morning of May 6, more than 50 French fishing boats staged a protest outside the main port of Jersey. They are being denied historical fishing rights, under terms of the new treaty with the EU. There was even talk of cutting off Jersey's electricity supply: 95% is provided by the French grid! The British government reacted immediately, by sending two Royal Navy vessels... just in case the French fishermen staged an invasion of this notorious British tax-haven! In the end, no cannon were fired; 6 hours later, the French boats sailed home.

But the situation isn't resolved, neither for French fishing boats nor for Jersey ones. Jersey, 14 miles off the French coast and 85 miles from England isn't French, as geography might dictate. As a British Crown Dependency it's quasi-independent and wasn't even in the EU. However its relationship with the EU has now been defined, post-Brexit, in the



UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement. And this means French fishers now must "prove" they've always fished in these waters. But it also means that Jersey fishermen now only have access to the EU market on Brexit terms - which has

already led to their catches being refused at French ports. Yes, fish remain a fly in the ointment of the Brexit deal! Could the fishermen sort it out among themselves? They couldn't possibly do a worse job than government officials!

### Football fans seize the moment

On 2 May Manchester United fans invaded the pitch at Old Trafford, stopping their team's Premier League football match against Liverpool. Their banners read "*We decide when you play!*". They called for the end of the Glazer family's ownership of the club which Glazer's US real estate holding company bought 16 years ago and which has now saddled United with £60m a

year in interest payments. The club is now in a dilapidated state.

Despite reports of injuries, populist Johnson said he found the demonstration quite "understandable". Of course he did, with the Hartlepool by-election and council elections four days away! In fact after the protests against the proposals for a European Super League just weeks before, he had announced a "*fan-led review*".

However, it will take a lot more than fans' protests to put an end to the profit game that football has long since become. Even if they score the odd mini-victory against losing managers(!) and cynical projects like the ESL. The Leagues are a money spinner which will only be done away with when the whole system of money-spinning in this society is overthrown.

**Ford Dagenham Engine Plant****• Give us off till shutdown!**

We're finding it hard to keep count of all the lay-offs being announced. Ford writes every week and says each time that there may be more - and yes, there are... But they also write that we have to be on call, and ready to come back at the drop of a hat. So what does it mean, in the end, to tell Tiger and Lion assembly, that we have over 4 weeks laid off? When we can't even book a dinner out, let alone a holiday! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• The dog ate my phone!**

We even heard a rumour that Ford is threatening to stop our lay off pay if they phone us and we don't answer... They say it would mean that we're "not available for work". Well, they might find that a little hard to prove... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• No pay cut!**

So Jetty managers want to save our night shift money? They aren't laying us off (yet) but they want us all on day shift! Of course, nobody chooses to work at night: the extra premiums were imposed on the bosses to ensure that night-work was kept to a minimum. But if we do regular

nights, then the premium is our regular pay. We rely on it and we should get it. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• Essential work? Like hell!**

Seems next week hardly anyone will be here. Unless managers decide to get more of us short-straw-drawers in (why is it always us oldies?) to clean the Panther area. Or go to Tiger. Word to the wise - the cleaning's already been done! Twice over. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• Sunak conned?**

We are really quite surprised: the LLL manager has written to us to tell us that we will be FURLOUGHED for the days they're laying us off. Well, OK: 80% pay is better than none, so we won't complain - except to say we should be getting 100%! But how come LLL is able to get the government to pay for lay-offs due to a microchip shortage? Ford didn't. What's the trick? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• Layoffs aren't holidays**

Hamton bosses are taking the mickey, asking us to take our holidays to cover for



the lay-offs! Of course it's no surprise. The smaller the boss, the greedier and the meaner. And let's not forget this is the same cash-cowboy that owns LLL. We heard the managers are meeting the union this week. Well, they better think hard and find another solution - because our holidays are holidays - to be taken as we see fit! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

**• Sick pay's a right!**

Yes, we did hear Hamton managers correctly: they said we must go unpaid if we need a few days off after being vaccinated. What can we say? Petty and stupid, but we knew that already. And we also know that things will change only when we have won the right to occupational sick pay!

PS: And by the way, where on earth is our pay rise? Some of us are still paid less than £9/hr... We can't wait a single day longer! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/05/21]

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

We hear that BMW expects us to "cover" for these five days of lay-offs, due to the microchip shortage, by "indebting" ourselves again, through the Working Time Account! After the 6-week Xmas shutdown left us all at the limit of WTA! No, this is really out of order. We cannot and will not "pay back" negative hours, nor, obviously, can we go unpaid. So we're going to have to sort this, one way or another! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 12/05/21]

**• Keeping us in the dark**

How come R&H told us nothing about these lay-offs until the last minute? It was only thanks to our workmates in BMW/

Gi that we found out. According to their own rules, R&H bosses are meant to tell us at least a week in advance! Meanwhile we have to tell them weeks in advance when we take holidays or leave. And we're disciplined for arriving a few minutes late... [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 12/05/21]

**• Casual payment on top of casual work...**

We need to all be on permanent contracts, with terms imposing paid layoffs and lockouts. For our mates who are agency R&H (logistics) or G&P (assembly work), shutdowns and lay-offs are always unpaid. G&P mates on zero-hours contracts don't even get regular work! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 12/05/21]

**• No to unpaid work!**

We already know what bins to empty and what surfaces to clean! If MITIE managers keep pointing out missing bits and spots, it's because they know very well there's not enough time to clean everything, and that's precisely why we left it! [Workers' Fight BMW Mini Oxford 28/04/21]

**Semi-conductors: car bosses try to pass the buck**

BMW, which up to now has managed to keep the Cowley Mini plant going despite the microchip shortage, eventually laid us off for three days at the beginning of May. And there are probably more lay-offs to come. For contract workers who make up the majority of assembly workers, this means going unpaid to cover for the three days or using up our annual leave, since these companies

don't pay lay-off pay. The only way we can be "paid" for the days off, is to effectively borrow money from the company using the so-called Working Time Account, but this just means we "owe" those hours to BMW!

On the other hand, at Ford Dagenham where lay-offs are already meant to last up to 4 weeks, most of us are directly-employed Ford workers and we all get lay-off pay (won after militant strikes in the 1970s), even if it

means losing attendance allowance of about £100 a week. But for the contract workers like cleaners and logistics working for Lineside and Hamton, again, there is no lay-off pay. Whether these workmates will get "furloughed" as the company has claimed is another question, since the issue is chips, not Covid... So a co-ordinated fight over pay for all laid-off workers would do well to go onto car workers' agendas everywhere...

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****50 years ago: all postal and communications workers on strike!**

In January 1971, the first ever national postal workers' strike took place, involving 200,000 postal workers, telegraphists, telephonists, cleaners and counter clerks (all part of the Post Office at the time). It lasted 7 weeks.

The background to this strike was years of attacks on conditions. In 1969, Wilson's Labour government transformed the Post Office from a government department to a "public corporation", which meant postal workers were no longer covered by the civil service's collective agreements. In addition, wages had failed to catch up with inflation, which by 1971 was 10%!

The Union of Postal Workers (UPW, now the Communication Workers' Union), demanded a 15% pay rise and the retention of the PO as part of the civil service.

But UPW officials were primarily concerned with the loss of their own bargaining position. The fact that postal workers would be split from the much greater civil service workforce was not their problem. In fact, during the strike, they made no attempt to call out or join forces with other sections of workers, who were under the same attacks - like the 600,000-strong railway workers, whose pay claim was due!



And when the then Conservative government gave them reassurances that positions were safe, the strike was suddenly called off. Postal workers were left with a 9% pay increase - only 1% more than was originally proposed.

Post Office workers might not have got what they demanded, but this 7-week all-out strike showed their fighting potential. It also showed that to win such battles workers have to take them into their own hands! ☐

**• Leaking test kits?**

We notice that management has got another big contract for collecting and delivering C19 test kits - and of course, H&S has (again) gone out the window! Yes, managers claim these potentially infectious kits are processed in a special area, but the fact is that we see them all over the shop floor, mixed with normal packets and often in damaged packaging! We can't touch these, not even

with a barge pole! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 05/05/21]

**• We are afraid of needles**

So we've seen from a union/management joint statement that Sunday deliveries are going ahead... on a voluntary basis. They call it the "Sunday Direct Injection", is that their job at a bad joke? Well, it won't make Sunday walks and van deliveries all the more likely... [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 05/05/21]

**• 2 Waves of recruitment - and a 3rd?**

So RM is recruiting 464 new LGV drivers from among the existing workforce, offering training etc., but it seems they're not offering these jobs to the casual drivers who were taken on to deal with the parcels surge. Why not? And who will do the jobs of those who move to driving? [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre, 05/05/21]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Azumas: are they what they're cracked up to be?**

On 8 May, London North Eastern Railway (LNER) and Great Western Railway (GWR) halted their entire fleet of newly acquired Hitachi Class 800 Intercity trains, after hairline cracks were found on carriages' aluminium suspension brackets.

It's not the first time cracks have been found. Last month, GWR maintenance engineers discovered cracks in other parts of the carriage. In fact, back in 2017, 310 aluminium parts in Japan's high speed "bullet" trains were found to be defective. Supplier

company, Kobe Steel had provided substandard aluminium parts not only to Hitachi's high-speed trains, including the LNER and GWR's Class 800, but also to car and aerospace companies! The Central Japan Railway company stated at the time that the defects on its trains were not dangerous and parts would be replaced progressively through normal maintenance operations. So is that what is now happening here? And why is this the first we hear of it?

Experts say that the poor condition of the track in Britain is also a factor in the



rapid deterioration of these parts. On-board workers have been complaining of excessive vibrations for years. So, it's not just the train fleets that need "inspection" and repair, but the tracks which should be replaced. If it means "service chaos", so be it. ☐

**• 1+1 Doesn't equal 3**

Why do we regularly find ourselves short of one worker on-board LNER trains, with 2 of us expected to cover 3 jobs...? We are not made of elastic and neither can we cover all those extra miles of endless walking up and down the aisles... [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/21]

**• The bosses need the training**

What's this "equality training" that LNER management has launched - making it

compulsory for us and creating "equality reps" into the bargain?! When it's not us workers who need any such training, but them! [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/21]

**• Too fast - and we're furious 1**

Do Atalian managers really think we can wipe by hand almost 700 Azuma coach drop-down tables and brush seats? And after that's done, spray everything with that machine which we have to carry (!) - and then put the tables back up... All in just a few minutes flat - if we're to cover

the whole train! Not do-able. Simple as that. [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/21]

**• Too fast - and we're furious 2**

As for those of us picking up the on-train litter, only Flash the superhero could (on his/her own!) get through all the coaches to pick it all up, empty all the (fiddly) bins and change the bin bags in the (less than!) 90 secs per coach which this would have to take! And let's not even mention the vacuuming! [Workers' Platform King's X 05/05/21]



## India

# Covid wave: Modi has these deaths on his hands

At the time of writing, the Indian government is belatedly discussing a national lockdown. In some regions lockdowns are in force – but they were declared late, after the virus had already spread. The result: at end-April, one in every 5 who were tested had Covid. The number of active cases is 3.7m – more than triple the number seen in 2020. From 7 April - 7 May, officially, more than 71,000 have died, but the real number could be 5-10 times higher. Now the epicentre of the epidemic is moving across the country. But a national lockdown is still being... discussed.

This Covid wave could have been prepared for, but the ruling party was more interested in winning regional elections. In January, Modi's BJP congratulated him on the country's "victory" over Covid. In February, as cases were beginning to rise, elections in 5 states were announced and rallies of thousands were held, during which Modi and others refused to wear masks. Playing to the Hindu right, the Uttarakhand state government organised the Kumbh Mela festival, which concentrated 9.1m people from January-April in the northern city of Haridwar.

Medical infrastructure which should have been reinforced and expanded was undermined: even at the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences nursing was contracted out and working conditions cut.

So when cases spiked toward the end of April, a crisis unfolded, most dramatically in Delhi. Long queues of ambulances waited outside hospitals. Most patients could not get in and had to return home - sometimes to die. Those inside had to wait for up to 10 hours for beds. Very quickly, hospitals ran out of oxygen. Families were told to move patients elsewhere, but there was no oxygen to be had anywhere in the city and more died. The price of oxygen cylinders and concentrators, ambulance journeys and drugs wrongly believed to fight Covid, skyrocketed. Even for the rich and powerful who usually pull strings to get to the front of the queue, there was no point: there were simply no beds nor oxygen to be had. So, the super-rich flew away in private jets, the



powerful commandeered luxury hotels, hoarding oxygen and medicines. The crisis continues to spread in Delhi and beyond... Yes, the Modi government is to blame - but also the systematic privatisation of healthcare carried out since the early 1990s by Congress and BJP-led coalition governments alike.

Medical workers are going through hell - overworked and tired, due to the lack of supplies, it is they who must decide who will get oxygen and who will die.

In the factories production continued - in Maruti, Suzuki, Honda - until workers had died and hundreds had got the virus. For those in the industrial areas around Delhi it was only a question of *when* they'd get the virus.

Modi's vanity project of rebuilding the administrative centre of Delhi was declared an "essential service" - forcing construction workers to continue work. However hundreds of thousands of daily-waged workers, had no option but to migrate, like last year, back to their villages when lockdown was eventually declared in Delhi and other cities. They crammed into buses and trains, spreading the virus further.

The vaccination program has been more about ensuring super-profits to vaccine-producing companies than anything else. By early May, India, the "pharmacy of the world", had only administered 170m single shots to the country's population of 1.3bn. At this rate, it will take some regional states 6

years to vaccinate the 18+ population! And why? Apart from Astra Zeneca's Covishield (produced by the India-based Serum Institute) and the Bharat Biotech Covaxin, the Indian government has rejected all other vaccines, creating a captive market for these companies.

On 19 April, central government deregulated the prices, procurement and distribution of the vaccine, throwing the responsibility onto regional governments and allowing companies to increase prices from 3 to 8 times! With the highest prices now being paid by private hospitals, they will receive vaccines (already in short supply) first, meaning the vaccination drive will favour the rich.

In the midst of all this, regional elections took place. The BJP failed to capture West Bengal from the incumbent Trinamool Congress (TMC). But there's nothing to celebrate: the TMC won by playing to regional chauvinism. The reformist Communist Parties were electorally wiped out - in part because the TMC has been assassinating their cadre for the past decade. In Assam, the BJP-led coalition returned to power by portraying the Congress-led coalition as supporting "illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators" and "threatening" the Assamese. In Kerala, for the first time in 44 years the incumbent Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front coalition returned to power, largely due to its better handling of the Covid crisis. But for now, the virus continues its devastation everywhere. □

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:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.