

WORKERS' fight



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

ALL THIS SYSTEM OFFERS IS CRISIS, WAR AND POVERTY: IT MUST BE BROUGHT DOWN!

The barbarism of the war in Ukraine has reached new heights, with reports of deliberate execution and torture of civilians and captured soldiers.

The targeting of residential areas has been labelled as "genocide" by Ukraine's president, who now claims that Russian troops are worse than Hitler's Nazis. Johnson, Biden and Macron and of course the British media, go along with this without question.

Far be it from these descendants of Churchill, Roosevelt (and Stalin!) to recall the history of WW2: not just the Holocaust, but how Britain's "Bomber Harris" along with US pilots, dropped fire-bombs over Dresden, leaving blackened and skeletal ruins of buildings much like those seen today in Mariupol and Borodyanka. Men, women and children hiding in basements, burned to death.

Today this is still denied by "official" historians. Truth, as the saying goes, is the first (and last!) casualty of war...

The real war criminals

What no-one can deny is that the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were annihilated by 2 US atomic bombs in 1945, without any other motive than to terrorise the rest of the population into submission. That was the nature of the WW2 Allied "victory". And of course, the victors decide who is the war criminal and who isn't.

When US President Biden sheds tears over the deaths of Ukrainian children, one should recall the 2004 "battle of Fallujah", when US troops killed 600 Iraqi civilians, 300 of them women and children, having shelled the city with white phosphorus.

Moreover, Biden bears personal responsibility for the death from hunger of 13,000 Afghan babies since January, having deliberately held back \$7bn belonging to the Afghan government, thus destroying the already half-broken Afghan economy.



So why should anyone doubt that Biden along with Johnson, Macron and Scholz, have the blood of the Ukrainians and Russians on their hands?

Biden could have averted Putin's invasion, but he cancelled his scheduled meeting with Putin on 24 February. He now uses the latest atrocities to justify sending in more weapons. What other conclusion can one draw, than that Biden and NATO actually want this war to continue?

The only good war is class war

Such is the cynicism of the US/West's political establishment. It has no qualms about using the Ukrainian population as cannon-fodder. Nor in using the Ukrainian army, shored up with its weapons, to weaken Putin's forces, if not defeat them.

Ultimately, they hope that Putin's demise will allow the opening up of Russia's great natural wealth, not least its gas and oil, to unbridled exploitation by US (and other western) companies, freed of the complex restrictions currently imposed

by Putin's bureaucratic kleptocracy.

In fact, it's already a "lovely" war for the world's capitalists. Russia's oil and gas rivals are making mega-bucks: Exxon Mobil just announced its highest quarterly profits since 2008!

On the other hand, speculation plus the devastation of Ukraine's wheat harvest is already causing a poverty crisis in the poor countries. Violent protests have broken out in Sri Lanka and Iraq.

In Britain, workers are experiencing the worst fall in their incomes in 60 years. But poverty post-Covid, aggravated by this war, is a problem shared by workers throughout the entire world.

Though nothing positive can emerge out of the fratricide in Ukraine, what it places on the working class agenda is the urgent need for the only justifiable war of our time: a class war to bring down the rotten, war-mongering capitalist system which, in its aims, unites all the working people and poor in order to build a world free from exploitation - and truly, to end all wars. ☐

France

Our French sister group, *Lutte Ouvriere*, as always, has a candidate standing in the French presidential election (1st round on 10 April and 2nd on 24 April) not because it has any interest in participating in the official political system, but because this allows politics which represent the interests of the working class to be heard.

The most likely winner will be current president Emmanuel Macron, a Margaret Thatcher wannabe who left the Socialist Party to stand in the last election as a right-of-centre candidate for his own new party called "Republique en Marche!" (Republic marching forward!), in order to scoop up the votes of an electorate disillusioned with the empty promises of "left" reform, in the context of increasing austerity. Everybody will have seen him on TV, with his small stature, but big head, shuttling between the EU parliament and Russia's Putin trying to appear as peace-maker, but failing.

The old Socialist Party has all but disappeared from the scene. Today it is the right and far-right like Marine Le Pen (and Eric Zemmour who is a new anti-immigrant candidate) who are Macron's main rivals. Although the so-called "left" is supposedly staging a comeback in the form of Jean-Luc Melenchon, who polls give 16.5% of the vote. A former Socialist Party MP, he left the party to found the nationalist-tinted, "La France Insoumise" ("Defiant France") in 2016. He was described by the *Guardian* newspaper as a "radical left wing politician who aims to throw the presidential election off course", after he addressed supporters by hologram at his last campaign rally on 5 April. But the general feeling is that working class voters, facing the cost of living crisis, are pretty disillusioned with all politicians and politics per se, so the results of this election are likely to reflect that.

We reprint below a shortened version of the editorial of their 4 April workplace newsletter.

"Vote Nathalie Arthaud, vote for the workers' side!"

Next Sunday's election is a farce. The war in Ukraine has shaken the world economy, which is already in deep crisis. It is workers who will pay for this

The French presidential election

worsening situation. So the question is not which candidate, after being elected, will attack us, but how we are going to defend ourselves.

Whoever becomes President of the Republic, he or she will be on the side of big business and finance. The most cynical candidate, and therefore the most "sincere", is the one who promises us blood and tears, and this is Emmanuel Macron. He admitted over and over again, that tomorrow there will be less growth and more inflation. And he's announced what he'll do about it: the unemployed who get RSA (long-term unemployment benefit) will be forced to work for 7 euros/hr (£5.84/hr) and retirement age will be raised to 65! Yes, it's Macron's great march backwards!

In this new context, when you hear candidates on the left spelling out their

the clear demand which the labour movement has always defended: that wages, pensions and allowances must be indexed to prices, month after month, week after week if necessary.

Keeping millions of workers out of work is a boon for capitalists. This allows them to pull all wages down and permanently blackmail workers.

If we collectively had the power to run companies, we'd have to start by sharing the work among all of us. Because many of us have far too much work to do. Many workers find themselves having to work overtime, working Saturdays, public holidays, doing the job of two because one workmate, who has retired, has never been replaced... this workload must be distributed among all, by imposing the hiring of new workers.

If we asked workers in hospitals, social care, education, public transport, to draw up a list of jobs that need doing, we'd end up with hundreds of thousands of useful and indispensable jobs that could be created immediately!

And I say to anyone who thinks that these goals aren't realistic, or to anyone who wonders if society is rich enough to achieve them: take up the call for the abolition of business secrecy and for workers control.

When you realise that the strength of the workers is not in the ballot box, you have to have a combative vote, a vote to show your side, your policy, your goals to the other workers. Of course, this vote will be a minority one and it will be against the tide. But against which tide? Individualism? The worship of money? Nationalism? War? Capitalist society? Yes, a thousand times yes, we stand our ground against the tide!

Of course, these ideas can only become powerful when they are taken up by millions of workers. But it is vital to prepare for the future, defending them against the odds and being able to express them in all circumstances, including in an election like this.

Those who share this view, but intend to abstain, should not remain silent. By voting for this candidacy, they could show that there are many thousands of workers who think this way. □



promises and even talking about "happy days", without warning workers of what's coming - when you hear some say that by voting for them, we'll save our pensions without having to protest and fight - there is reason to be angry. Because they disarm those who listen to them. Workers do not need traders in illusions, they need clarity.

I am defending the need for workers' political organisation. My candidacy is a call to raise consciousness and to mobilise. And I am running in order to argue that workers can defend themselves through their collective struggles.

When we talk to each other about what it takes to live, everyone agrees that an increase of 500 euros/month is needed (£400/month), and that the minimum wage to live decently is at least 2,000 euros/month (£1,600/month). But facing inflation, we must put forward

Flag of convenience or just the flag of capitalism?

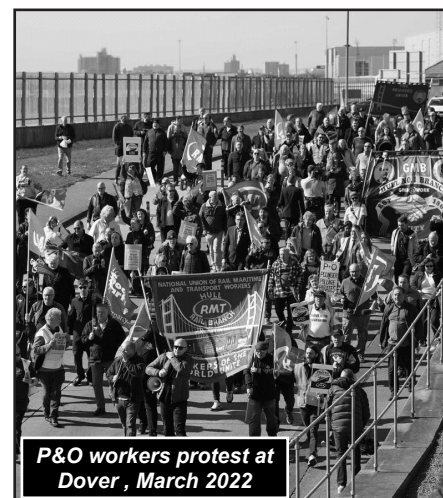
It seems that P&O Ferries was already preparing to sack part of its British workforce back in January 2019, when it "re-flagged" its fleet from Dover to Limassol in Cyprus, which is part of the EU, citing Brexit. Of course, sailing under so-called "flags of convenience" is standard practice among ferry-operators, since it allows ships to dodge regulations and cut operating costs.

P&O aimed to benefit from Cyprus's low corporate tax rate of 12.5% and the low minimum monthly wage of £725, while having access to the EU's benefits: P&O ships on the Liverpool-Dublin route were already being crewed with Filipino workers paid just £2.64 per hour, when that notorious sacking by zoom took

place in March. So it should have been no surprise when P&O immediately hired (via a "third party"!) Indian seafarers on a rate of £1.80 per hour!

While the use of flags of convenience has always been tolerated by governments, this time ministers were obliged to put on a public show of disgust at P&O's "disgraceful behaviour" since the sacking video went viral. But it would be unwise to bet that P&O will be forced to reinstate the workers, who it claims to already have compensated. British employment law, even if it could be enforced on foreign-flagged ships, always protects the employer first, not the employed. ☐

P&O scandal



P&O workers protest at Dover, March 2022

• Law overboard!

P&O's chief executive Peter Hebblethwaite was obliged to attend a House of Commons Business Select Committee on the 24 March to answer questions about the ferry workers' sackings. During the session he quite shamelessly admitted that he knew that the law obliged employers to give 45 days notice of an intention to make workers redundant in such cases. But he quite consciously decided not to do so and indeed, felt it quite acceptable, since P&O was offering compensation "in lieu of notice"...

He said he'd do the same again, as "no union would have accepted our proposals"! Yes, and that's the whole point of these very limited legal protections! He then added that he was very sorry, but that the sackings were "necessary", or the company would go bust.

In fact this bankruptcy threatening P&O Ferries is used as an excuse again and again and never questioned. Never

mind that its losses were already absorbed by its owner, Dubai-based DP World, whose pre-tax earnings in 2021, despite the pandemic, increased by 15%, to £2.9 billion!

As for the obligation to notify the government of planned redundancies, since P&O ships are now registered in Cyprus this notification - which was nevertheless sent to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps - wasn't even necessary. Just as well, since Shapps claims he didn't get it...

• P&O pensions: who will pay?

It transpires that P&O workers' pensions are also under threat. The British pensions regulator is investigating P&O Ferries over its failure to pay a £146m debt owed to the Merchant Navy Ratings Pension Fund (MNRPF). In fact it has failed to make any of its voluntary contributions since being acquired in 2006 by DP World, which is majority-owned by the (very rich) Dubai

Sovereign Wealth Fund.

P&O bosses say that it can pay what it owes by selling 2 of its ships, although the most recent valuation revealed that this would cover less than 1/3 of the total.

The rules of the MNRPF pension scheme, which includes around 100 different employers (including Stena Line Ferries and even multinationals like Shell and BP) are known as "last man standing". So if a participating employer is struggling to pay contributions, the others have to pay up to meet the deficit. In 2021, Matt Rodda, Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary, had already told parliament that a P&O pension default would cause "serious problems" for the pensions of MNRPF's 20,000 members, in a context where the pension fund had already been under investigation for "poor governance". This is another scandal waiting to happen. All the more reason for the fight for P&O workers' reinstatement to be ramped up!

Sunak's spring mini-budget: the bosses are served

So, with inflation the highest in 30 years and energy bills rising by 54% from April, what did Sunak offer to alleviate the current dire cost of living crisis? After listing all his "help for Ukraine", like restoring the Foreign Aid Budget which he himself had just cut, he took a few seconds to admit that maybe some people might find it hard to pay skyrocketing energy bills! But he was going to "help"... Yes, by cutting fuel duty by 5p a litre! As if those needing

"help" can even afford a car!

Next, he offered incentives to fit heat pumps and solar panels... Again, a measure aimed at the middle class. There was no mention of extra-funding for public services, bar the funds for the NHS and social care to come from the 1.25% increase in National Insurance Contributions, which both right and left had asked him to scrap. Instead, he increased the threshold at which NICs kick in to £12,750, which amounts to a

tax cut worth £330 to 70% of workers.

In the meantime, corporation tax on big companies remains at 19%, among the lowest rate in Europe and the super-profits of oil and gas giants, cashing in on the crisis, won't be taxed, etc., etc... And then, the cherry on top: to prove he's a "low tax chancellor" he promised to cut income tax cut from 20p to 19p in the pound, in... 2024, just before the next election! If, of course, this government survives that long... ☐

• A spring of discontent?

So what about the poorest? Sunak announced a 3.1% increase in benefit levels, covering not even half of the current increase in the cost of living: RPI was 8.2% in February. It amounts to just £2 more per week. But this remains a "real" cut given that Sunak hasn't reinstated the

extra £20/w the government paid during the pandemic, despite pressure from all sides of the political spectrum.

Today, 11m people are said to live in poverty. A You Gov survey found that a third of those on Universal Credit often took only one meal a day and that many

were already switching their heating off, even before the April hike. The rise in living costs pre-Ukraine war was already expected to drive another 2m under the poverty line. So now many more are likely to drop below it. A spring of discontent has to be on the agenda.

War in Ukraine

On 24 March, Boris Johnson announced an extra provision of 6,000 next-generation anti-tank weapons (NLAWs), Sky Sabre anti-air missiles together with 100 soldiers to deploy them, and a Starstreak high velocity anti-aircraft missile system for Ukraine - hypersonic missiles capable of hitting fighter jets. There was also the provision of £25m for Ukraine's military and police forces. This comes after Britain had already dispatched over 4,200 NLAWs, and provided £400m in aid at the start of the war.

These new provisions were announced just before a meeting of the G7 with NATO in which they committed to placing 40,000 troops altogether, along with extra military aircraft and battleships in the ring of NATO states around Ukraine. The week before, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace had promised to send an artillery squadron for the firing of Sky Sabre missiles to the south east of Poland, near the Ukrainian border.

NATO's British arsenal...

Since 2017, NATO has established battle groups in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland. Britain's contribution was to send over 900 British soldiers and several Challenger tanks to Estonia and Poland. Indeed, Britain is the second biggest contributor to NATO, investing £47bn

Johnson's military aid for Ukraine: A bonanza for weapon producers!



British Challenger 2 main battle tank being transported to Estonia, February 2022

in 2021 - compared to £590bn for the US and £41.5bn for France. Britain's contribution has increased by 22% since 2015, in line with NATO's increased funding - increasing from £586bn in 2015 to £769bn in 2021 (+31%!) - the highest since 1990.

...and behind it, the weapons merchants

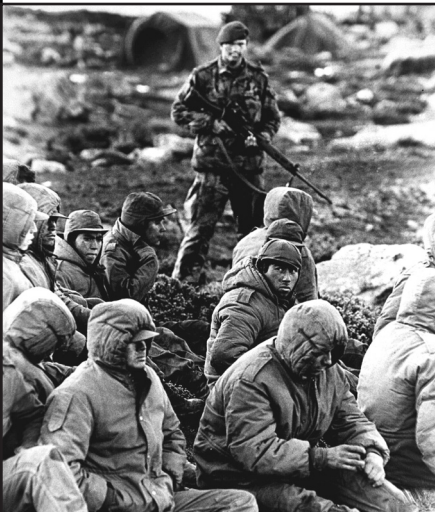
Behind these weapons provisions, already inflated by NATO's expansionism in Eastern Europe, are the interests of western weapons manufacturers. The Anglo-Franco-Canadian conglomerate Thales, formerly the British company Shorts

Missiles Systems - owned by the French Dassault - with its historic factory based in Belfast, produces Starstreak and Sky Sabre missiles. While the Anglo-French MBDA, owned by Airbus and BAE systems - the latter owned by the French AXA insurances and the American Black Rock - produce the NLAWs in sites at Bristol, Stevenage, and Bolton (a missile initially funded with £483m from the Ministry of Defence in 2012). Unsurprisingly, as the war began, Thales reported a 45% rise in its share price (adding £5.5bn in value) while MBDA shares rose by 26% (adding £4.3bn in value) after orders worth £10-15bn! These figures speak for themselves. □

40 years ago, the Falklands war: imperialism's bloody cost

Britain's colonial ownership of the desolate Falkland Islands - Islas Malvinas - 8,000 miles away in the South Atlantic and close to the coast of Argentina, remains an absurd anachronism. Just 2,840 people live on this archipelago, along with half a million sheep and penguins. Its "capital" Port Stanley is a bit like Gibraltar, adorned with Union Jacks. However these islands, 450 miles north of Antarctica, are freezing cold and wet most of the year.

Since 1833, when Spain was forced



to hand them over, the Falklands have been a symbol of Britain's historical piracy in the region. They've always been claimed by Argentina, their closest "mainland". However when Argentina's military dictator, General Galtieri, decided to invade and declare the "Islas Malvinas Argentina's", on 2 April 1982, Margaret Thatcher's government immediately dispatched the British navy to retake the islands.

War is politics by other means

The subsequent war cost 907 lives on both sides. Over 1,800 were wounded. Of the 649 Argentinians who died, many were young conscripts. Nearly half were killed in just one infamous attack - the sinking of the cruiser, the Belgrano. Thatcher personally authorised a nuclear submarine to torpedo it with the justification that it was inside an "exclusion zone", unilaterally declared by the British navy, even though it was sailing away at the time.

General Galtieri had hoped his invasion would stave off his regime's collapse (which it did, but only for a year) by rallying the population behind a legitimate and long-standing grievance against British imperialism. For Thatcher, this was an opportunity to divert attention from record unemployment in Britain and workers' resistance to her

attacks against nationalised industries, while re-mobilising the Tory electorate behind her.

Imperialism's fist

The swift victory (the war lasted 74 days) did indeed help to boost her popularity, while Labour's enthusiastic backing for the war dented its own electoral support, allowing Thatcher to secure a much-increased majority in the 1983 general election. But behind Thatcher's lethal nationalist posturing, what was really at stake in this war was the authority of the imperialist powers. The war made clear, not just to Argentina, but to all those who might be tempted to challenge encroachments on their territories or their economies, that they risked being met with overwhelming force.

That was why Thatcher committed such disproportionate military resources, allegedly to "defend the islanders" and why she got the full support of the USA to do it.

Obviously, the British working class has no interest whatsoever in helping the British state to police a world order which only benefits capitalist exploiters - let alone in condoning the British occupation of islands like the Malvinas, which constitutes an ongoing provocation against the people of South America.

A NATO-fuelled, fratricidal war

After 5 weeks of war, the sixth round of peace talks between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations went ahead in Turkey on 29 March. This may well be the last. Even if, at the time, both sides announced "positive signs" after Ukrainian proposals were presented. These included not joining NATO in exchange for security guarantees from a number of states including Russia, a non-military resolution of the Crimean and Donbas status and allowing the Ukraine to join the EU. But while there has been an apparent withdrawal of Russian troops in the north of Ukraine, the allegations of atrocities - from both sides - and the continued siege of Mariupol, mean that this murderous conflict is far from over.

Washington's coup

In fact, ever since NATO announced its intention to integrate Ukraine - as early as 1992, when Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council - the region has seen increasing tensions. But the real turning point was in 2014, when the so-called Euro-Maidan protests against the corrupt Ukrainian president Yanukovich were used by Washington to push out of power a president that was regarded as not Western-friendly enough - and "help" into power one that was. And never mind that this armed "coup", which was portrayed as the result

of popular protest, reinforced Ukrainian ultranationalists! Worse, it was the spark for the minor civil war that has been taking place in East Ukraine's Donbas ever since, in which an estimated 8,000 people have died.

The invasion becomes inevitable

And then in June last year, when NATO's Brussels summit invited Ukraine to join the alliance, oil was poured onto the fire. In December, after its demonstration of military strength on Ukraine's border, the Russian government put forward proposals to limit NATO's influence on former Soviet states. But talks quickly reached a stalemate. Representations



War in Ukraine

on both sides followed, but NATO was not prepared to withdraw its offer to Ukraine and proceeded to build up its forces in Russia- and Belarus-bordering states.

A war Putin cannot win

Of course, Putin went to war hoping for a quick conflict that would destabilise the Ukrainian government and limit NATO's "encirclement". But his initial plan for a quick military victory has failed, not least thanks to the huge NATO provision of so-called "defensive" weapons, capable of incinerating tanks. The Russian army has faced hostile resistance from the Ukrainian population. As it fails to make gains, the initial bombing of military targets has given way to the bombing of entire cities.

Inside Russia itself, despite the attempt to control all media and prevent news of the war reaching the population, and despite thousands of arrests, anti-war protests continue. Some of these protestors defend the idea that the Russian and Ukrainian masses have, in fact, the same interests against the bureaucrats and their oligarchs, the imperialist Western countries and NATO, and against the far-right nationalists! They are right. However the fight to link workers across what is now a river of blood will not be easy. □

From hunting down "dirty money"...

Just after the entry of Russian troops into the Donbas on 21 February, Johnson boasted that Britain was leading the way against Russia, with "the biggest sanctions package ever": these were not just "sanctions", but a great British "barrage"!

Labour's Starmer claimed that the sanctions don't go far enough. Lily-white Britain had to be totally cleansed of "dirty Russian money" once and for all! Never mind that the City of London relies on its job as chief Laundromat of the world, washing and drying the ill-gotten gains of every capitalist individual or gang who ever asked. Which begs the question: whose money is actually "clean"?

Sanctioning oligarchs

Anyway, by 10 March the list of 18 Russian oligarchs had been expanded to over 1,000, mostly owners of property in exclusive locations around London or the gated St George's Hill estate in Surrey, where one

of Putin's daughters apparently owns a mansion. Yes, the same hill where one of the first communist movements, the Diggers, came to cultivate land in common in 1649, during the English revolution!

In fact wealthy Russians have been encouraged to settle ever since the 2008 crash, when "investor visas" were offered at the "cost" of £2m. Around 700 Russian "investors" thus gained resident status, 8 of whom are now under sanction, although more of these sanctions are announced daily!

The sorry state of Chelsea

The most well-known oligarch to have his assets frozen is Putin "confidant" and (former!) owner of Chelsea Football club, Roman Abramovich. Chelsea, which was just one of his many assets, now operates under government licence and cannot sell tickets for home matches.

Abramovich's story is typical of those crooks who benefited out of the privatisation

of Russian state assets after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. He and Boris Berezovsky "acquired" state oil company Sibneft for almost nothing (it was later bought back by Putin's regime for billions...) and while Berezovsky, hiding in London, was prosecuted in absentia by a Russian judge for theft of state funds and failure to pay taxes, Abramovich managed to keep on Putin's right side and even became governor of a Russian region.

Goodbye Beluga caviar?

British governments, who've happily sheltered business mafiosi from all around the world, and still do, certainly didn't care how Abramovich or his fellows got their billions. But along with the other western hypocrites they need to appear "serious", and have suspended all Russian flights, frozen assets, cut business and cultural ties and impounded Russian gold! Tomorrow..? Well, we shall see.

...to switching off "dirty gas"?

Russian state-controlled energy giant Gazprom is not only the chief supplier of Russian gas to Europe but through its subsidiaries, it's a major player in the international energy market. Profits from gas sales enabled it to become a powerful buyer and trader of gas from far beyond Russia's borders. And its global trading wing, Gazprom Marketing and

Trading (GM&T), has a headquarters in London employing 350 staff.

So while Russian gas only accounted for about 3% of British gas needs, Gazprom remains a major retailer of other gas. Fearing the impact of possible sanctions, customers have been seeking to switch, while GM&T's landlords are trying to eject it from its Regents Park

offices. In fact, its position within the market is just another consequence of deregulation, first in Britain and then in the EU. And when prices started hitting the roof last year it was less vulnerable than many other companies which went bust, since these price rises, actually help fuel its revenues!

Ford Dagenham Engine Plant

Ford-Electric could do with a shock

On 14 March, Ford Europe's boss, Steward Rowley did a video presentation in which he announced that in partnership with Volkswagen, 7 new Electric Vehicles will be launched in Europe by 2024 - in addition to the Mustang E-Mach and the E-transit models. Ford is obviously accelerating its electric plans to get ahead of the pack and aims to be selling 600,000 EVs by 2026. At the same time, it boasts that by 2035, Ford Europe will have achieved zero carbon in all European facilities.

Our question is, however, how does Dagenham fit into all of this? And is it

counted as part of Europe, or not, post Brexit?

It's quite obvious that Ford aims to cut the EU workforce radically. So its answer to us that it has no plans to continue production at the Dagenham site after "the end of diesel" and the rumour of a cut in 500 jobs (half of us!) by 2026, is probably the truth. After shutting down 2 plants in Russia (long before the war started), the Bordeaux and Bridgend plants, now we hear that the Saarlouis and Valencia plants are also under threat.

What's worth noting however, is Rowley's insistence that "the diesel



segment in Light Commercial Vehicles in the medium term will remain very important" - which means that the diesel engines that we make here will be needed until at least 2035 and they will count on us to make them. Plenty of scope therefore to organise a fight for the future we all need..! ☐

- **Happy times together...**

Wouldn't it be nice if we were... told what Ford managers were planning!?! Especially when it concerns a longer holiday at Easter! And by extra "holiday", we do not mean extra "lay-off", so they'd better not mean that, either! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/03/22]

- **... On the beach**

Yes, extending the Easter break to a week, or more, with full pay for all - including LLL/Hampton - would be welcome, but only on that one condition. And btw, it's already getting late for us to book our B&B... [Workers'

Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/03/22]

- **Building to stockpile!**

Who knows what the reason for a longer break may be: war, microchip shortage, or that no-one's buying cars... But you'd never think that this was the case, given the current high schedules!

On Tiger it's been up to 800 (740?) - and never mind that we can only build 700 max, when all hands (plus loan-ins!) are on deck! On Tuesday it was just 550..! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/03/22]

- **One job, one worker...**

You'd also never think there was an even more crucial supply problem - that of us, our hands!!

(+ on top of that, many are still off sick!). The difference between being short of chips and short of workers however, is that the bosses expect us to "cover" the missing workers. They need to be shown that just like a microchip, we can't be split into 2! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/03/22]

- **Lineside's illogistics**

In fact everywhere - whichever area you want to choose - there aren't enough of us. And above all, in LLL! Yet what do we see? More and more supervisors and senior supervisors being created "above" (for friends and favours!), while "below", we're too few to do the work! A word to the unwise: top-heavy structures tend to collapse... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 30/03/22]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

- **Health screening needed**

The average age of the workforce is above 50. So yes, some workers are bound to be suffering from chronic health problems. At one point we were offered chest x-rays. With the state of the NHS and the problem of late diagnosis, shouldn't employers be taking some of the responsibility for screening us for things like cancer etc.? After all, they contribute to us getting ill in the first place! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 06/04/22]

- **Part of the reason...**

Some of the managers in here (yes, like King Etcetera and his Master) think they know better than our own doctors... they send workmates to do parcel duties when they're supposed to stay on light duties. Not knowing their own limitations and boundaries is what makes these managers a real hazard! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 06/04/22]

- **Young blood needed!**

When parcel volumes pick up, it becomes obvious that the work is too heavy for us. We end up lifting, pushing, pulling

and carrying far too many heavy parcels. And on Nights some of us have to deal with over 1,000 large parcels in one single shift! We're not getting younger. When was the last time we saw "cadets" - new permanent trainee recruits - in this place? Because that's what's needed.

- **Dragging their feet**

Our pay deal was due on 1 April. On 31 March, union DGS Terry Pullinger wrote to CEO Simon Thompson, explaining that he had a "debt of honour" to us. And that not ensuring that the board sorts out our pay offer is "quite frankly hugely disrespectful to a workforce that have surpassed themselves as key workers during the pandemic, and have served with distinction." Wow. Thompson's going to be shaking in his boots. Meanwhile we can't pay our bills. [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 06/04/22]

- **Was that an april fools?**

Post Office workers have had a pay offer - of 2%! And after a pay freeze last year! This is beyond a joke. If RM dares offer us that, there won't even be time for a ballot, we'll be out the door! In the meantime, we could reinforce PO workmates in their furious refusal of this insult. [Workers'



fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 06/04/22]

- **We want a real pay rise!**

What can we say about the RM-PFS manager's overtime "generosity"? Yes, cleaning on weekends is mostly done on overtime, which he distributes like a king from his ivory tower. If our wages were half-decent, no one would need to bother with overtime. And now, with RPI inflation already at 8.2% and rising, our wages need to follow!

PS: We hear that the Living Wage Foundation rate of £11.05 (some had more - £12.67/hr - via London weighting allowance) and starter rate of £9.90, should be paid by this April, but now there's the cost of living crisis, so no, that rate is still too low! [Workers' fight bulletin Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 06/04/22]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

BMW's "war damage"

After a week-long shutdown from 21-25 February, due to a shortage of semi-conductors, the Russian invasion of Ukraine caused another parts shortage. So another week's lay-off was announced, due to start on 7 March, because the factory belonging to parts supplier Kromberg & Schubert in North-western Ukraine, which produces all the wire harnesses for the MINI, had closed, as workers fled the invasion.

As a result, all of us - BMW, GI and R&H workmates faced going even further into "debt" to BMW. But for those who'd reached the "debt" limits of their Working Time Accounts, or who were sub-contracted agency workers,

it has meant going completely unpaid, yet again.

So as a result, on the Friday before production was due to stop, all R&H workers in the AC warehouse walked off the job... And just as happened once before, the managers ran after them begging them to come back and offering to pay them in full.

In the end, the lay-off lasted for 3 weeks for most of the workforce. Production was able to resume because the factory in Ukraine had apparently reopened - a surprise to us, because as far as we know, the war continues and what's more, able-bodied men are meant to have been called up to the army...



BMW has in the meantime thanked the Ukrainian workers for their bravery in risking bombs for the sake of its production schedules. As for us, they suggest that if we are concerned about these workmates, we "show our solidarity" by making a donation to UNICEF! It would make more sense for us to down tools...

• What's our plan?

Unite's consultative ballot at R&H approving industrial action unanimously on a 78% turnout. So isn't it time to start discussing our strike? We didn't vote just to get R&H back to the table. We already knew that only stopping work gets results! [Workers' Fight Oxford Mini, 29/03/22]

• Workers pay the price

Early in March, BMW decided to stop exports to Russia due to the war in Ukraine,

following many other western companies in imposing its own sanctions. It's also pulled out of the partnership with Russian car maker Avtotor in Kaliningrad (the Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania). So what's happening to the 2,000 workers there? [Workers' Fight Oxford Mini, 29/03/22]

• From shortage to shortage?

We were a bit surprised when we saw that last week only mornings and afternoons were working! Is that why they ramped up the speed? [Workers' Fight Oxford Mini,

29/03/22]

• Scrap this rotten system!

Year one of BMW/Gi pay increase under the recent deal: 5.5%. Latest inflation figure, before removal of the energy price cap: 8% (not to mention the 6-7.5hr cut from our pay for the WTA credit)! So what we need certainly isn't more reorganisation of our "debts" racked up by BMW's closures. It's 100% pay for lay-offs with no strings, write-off of the money "loans" and bin the entire system of WTA! [Workers' Fight Oxford Mini, 29/03/22]

King's Cross railway station (London)

No, London Underground bosses haven't suddenly seen the light!

London underground workers are to get a pay rise from April equal to February's RPI (Retail Price Index) plus 0.2% - an 8.4% pay rise for the coming year. Although, we're told, the "plan for implementation" is yet to be agreed with TfL bosses. And no wonder, since they never anticipated that they'd have to pay this much.

Indeed the 2022 rise is part of a 4-year deal agreed back in 2019 at a time when inflation was 0% and

no great RPI rise was expected. It guaranteed tube workers an annual pay increase of RPI+0.2%.

But the real issue facing tube workers is the 600 job cuts and pension cuts which have been announced - putting them in the same boat (or coach) as us railway workers. TfL bosses were aiming to thus save between £79.3m and £182.4m per year, except now the latest pay rise will cost at least £100m!



The RMT's railway workers' ballot over pay and jobs is about to begin, so the next step would surely be to join ranks with our "natural" allies on the tube to prepare a joint strike...

• At last!

We've just heard - at last - from RMT leader Mick Lynch that he's declared a dispute with the train companies and Network Rail! So we're going to get ballot papers any day now...

There's a very short video on the web, saying that the issues are the pay freeze "which [the union] is determined to bust" and compulsory redundancies (not all redundancies, though!) and we should vote "yes to support their campaign".

We guess he means vote "yes" for

strike... And of course we will. [Workers' Platform King's X, 06/04/22]

• Their unity and ours

That said, if we leave it to this vague list of "issues" from the RMT union and its "campaign" we're not going to get very far. So sure, we can use the meetings they're arranging to organise ourselves - because as Lynch says, "unity is strength". But since union leaders (RMT, TSSA, ASLEF...) are divided it's going to be up to us, drivers, train staff, station, ticket, cleaning, maintenance workers, etc., to build "unity" on the ground.

We're all affected; we can and must fight together. [Workers' Platform King's X, 06/04/22]

• Are they mad?

What's that rumour we're hearing from LNER that they want any pay deal to be "self financing". Drivers have heard through the grapevine that the offer might be £900/year... (+~1.2%!)) if they agree to lose £4,000 in allowances... This has to be fake news. And if it isn't, well, we won't even wait for a ballot, we're out on strike! [Workers' Platform King's X, 06/04/22]

Sri Lanka

Protests in the capital Colombo are escalating. They began in mid-February, when demonstrators burnt effigies of President Gotabaya Rajapaksha and stormed his office. The population has been experiencing acute shortages of fuel, food, drugs and other essential items for weeks. Bakeries have shut down due to a lack of cooking gas and some school exams were even called off indefinitely after printing paper ran out. There are frequent power outages. People have died waiting in long queues policed by the army for petrol and cooking gas. Escaping unemployment and hunger, some have fled to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Doctors say the entire health system is near collapse. After highways minister Johnston Fernando announced that "the president will not resign under any circumstances", 200 health workers, some in their blue scrubs, took to Colombo's streets, chanting slogans against the government. People are openly defying the emergency and curfew which Rajapaksha imposed, and are demanding his overthrow.

The dynastic Rajapaksha family,

Yemen

After seven years of bombing by a Saudi-led coalition in its attempt to annihilate the Houthi militia which took power against the corrupt Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime, an estimated 377,000 Yemenis have been killed. The economy has been destroyed and 80% of the population now survives on humanitarian aid. In January, already meagre food rations were cut by half and now 17.4m people or nearly 2/3 of the population is undernourished, with 2.2m children suffering from acute malnutrition. Infrastructure, from healthcare to

Somalia

Somalia is yet again threatened with severe famine. Today, half of the country, or 4.5m people, are facing acute hunger. More than a million children are malnourished, 300,000 severely. So an intervention from the US might be expected to bring aid. But no. On 22 February, two days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US bombed Fiidow village in Somalia killing 60 people.

The US has conducted 267 drone strikes in Somalia since 2003. These had killed over 500 people before Trump took office. Trump's bombing campaign

Sri Lankans take to the streets!



first came to power in 2005 on a wave of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, was reinforced when the military brutally crushed Tamil rebel fighters in May 2009, ending a 25-year civil war. During the endgame of this war, an estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians were herded into so-called

no-fire zones where they were bombed to death. Rajapaksha has never had to answer for this. But maybe today he will have to answer for the drastic economic crisis which his corrupt government has undoubtedly made so much worse. □

7 years on, another forgotten US-British-backed, genocidal war

sanitation, has collapsed. There are regular cholera outbreaks. Now, amidst the global increase in food and fuel prices, aid agencies say even their funds are dwindling.

The Saudi-UAE coalition, supported by the British and US governments which sell it bombs and planes, (supplemented by French and Italian weapons companies) wants to reimpose the rule of a new alliance around Al Saleh - and indeed the country is already split around contending powers, epitomised by its two central banks and multiple regional

currencies. The activities of the militias, which claim to fight in the name of religion, stoke a Sunni-Shia divide which never previously existed.

In retaliation the Houthi are attacking the UAE, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, particularly targeting oil refineries. Since Saudi is promising more oil to the EU and America after the Ukrainian war, media attention is only given to these attacks, while the genocidal civilian death toll and rendering of Yemeni cities into rubble by Saudi Arabia et al, is apparently not worth mentioning. □

The US drops bombs, not food, on starving Somalia

killed over a thousand more. Now it is Biden's turn. The official justification is the targeting of Al-Shabab, a right-wing Islamist group. However, in recent years oil companies have found evidence of major oil and gas reserves off the Somali coast, with American company ExxonMobil, and Shell and British company, Genel Energy involved in exploration. This latest bombing came only three days after an exploration deal between the government and American firm Coastline Exploration Co. was signed ... and then hastily annulled by the

government.

American bombs are being dropped at a time when it is food that Somalia needs. This year, after three consecutive rainy seasons failed, crops and over 2m livestock died. Half a million families had to leave their villages, with many dying of hunger and thirst. On top of this, there has been a measles outbreak. Save the Children has reported that 4.6m families will not have sufficient food until May. But in this capitalist system, what are their lives worth when the profits of the oil companies are at stake? □

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

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