

WORKERS' fight



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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)

LET'S FLY AN INTERNATIONAL WORKING CLASS BALLOON!

When striking workers demonstrated all around the country on 1 February, demanding wage rises and an end to the attacks on conditions and jobs, they flew their union balloons.

So too across France. On 11 February, over a million people gathered to protest against a government bill to increase pension age under the white, red, yellow and lilac balloons of their respective unions.

In fact it is these balloons - a visible symbol of today's strikes and working class resistance - that governments, and behind them the capitalist class, really fear.

And while union leaders hesitate to co-ordinate strike action, many workers on both sides of the Channel talk about the need for a general strike, to achieve a decisive win against the across-the-board attack on living standards, on pensions, on jobs and working conditions.

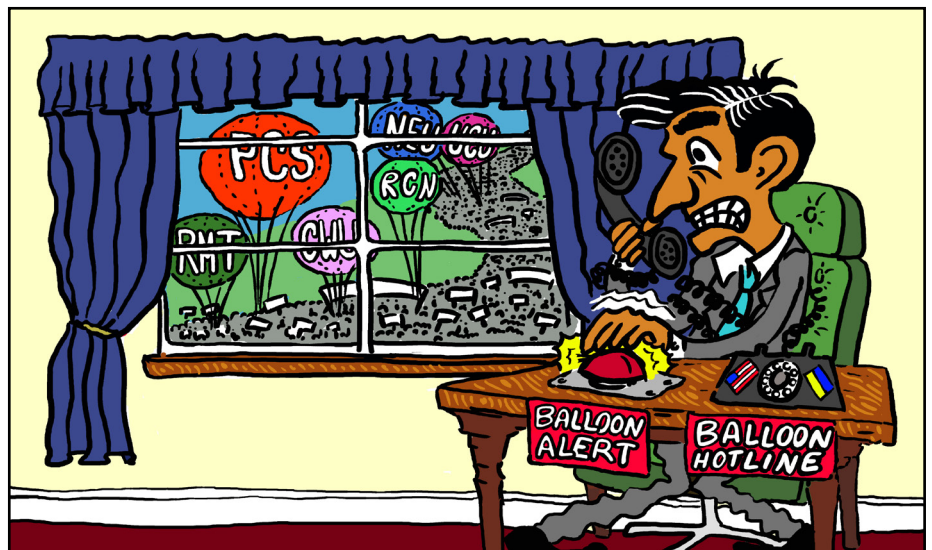
So the "Chinese spy balloons" and 4 other UFOs which so far have been shot down by sophisticated US fighter jets (when they could surely have been popped by a well-aimed "pin"!), are a gift from the sky for the powers-that-be!

A call to "national unity" (and even if possible, international unity!) against a common enemy - in this case the Chinese - is meant to rub out the glaring class divide which pits the exploited majority against the exploiting minority and their reactionary governments. It's a deceitful, but also very dangerous, game.

Anti-chinese hot air

As soon as that white balloon appeared in the sky over Montana USA, British politicians relaunched their anti-China campaign. They even claim that Chinese-owned TikTok is a security threat because of "potential links" to the Chinese government!

Of course, just like in Britain or the US, or indeed any country in this capitalist world, including China - where a revolving door exists between business and



government - no company can say it's free of politicians' "influence". And vice versa!

When this government awards PPE contracts to friends of ministers, or even when it gives Ford or BMW several million in subsidies, that's mutual "influence"... And as global capitalism slips into its latest recession, companies rely ever more on the protection of the government in power to promote and protect their interests.

Having expected China to provide cheap and quasi-militarised labour for several decades the big US, EU and Japanese multinational corporations are, under pressure of the recession, cutting their Chinese production and often repatriating it.

But they are threatened by the transfer to, and sharing of, technology and expertise with China, which their years of exploitation produced. Hence the current US-China "trade war", protectionist wall and anti-Chinese xenophobia.

Workers can't and won't pay!

The working class, whether here, in France, in the US, or indeed in China, has no interest in uniting behind the

ruling capitalist classes which compete, at workers' expense, against a foreign "enemy", whether it's the Chinese government or Russia's Putin. Workers' interests in no way coincide with those of the military-industrial capitalists and the ghoulish politicians who use them as their cannon- or factory-fodder. Besides the terrible carnage caused in Ukraine, the war has fuelled inflation. Energy bills, already doubled here in Britain, are due to go up by another 20% in April!

And now, confronted by the strike wave, British bosses and their government are playing hard-ball and refusing the demands of almost a million workers!

Obviously a concerted, collective, general fight back is needed to win the immediate battle over living standards. But it's also needed to counter, once and for all, the anti-foreign hot air which the bosses and their politicians use to divide workers' ranks and break down the natural international class unity which exists. Today, more than ever, against the warmongers, the exploiters and their rotten, destructive capitalism the one, red, working class balloon must fly! ☐

Ukraine/Europe Zelensky, a hero in their own image

On Wednesday 8 February, Ukrainian president Zelensky was invited to address the British parliament and was greeted as a hero of democracy and freedom. He used the occasion to present his audience with a pilot's helmet inscribed with the words "we have freedom, give us wings to protect it" - basically asking the British government for fighter jets.

In fact this is just the latest item which Zelensky has added to his weaponry wish list, after getting air defence systems, armed fighting vehicles and tanks from the West. But so far, the US, as well as Britain and the EU, are less enthusiastic about sending fighter jets. Possibly because, at least for now, they prefer to avoid an escalation in a war that, according to Zelensky himself, "is getting more complicated".

And indeed, the Russian army, which had to retreat in the south and east of the country, is starting to regain ground. Ukrainian soldiers are using social media to voice their anger against the conditions imposed on them by their superiors. Their families, in the same way as their Russian counterparts, are mobilising against the war. So far, it has killed and wounded, according to US/EU officials, upwards of 180,000 Russian and 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers - and 30,000 Ukrainian civilians.

A corrupt government

But the war is not just "getting more complicated" at the front. The



government has been recently hit by a series of huge corruption scandals, where senior officials have used contracts intended for the army to line their pockets.

Zelensky was forced to dismiss some fifteen senior officials, six of whom are being investigated for corruption. So far legal action has not been taken against them. He has exercised the same caution towards the clans of "mafiosi" which dominate the Ukrainian bureaucracy. For instance, although he removed his Defence Minister Reznikov, who was accused of buying food for the army at inflated prices, his deputy took the blame and Reznikov was appointed to another ministerial post.

Missing weapons, missing aid

These dismissals coincided with the arrival in Kiev of a high-ranking US

commission charged to verify "in an indisputable and independent manner" the way in which the Ukrainian government uses the billions of dollars that the West has provided. Indeed, according to the Times, of the recent £11.5bn non-military US aid, "most is cash to support Zelensky's government, not humanitarian assistance". Other reports have suggested that 40% of the military equipment (which we hear is now running out!) sent from donor countries to Ukraine "goes missing".

So now Zelensky, the elected representative of the clans of wealthy parasites who run Ukraine at the expense of workers, has been ordered to clean up his act so that he can still be presented as the antithesis of Putin. But the superficial clean up might not be enough to appease the discontent brewing in the country! ☐

French workers say: hands off our retirement!

The Macron government's plans to raise retirement age from 62 to 64 has caused widespread outrage. Three nationwide one-day strikes have been held, with huge demonstrations across the country. Workers from small and medium-sized companies have been joining these marches in unusually large numbers, many of them for the first time in their lives. They include thousands in their 50s, already worn out or injured by work and determined to fight for those extra two years.

Although the numbers demonstrating during the 7 February strikes were lower than the peak of 2.5 million on 31 January, some small towns saw an unprecedented 20% of their populations turn out! And on Saturday 11 February

a demonstration of a million (union figures) or half-a-million (police figures) crowded the streets of Paris. Air Traffic Controllers at Paris Orly airport called a wildcat strike on the day. The unions said that there were probably at least two million protesting across the rest of the country.

Further days of mobilization have been called for the 16th February and for the 7 March, and some sectors such as the Paris metro have already announced renewable strikes. Macron's prime minister, Elisabeth Borne, has made a minor concession allowing some workers to retire at 63. But workers are angry and want nothing less than the entire programme scrapped!



Sectional strikes: not the best way to win

It's been over 7 months since the railway workers kicked off the current strike wave. But (at the time of writing) there's still no end in sight. Railway and Postal workers have even had to have a second strike ballot in the meantime, given that the law limits strike mandates to 6 months. So the dispute drags on, in the face of a flat refusal from the government and the private bosses (who run most train operating companies and the Royal Mail) to pay up and back down from the job- and conditions-shredding "reforms" they want.

Ministers pretending to be deaf

Now hundreds of thousands of public sector workers - NHS nurses, teachers, civil servants, lecturers... are also taking action. But regardless of the political sensitivity of the NHS, even in this case, the government remains totally aloof. Along with the private bosses, it is acting

as if it doesn't recognise the unions. This could also be interpreted as a childish wish that if you ignore something it will go away. Certainly Sunak and his ministers are amateurish in their handling of the unions.

Free trains on the day?

The 1st February demonstrations and rallies called by the Trades Union Congress - were organised as a protest against the latest anti-trade union legislation going through parliament. But on the same day train drivers were on strike, so there was no huge national mobilisation in London to provide the shock treatment the government needed, unlike in France (see page 2), railway and metro workers called off a planned strike so that demonstrators could get to the marches which had been organised. British union leaders did not consider it necessary to talk with each other nor even to use their brains when planning their protests.

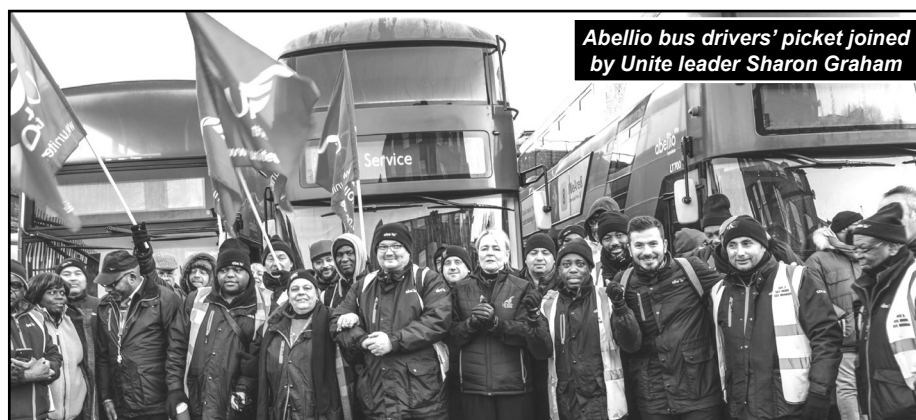
• Abellio bus drivers beat inflation

Unite - a union which has probably been the most sectional and narrow-minded of all, has in fact just announced what sounds like a spectacular victory for London's 1,800 Abellio bus drivers: they will get what Unite says amounts to an 18% pay rise (amounting to £100/week on basic) if they have 2 or more years' service. They also won increases in overtime rates and the rate paid for working your rest day... but no guarantee that they would never be asked to work their day off! Which is surely what they should expect, being responsible for passenger safety...

This "victory" took 20 days of strikes - one or two of them coinciding with railway strikes - but this was by accident, not design. Unite is using it as a recruitment aid - to get workers to

join the union - after pouring resources in to this particular strike to make it a showcase. It would have been a much better showcase, if all other bus drivers

from the many different companies around the country, currently engaging in separate action, could have joined them - in the strike and also in the victory!



Abellio bus drivers' picket joined by Unite leader Sharon Graham

• Doctors on strike again?

The existing multiyear pay-deal for junior doctors ends in March 2023 and Sunak's government is proposing a 2% pay-rise for 2023-24. This is 2.75% below other NHS workers' pay, as well as 12% below inflation.

The doctors' union, the British Medical Association, reports that junior doctors' pay has fallen 26% between 2008 and

2022. For example, a junior doctor in the East Midlands, is paid just £14.09 per hour. A poll of 4,553 junior doctors in England, carried out in November and December 2022, found that nearly half of them struggle to afford their rent or to heat and light their homes.

In response to the government's pathetic "offer", the BMA launched a

strike ballot which closes on 20 February. At the same time, a consultative ballot for consultants and possibly GPs is to be conducted. It just may be that this time, unlike in 2016 when junior doctors last struck, that they'll find themselves striking alongside all the other striking NHS workers... Let's hope so.

• Firefighters hold their fire

On 30 January the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) announced that 88% of firefighters and control room staff across Britain had voted to strike over pay - on a 73% turnout. They had been offered a paltry 2% pay rise, which was finally jacked up to 5%.

However, no sooner had the ballot result been released than the bosses rushed out a new offer of 7% backdated

to April 2022, plus 5% rise from July 2023. FBU leader, Matt Wrack and the union executive recommended acceptance, even if this remains a real terms pay cut (still well below current inflation, at 10.1% CPI and 13.4% RPI)... To justify themselves they said that inflation is forecast to be lower in the coming year, so the 5% "may amount to a slight increase in real terms pay",

but, they add "this is your union, and it is now for you to decide whether this offer represents a good enough improvement for us to resolve this dispute".

Given that firefighters' wages have shrunk by a 12%, since 2010, a fifth of their jobs have been cut and many are left paying as much as 11% of their wage as pension contributions, no it is not "a good enough improvement"!

Our strikes

So only tens of thousands turned up in London, compared to 1 million in Paris.

Strikers' control!

However the worst aspect of British union leaders' behaviour is their insistence on going it alone. As if each union is an island, entire unto itself. No conscious co-ordination between unions is sought, let alone the general all-out indefinite strike, which would be the best way to win a rapid victory. How on earth, for instance, can the leaders of Unite, the GMB and Unison justify calling out ambulance drivers, paramedics and control room staff on different days? All in all, while yes, these are the longest strikes since 1989 and the widest since 1979, it looks as if they will drag on indefinitely and unsatisfactorily, a section at a time and a day at a time. Unless strikers themselves take control and "glue" everyone together... as happened, yes, momentarily, in 1989! □

Education on strike Teachers' strike needs to include everyone!

The 1 February 2023 saw the first national teachers' strike since 2016. Then, 30% of schools were closed by teachers walking out, protesting against cuts to funding. This time, more than half of schools were closed, as teachers joined striking train drivers and civil servants in rallies across the country. The reaction of the government and Education Minister Gillian Keegan, was moralistic. Their focus was on the "poor" children, who were missing a day of school. Keegan claimed that her focus was to "protect children's learning". However, their "learning" is not under threat from teachers (striking or not!) but from the government.

Poor pay, poor education

Pay has fallen in real terms by an average 11% since 2010, which has contributed towards dire shortages of teachers and especially in specific subjects like physics and maths. So last year, 45% of state schools were using non-specialist teachers to teach maths. Even foreign languages were being taught by non-specialists in almost 20% of schools!

One problem is unattractive pay, but there's also the fact that school budgets are so tight, so schools are cutting down on the numbers of teachers they recruit

• UCU strikes: united we're strong!

University lecturers organised in the University and College Union (UCU), have just voted by 80.4% to reject a 5% pay offer. It's obviously still a cut in real pay - with inflation at 10.1%. But in addition to real wage cuts, university employers are also going ahead with pension changes that will result in a 35% cut in pension benefits!

The UCU has called 18 days of strike action during February and March and

• College and university staff on precarious contracts...

A UCU report shows that 46% of universities and 60% of colleges, employ lecturers on zero-hours contracts. Another study from "FE Week" (a journal specialising in education) says that the percentage of colleges employing over half of their teaching staff on casual contracts has tripled to 29% compared to 9% in 2016.

An "associate" lecturer - i.e., non-permanent - who has been working at

• Scotland: rolling out their strike demands

Scottish teachers in the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) walked out on strike on 16 January, demanding a 10% pay rise against the employers' 5% pay offer. They announced 16 days of rolling strikes across January and February, with teachers striking in two different local authorities each day.



- only a third of schools said they could recruit an extra teacher if they needed to. They are also cutting the number of subjects they offer.

Starvation wages for TAs

Instead of qualified teachers therefore, in many instances teaching assistants (TAs) are taking lessons. And they are usually on minimum wage! In the last 20 years, the number of teachers in schools

has remained flat, while the number of TAs has almost tripled. For the same reasons, schools are relying more on supply teachers via agencies, who are also paid less than a regular teacher's wage, and can be on as little as £80 a day.

So no wonder, when teachers demonstrated through London on 1 February, they were joined by hundreds of school pupils and parents who support their fight. □

participated in the 1 February TUC day of action. But like the other unions its leadership makes no effort to coordinate strike action or cooperate with sections of workers which have industrial muscle, in order to strengthen its hand. Leaders even managed to choose 6 out of 18 days when no other section of workers are on strike.

Moreover, the strikes are only meant to involve 70,000 university members, when

the union is 130,000-strong. In fact most of the academic and support staff aren't participating, despite being in the same boat as everyone else. It is little wonder that this union has been unable to fend off years and years of systematic attacks against conditions. And it's ironical that it seems beyond the wit of university-educated trade unionists to understand that the more numerous we are when we fight, the more likely we are to win!

Norwich University for 10 years, explained how "you never know how much money you have coming in! I've gone from taking £1200 to £600 a month...". She has been on a zero-hours contract all these years, and lately her teaching hours were cut to fewer than 8 hours per week.

At the university of Bristol, a researcher on a fixed-hour contract says: "What's the point of a contract for 3 hours per week? I cannot get a mortgage and

I cannot even get a rental contract". She has been sofa-surfing for several months.

In Further Education colleges, 69% of lecturers earn less than £1,500/month and as many as 87% less than £2,000/month. Universities and college administrations blame it on underfunding - which is undeniable! But casualisation has now become part of their "business model". And it's surely the central issue for any union worth its salt to take on?

join them. Some of these strikes will also coincide with the walkouts by the UCU university staff across Britain. It would make sense to make this coincidental and "casual" unity a conscious, collective stand - and together with all the other sections of workers - in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, too!

Sunak "surfing" the wave of strikes...

Sunak's government may be facing the biggest strike wave by workers in England since the 1970s "Winter of Discontent" and the huge transport strikes of 1989, when buses, trains and the London Underground coordinated strike action. But one would never know it. His political priority has been to address the problems he has with his own party. This has shades of Cameron's Brexit vote about it. That referendum, with all its unintended consequences was first and foremost about sorting out the infighting between ultranationalist and not-so-nationalist factions...

Reshuffling the deck

So on 7 February, he appointed a new party chairman, Greg Hands, and as his deputy, working class Tory, Lee Anderson, who happens to be a supporter of the death penalty - causing minor uproar. Cabinet ministers were then reshuffled and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy split into 4 parts - a stand-alone energy supply and net zero department under Grant Shapps; a combined Department for Business and Trade; a Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; and a "refocused" Digital, Culture, Media and Sport department.

Shapps is meant be "securing our long-term energy supply, bringing down bills and halving inflation". Given the giant profits registered by energy firms and Centrica's record bonanza, that should surely be a doddle.

Like Old Mother Hubbard

PM Sunak has left it to the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt to explain to striking workers that pay rises which equal or overshoot inflation are "impossible" because they will make inflation worse... Never mind that no mainstream economist backs up such nonsense. For once it is clear that inflation has its origin in the deliberate profiteering - better called racketeering, with the main culprits being the oil and energy giants.

In the meantime, the Bank of England has predicted that inflation is expected to fall back to 4 or 5% by the end of this year. No doubt they hope that will make the 3, 4, 5% rises offered to public sector (and privatised public service) workers seem more reasonable, in the eyes of the public and the media. Their Minimum Service Levels Bill is certainly about trying to turn the public against the strikes, given that essential workers like nurses and ambulance workers already have a code of practice

Their politics

for strikes which provides for emergency cover...

Forcing open the cupboard

Underlying all this, is of course the policy to cut public finances, which is no different, in fact, to what Truss proposed during her short stay at Downing Street. It was she, in her tax-cutting frenzy who abolished the increase in National Insurance (with Labour's support!) which Sunak himself had imposed, to raise £18bn for the NHS and Social Care. That lasted from April to November 2022, until Truss arrived on the scene. But having taken over, Sunak did not reinstate it.

Instead he has tried to appear to be addressing the terminal NHS/Social Care crisis by throwing a few coins at it... An extra £1bn, not towards pay, but for 800 ambulances and 5,000 beds including 3,000 "virtual beds". The staff needed to run the extra ambulances or care for patients remain virtual too, unfortunately, with vacancies at an all-time high of 165,000 in social care and 190,000 in the NHS itself... Providing the funding for decent pay and conditions in these professions remains "off the table", unless it is forced back onto it by an upsurge in the strike wave... □

• Britannia sinking?

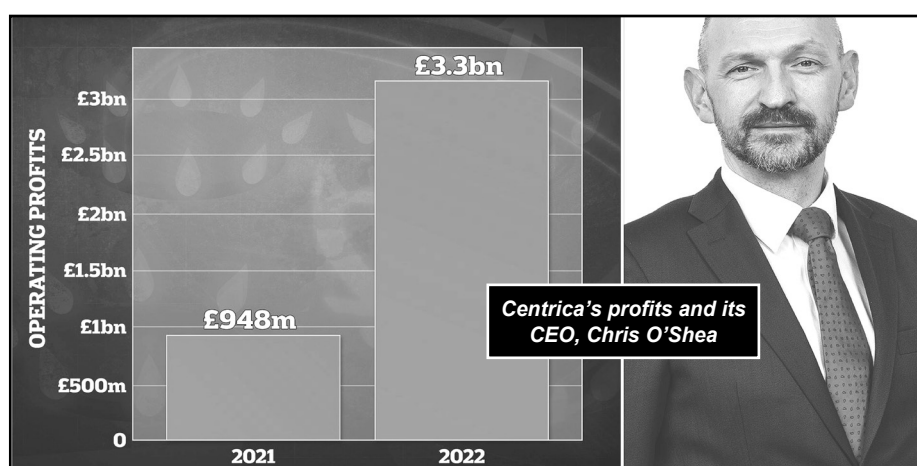
According to the International Monetary Fund, the British economy will shrink by 0.6% in 2023 - and is the only large economy likely to do so. Commentators mention that its performance is currently even worse than that of sanction-encircled Russia - despite the fact that Russia is engaged in a hugely self-destructive war.

Already last year, a recession was narrowly avoided - on paper at least - when the Bank of England staff raised its fourth quarter estimate for GDP growth to 0.1% after the economy shrank in the third quarter (recession is only diagnosed if the economy shrinks for two successive quarters). This is really semantics. None of the pundits would deny that the general economic outlook is one of deepening crisis. But that said, it doesn't mean that the City and the energy and arms firms among many others (like mining houses) are not making record profits!

On 16 February, the FTSE 100 share index (the Fointsie) registered an all time

high of 8000.3 points. This was just after the energy giant Centrica announced monster profits, tripling its total to £3.3bn... So when the bosses and their government tell workers that the money isn't there for

their pay rises or to fund proper housing and health, education, and social care... well they should be told to go and take it from where it evidently is accumulating... in the pockets of these super-rich shareholders!



• If so, say thanks to Brexit!

When Britain left the EU in January 2020, thanks to the efforts of Boris Johnson, then prime minister, he proclaimed that Britain would "rediscover the muscles that we have not used for decades". Three years later and the muscles seem to have atrophied further...

The economy is estimated to be 5.5% poorer now than it would

have been had it stayed in the EU, according to a study by the Centre for European Reform. And according to the government-appointed (but "independent") Office for Budget Responsibility, the figure is 4%. So no real question there.

Trade in goods is 7% lower, and investment 11% down. On top of that,

an estimated 460,000 EU workers have left Britain and many are still leaving; more than 4,000 European medics have chosen not to work in NHS.

It was true at the time of the referendum in 2016 and it's true now: for the working class there is nothing to be gained from Brexit.

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**The fight needs to resume now!**

Almost 6 months since our first strike and 18 strike-days later, the pay offer remains a below inflation 9% over 18 months (3.5% of which is not backdated and 2% not consolidated in our pay!). Worse, managers are already implementing the radical cuts in working conditions and jobs, proposed as "necessary change". Here at Mount Pleasant, duties are meant to be "realigned" by mid-February - the first step in a series of "revisions" that will result in 150 Processing job cuts; almost a quarter of the workforce!

Despite "no compulsory redundancies" being put forward as some kind of a climb-down, 10,000 job cuts are still aimed for - and the so-called voluntary package is cut by 50% to a maximum of 9 months-worth of wages instead of 24 months! Senior workers are pressurised to leave on medical grounds; light duties are being abolished. Everywhere, managers expect us to cover extra work. And since there aren't enough workers, temporary workers are brought in... while they're cutting jobs!



The 1-day strike called for 16-17 February was cancelled after RM challenged it. Now the re-ballot to renew the strike mandate is awaited before "legal" action can again be taken, postponing any new strike to March... Yet this fight needs to resume now! The bosses aren't waiting! ☐

• This is incredible!

Cleaners have had a note from the union to say that RM has made us a (separate!) pay offer which the officials are "considering"... But they don't say what the offer is! How can they even "consider" an offer that they haven't told us about? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/02/23]

• It just gets worse

DUMs (Delivery Office Managers) are dumping more collection work on Deliveries! Yes, if they get away

with it, it'll be the end of collections-only duties... Not to mention next-day deliveries... and where does this end? Does anyone still remember the long-lost era of "same-day" deliveries? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/02/23]

• DUM and dumber

DUMs are also going ahead with the Early Voluntary Retirements, while at the same time they expect us to work overtime... How on earth do they justify that? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/02/23]

• We need them

The fit-up (duty revision) currently underway in Distribution means that the duties on Nights, which were up to now covered by agency workers, aren't available to them any more. Obviously if agency workers were needed, it meant there was a shortage of drivers, so moving people from days to nights is hardly going to fix this. Any fit-up should include giving proper contracts to the agency workers! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/02/23]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Car sales may be falling, but BMW's profits aren't!**

Last year fewer cars were built in Britain than at any time since the 1950s, and sales were the lowest since 1992. BMW bosses here in the plant constantly remind us of falling "volumes". But while the company may have sold fewer cars in 2022 (Mini sales were down 3%), the £14bn profit it made was higher than the total of 2018 and 2019 combined!

How? On the one hand, through producing more expensive models - Minis, and electric cars. But more importantly,

it's the cuts to the workforce. The total BMW workforce is the lowest it's been since 2017, and in Cowley we've seen 500 jobs go, with a whole production shift cut. Managers are still sacking workers now, while expecting the rest of us do their work! We are all now being "encouraged" to work our rest days - which is extra work for no pay, as we'll just be paying back the Working Time Account hours we supposedly owe them!

And of course, despite these record



profits, BMW is still going cap-in-hand to the British Government for a £75m subsidy to bring back electric Mini production to Cowley! ☐

• Hands off our jobs!

At BMW, some Staffline "temp" mates are still being sacked, on top of the 500 of us who were cut last November! Do managers think we won't notice them going up to mates at the end of their shift and telling them not to come back the next day? We're already short of hands! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/02/23]

• The more, the merrier:1

Managers expect us to do the jobs that our sacked mates used to do. More and more tasks are squeezed into our processes. One more reason to get back everyone who's been sacked, and many more! [Workers' Fight bulletin

BMW Mini Oxford 14/02/23]

• The more, the merrier:2

If we go to the office of BMW's in-house temp agency, Staffline, with a problem, it's no more useful than trying to phone them. They fob us off, saying they need to "ask higher up"... But if enough of us paid them a visit and didn't leave until we got service from these "agents", perhaps it would concentrate minds... [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/02/23]

• Individual slaving plans

BMW started issuing us all with a form for a "2023 Individual WTA Action Plan". Yes, management (and the "Trade Union"!)

December, for a big new model upgrade next year. Managers say that we either have to "buy-back" WTA hours from our wages, or work our days off! Well we don't want either of these. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/02/23]

• We know our own interests, ta!

What's more, getting us to work our rest days, when they've just cut 500+ mates' jobs is outrageous. How dare they ask us to help them out by working overtime? And then they try to tell us it's in OUR own interest, because otherwise they "can't" pay us for future shut-outs! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/02/23]

King's Cross railway station (London)**We need to unite to fight!**

At the time of writing, the RMT has announced its rejection of the latest (hardly changed!) offer from Network Rail and the train operating companies (under the auspices of the so-called "Rail Delivery Group"). Our rejection was clear from the beginning. The 5% plus 4% pay-rise over two years leaves us with minus 10% compared to RPI, after the now 4-year-long pay freeze. The long list of "reforms" are nothing but a concerted attack against our Ts&Cs. The 10,000 or more job cuts, jeopardise safety (cuts in maintenance, closure of ticket offices,

cuts to traincrews). And then there is the mandatory Sunday/rest-day working plus the loss of public holidays and sick pay. There is no way we can accept any of this.

So what's next? New strike dates? Leader Mick Lynch said in one of the meetings "we have to dig in together with all the other workers and be part of the fight". But he also said that we started the strike movement so the others should follow us! Yet we all know that co-ordination should start at home: with first, our own cleaning workmates, together with drivers in Aslef and TSSA members!



And it should go without saying that we need to go out on the same days as teachers, posties, civil servants, lecturers, nurses, doctors... So why do we have to say it? Away with superficial boundaries and unite to win this fight! ☐

- **The way to a clean winner!**

Cleaners who were left to strike on our own all along, are now supposed to wait for a new strike date... But we've really been messed around far too much. It's 12 months since Churchill workers (only!) were first on strike! Of course all cleaners want at least £15/hr! But even some train crews and station staff don't get this! So isn't that one more reason for our strikes to be co-ordinated - not just with other cleaners - but with ALL other workers? [King's X Workers' Platform 08/02/23]

- **Not "martyrs" to the cause!**

As for losing our wages whenever we strike - why should we? Striking is not what we do for fun. The bosses who made these strikes a necessity must pay for them; not just by giving in to our demands, but by paying us back every penny in lost wages from strike days. [King's X Workers' Platform 08/02/23]

- **Totally clueless**

Again last weekend there were delays across East Coast line due to engineering works. And the delays meant passengers missed their connections... and so did we!

Instead of adjusting the timetable and informing the passengers accordingly, everyone is left expecting their trains still to arrive on time - and connections aren't rejigged, so they don't wait! Yes, even though these are anticipated delays! [King's X Workers' Platform 08/02/23]

- **Genius on our side**

Cheers to LNER's "Genius" app, which went on strike along side the drivers last week! It's meant to tell passengers where the trains will be stopping, but managers were left in the dark as to where the few strike-breaking trains would stop - so it couldn't be updated... [King's X Workers' Platform 08/02/23]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**The subsidised Ford axe**

Ford has just announced 3,800 job cuts in its European operations - and 1,300 are to be made here in Britain - targeting Dunton Research and Design centre in Basildon. Similarly, there are to be 2,500 cut at Germany's John Andrews Development Centre in Merkenich and 700 in Cologne's admin departments. Only last year, Ford said it would close Saarlouis assembly (with the loss of 4,600 jobs) by 2025. Already closed between 2019 and 2021 are the Blanquefort plant in France, Bridgend in Wales, plants in Brazil and in India's

Chennai and Gujarat. And of course its Russian ops. Ford wants to switch as fast as possible - and ahead of its rivals - to making only electric cars by 2030. It points out that it takes 40% less labour to make an EV. So workers are expected to pay for the electric transition.

Despite gross profits of £19.6bn, not to mention the attack on our jobs, we now hear that Ford-Britain is due to get a government subsidy this April! Shop stewards at Dagenham report a possible hydrogen fuel cell project being launched here. But Ford has already



received a total of £1.4bn from the British government's "UK Export Finance" scheme - a guaranteed loan scheme - of which £600m was awarded in December! So while Ford cuts workers' livelihoods, the government gives shareholders a bonus! ☐

- **Cheaper option**

We've been asked to work a lot of OT here on Panther machining. So now temps are coming over... onto 3-shift working... Of course, and no wonder: they're being paid less for it than us old hands would get (some who are now on Assy and having our pay cut!). [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/02/23]

- **Restore shift pay!**

With Panther Assy now on 2 shifts, we've joined Tiger in the pay-cut

category... We knew it was coming. Rumour has it we may be back on 3 shifts in the summer... But a cut is a cut and we can't afford it. Nobody can. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/02/23]

- **No to these cuts**

These AGV-electric-surfboards are being used to dump forklift truck drivers in the "sea"... yes they're being used on Panther Buy-off to carry pallets with engines from the line now, so Ford can try to get rid of even more of us... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/02/23]

- **Again, reject!**

Let's recap: LLL workers first rejected LLL's pay offer of 7% by 98.5%! Then, we were told to vote online for a 2nd time. But just as we were about to reject again, we were told a paper vote was needed. Seems the bosses (and their pocket union officials) think this will cut the turnout since we'd have to be there in person... It's getting ridiculous: this fiasco has been going on for 8 months! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/02/23]

Turkey and Syria

The devastating 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes which struck south-east Turkey and north-west Syria early on Monday morning 6 February, are the worst and deadliest in the region's modern history. At the time of writing, the death toll is 41,000 - and it will probably rise further.

Ten days after the tremors hit, survivors were still being pulled out from under the rubble. The heavy equipment like cranes and diggers required to assist the rescue effort has been slow in reaching many of the devastated areas. Parts of north-west Syria, close to the quake's epicentre, but which, after a 13-years of civil war, remain under rebel militia control, received no initial help, until agreements could be reached over border crossings.

Relocation the only way

This whole region, located over the East Anatolian Fault in the earth's crust, sees frequent earthquakes. What's more, these fault-lines are accurately mapped out.

Given the impossibility of knowing in time that a quake is coming, in order to take emergency measures to save lives, the most effective way to prevent such human disasters is to ensure nobody lives on or near these fault lines.

This would mean that all existing dwellings - even whole cities maybe, as would be the case for San Francisco which lies over the notorious San Andreas Fault - would need to be moved. But not only is this not done - due to the costs and the "profit before safety" mentality of the ruling classes of this world, but new buildings are constantly built in dangerous places.

...or build resistance

A less costly alternative (and which respects the capitalist class's "sacrosanct" private property!) is to build earthquake-resistant buildings. So for instance, Istanbul airport is (apparently) the largest earthquake-resistant building in the world. But what about all the other buildings? In Gaziantep, near the epicentre of Monday's quake, savings made on building materials in constructing residential blocks meant they collapsed. And in Syria, after decades of war, there was no chance at all for any "safe building".

Political quake to come?

Facing an election on 14 May, Turkey's President Erdogan is having to answer

Earthquake: a natural disaster made worse by an unnatural system



Inhabitants of Kahramanmaraş (Turkey) searching for survivors

for the preventable consequences of this earthquake: not having ensured that all new buildings constructed in the country are built to regulation, and the slowness of rescue teams which he claims are "the best in the world". He is all the more liable because he was elected in the aftermath of the 7.6 magnitude earthquake which struck Kocaeli province in 1999, after his predecessor, Bulent Ecevit had failed to have potentially dangerous buildings replaced and demolished. Now Erdogan is in his shoes.

Erdogan's "measures"

After declaring a 3-month state of emergency he has banned criticism and arrested journalists (his signature response) while reluctantly admitting he could have done better. He promises that "we will not leave any of our citizens uncared for" (therefore not including Syrian refugees?) and that financial help of 10,000 liras (£438) would be given to every affected family, while social housing would be built for all survivors within a year.

In character, he added the following implied threat: "Some dishonourable, dishonest people are making false statements such as 'We didn't see any soldiers or police.' Our soldiers and police are honourable. We won't let the disreputable speak of them like this".

A repressive regime

With the election in mind, Erdogan has just allocated £4.3bn for post-quake efforts, finding funds despite the fact

that Turkey's economy remains in free-fall with an inflation rate of 57%. Of course one of Erdogan's concerns is to maintain his "international" stature - Turkey belongs to NATO, even if its EU membership has been held up on grounds of its human rights record... It maintains the semblance of a democratic republic, which everyone knows is a sham, while the current regime amounts to a police state ("a totalitarian autocracy") where political opposition is rewarded with prison if not worse and the Kurdish population remains persecuted and treated as second class.

No escape within this system

The Turkish population is in the same boat as many other peoples stuck in "natural" disaster zones around the world, aggravated by imperialist-imposed "unnatural" borders, controlled and patrolled by armies and police. These prevent the free movement of people for any reason - even safety from death.

Given the choice, people would leave these danger zones. Haitians are constantly trying to escape their shaking island (a quake in 2010 killed 220,000), where today, armed gangs rule at gunpoint. But their boats are stopped by US patrols and returned.

The poor are not permitted to escape their fate. Not here in the English Channel, not in Syria, and not in the Caribbean. Instead, the deadly effects of natural disasters are compounded by the effects of a system which is not natural, but even more deadly. ☐

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

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

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.