

WORKERS' fight



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

"BACK TO WORK"? NO! BACK TO STRIKE, AGAINST THIS LETHAL SYSTEM!

The Sunak-Hunt Spring Budget was delivered on the same day as workers from 8 unions staged the biggest walkout since strikes first began last summer.

The strikers are up against it. The bosses are maintaining their squeeze on wages in the face of the worst fall in household income in 60 years, refusing to increase real pay, even though, by their own admission, they can't find enough workers to fill job vacancies.

Instead, the capitalists and their government are sitting tight, hoping workers' wage claims will just go away!

But it's not only wages that need improving: so do working conditions and pensions, if the bosses want to attract workers! Isn't the NHS alone critically short of 170,000 staff?

By now it's obvious that the only effective "cure" for the bosses' and government ministers' ongoing state of denial, is the strike cure. So for good reason, industrial action is set to continue beyond Budget Day!

As for Sunak and Hunt's "growth" plans, these are yet another example of tinkering with a failed system, offering crumbs to the poor, while giving cake to the rich. There wasn't one word in this budget about the striking public sector's pay! These latest representatives of their class can only fiddle while Rome burns.

The cracks in the banks

And the fire isn't just singeing British capitalism. The world's financial system is overheating, yet again.

For now, recession may be cushioned by state intervention, with billions injected into the arms industry. But the economy isn't behaving as big players expect. Inflation remains high, despite Central Banks raising interest rates.

And it is precisely this interest rate rise which ensnared Silicon Valley Bank when its attempt to capitalise on



the new rate backfired. It found itself without enough free cash to remain "liquid"... and it collapsed. New York's Signature Bank followed in its footsteps within hours.

These banks may be small fry. But despite the reassurances of the US President himself - and his puppy dog, Rishi Sunak - the financial system is not settling down. Credit Suisse stocks also fell to record lows.

Government spokespersons say we won't see a repeat of the 2008 banking crash. But SVB followed exactly the same pattern as Lehman Brothers, whose insolvency heralded the "Great Recession"...

All that said, the real, but unspoken, problem for the capitalists and their governments is not the unrest of the financial markets, but the social unrest of the working class.

Their austerity killed 250,000 +

Everyone remembers the austerity following the 2008 crash. Pay and conditions never recovered. And evidence for the so far untold human cost, was provided this week by the *Economist*, magazine, not known for its

pro-worker stance.

Its leader entitled *"The missing quarter of a million"* reveals how working class life expectancy fell thanks to austerity and how, since 2010, there were 250,000 excess deaths, mainly among the poor, over and above Covid deaths.

It concludes that to address this means *"raising the living standards of the poor"* who die earlier simply because of poverty... Yes, for once, honesty from the *Economist*!

For the rest of us, this is no big discovery. What's obvious, though, is no government which upholds capitalism can or will change this: to increase their profits, capitalists increase workers' exploitation. It's simple. Their interests and those of the working class are diametrically opposed.

In other words, there's no "compassionate" capitalism. The capitalist class has to be forced by collective action (if not civil unrest!) to make even the smallest concession. But if we are to get real change, not just in order to eat, but to really *live*, the whole lethal system will have to go! ☐

Ukraine/Europe ARMS MERCHANTS NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD!

The bloodbath in Ukraine continues. In Bakhmut, where Ukrainian and Russian forces fight to control this "gateway" to western Donbas, less than 5,000 civilians are left in a city that used to have 70,000 inhabitants - and an estimated 40,000 Russian and Ukrainian soldiers have been killed there.

Skyrocketing budgets...

In the meantime, western powers are pouring more weapons into this war, and increasing their defence budgets accordingly. The 2023 US military budget has hit an all-time record of £720bn, the equivalent of 38% of the world's combined defence expenditure.

This represents almost 3 times the Chinese expenditure and 13 times Russia's military budget. As for Britain, it spends close to £70bn in defence - more than Russia, which has twice the number of people and is 70 times bigger!

...and skyrocketing profits!

Of course, the first beneficiaries of these massive government hand-outs are the western arms companies. Britain's BAE systems will be one of the main recipients of the multibillion boost to defence, announced by Sunak at the trilateral Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) defence pact summit in San Diego.

As for the US arms companies, they are doing even better. According to the CEO of Raytheon, the 4th largest arms maker in the world, "we have sold as many Stinger missiles in the last ten



months as we have in the last six years". The company exported 1,600 of its missiles to Ukraine. Lockheed Martin, the largest arms maker in the world, produces the Himars multiple rocket launchers, which the United States also delivers to Ukraine.

Production is now running day and night, seven days a week, to increase from 60 to 96 systems per year.

Alliances for a future war?

But the money-making spree does not stop there. The US has also approved

£94bn in aid to Ukraine. Taiwan will also receive £15bn as western powers step up their anti-Chinese sabre-rattling. Of course, a good fraction of this "aid" will find its way back to the pockets of the same Western arms merchants!

General Minihan, head of the US Air Force, declared in January in an internal memo, later confirmed by the Pentagon, "I hope I am wrong. My gut tells me we will fight in 2025". The defence industry can rejoice at the prospect. Sales and share prices must go up - no matter the inhuman consequences! ☐

GREECE - RAILWAY PRIVATISATION HAS CAUSED CARNAGE

The train crash near Tempi in Greece, on the night of Tuesday 28 February, is the worst in the country's history. A high-speed passenger train from Athens with 342 passengers and 10 crew on board, operated by Hellenic Train, the private subsidiary of Italian State Railways - hit a freight train bound for Athens head-on. The first four carriages of the passenger train were derailed, and the first two caught fire. At the time of writing, the death toll is 57 with dozens injured. Both drivers, their co-drivers and 4 train crew were killed.

Blaming the worker...

The passenger train and freight train were travelling in opposite directions on the same track. A finger was immediately pointed at the local railway worker responsible for changing the points. He has since been accused of negligent homicide and jailed. The rail unions responded by going on strike in his defence, On 2 March a national rail strike was called, culminating in a general strike. There have been huge public demonstrations across the country, with protestors placing the blame for this accident squarely at the

door of successive governments.

The real culprit

Since 2013, the state-owned railway system has been restructured. Like in Britain, tracks and signals remained "public" while train operation was handed to private companies. This has predictably led to under-investment and profiteering through cost- and corner-cutting. What's more, track and signal work has been serially subcontracted by the government.

A train drivers' union leader said that the electronic systems that warn drivers of danger haven't been functional for years. "Nothing works, everything is done manually. We are 'in manual mode' throughout the Athens-Thessaloniki network". Equipment is in a dilapidated state and there is permanent understaffing, with 1,100 posts unfilled.

The Transport Minister, taking responsibility for his "failure to bring Greek railways up to 21st-century standards" resigned, but railway workers and public alike are calling for an end to privatisation. There's no place for profit in public service. Whether in Greece, or Britain.



BUDGET DAY: STRENGTH IN NUMBERS!

Strike news

The Budget Day strike on 15th March brought strikers from 8 unions out together: 130,000 civil servants in the PCS, 50,000 BMA and HCSA junior doctors, 70,000 UCU (university workers), 300,000 NEU (teachers), 15,000 Aslef and RMT London tube workers, BBC journalists working in local radio in the NUJ and Prospect's senior civil servants - plus all their supporters! At least half a million, fighting for decent pay, jobs and conditions...

While the railway workers weren't on strike until the next day, so that trains could bring protesters to London, the London Underground was on strike - so this meant London streets were crowded with on-foot strikers all day!

Civil servants are in the middle of a series of strikes which began in September last year. They're not even asking for an above inflation pay rise. The demand is for 10% and no cuts to jobs, pensions or redundancy terms.

Almost every day from the end of February and throughout March, government departments have been going on strike separately, or a few at



time. Unlike the teachers' union, which organised coaches into London for the Budget Day protest for a collective demonstration, PCS union leaders said they wanted "1,000 picket lines across the UK" on the day.

In the end, at least 40,000 strikers marched to Trafalgar Square while in parliament, Hunt refrained from even mentioning their existence.

Undoubtedly the strikes will need to continue. However, it seems rather than escalating by striking together, for as long as it takes, UCU and health service union leaders are already meekly submitting themselves to talks with the bosses over below-inflation pay offers, thus squandering the militant energy of workers who've been taking to the picket lines and the streets. □

• Junior doctors have led the public sector strikes this month

Around 50,000 junior doctors in England went ahead and staged their first 72-hour strike over pay - walking out on the 13 March. This was the most disruptive NHS strike so far. As these doctors say, they are the backbone of the NHS. Senior consultants and nurses were obliged to provide emergency cover.

Placards on picket lines read: "£14 per hour is not enough". And their union, the BMA, used the job advertisement from sandwich chain, "Pret A Manger", to make the point:

since it's offering £14.10/hour and a junior doctor gets just £14.09, "Thanks to this government you can make more serving coffee than saving patients"!

Doctors are told their 35% pay demand is unrealistic. They answer that it's merely "pay restoration". CPI is 10.1% and RPI 13.4%; since 2008 their pay (like the pay of many other workers) has fallen by 26%, while working conditions have become intolerable.

The last minute "offer" from Health Secretary Stephen Barclay, not for a

pay rise, but to call off their strike and enter into talks like the other health unions - was refused. The government maintains the lie (for now) that there's no "outside money" for paying NHS workers, thus playing them off against patients. But doctors are holding their ground and more's the pity that other NHS workers are absent. Because it's the same ground all workers stand on.

Every other worker in every other sector has reason to support their fight, and not just to support it, but to join it.

• NHS workers still overworked, still underpaid

Contrary to the slogans of the "Keep our NHS Public" and "SOS NHS" demonstrators on 11 March, the NHS is not "ours". If it was, there would be enough beds and nurses and NHS staff would not be struggling with the cost-of living. Anyway, for now nurses' and ambulance workers' strikes have been suspended while union leaders discuss a new pay offer with NHS bosses/ministers.

Since the pandemic, when the NHS

became a Covid-only service, conditions have got worse. A study shows that the overall number of vacancies in 2022 was 26.2% higher than in 2019! Within that, the number of nursing vacancies was 9.3% higher...

Relative to the number of patients, there are 9,000 fewer beds in the NHS now, than in 2019! To make matters worse, about 1 in 7 of all beds (about 14,000) are occupied by patients who no longer need to be in hospital but

who can't be discharged, for the simple reason that there is no social care in place for them.

Despite an 11% increase in staffing and 2.9% additional funding, in December hospitals carried out 14% fewer emergency admissions, 14% fewer outpatient appointments, and 11% fewer elective and maternity admissions than December 2019. In other words, having more staff doesn't mean having enough staff.

• Where are the teachers' strikes going?

Ahead of the last teachers' strikes in England and Wales, Education Secretary Gillian Keegan offered talks on pay if the strikes were called off. The National Education Union (NEU) refused, given the government was sticking to its 5% this year + 3% next year offer. The union demand is for a rise above inflation paid for with extra money, rather than funded out of current school budgets.

The NEU suggested talks mediated by ACAS, which the government also rejected this unless the strikes were called off. So strikes continue this March, including on Budget Day - when the NEU jointly organised the big national demonstration in London.

However, the Scottish teachers, who've been on rolling strike for 16 consecutive days, and were preparing 22 more strike

days from March 13, have voted to accept a pay rise of 14% over two years. The 7% per year deal is less than the 10% teachers were demanding. Is this what is in store for teachers in England and Wales? Let's hope that instead, that they can stand firm and hold out for the pay rise they need. And not only that, but for urgent improvements in their working conditions.

Refugees

REFUGEE CRISIS: BLAME CRIMINAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The drowning off the shores of Italy's Calabria on 26 February of 79 refugees, including 24 children, is only the latest such tragedy. Since 2014, over 20,000 people have died or gone missing while trying to cross this treacherous stretch of the Central Mediterranean.

Home Affairs ministers right across Europe blame "illegal criminal traffickers" for these deaths, when these opportunist crooks are their very own creation: they've closed safe and legal routes for migration and keep tightening immigration rules further.

This is the context of the British government's pledge to "stop the small boats" i.e., the refugees from Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa (and Albania, yes!) who dare risk their lives by crossing to England in rubber dingies.

For those who make it, the "dangerous crossing" isn't over. After being placed in a detention centre and/or temporary hotel accommodation, and with the threat of deportation to Rwanda hanging over their heads, they can wait years

• Braverman "bravely" goes... even further to the right

The Tories' so-called "Illegal Migration Bill", presented to the House of Commons on 7 March by Home Secretary Suella Braverman, was unintentionally well-named: according to the UN High Commission on Refugees, in terms of international law, this bill is itself "illegal".

The UNHCR says it "is profoundly concerned by the asylum bill..." which "compels the Home Secretary to deny access to the UK asylum system to those who arrive irregularly. (...) This would be a clear breach of the Refugee Convention".

Of course breaking international law is par for this government's course... And all the more so, if it means playing to its right-wing electorate and appealing to the far-right - just 2 years or less, before a general election.

So no wonder the "debate" (if that's what it can be called!) in the Commons revolved around name-calling, with Labour accused by Sunak of being a

• Fortress Britain and Fortress Europe...

The UN estimates that across the world there are at least 100 million displaced people. And while Home Secretary Suella Braverman used this number to justify her "Illegal Migration Bill", the fact is that 75 million refugees are displaced inside their own countries, or in a neighbouring country. Of the 26 million people who do manage to get further, less than half have ended up in Europe or the US. As many as 3.7m refugees live in Turkey and 2.5m in Colombia. Sweden, under a right-wing coalition government (it currently holds



Red Cross volunteers and coast guards recover a body, South Italy

(some have waited ten!) for their asylum claims to be processed. By the end of 2022, there was a backlog of 166,261 cases. Proof that this isn't a question of lack of capacity, nor the Home Office being overwhelmed, is the fact that 146,000 Ukrainian refugees have been provided with homes and special status in the past year, after being fast-tracked through the system.

Indeed, this shows that Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian, Pakistani, Somalian and other African refugees, are regarded as neither legitimate nor worthy by British ministers, whose main current preoccupation is to use them as scapegoats, to distract attention away from their racist policies aimed against the international (!) working class which all of us belong to. □

bunch of "lefty lawyers" and in favour of "free movement"!

If only it was! But Labour's only objection to Braverman's policy is that it is not effective enough at stopping the people smugglers and the "small boats"!

On the other hand, unlike Labour's MPs, BBC football commentator and former ace striker (England's 4th highest scorer), Gary Lineker, stood up for refugees against Braverman et al, tweeting that the kind of language she uses sounds like the rhetoric heard in Germany in the 1930s. Yes, the time of Hitler's rise to power. He's not wrong.

But such sentiments weren't confined to Germany in those years of severe economic recession - times much like now. They were well-represented in Britain, by a large section of the business class, news editors and by members of the royal family; something the anti-Lineker mob wouldn't care to acknowledge!

Braverman claims that her Bill will

stop the people smugglers. Yet the Bill, which will "enable the detention of illegal arrivals, without bail or judicial review within the first 28 days of detention, until they can be removed" isn't aimed at "people smugglers" but the people they smuggle. It criminalizes them automatically.

As the UN says, the government has made it impossible to be a "legal" arrival, since it insists that asylum seekers must put in a claim in their first safe country. Given that Britain is an island, how is that even possible? It puts them in a "Catch 22".

Arguing that refugees must be stopped, Braverman mentions "the overwhelming volume of illegal migrants". But if the 160,000 waiting for their claims to be processed (for lack of Home Office staff!) is anything to go by, this is a tiny "volume". It is even fewer than the 170,000 NHS vacancies crying out to be filled. That should speak for itself.

the EU presidency), has already halted its annual intake of refugees to less than one-fifth of previous numbers. Yet Sweden used to be a haven for refugees fleeing political persecution.

The total number who manage to come to Britain is in fact tiny. Yet Braverman hysterically claimed that 45,000 refugees (who successfully crossed the Channel) constituted an "invasion"... PM Sunak has accordingly struck a new deal with France to "stop the small boats". No, not to provide bigger, safer, boats, but to

provide £480m for a new detention centre and anti-migrant patrols on its beaches!

Quite who would be detained and under which law is unclear, as the migrants on the beach or climbing into dingies are not actually doing anything illegal.

As the crisis deepens (irrespective of natural disasters like Turkey's recent earthquake) refugee numbers can only increase. This is why the only answer - in a future humane society - is to open all borders, permanently.

THEY CAN'T BUDGET THEMSELVES OUT OF A RECESSION...

Their politics

On the day that Chancellor Jeremy Hunt presented his budget, the London Stock Exchange's FTSE index plummeted, wiping out £75 billion. It was the biggest drop since the invasion of Ukraine. The trigger was a 30% fall in the stock of European bank, Credit Suisse, to a record low.

Banks collapsing

Just the day before, pundits (including US President Joe Biden) had said that the financial disruption after the collapse of the two US banks, Silicon Valley Bank and Signature had been contained (in Britain the SVB subsidiary was taken over by HSBC; in fact "sold" for £1!). But their "rescue" is clearly not the end of the story.

Reacting to the plight of Credit Suisse, stocks of BNP Paribas, Société Générale, Deutsche Bank, ING and Barclays lost 9%-12% of their value. In the US, JPMorgan's shares fell 4.7% and those of Citigroup 5.4%.

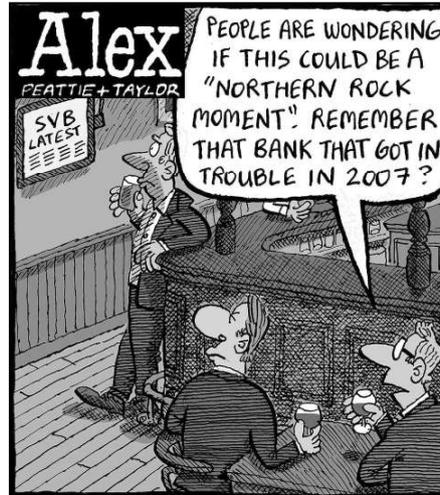
"Expert" opinion

Economist Nouriel Roubini, (who predicted the 2007-8 financial crisis), had already said that the knock-on effects of the SVB insolvency might turn into a "Lehman moment" (the collapse of Lehman Brothers heralded the "Great Recession" of 2008 and the decade of austerity). BlackRock's Larry Fink said it could turn into a "slow rolling crisis" of the whole US financial system. Which means the whole world financial system, since there's no such thing as an isolated

banking crash, contrary to Biden's (and Sunak's) wishful thoughts.

Hunt on planet Brexit

Never mind though, in this context, Jeremy Hunt boasted that all was well with the British economy - apparently, because of Brexit, fully insulated from shocks from the rest of the world! The doubters would be proved wrong; there



will be no "technical recession" and the economy is going to grow faster than any other...

Anything but a pay rise

However none of this was reflected in the details - or lack of them - in his budget. And as one couldn't fail to notice, not one

word was mentioned about the strikes for pay rises taking place around his ears. His only measure of note is one which cannot be implemented, not least because of a crisis in nursery education: to extend the 30 hours of free childcare for 3 and 4 year-olds to 1 and 2 year-olds. Along with plans to force older people and the sick and disabled to go back to work, (thus cutting the welfare budget, with Labour's agreement), the offer of childcare is supposed to address the shortage of skilled workers in the economy... eventually?

How can the economy grow?

The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that by March 2028, living standards will still be below where they were before the pandemic. Without the spending power of the working class increasing, as the bourgeois economist Keynes always said, the economy will stagnate. And yet paying public sector workers above inflation rises is the one thing that Hunt - who said this was a "growth" budget - rules out!

Can anyone believe in Hunt's promises of castles in the air: the "12 Canary Wharfs"? Maybe, yes, a millionaire banker from another planet, like Sunak. And perhaps his mates in construction giant Balfour Beatty! Even so, it's empty rhetoric. And all the more reason for the workers who have been leading the strikes on the ground for a pay rise to begin seriously to organise, not just the fight over wages, but the political fight against a bankrupt political class and their dead-end system. □

• Northern Ireland's borders: Unionist veto still holds

It seems that the "Windsor Framework" (or WF) announced on the 27 February, which amends the Northern Ireland Brexit Protocol and which so delighted Rishi Sunak and EU president Ursula von der Leyen remains "on hold"...

Having bent over backwards to please the far-right bigots in the Democratic Unionist Party, who represent perhaps 20% of the voting electorate in the 6 counties, Sunak then gave them a "hard sell", to try to get them to go back to

participating in the up-to-now suspended NI Stormont government. He told them that thanks to the WF, "*Northern Ireland is in the unbelievably special position of having privileged access, not just to the UK home market ... but also the European Union single market, ... "That's like the world's most exciting economic zone!"* Never mind the irony of a Brexiteer PM promoting the EU single market!

It hasn't worked. Having got plenty of new concessions out of the latest

"deal", Unionists want more. However, with the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement coming up (7 April) and the prospective visit of US President Joe Biden, they may have to cut short their period of scrutiny of the deal. But even that's not certain: pandering to NI's unionists has always gone against the dictum that capitalist economic expediency should trump political prejudice. Brexit is there to prove it!

• Scotland independence sidelined?

After the SNP's nearly 16 years in power, the party's leadership contest to replace Nicola Sturgeon is exposing the party's inability to deliver the independence it always promised.

Its record in government is under fire, and especially the performance of NHS Scotland, even if it handled the Covid pandemic far better than NHS England and NHS Wales. In the midst of the pandemic, support for independence reached a high 56%.

But this February, after Sturgeon's failure to get Westminster to agree a new independence referendum, and after her sudden resignation, support for "yes" fell to 45.3%. And now even Sturgeon's replacement candidates say independence must be left off the immediate agenda.

The cost-of-living crisis is obviously the main issue for the Scottish working class, as it is for workers in the rest of Britain. That said, conditions of the

Scots urban poor have always been worse: Dundee is said to be the "drug death" capital of Europe.

But whether the SNP weathers its current storm or not, will make little difference to Scottish workers. What's needed - and what doesn't yet exist - is a genuine party of the working class - organising across the whole of these British islands and beyond, to fight and bring down the international (!) capitalist system... the real cause of crisis!

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**We need to fight Royal Mail's cuts!**

On 2 March, the CWU published a "joint statement" in which they undertake to "work together in local revision activity" - with Royal Mail bosses. In other words, they're now ready to help RM force the cuts and changes we've been fighting against, down our throats!

They've reprinted (and agreed with!) the bosses' anti-strike propaganda, writing that "the business faces the most seriously challenging financial, economic and market conditions in its history". But didn't RM make the largest

profit - £1.46bn - in its history over the past two years? Union leaders say they aim for an agreement that "aligns the interests of all". As if workers could have the same interests as Thompson&Co!

The worst thing about this capitulation is that 95.9% of us voted to renew our strike action on a 77.3% turnout! Yet now union leaders are using this overwhelming result to regain their own positions at the bosses' negotiating table! They intended to sign, seal and deliver the revisions within 10 days, on



12 March!

After all this, we're even more sure than ever, that we need to go back on strike. Tyneside Mail Centre and Redcar Delivery Office have already walked out. They are right - taking this fight into our own hands is the only way to defeat Royal Mail's revisions and its pay cuts! ☐

• Letter from the North West

North of the Watford gap it's not revisions we're seeing, it's job cuts! What has not been cut is the work. Our duties were already badly planned and "inefficient". Now they are also heavier. When we last met the union officials, we asked if the massive job cuts are our reward for striking for 18 days? None of us went on strike for this!

The letter carriers have it worst, but the porters and sorters have not

been spared. All any of us want is fair and equal duties that we know we can do. We can only get this if our work is properly planned and fairly shared. There are so many historic problems that it's going to cost the bosses to put things right. In the meantime, the job cuts are being covered by unpaid work, corner cutting and overtime.

The one thing we all want is renationalisation and a return to

providing a public service for the benefit of the public. Despite this being union policy, we never hear the leadership calling for our industry to be returned to the public! Renationalisation is the only way we'll save our jobs and have fair and equal duties. Continuing privatisation will simply cut more jobs and increase the pressure. Let's keep fighting!

• Starvation wages

Us cleaners can't believe that after all this time waiting for a decent pay rise, the bosses are offering, and the union officials recommend that we accept, £11.95/hr for this coming year (£10.90 outside London)! Who can make ends meet on that rate - and

that's the "increase". But of course 10.1% of nothing, is nothing. And a non-consolidated lump sum and bonus bribes won't make up for this! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/03/23]

• Pushing their luck

Incredible that DUMs (Delivery

managers) think they can come up with the new duties by Monday 13 March and implement them in two weeks time! We know they're preparing the worst possible walks for those of us who'll be considered spare because we can't drive... [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 08/03/23]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**Time for BMW to pay up!**

BMW's plan to get us all to make "WTA payback plans" is daylight robbery. Some of us are more than 300 hours in "debit" in our "Working Time Accounts", yet BMW expects us to work overtime until all the hours are paid off! Many of us refused. However, if anyone did plan to pay back, their plans have been rendered useless by yet more lockouts! There are 4 days so far this year - 16 and 17 Feb, and now 16 and 17 March. And yes, 100% of that time has been

added to our WTA debits!

Apparently, they want us all back to zero... so that they can lock us out again next spring and push us all back into owing them free overtime! They tell us the 19-week shutdown will be unpaid if we don't clear our accounts... Why on earth should anyone cooperate with this outrageous exploitation?

In fact the shutdown/lock-out, we hear, is to do with bringing new models to Cowley. And BMW expects a bribe from government to confirm a £500m investment. The Treasury is meant to



add (only) £75m. Never mind that BMW had £14bn in profit last year, enough to invest fully, pay us fully AND to cancel all WTA debt. With a little encouragement from us... ☐

• Strike for permanent jobs?

Imperial Logistics drivers are in the middle of a full strike ballot, after a 94% vote in the consultative ballot, after rejecting a 6.7% "offer"... Sixteen months ago, the 25 permanent drivers won a 27% deal over two years, and pay parity with 45 agency workers.

So, this time, is everyone going to strike together? Including the rest of us?! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/03/23]

• Strike together?

So after being locked out on 16 and 17 Feb, we face the same again this

Thursday and Friday (and every Thurs and Fri until the end of March, too?). We hear it's a parts issue, but who knows? And if the Imperial Logistics strike goes ahead, will that just mean more lockouts? Perhaps we should join our mates on strike instead? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 14/03/23]

King's Cross railway station (London)

Network Rail and train company workers divided...

RMT members from most train operating companies are taking strike action on the 16th, 18th 30 March and 1 April - for now - after the union leadership refused the Rail Delivery Group's attempt to blackmail it into cancelling planned strike days in exchange for talks...

So our strikes go ahead, but we'll be striking on our own this time. The leaders of white collar rail union, TSSA have accepted the offers from both Network Rail (NR) and the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) representing train companies - first reaching a deal with NR in December, and in late February with the RDG. NR offered

a 5% pay increase for 2022/2023, and 4% increase for 2023/2024, and promised "no compulsory redundancies until 31st December 2024".

But while the RMT refused these offers, it nevertheless halted strike action against NR and has now received a new offer which it's put to a referendum of NR workers. It amounts to around 14.4% for the lowest paid grades and 9.2% for the highest. The union hasn't recommended this and refuses NR's "modernisation" (i.e., cuts) agenda.

The consequence of it all is that signal workers, maintenance - and Aslef train



drivers, whose leaders are considering their own deal - are meant to work while the rest of us strike! Proof yet again that the organisation of this fight needs to be in the hands of the strikers: we know how vital it is to keep our ranks united! ☐

• We're not having it

LNER bosses are already trying to impose some of the changes we're striking against. Apparently they think we're guinea pigs that they can experiment on... For instance they expect floor walkers to carry a tablet and ticket machine and sell tickets... while they close ticket offices? [King's X Workers' Platform 08/03/23]

• Killer shifts

What is to be done about the 11/12-hour shifts - and on nights! - which GN workers are rostered for? This is against

all health "guidelines" (should be laws!). It's medical fact that just working nights, let alone such long shifts, increases fatal heart attacks and strokes. These rosters must be rewritten as a matter of urgency! [King's X Workers' Platform 08/03/23]

• Leading nowhere

LNER senior hosts now have a new title: "Customer Experience Leader (CEL)". As of 6 March they're meant to check tickets in 1st class and standard on the half of the 10-car Azuma without a guard. But since they're not guards and aren't able to collect unpaid fares, what exactly is the point? [KX Workers' Platform 08/03/23]

• We were already short

Where are the extra staff to cover the work of the CEL who is now meant to be occupied with ticket-checking? We already needed an extra "host" for 1st class! So now we are two workers short! [King's X Workers' Platform 08/03/23]

• Disaster waiting to happen

LNER's online sale is a disaster! Tickets have been oversold with double booking on the trains and passengers end up without seats. It doesn't only make for unsafe travel for them, but also for us staff... [King's X Workers' Platform 08/03/23]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

We want to go on strike!

Lineside Logistics workers have been asking for two things for a very long time: occupational sick pay (OSP) and a decent wage! At the time of the 2021 pay offer, we were told by the union that we couldn't have both, and that we had to choose between OSP or a 5.1% pay rise... In the end, our real pay was cut by 2% and we didn't get sick pay either!

But 8 months ago, when the negotiations over a new offer started, the union officials promised they would demand a pay rise matching inflation plus 3% and

a sick pay scheme. They added that in order to win this, we needed to recruit more members to the union, since only 60% of us had joined.

The bosses then came up with a 7.5% pay offer (6% below inflation) which 98.5% of us rejected. However the bosses said the vote didn't reflect the real will of the workforce, accusing one steward of skewing the vote after he put up a poster saying the offer was too low! Using this pretext, boss-friendly full time union officials invalidated the ballot result and said



it had to be redone. But when we were ready to reject again, the officials cancelled the ballot! This time the Unite officials finally realised there was no option but to organise a strike vote. At the time of writing, however, we're still waiting to receive ballot papers... ☐

• No to these job cuts!

We hear from Dunton workmates that management is going to find it hard to find the 1,300 redundancies in engineering and admin...

Some of our workmates there haven't been long enough in the job and aren't expecting much from a VR package. But our issue remains: voluntary redundancies are still job cuts - which we're against. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/03/23]

• How to create bottlenecks

As expected, TOPs management can't find enough of us fleet drivers to move their vehicles fast enough.

So after piling up vehicles in Holland, now they're creating another bottleneck on this side of the Channel. And just because they won't recruit enough drivers - Ford drivers - which would solve their problem...

[Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/03/23]

• It should work both ways

We're being spied on in DEP again. We're caught and penalised with a pay deduction (or "detention"! for leaving just a few minutes early. Yup, that's the childish mentality of supervision and managers these days. But with only one way in and out of the plant, as we queue up trying to exit, it could add 20 minutes to our working day. Are they going to pay us for this? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 15/03/23]

Israel-Palestine

Israel's 37th government - the most reactionary government in Israel's history - took office on 29 December last year under Benjamin Netanyahu (returning for the third time as PM). It's a coalition of Likud, Netanyahu's "centre" right party and five ultra-right religious, anti-Arab Zionist parties with core support from settlers (illegally) occupying Palestinian territory on the West Bank. They have a majority of 64 in the 120-seat Israeli parliament.

Little wonder that the mob of several hundred settlers which stormed the Palestinian town of Huwwara terrorising inhabitants, looting and burning homes, felt it had licence to do so. True, two settlers had just been shot by a Palestinian gunman. But Palestinians are reacting to an unprecedented death toll (79 since the start of this year) among their own people at the hands of these same settlers over the past year, presided over by the Israeli Defence Force.

The leader of the settlers living in the occupied Palestinian territory near Huwwara is Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, also leader of the Religious Zionist Party. Rather unbelievably, given the Jewish people's horrific history under fascism, he calls himself a "*fascist homophobe*". Itamar Ben-Gvir, National Security Minister, of the far-right Jewish Power Party joined settlers attacking East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood

PROTESTS AGAINST THE FAR-RIGHT GOVERNMENT ARE GROWING



Palestinian youth stoning an army bulldozer

last October, shouting "*we're the landlords here*", brandishing a gun and calling on police to shoot the Palestinian residents.

This government has, however, also caused Israel's middle classes and youth to mobilise "*the biggest protest movement in Israel's history*" against it, in response to its attempt at judicial reform. Besides wiping out charges of corruption against Netanyahu himself, it would allow parliament to override Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority, giving it the power to appoint judges and deny the Court's right to rule against amendments to Israel's constitutional laws.

The police have violently attacked protesters, but the army has been kept at bay for obvious reasons: it is unreliable as a repressive force against Israeli civilians. In fact just this week all but 3 of the 40 reservist pilots in Israel's elite 69 Squadron refused to take part in a training exercise, instead participating in the public protests, claiming they were not prepared to serve a "dictatorial regime".

Whether the "common enemy", i.e., this current regime, will help bring together those opposed to it among Israelis and Palestinians remains to be seen. We can only hope so. □

Letter from India

Back in January, a report by American short-selling firm Hindenburg Group, which showed that Modi's close ally and Asia's richest man, Gautam Adani was heavily over-indebted, led to a resounding crash in Adani Group shares.

Adani, who funded Modi while he was still Chief Minister of Gujarat (2001-14), was rewarded when Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, by being allowed to buy public-sector port, coal and energy companies at rock-bottom prices with loans from public-sector banks. Thanks to state backing, the 'value' of Adani stocks increased by 1000% from 2017-2022, which he used as collateral to take more loans and buy even more state assets.

So, while the Hindenburg report was news to no one, the suggestion that Adani had gone too far, nevertheless prompted a panic sell-off of shares,

and within weeks £100bn of the group's market capitalisation was wiped out.

Backed by the State Bank of India, and the publicly owned Life Insurance Corporation, the Adani fall-out put life savings and insurance policies of millions of largely lower middle-class and working-class people at risk. Yet Adani's business empire is not even being investigated and the government has written off the Hindenburg report as "*an attack on India and its democratic institutions*".

Of course, there may still be aftershocks to this sudden loss of confidence in Adani's billionaire group. But Modi had, in effect, virtually integrated a large chunk of Adani's investments into the Indian state, thus cushioning his losses. In fact some liken the Adani-state relationship to that of the Korean family-owned Chaebols which helped to turn what had been a small agricultural economy into Korea's modern industrial

"tiger" economy.

Whether in today's more degenerate capitalist world, Adani's multifaceted global group can help India's economy in the same way is debatable. But for the time being Modi is getting away with turning a blind eye to impending economic problems while openly veering to the far-right politically - rubbing shoulders with the likes of Israel's Netanyahu, with whom he openly boasts of "*sharing values*".

This is borne out by the latest outrages against Indian Muslims carried out by Bajrang Dal (BD) activists, the right-wing Hindu militia affiliated to Modi's BJP in BJP-ruled Haryana. They have begun a reign of terror torturing and killing Muslims (two were burnt alive on 16 February) accused of "*slaughtering cows*". Modi's silence over these latest pogroms is obviously the silence of consent.

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:

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