



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

## What about celebrating Mayday with a "general" strike?

The unprecedented 4-day continuous strike by junior doctors from 11 to 15 April had overwhelming public support. Pickets were constantly hooted and waved at by passing motorists, bus drivers, in fact everyone! It was like the clapping for key workers during the Covid pandemic. Only this time, strikers were being clapped.

And that is also unprecedented. But nobody needs to be told that the conditions and pay in the NHS mean that staff no longer want to work in it. Or that the thousands of cancelled operations and appointments and spectacularly long waiting lists are caused, not by strikes, but the causes of strikes... That is, the chronic lack of investment in health and health workers by serial governments.

### **Historical divisions hurt**

On the last day of the doctors' strike, the RCN union announced that nurses had rejected the government's 5% pay offer by 54% to 46% - against the leadership's recommendation. The RCN then announced a 48-hour strike, including of intensive and emergency care nurses, over the Mayday Bank Holiday.

So now the media are speculating that the doctors' unions might announce a strike on the same days - co-ordinating their strikes with "another union", at last... and, say the media, leaving the NHS in an even more precarious state.

But there's a big hitch. Because NHS workers in Unison, which organises nurses and other NHS workers together, voted to accept this very same pay offer.

In fact the union leaders of Unison and the RCN conducted separate pay talks (in time-dis-honoured fashion, behind closed doors) over this identical offer. Pat Cullen, RCN leader, was open about this narrow sectionalism: she said she only wants to represent "her nurses" and even argued that the collective "Agenda for Change" NHS pay system needs to be scrapped so that "her" nurses can have



their own separate one!

So what happens now? Does this mean the offer is now off the table for Unison workers? And what about for the others, in Unite or the GMB, etc? If RCN nurses indeed go out they'd then, de facto, be striking on behalf of these other NHS workers. How can this be an effective way to fight?

Today, we see almost every single category of worker motivated to take on the bosses and their government - a potentially mighty force, if put into action!

### **How to really flatline the economy**

However, for a whole year, a divisive union strategy, respecting restrictive anti-union laws, has played into the hands of the government and the bosses. Leaders called strikes which were isolated, intermittent, uncoordinated, and sectional. This meant that these strikes have dragged on without winning.

Yet these strikes could have been simultaneous, with all workers out

together, flooding the streets, until the bosses caved in. After all, hitting profits is effective! But thanks to their entrenched structures, unions behave like companies, competing with each other. Leaders' positions depend on their success in selling the bosses' demands to the members. To overcome this, for a start, strikers and activists would have to take over the conduct of strikes, mobilising everyone, regardless of restrictive and bureaucratic ballots, and yes, take the "law" into their own hands.

Today the media predict a summer of protracted strikes - including among NHS workers. But what if there was a collective all-out, this spring? A mobilisation of every section of the working class, demanding an end to all attacks on pay, jobs and conditions - including the demand that NHS workers get their 35% pay rise? And a refusal to return to work unless they do? That would provide a much quicker fix for all. And it could even overturn a government. ☐

## NORTHERN IRELAND: 25 YEARS LATER, NOTHING "GOOD" ABOUT THIS DIVISIVE AGREEMENT

This week it was the 25th anniversary of the Belfast "Good Friday" Agreement - GFA - which ended the 30 year armed struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland.

So US President Joe Biden, reclaiming his Irish roots, visited to celebrate this great peace-keeping, "democratic" achievement!

And he made sure to encourage (very diplomatically) the Democratic Unionist politicians to resume their power-sharing government with Sinn Fein and accept Rishi Sunak's "Windsor Framework" Brexit deal.

Refusing this Framework is the Unionists' tried and tested formula to punch above their weight and get what they want in a situation where their support is steadily dwindling. They only receive 21% of the vote today.

But nobody would guess this. Not when the media coverage this week exclusively involved interviews with or about these same Unionists.

For a whole year the devolved Northern Irish Assembly has been paralysed by the so-called "ethnic veto", hard-wired precisely, into this much-celebrated Good Friday Agreement! So much for promoting peace! And this is only the Assembly's latest suspension: since it was set up in 2002, it has been suspended for 10 years out of the total 21 years of its existence!

Yes, the GFA made sure that the poison and divisiveness of religious and political sectarianism would remain the main arbiter of NI's political system!

### **The built-in sectarian divide**

Once elected, members of the NI Assembly must officially designate themselves as Unionist, Nationalist or other; unionists being those wanting NI to remain in the "UK" and Nationalists being those in favour of Ireland's re-unification.

The GFA duly created a mechanism that requires any new law to be supported by a majority of Unionist and Nationalist assembly members to be passed. It was argued at the time that this would protect the interests of each community... Instead it just helped entrench their differences... A trick, in effect, designed to maintain divide and rule.

The veto was allowed to turn into



James Connolly addresses workers in New York, May Day 1908

a Unionist veto - most recently used to oppose the "Border in the Irish Sea" proposed in the Northern Ireland Protocol...

In fact the headache-generating Protocol too, was only really needed because the GFA - quite rightly in this case - stipulated that there be no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the six counties of the North. As a result there was nowhere else to move it to, except into the sea between NI and Britain.

### **Workers belong to one class, not two!**

Today's political stalemate in Northern Ireland was entirely predictable, given the provisions of this GFA. And Sunak's government is totally cynical about the repercussions of its proposals. The Tory party may be Unionist itself, but it can even do without the DUP on side, if it comes to it.

However the political stalemate continues to have severe consequences for Northern Ireland's population. The suspension of Stormont means that civil servants have, for the past year, been left to run those few state institutions which they could. But they could do nothing to alleviate the plight of NI's severely collapsing NHS, since they cannot legislate a budget. Today 37% of NI patients wait over 3 years for treatment, as opposed to just 0.016% in England. And the situation continues to get worse.

On Easter Monday youths threw a few petrol bombs at a police vehicle in Derry's Creggan estate - youths who had nothing else to do. And while this did not signify anything much, the (still) predominantly unionist police managed to find suspected "pipe bombs" in a nearby cemetery, where some dissident and masked Republicans had marched to commemorate Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising.

This year, the commemoration was overshadowed by Biden's visit to shore up his home vote among Irish Americans and soothe NI's unionist bigots. But it should be remembered. The socialist and Marxist leader of the uprising, James Connolly, (who the British executed) warned, already in 1914, about a future partitioned, divided Ireland. This is what he wrote: "the betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured".

While NI's working class remains divided, more out of lack of alternative than conviction, the "reaction" Connolly foresaw was given a new lease of life by Brexit. That said, divisions and borders cannot be the future. A united Ireland - finally - might be a step towards eliminating them. ☐

**THE RISING COST-OF-LIVING STILL HITTING - WE NEED TO HIT BACK!**

**Our society**

How is the poor majority in the working class supposed to eat? The latest figures show 14.4 million among the population living in poverty - but the statistics are always delayed. This was before inflation started spiralling! So if over one fifth (21%) were in poverty before food and energy prices went up, how many can it be now?

Food has gone up at least 18% (depending on where you buy it; it can be more!) Prices of low-fat milk and olive oil have gone up more than 40% in a year, and sugar 38.4%, driving up the prices of many processed foods too. And this comes as food banks, virtually unknown 15 years ago, have become universal institutions in Britain, and are now relied upon by those in work - since wages levels have never been so low!

**Heating unaffordable**

At the last minute, Chancellor Hunt's "Spring" budget kept the annual energy price guarantee at £2,500, (this caps cost per kilowatt hour, not total bills), at least preventing a rise to £3,000. However the £400 unconditional support for everyone, (around £60/m) paid over the last six months has ended. True, some households on means-tested benefits might qualify for

up to £900 off their bills. But for most of us, without that £60 a month, the bills are going up. And all to keep the multitude of energy companies, most of whom only trade in energy, in profit!

**Not a drop to drink...**

Water and sewage disposal bills are also going up by the highest amount in 20 years! The variegated private sharks will charge an average £450 a year, to supply water through mains so poorly-maintained that they burst and flood roads. And to take foul waste away and dump it in rivers and seas when their outdated combined sewers overflow!

Water privatisation in 1989 handed monopolies to these sharks. By 2020 they had paid £57bn(!) in dividends to shareholders from their enormous accrued profits.

**Prescription to extort**

On top of it all, in England, where the NHS still charges for each item on a prescription, the cost goes up by 30p to £9.65. For a 3-month prescription prepayment certificate (PPC) it goes up by £1 to £31.25 and £3.50 for the 12-month PPC to £111.60. Last April charges were

frozen at £9.35 "in recognition" of the cost of living crisis. But the crisis hasn't gone away! And given that charges are already way above the cost price of some commonly prescribed drugs, this is pure racketeering.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, prescription charges were abolished long since, mainly because their implementation cost more than they were worth. So why not in England? Incidentally, in France, which doesn't even boast an NHS, the cost of prescriptions is fully refunded.

**Councils (very) taxing**

Then there is council tax: three quarters of all councils are raising their rates by 5% - the maximum permitted under the government's cap. Croydon has special dispensation to increase it by 15% - making this the second highest in London: £2,239 for the cheapest "band D" property. Slough and Thurrock councils are also raising the rate by 10%, to "plug holes in their finances". The holes are real - and are due to systematic cuts in the government grant! So the government who should do the plugging, not the rest of us! ☐

**FRANCE: STILL FIGHTING PRESIDENT MACRON'S ATTACKS**

Since 19 January, hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of French workers and youth have been demonstrating their opposition to President Macron's latest attack on pensions. Macron, who forced through his new pension law thanks to special powers which allow his government to by-pass parliament, wants to increase the age of retirement from 62 to 64. This law would also increase the number of years workers need to work in order to receive a full pension, to 43!

On top of this, the government has just reduced unemployment benefits. The maximum period of time one can claim unemployment benefit has been cut by a quarter. All these measures will push millions into poverty, aggravating the situation of the most exploited, that is, social carers, nurses, workers in factories and slaughterhouses, security guards, construction and council workers, delivery drivers - and all those on precarious contracts doing heavy manual jobs. They are already worn out well before retirement, or sacked before reaching the legal retirement age. Today in France, half of the workers who reach retirement age are unemployed, sick or disabled!

So no wonder the working class is furious and has mobilised at the call of their unions. Over the past 2

months, there have been 12 strike days of protest - attended throughout the country in towns and cities, big and small, by up to 3.5 million people. And most importantly, public and private sector workers - railway, energy, teachers, bin collectors, oil refinery workers, incinerator workers - have all taken strike action.

On the 14 April however, the Constitutional Court ruled that Macron's

pension law was perfectly legal - surprise, surprise! At the time of writing it's not certain what the reaction among the population will be. The establishment is worried it could result in a serious social crisis. The far right - Le Pen's party - which opportunistically opposed the pension reform, can gain out of this politically. But not if the working class retains its control of the streets.



## Strikes

At the moment passport workers in the civil servants' union and junior doctors are just about the only sections left on strike. In fact, it's been over 9 months since the railway workers kicked off the strike wave, which, by the end of last year had spread to public sector workers, including nurses, teachers and civil servants.

At the time of writing several offers have been put in front of their union negotiators. As a result, rail strikes, postal strikes (see page 7 of this newspaper) and strikes by nurses are on hold. And ballot results on "final offers" are awaited.

So what is the substance of some of these offers and does the strike wave still have momentum?

### **Railway workers are meant to accept big cuts**

Network Rail (NR) bosses offered a 5+4% pay increase to workers, over 2 years, saying they'd make no compulsory redundancies... till January 2025! Their "modernisation" agenda, which involves halving scheduled maintenance and inspection tasks as well as changing working arrangements, would be negotiated separately. The offer was put to the vote and was accepted by 76% on a turnout of 90%.

On the other hand, the Rail Delivery Group, which is the new name for the Association for Train Operating companies (mostly private) offered a 5% pay rise or £1,750 (whichever is greater) for 2022/23 provided that "3 integral principles" are followed, i.e., introduction of multi-skilled station staff, a 2nd tier of pay for new workers plus new "working arrangements". The 2nd year pay increase (4%) is however to be discussed company by company and is subject to further conditions. In the meantime

### **• Unite the Union neglects to "unite" workers' strikes**

Heathrow airport security guards and cargo workers - just 1,400, mostly in Terminal 5 used exclusively by British Airways - started a 10 day strike on 31 March. BA cancelled 300 flights and more may yet be cancelled.

Unite actually balloted over 3,000 security guards, engineers and firefighters back in February, and represents more than 4,500 workers at Heathrow. But they aren't on strike this time.

In fact, the entire Unite workforce took about 4 weeks of strike action, against Heathrow Airport's fire and rehire attack, back in February and April 2021. This was not successful, not least because the days of strike were "targeted", i.e., different sections of workers at Heathrow were out

## A NEW STRIKE WAVE - OR JUST AN EDDY?



strikes are suspended (the mandate to strike is currently being renewed by postal ballot) and the next step is likely to be a vote on the offer - although the RMT is unlikely to recommend it.

### **Nurses taken up the garden path**

After RCN leader Pat Cullen demanded a 35% increase in pay for nurses, she eventually went into negotiations after an offer of just 5% had been made and even put this to the vote. The result pending, at the time of writing. The "offer" from Steve Barclay's Department of Health is a 5% consolidated pay increase for 2023/24 plus a one-off payment for the current financial year of £1,655 for the lowest band and £3,789 for senior managers and directors.

The result comes out as junior doctors take their 4-days of continuous strike action, on their own. If nurses vote to reject, maybe there could be joint action to come. Although it seems that such co-ordination is still unlikely given the sectionalist attitude of union leaders and their fear of being accused of "solidarity" striking. As if that wasn't, on the contrary, something to be proud of!

on different days over that period.

Unite's policy is to "expose" a company's enormous profits, relying on General Secretary Graham's now well-known "naming and shaming" tactic. And what if the company doesn't publish big profits? Can workers not demand a pay rise? There is another (more traditional) way to achieve demands! Relying on workers' collective strength... Isn't Unite the 2nd largest union - with 1.4m members - in the country?

### **• PCS: Strikes for effect; not effective strikes**

The PCS civil service union has 200,000 members, 130,000 of whom voted to go on strike. But only 1,000 from 8 different Passport Offices started a 5-week strike on 3 April. This is just a quarter of the

### **Teachers out again**

Unsurprisingly, teachers in England have rejected by an overwhelming 98% the paltry pay rise they have been offered amounting to a £1,000 one-off payment and a 4.5% pay rise for 2023/24. They know full well that despite the government's so called "extra funds" for pay, desperately underfunded school budgets will still have to contribute to the pay increase. So now new strike dates have been set for Thursday 27 April and Tuesday 2 May.

### **The big problem**

At the moment, these fights are not being conducted as if workers all belong to the same class. It's one section at a time, partially co-ordinated and with some sections inside sections, already having accepted the pay offers - like Network Rail workers who are really part of the railway workforce as a whole. There has been no attempt to use the very substantial collective strength that all strikers out together would represent, to win general demands. However, it's certainly not too late to seize the initiative to build the collective, all out, ground-level fight needed. □

total who work in the Passport Office. And they have the same demands as the rest of the civil service who voted for strike - a decent pay rise, and "hands off" pensions and Ts&Cs. Besides Library and other small agencies, like DVLA staff, who are also striking, the 129,000 other civil service workers will be out for just one day alongside them, on 28 April.

The PCS leadership asked all members for a £5/m levy so that its selected strikers can receive full pay for the duration of their strike - and thus achieve an exemplary victory. But will this be translated into a victory for the entire workforce? And just like the other sectional strikes, it takes no account of the general and shared interests of the whole working class. Let alone the possibility that many sections winning together could tip the balance of class forces in our favour, for once...

**BANKING CRISIS: SVB, SIGNATURE, CREDIT SUISSE... WHERE NEXT?**

**Their society**

The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and Credit Suisse in early March represent the largest bank failures since 2008 - the crash which heralded the so-called "Great Recession". Once more, despite the best efforts of the regulators, the capitalist financial system is again showing its inbuilt fragility - and its greed-induced stupidity.

**SVB's wrong margin call**

SVB was brought to its knees because depositors got scared by the effect of rising interest rates on the market value of the bank's "government-guaranteed" assets. In fact these rising interest rates - an increase set in train by reserve banks to tackle inflation - have affected the assets of all US banks, cutting their value by an estimated \$1.7trillion to \$2trillion, almost as large as their aggregate equity of \$2.1tn - the total capital cushion against losses. In other words they are all technically bankrupt!

**The bail-out**

But for the time being it's just SVB and a couple of others in the US, plus Credit

Suisse which have actually gone belly-up. And US and Swiss state agencies have stepped in to save them. Deposits of SVB clients - including senior managers - were secured. The Bank of England supported HSBC in buying the British wing of SVB to save its shareholders. After giving Credit Suisse an emergency loan, the Swiss state opened a line of credit for another big bank, UBS, to take it over.

**Too big to fail**

We've heard it all before. They were "too big to fail" - even SVB, which had become one of the largest banks in California... But as Martin Sandbu writes in the Financial Times : *"That is money that could have stayed with taxpayers (if UBS hadn't had to grant it to Credit Suisse shareholders, it could have been subsidised that much less). The impression is, again, that the losses of bank shareholders will be limited, at taxpayers' expense"*. Too right. As for anyone who thinks this is all because these banks didn't follow the regulatory rules; the joke is they literally regulate themselves: Greg Becker, head of SVB at

the time of its crash, was director of the San Francisco Fed! That says it all.

**The system can't be regulated**

State regulation and bailouts in fact short circuit the only way that capitalism does have to regulate itself: though economic crises themselves. An economic collapse clears out the dead wood, deflates economic bubbles, destroys bad debts, etc., But the social effects are disastrous, leaving desolation and paving the way for new capitalist wars of conquest of markets and wealth... So for now, these are put on hold.

**... only overthrown**

Back in the 1840's Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto that the periodic crises of the time put capitalism on trial. The terrible destruction and waste for humanity merely proves that an economic system under the domination of a tiny class of exploiters is an anachronism and has to give way to another system in the only way that history provides, through a working class social revolution. □

**• 2008, the last time the cracks burst open**

In the summer of 2007, the bursting of a speculative bubble in the United States housing market turned, within a few months, into a full-blown international financial crisis. Subprime mortgages had been issued freely to aspiring home owners who had little chance of paying the loan back. This allowed a massive offloading of cheap housing stock, on credit, increasing the house price index by 124% while accumulating billions in toxic debt.

When the housing market began to

contract, financial institutions which had bought debt securities i.e., packaged mortgage debt in bond-like investments containing subprime mortgages, lost billions of dollars. Investment bank Lehman Brothers - the first large bank to fail - declared bankruptcy on 15 September 2008.

Transactions between banks stopped, freezing the market. The crisis spread to the stock market and to large corporations. The big shareholders seeking to save themselves withdrew

their capital. In 2008 alone, more than £6 trillions-worth of stocks vanished worldwide. Pension funds disappeared; the economies of Iceland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal had to be propped up by the EU Central Bank. This did not avoid recession: 15 years of austerity followed. The intervention of Covid may have masked this Great Recession. But it's back and another is coming up behind it already... So yes it's time for a new system without profit and without banks...

**Against Braverman and Cooper, for a world without borders!**

The anti-immigration policies and rhetoric from both sides of the Commons keeps coming. Before Easter, the Home Secretary Suella Braverman announced she was going to cut the cost of accommodating asylum seekers in hotels: a barge off the Dorset coast would "house" 500 migrants. This vessel, currently in Italy and owned by British shipping company Bibby Marine, will be leased to the British government for at least 18 months.

In fact, this same vessel has been used previously by the Dutch government for the same purpose... Nor is the use of ships new in Britain: the Scottish government has been housing Ukrainian refugees in, amongst other places, disused cruise ships. Other "options" are military bases and ex-RAF sites, one of which was formerly used as a prison.

In the meantime, Labour's shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has been trying to outdo Braverman - and succeeding! Her

only problem with Tory immigration policy is that it doesn't go far enough! She says she would be much better at "stopping the boats" if Labour gets elected.

In the midst of all this anti-migrant hysteria, it's worth noting that Britain takes fewer refugees than most other countries in Europe. In 2021, it ranked 19th, when it

came to the number of asylum applications, compared to population size. So the least the British government could do - especially in such a rich country - is to make sure that migrants have the means to get here safely. If ministers can bring a boat all the way from Italy, they can put in place proper, safe ships to bring migrants over the Channel.



**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****We need to fight this!**

Royal Mail bosses announced on 5 April that "talks with CWU have concluded without an agreement". One week later - after talks actually continued CWU leaders announced the talks are at a "pivotal moment".

Now (16th of April), the leaders have decided to put a final offer to the union's Executive, most likely to be followed by a ballot of the membership, for or against.

So far what we know is that RM has offered a 3-year pay deal, with pay "increases" of 2% for 2022-23 (already imposed on us in June last year!) and 8% over two years with paltry non-consolidated lump sums: an insult, when

inflation has been increasing monthly and RPI is currently 13.8%!

Delivery start times will still be 60-90 minutes later, to match with the only daily collection which is now left! In fact, they want all of us, including in Processing, to move to a "flexible seasonal working time pattern", so that they can move our start/finish times according to need, i.e., their whims.

Even worse is the two-tier system: new starters won't get allowances and will need to wait 5 years to achieve pay parity! As for sick-pay, for any second absence during a 12-month period, the first 3 days will be on statutory sick pay - i.e., £21.88 per day!



RM said it "has nothing more to give" - after the company made £1.46bn record operating profits during the Covid pandemic (and £5.4bn since privatisation, in 2013). In fact, management is already cutting jobs and changing our working conditions to try and squeeze even more out of us!

Union leaders are likely to put a slightly adjusted "new" offer to the vote. But we already know what we need to do. ☐

**• Letter from the North-West**

Our mates are leaving in droves. Some retiring, some retiring early, some going to other jobs and some being sacked. The changes are being pushed through. Meanwhile the Union (leadership) does nothing. Do they understand that there is no Union without Members?

Workplaces across the North West are seeing an increase in work. The letter

carriers are unable to do it all. It makes us wonder why all the new houses and flats are still being built with letterboxes if our jobs are obsolete!

As for RM's claims of bankruptcy, the older Blueshirts are saying they've seen and heard it all before. The younger more tech-savvy Redshirts are telling us that the internet has reports from 2003

saying exactly what we're being told today. What we all know is that the bosses are still getting paid massive amounts of money so our jobs must still be vital. In fact many of us have been told by the bosses that the future looks rosy! But for whom? If we want roses, we will have to fight (again!) for them!

**• Can't trust a word they say**

The RM Board's threat to declare RM insolvent if we strike was interpreted as a ploy by some pundits: an attempt to free themselves from dwindling Universal Service Obligation-required Letters and retain the profitable Parcels business... But just how would this even be possible, given how intertwined they are?

**PS:** After Brexit, Britain was no longer bound by EU legislation that made the USO a legal obligation in every

EU country... So is it still bound by British legislation? If so, for how long..? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 04/04/23]

**• Lies and damn lies**

Dave Ward said the union "acknowledges the serious state of the company's finances"... Well, at least he's asked for "independent access" to evidence of these purported financial difficulties. We'd all like to see the "books"! But if RM is really losing money, would we accept to lose out? Of course not. The bosses can take it back from their shareholders.

[Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 04/04/23]

**• Full-time's what we need!**

With this "realignment" or resign (whatever it's now called!), we see management's only "offering" 25-hour part-time duties! Yet most part-timers currently do more hours than that. So how can we sign for these jobs? We've been told we can keep our extra hours for now... but there's no guarantee for the future, let alone the offer of the full-time jobs we need! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 04/04/23]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• Unacceptable already**

It's crazy that anyone is working weeks of nearly 50 hours just to be paid for shut-outs that start in 10 months. But with rest-day working and VPO (Volume Protection Overtime, i.e., compulsory overtime) on lates, this is happening. Have we signed waivers of the working time directive? In this hole, 37 hours is more than enough! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 12/04/23]

**• A year's work in 7 months? No!**

Now, we're told we may be asked to do overtime on Saturday mornings, but why should we have our lives pulled apart at BMW's bidding? We have our own plans and our own lives. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 12/04/23]

**• Ripped off**

The "O" in VPO is supposed to stand for Overtime - which comes at a higher rate, especially in the middle of the night. So why are the hours credits from our VPO showing up as paid at flat rate? We all know BMW won't miss any opportunity to rip us off! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 12/04/23]

**• We're not in a rush**

For some, this is the longest shift we've ever worked - 10 hours - and it's a killer. Is this what our mates were sacked last year for? Bring them back! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 12/04/23]

**• Time to bin VPO and WTA**

VPO was supposed to be a compulsory half-hour added to shifts to "catch back"



production after breakdowns. BMW got it through, in a plant-wide vote about 6 months before WTA (Working Time Account), in May 1998, and with the same kind of blackmail: no new model to replace the two old series built here had been confirmed when the ballot started. For years it could only be paid as extra wages, but now, of course, it's paid as time - like that's a favour! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 12/04/23]

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Strike!...**

So the RMT has called more cleaners' and tankers' strikes on the 14th and 15th of April over wages, sick pay and travel allowances. This will involve those working for Churchill at King's X as well as Atalian workers at Avanti, Alstom, and GWR, and Bidvest Noonan workers at Northern.

BUT (and it's a very big "but"! ) why are us Atalian workers at King's Cross not striking alongside them? We not only have the same demand for a pay rise, but Atalian bosses here have announced that they intend to cut 25 of our jobs! [King's X Workers' Platform 05/04/23]

**• Strange timing**

And why has no one from the union leadership even asked us when we want to be on strike? In fact union officials promised strike dates for January... Why have they waited almost 4 months to call these stoppages? [King's X Workers' Platform 05/04/23]

**• 2-pronged attack disguised as pay-offer**

We got the latest pay offer from the Train Operating Companies, if you can call it "latest"... And it's still a 2-year deal: the first year is 5% or £1,750, whichever is the greater.

But then we come to the 2nd year's pay increase - it is meant to be negotiated with each individual TOC and is conditional on agreeing "3 integral principles" - multi-skilling, new arrangements for attendance, absence, holidays, rostering, the 7-day railway and then... new contracts for new entrants on a 2nd, lower, tier?! [King's X Workers' Platform 05/04/23]

**• Just another trick**

Yes, and it's only if all these "reviews and reorganisations of stations, catering, admin and fleet grades" are agreed, that the TOC bosses will "guarantee no compulsory redundancies before 31 Dec 2024"... And then what? We are kicked out of our jobs? They also claim they'll



protect salaries of existing employees (not cut our pay..?) and provide "training" for those who don't fit the multi-skilling bill! This is an "offer" we can and must refuse! [King's X Workers' Platform 05/04/23]

**• Sectionalism is always bad...**

The main problem with this is that it splits everyone up into separate negotiations with separate pay and condition deals... Divide and rule! How can that be a good idea? [King's X Workers' Platform 05/04/23]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****• LLL strike ballot - about time!**

We saw on "Ford Authority" online news (quoting AM Online), that LLL mates will finally be balloted for strike over pay! Then we heard from the union - which "recommends" a yes vote... as if they need to! The ballot's meant to close 2 May. Unite officials had better not fiddle things or try to use this to blow their own trumpets. And we're not just going for pay equality with core Ford workers, but lay-off pay and OSP! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/04/23]

**• We'll be with you**

And for the rest of us at Ford - other contractors (Hamton under the same dragon-like boss) and direct Ford workers - we'll be alongside you. It's about time outsourcing on the cheap like this was challenged! We won't forget how Ford sold to the cowboys and

screwed us in MP&L. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/04/23]

**• More eggs? more chicks!**

Farm bosses have told us a big order for eggs (engines) is coming - 12,000 to be produced over a period of 3 months. And since these bright sparks cut so many jobs, they now want to extend our working day by 2 hours! Yes, a 10-hour day! They say they won't recruit more workers, because this is only a "temporary" increase. When they already need more hands.

**PS:** Finishing 3.30pm is bad enough, but 5.30pm? Truly mad! And of course we know why they aren't asking for a Sat at time+1/2 or Sun at timex2 - even if they'd get their extra done in record time... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/04/23]

**• Not good for our health**

Us on Lion machining also got told about the 10-hour day - after we'd already



been asked to work overtime for a week on blocks due to a breakdown. Now it's confirmed by the steward for blocks and heads. Maybe if we all met together to discuss this, we'd have a different take on it and a different answer, too!? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/04/23]

**• Not worth our attention**

The VR offer made to workmates at Dunton is a joke: bluebook terms plus a miserable 12 weeks! Are bosses just dipping their toes in the water to check if anyone would go on those terms? They needn't wet themselves. Because we won't. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 13/04/23]

**Night work is a killer; Communism is the cure!**

This March, a French court recognised as an occupational disease, the breast cancer of a nurse who worked night shifts in a hospital for 28 years.

Night workers know very well that night shifts are a killer. It has long been ascertained that we are more prone to high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. But proof that night work also increases the risk of cancer was lacking. Now we have it.

Melatonin - a hormone inducing sleep - is suppressed when we are exposed to

light - including artificial light. But now it has been proven that melatonin helps control excess cell proliferation, thus helping prevent the growth of cancerous tumours.

It's thought that as many as 4.5% of cancers in Britain could be due to night work. Women who've worked night shift for at least 6 months have been shown to have a 2 to 3 times higher cancer risk. And offshore oil night workers have an increased risk of developing aggressive prostate cancer, as well as a higher risk

of cardiac arrest and type 2 diabetes.

It's worth remembering that over 150 years ago - and without any scientific evidence at the time - the workers of Paris, whose committees took control of the city during the Commune, implemented the first real ban on night work in history. They knew it was detrimental and stopped bakers from doing it. Today, as 8, 10, or even 12-hour night shifts are becoming even more common in Britain, we need another Commune ASAP!

## IRAQ: TWENTY YEARS LATER

The 20th anniversary of the invasion and occupation of Iraq was barely mentioned in the media. But 20 years afterwards the country is still in ruins.

### **From imperialist occupation...**

Iraq was already devastated by the Gulf War in 1991, repeated bombing to impose a no-fly zone and 13 years of Western-imposed embargo. From 1990 to 2003, all normal trade with Iraq was banned. An "oil for food" programme was eventually imposed which allowed the trade of oil for essential items. But 25% of the proceeds went to Kuwait as reparations for the 1990 invasion. The effect of the sanctions, despite "oil for food", was the near-collapse of the health system, sickness and widespread malnutrition - by 2003, 27% of children under 5 were undernourished.

Then, on 20 March 2003, US President George Bush and Britain's Tony Blair launched a full scale war and invasion, which opened with the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad - in Bush's words. Their justification was that Iraq possessed "Weapons of Mass Destruction" (WMDs) which threatened the West - despite the fact that Saddam Hussein's government had complied fully with UN weapons inspections and no WMDs had been found. This lie about WMDs told by Blair and Bush was a cover for the real reason for the invasion: to allow western oil companies to control the region's oil resources. It was a war for oil.

### **... to bloody quagmire**

In 2004 it emerged that the US military was systematically torturing and humiliating prisoners of war in the Abu Ghraib prison. Towns which resisted US occupation, like Fallujah, suffered carpet bombing with devices containing phosphorus. Former President Saddam Hussein who'd been in hiding was found and hanged after a summary trial, in 2006. The US/British special forces abducted opponents by so-called "extraordinary rendition", detaining them indefinitely in secret locations.



Youth protest in Iraq, 2019

When the US finally pulled out of Iraq on 18 December 2011, it left a puppet regime in place, led by a corrupt political clique, which relied on religious sectarianism to prop up its brutal rule. In 2012, the US-backed prime minister Nouri al-Malik dismissed his own deputy and sentenced to death one of his vice-presidents. Rather than the "democracy" hailed by British and US governments as its achievement in Iraq, it was another dictatorship.

### **The US created ISIL**

But even more disastrous was the bloody civil war between political factions from each side of the Sunni-Shiite divide which the western invasion provoked. One of the religious militias that came out of this was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) which recruited its supporters mainly in prisons and refugee camps. It took control of the entire Anbar province, imposing a regime of terror and sharia law over the population.

The imperialist powers' divide-and-rule had succeeded in tearing the country apart. The subsequent Western-led war to crush ISIL as it gained territories over parts of northern Iraqi Kurdistan and the North of Syria, left behind more devastation, refugee camps and... more recruiting grounds for religious militias! In 2017, the ancient city of Mosul was bombed into dust by US supplied weaponry

and drones.

### **A mobilised population**

Millions of Iraqis have left the country. Many still live in refugee camps. The civilian death toll due to the war and the deadly living conditions created by it, is probably over 1.5m. The religious militias, including ISIL, haven't disappeared - in fact, they feed on the destruction and misery left by the war. But the Iraqi population has not taken this lying down. Since the war, and particularly between 2019 and 2021, many - particularly among the youth - have risen in protest against the corruption of the regime, against religious sectarianism, unemployment, the lack of public services and the continued interference from the West.

### **And Blair teaches lessons on Ukraine?**

Back in 2003, the "1-million" anti-war protest in Britain, and those in other rich countries, failed to stop US Republican President George Bush and Britain's Labour PM, Tony Blair, from launching their bloody invasion. It is vital today, just as it was in 2003, to expose what western countries call "wars for democracy" - like the war in Ukraine - for what these wars really are. The ruthless domination of the rich imperialist powers and their armies over the rest of the world! ☐

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

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