

WORKERS' fight



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

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

TIME TO GET RID OF THESE ANCIENT TRAPPINGS AND ORGANISE THAT "GENERAL REVOLT"!

The worst cost-of-living crisis in 40 years continues. Yet instead of offering the population "circuses and bread" - like the Roman rulers of antiquity - all the public got was the circus. No bread.

Millionaire PM Rishi Sunak himself appeared in the coronation circus-ring on 6 May - as ringmaster. Thereby showing how it's parliament which really wears the British crown... And he's standing firm against raising public sector pay!

Last month, RPI inflation had increased to 13.5%. In fact this week the Financial Times complained that the British economy has suffered double digit inflation for seven straight months - while it carried on shrinking. A scenario not replicated anywhere else in Europe...

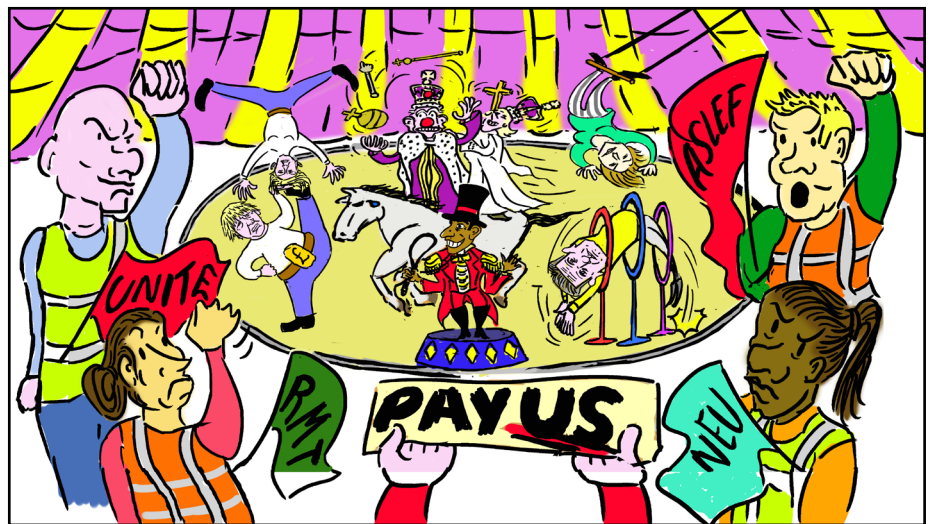
Economists say inflation is about to fall. But the cost of food and other basics, is still going up. And speaking of bread, a loaf of sliced white is 22.8% more expensive than this time last year!

No to coronation quiche!

Rents are soaring, with evictions and homelessness growing again. At these high levels some renters might find a monthly mortgage repayment even cheaper. So, enter Skipton building society! Yes, with the offer of a "deposit-free, 100% mortgage"!

But there's a catch. To get one, you need to prove a clean rent and credit history. Skipton's required repayments would be no higher than your rent was. But since the reason to take a mortgage in the first place, was to escape the unaffordable rent, it's right back to square one! In fact most mortgages have a minimum income requirement. So the majority of low-paid workers haven't a hope of getting one.

No. The only remedy for workers - whether renting, or buying, or neither - is to get a decent cost-of-living pay rise, as soon as possible!



Meanwhile, in the midst of the housing crisis, capitalist "king" Charles presides over a £20 billion real estate empire, which includes 7 palaces, 10 castles, 12 houses, 56 cottages, and 14 ancient ruins "where he can hang up his crown". No wonder he looks so glum. It must be painful to be so spoilt for choice.

And now the Bank of England, driving force behind the "pay rises fuel inflation" lie, is raising interest rates for the twelfth time, bringing them up to 4.5%. So much for "helping to buy"... No bread there, either.

Their gruesome "entertainment"

But back to circuses. The next one up is the Eurovision Song Contest, which used to come and go without anyone even noticing.

However this year, Liverpool - famously anti-monarchy - is hosting it in place of Ukraine, last year's "winners", so there's not just over the top razzmatazz, but glorification of the war...

Yes, it's gruesomely distracting

entertainment, fitting the bill perfectly, of Roman poet Juvenal's "gladiator games" of 100AD.

The "bread and circuses" policy was a sign of degenerate times. The Roman public had lost all trust in their political system. Providing games and "wheat dole" was the emperor's attempt to forestall general revolt...

There are parallels. At most 30% of the electorate, vote in local elections. Up to 40% abstain in general elections.

Contrast that with today's votes for strike action - averaging 90%! Even after a year of sectional strikes, due to union leaders' refusal to coordinate action, decisive majorities of workers are voting to renew strike mandates.

So what about that "general revolt"? A good start would be for striking RMT railway workers - accused of "sabotaging" Eurovision on 13 May(!) - to join Aslef drivers, ambulance workers, teachers, civil servants and even Ford Dagenham's Lineside workers, to generalise this fight, and turn it into a strike for enough "bread" for all! ☐

Ukraine-Russia

The drone explosion above the Kremlin on 3 May triggered a wave of accusations and counter-accusations from Moscow, Kiev and Washington. It has allowed Putin's regime to accuse Kiev of a terrorist attack "on the eve of Victory Day, the May 9 Parade" - which commemorates the Soviet defeat of the "Nazis" in 1945. But it has also provided an opportunity for Zelensky to point out that "we don't have enough weapons even for that" and continue his campaign to get them from the West, so that his delayed "spring counter-offensive" can go ahead.

A bloodbath on both sides

According to a leaked US Intelligence document, 35,500-43,000 Russian and 15,500-17,500 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed in action - while 154,000-180,000 Russians and 109,000-113,500 Ukrainians have been wounded. These numbers are 10 times higher than the official casualties announced by Moscow or Kiev!

And while the intelligence documents predict that the battle for the Donbas region is "likely heading for a stalemate throughout 2023", the recruitment drive in both countries has intensified.

Ukrainians resist the draft...

The Ukrainian government's attempt to create 8 new brigades has met with the resistance of potential recruits, according to the Wall Street Journal, one Ukrainian paid almost \$10,000 (nearly £8,000) to avoid the draft. Another ignored five military summonses. A third doesn't go

• Postscript on Nordstream 2

The implausible Nordstream 2 pipeline explosion saga continues with another accusation early in May that after all, it was Russia "what done it". Swedish agencies apparently have photos of a Russian military ship and fishing boats nearby the site around the time of the explosion. This explosion, which took place on 26 September last year, ended Russia's hugely expensive and complex undersea project of constructing a second

• Journalists in jail, Assange here, Gershkovich there

Joe Biden hosted the annual White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) dinner on 29 April. This theoretically "independent" group of 400 journalists covers White House news.

After jokes about his old age, Biden used his address to pay tribute to Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, imprisoned in Russia since March and charged with spying. "Journalism is not a crime. Evan... should be released immediately", said he.

Yes what an outrage that such things can happen! It just exposes the real nature of Russia - a country where there are no democratic freedoms, nor freedom

LESS WAR, MORE LIES?



out in public, afraid a military official will pounce and issue a call-up.

In fact, a series of scandals have exposed the racketeering of Ukrainian officials: bribes to dodge the draft can reach £8,000, while it costs twice as much to get out of the country. And of course, only well-off families can afford such sums!

At the very beginning of the war, there were huge queues outside recruitment offices; the Territorial Defense Forces saw 100,000 people join its ranks in less than a month. Now they don't even meet the recruitment quota needed for their counter-offensive. And Western countries see in this a sign that the Ukrainian authorities are running out of steam to ensure a victory in this proxy war.

...so do Russians

Putin's regime, on the other hand has

not found it easy to recruit right from the start. So now punitive action has been introduced against those who don't show up when conscripted. Call-up papers are to be sent electronically and considered received by a potential draftee after 1 week. Those who don't show up at the draft office are banned from travelling abroad and their driving licences are invalidated.

But despite this, draftees still resist. Conscription offices are set on fire - a Russian official admitted that 77 offices were set in fire in 2022 alone.

So while the rich countries' politicians (and their supporters, left and right) call for more weapons to be sent to Ukraine - including aircrafts - more and more Ukrainian and Russian youth are refusing to be sent to the front to fight a war they rightly regard as not theirs! ☐

gas pipeline - in its own very material interests. But western pundits say it could only have been carried out with "major state expertise" - so they say it could only have been Russia, executing a perverse act, so that it could accuse the US of sabotage! The US is, of course, the only really plausible and able culprit, directly or using a proxy... And as the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has repeatedly reminded everyone, Biden actually

threatened to end Nordstream 2 several times, and over the course of many years, since it meant US liquified gas exports (including from its recent shale gas projects) would never be needed. From White House minutes in February 2021: "As I said when I met with Chancellor Scholz earlier this month... we have closely coordinated our efforts to stop the Nord Stream 2 pipeline if Russia further invaded Ukraine". Believe him or not!

of the press in contrast to the good old US of A, the Land of the Free!

Hang on though, what about Julian Assange in prison in Britain at the behest of US authorities? He has been confined since 2012 after publishing more than half a million documents obtained by Chelsea Manning, an ex-US intelligence analyst - relating to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Manning was jailed in the US for 35 years, but got her sentence commuted in 2017 by President Obama.

While fighting extradition to the US, Assange was granted asylum by Ecuador and sheltered in its embassy till 2019, when British police in collaboration with

a new political regime in Ecuador entered the embassy and arrested him. Assange has been imprisoned ever since in Belmarsh and remains under the threat of extradition. Just like Gershkovich, he's charged with spying and violating the Espionage Act of 1917 even though most of the documents published weren't even classified...

The embedded WHCA journalists don't see fit to protest against the denial of Assange's freedom. Behind the cover of "journalism is not a crime" and "the truth matters", the official media freely parrots the lies of the Bidens, the Blairs, the Johnsons, the Sunaks...

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SECTIONALISM: NHS WORKERS DIVIDED

While the four biggest unions representing workers in the NHS - Unison, GMB, Unite and Royal College of Nursing (RCN) - have all been on strike for the same thing - higher pay. Thanks to the narrow-mindedness of the leaderships, they were rarely on strike at the same time. RCN leader, Pat Cullen, even went into negotiations unilaterally with the government at the end of February.

So NHS workers were divided. Eventually, at the beginning of May, the NHS Staff Council, which represents all NHS workers (excluding doctors and dentists), agreed to the government's "improved" pay offer. But NHS workers' votes were not at all overwhelming either way. Over

all four big unions, only an average 30% of members actually voted in favour. Two of these - Unite and RCN - rejected the deal, while another two, Unison and GMB accepted. Turnouts were low: 53% in Unison, 51% GMB, and 55% Unite, while the RCN had 61%. Unite voted "No" with 52%, and GMB "Yes" with 56%.

The split can partly be explained by the fact that all NHS pay bands were offered a 5% pay rise in 2023-4, except the lowest (those on up to £20,270), who were offered 10.4%. So, for workers on the lowest pay, more concentrated in Unison, this deal was perhaps slightly more palatable.

So what now? Although one day of

a two-day strike by RCN members (on 2 May) was declared illegal by the courts, the union is re-balloting all 280,000 members to renew its strike mandate. And Unite's ambulance workers will continue industrial action.

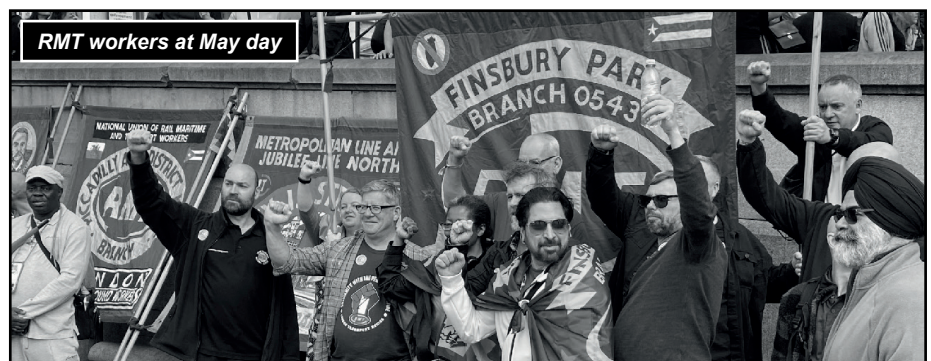
Health Secretary Steve Barclay said hopefully that it was "important everyone now respects the decision of the NHS Staff Council", calling on RCN and Unite to end their strikes. But, with the junior doctors still in dispute, and a possible ballot of consultants and GPs, there's still the possibility for at least some NHS workers to strike together - and alongside sections of workers outside the NHS, too! ☐

• The railway dispute remains "live"... and kicking!

Railway workers are going on strike again! The latest offer of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) representing 14 train operating companies (TOCs) was the last straw. Nobody was ready to vote for it.

And 3 weeks down the line, the RDG "clarified" further that the first year's 5% pay rise was only payable if the RMT agreed that all strikes were called off. But the additional 4% for the 2nd year would still be conditional on the acceptance of wide-ranging changes in working conditions, to be negotiated separately with each individual company: multi-skilling, changes to attendance conditions, absence, holidays, rostering, the 7-day railway and a 2nd, lower tier for new entrants!

RMT leader, Mick Lynch has given two video updates to members since. First to announce another strike date for the 13



May and second to announce the result of the vote to renew the strike mandate - 91.63% in favour with turnouts from 56% to 76%! Not bad, after a whole year of on-off strikes!

So the fight continues! This time

round, one can only hope that lessons have been learned from the last 12 months and that not only drivers and the rest of the railway workers find a way to strike together, but that they go out and stay out until they win.

• Another Brick In The Wall

On the 2nd May, teachers across England took a 5th day of national strike (plus 3 days of regional strikes). Three thousand teachers marched through London to protest against the Department for Education's pay offer - of 4.5% plus a £1,000 one-off payment.

During the march, the National Education Union (NEU), called for a minute's silence to remember Ruth Perry, the head teacher who committed suicide following a low rating of her school by Ofsted - the government department in charge of inspecting schools.

If Ofsted gives a school a low rating, schools find it hard to recruit pupils and thus qualify for less funding and are caught in a vicious circle. The number of teachers is cut: lower-paid junior teachers replace seniors on higher pay. Since this constitutes a saving for the DfE, bad Ofsted ratings could be seen as a cynical device to cut government spending. The lowest Ofsted rating imposes an immediate compulsory immediate takeover by the DfE!

This time around fewer schools shut down during the strike and turnout at the march was smaller - half as many as

the 10,000 on 1 February. Some schools didn't even have a picket line. Teachers are growing tired of listening to the NEU echo their concerns without offering any perspective. Not to mention its policy of telling teachers to provide "minimum service" for years 11 and 13 students to avoid "undermining" their exams!

In fact, as pupils were being brainwashed by lessons on "British values" during the run-up to the coronation, they were the ones who kept the strike solid, by staying at home - against all official moralising!

• Civil servants continue the fight, bit by bit

Civil servants in the Public and Commercial Services union are still taking strike action. The strike by passport workers who were called out for five weeks of continuous strike ended on 6 May - and now tax workers from HMRC are taking over, starting on 10 May for 18 days in total.

A new pay offer was made in mid April: 4.5% "rise" for 2023, and 2% for 2022 (which was on the table

before). It's only 2.5% more for 2023, compared to the first offer and still way below inflation. So the PCS continues its "strategic" walkouts of selected sections, paying their wages. There were general walk-outs of 100,000 workers on 1 February and 15 March; 130,000 walked out on 28 April and now 124,000 have voted to renew their strike mandate.

Other unions like Prospect (representing Met Office workers) have

called strikes for 10 May and 7 June, and the FDA, (managers and professionals) is currently balloting for strike.

When asked about co-ordinating strike action across sections and industries, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka, said that "it must be right that ... we should coordinate our efforts to make it as effective as possible". So how come he doesn't?

Their society

According to the Office of National Statistics, private rental prices have gone up by 4.9% in the 12 months to March 2023. This index takes into account both new and existing homes for rent. However, the index from Zoopla or Rightmove (of rent for newly-let properties, which better reflects current changes), puts it up by 10-11%. And in London, it's gone up by 14.3%. A studio flat in Tower Hamlets now cost an average £1,400 per month - and even in Dagenham and Barking (zone 5) the average studio rent is £730 per month.

The rise in homelessness

The direct consequence of skyrocketing private rental prices is tenant evictions. The BBC recently reported one case (among so many!) of a 66-year old woman in Kent, who was forced to live in a converted van after her rent rose by 62%. In England, the number of bailiff evictions due to a "section 21 notice" increased by 143% in the 12 months to December 2022! Landlords can serve these notices without having to provide a reason, using them to evict tenants who are in arrears or who ask for too many property repairs. And with rent prices still sky-high, the eviction rate will certainly continue to increase!

The charity Crisis estimated that in 2020 the number of homeless "households" in any one night was 227,000. In 2023, this number is expected to increase by 32% to over 300,000. Besides the cost-of-living crisis and rising rent, Crisis blames the government's withdrawal of the emergency measures which were introduced during the pandemic: the

HOUSING CRISIS: CUT RENTS, BUILD SOCIAL HOUSING!



temporary ban on section 21 evictions and the emergency accommodation provided for rough-sleepers. But it also blames the government's freeze on housing benefit, which is based on outdated 2018-19 rent levels!

Labour's empty housing policy

What no politician dares to talk about is rent controls, for fear of upsetting the huge number of landlords small and large. Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Lisa Nandi said Labour's plan is to legislate to "raise standards in the private rented sector" - which in fact already exist - and "put an immediate ban on unfair no-notice evictions" - but landlords can use all sort of legal tricks to evict tenants. And how would such policies make rents more affordable?

National campaign coordinator for Labour, MP Shabana Mahmood, says the answer is to build more homes because people are "desperate to get on the housing ladder"! In other words, homes

for sale. And she adds that Labour's policy is for "British people" to get "first dibs" against "foreign speculators". A peanut to the xenophobic gallery. So Labour's priority is not to build social housing at social rents, but to give first dibs to British property developers, like Grainger plc, the biggest in the country!

Rents down!

Of course, the number of homes built for social rent is abysmal: only 70,800 in the past 5 years. To just begin to address the housing crisis - which is a crisis for the working class poor and the youth - charities estimate 90,000 new social homes per year must be built - that is 6 times more than the current figure. But the cost-of-living crisis is hitting a growing number of workers and students right now, so in the meantime what is urgently necessary, is the imposition of rent cuts and long-term rent controls on private landlords, and an immediate end to all evictions. □

• Failing to sweeten the Pill

Huw Pill, chief economist at the Bank of England, thinks "Britain's" problem is "a reluctance to accept that we are all worse off". As if the country is a person or the state of the economy is really the expression of collective psychology! According to him, everyone should "stop trying to maintain their real spending power by bidding up wages or passing the energy costs through on to customers"! Yes, in an attempt to look even-handed, this Oxford and Harvard-trained

economist puts workers, and the billionaire multinational companies who exploit their labour in the same bracket!

Workers don't need anyone to tell them they are worse off. Wages have been falling behind the cost of living for years. Food price inflation is running at 19.2% on last year! Food banks, almost unknown when they had 26,000 "customers" in 2008-09, supplied food to 2.99 million users in the year to March 2023.

Pill's comments came on the same day that Nestlé, McDonalds and PepsiCo all announced increased sales revenues, after big price rises. The last time inflation was this high, in the 1970s, the then Labour government's policy was to cap prices - and rents. But interfering with the capitalists' precious profit margins is the last thing the Tories, Labour, or the Bank of England propose today!

Europe: inflation less... but the price rises hurt just as much

In France, Macron is still refusing to reverse the new pension reform, which would postpone retirement by 2 years (to 64 years) - after 3 months of strikes against it. But workers in 300 cities and towns across France continue to protest, with 2.3m of them marching on Mayday.

In fact, on 1 May workers right across Europe went into the streets with demands for pay rises above inflation to counter the

squeeze on their wages.

During 2022, on average, inflation in Europe increased to 9.2%, particularly in sectors like housing and utilities (18%) but also food and transport (12%) - amounting to a cut of as much as 9% in real wages! By April, inflation had fallen to an average 6.8% (a 30% fall), mostly driven by a reduction in the cost of energy bills.

But despite this, prices haven't gone

down. Food prices have gone up by 19.5%, or even above 30% for essentials (like oil and eggs) in some of the poorest EU countries like Poland and Portugal.

Some EU states introduced measures to reduce food prices: Croatia capped the prices of essentials, while Spain and Poland removed food taxes - a measure which the British government, with inflation at 13.5%, refuses.

LOCAL ELECTIONS: CAN STARMER'S BLUE-WASH REALLY DO THE TRICK?

The coronation weekend allowed the bad news of the Tories' local election "bloodbath" to be buried... as a Guardian journalist pointed out! Labour got its highest score since 2010, with a 25% share of the vote (9% more than the Tories,) gaining 536 seats, while the Tories lost 1,061 seats. But despite the Tories' shambolic record and Austerity Mark 2, on the basis of these results, Labour would still be at least 14 seats short of the 326 seat majority needed to win a general election. The largest relative gains were made by the Greens who won 240 seats and took control of their first council (Mid-Suffolk), while the Liberal Democrats won 400 seats with a 20% vote share.

Who's on track to win?

Labour MPs aren't too surprised that they didn't win a landslide, well aware of their unpopularity among working class voters. But that's not who they're aiming at. If they won back some Red Wall seats which had gone blue, it's only because the Tories are so bad. As for

the rest, having scrapped what's left of any social-sounding policy associated with expelled former leader, Jeremy Corbyn (abolishing university fees, renationalising post and rail, repealing anti-trade union legislation, rejoining the EU single market, etc.), they're appealing to the Tories' constituency. Corbyn is still blamed for Labour's "uphill struggle" and what Shadow Levelling-Up minister Lisa Nandi recalls as "Labour's biggest electoral loss in 100 years", in 2019.

First-past-the-post to blame

Yet it was this country's insane "first-past-the-post" system which meant that Johnson's tiny 1.2% majority in 2019 produced his additional 47 MP majority - equal to just over 7% of the Commons' 650 seats. In fact that election, above all else, exposed the depravity of this system. At the time, the Tories only needed 38,264 votes in order to get one MP elected, while Labour needed 50,717 votes, the Lib-Dems 336,038 and the Greens, 865,697! In other words, 4 Tory voters had more say in today's Commons

than 5 Labour voters, 34 Lib-Dem voters and 86 Green voters!

Of course, this institutional form of electoral fraud has long been used by the capitalist class to maintain some sort of political stability. Over the past century, it is this electoral system which has allowed Tory and Labour to alternate in office, managing the capitalist class's affairs, but giving voters the illusion that their ballot paper allows them to have a say.

The falling turnout

By now, most of us know this. It's why a third of all registered voters don't bother to vote in general elections and why, in these local elections, 70% didn't vote. A low turnout seemingly unaffected either, by the introduction of compulsory proof of identity in order to vote, for the first time ever. It's clear that change will not come through the ballot box, but only by workers using their collective strength in the streets and industrial muscle in the workplaces - in other words building that general strike, for a start! ☐

OUT WITH THIS BILLIONAIRE KING AND THE SYSTEM HE UPHOLDS!

The full cost of the coronation circus to the public may be over £250m. And that's in addition to the millions splashed out on the platinum jubilee and the queen's funeral. Yet the government pleads empty coffers when striking workers demand a pay rise?!

The state's need for the constitutional monarchy obviously trumps the needs of millions of underpaid workers resorting to food banks in the face of the cost-of-living crisis! So arcane ancient rites and pageantry were played out in true Hollywood style! The doddering titular head of state - there by accident of birth - was even anointed with "holy oil" by an equally-doddering bunch of archbishops and bishops.

Spoils of old Empire

To add to the "fun", Sky TV provided an "app" enabling viewers to examine the super-bling crown jewels up close - literally the spoils of bloody empire! The biggest stones are cut from the largest diamond ever found, "contributed" in 1907 by the colonial government of South Africa after British soldiers annihilated the Afrikaner-Dutch Boer guerilla army fighting for self-rule, by implementing a scorched-earth policy and placing enemy women, children and black farm workers in concentration camps, where they died in their thousands of malnutrition and smallpox.

The forgotten English republic

It must be said that contrary to the line

spouted by obsequious reporters, "Charles 3rd" doesn't represent an "unbroken" continuity. Either they don't know their history or simply deny it, but for 11 years from 1649, this country was a republic. Oliver Cromwell, leader of the Leveller army, beheaded the first King Charles and had the old crown jewels melted down as "monuments to superstition and idolatry"!



Swearing at the monarchy...

As for the so-called "oath of allegiance to the king" which the general public was invited to take, it was only spoken by coronation guests in Westminster Abbey. But even then, the PM of St Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean, among others, didn't take it, stating that having a British monarch as head of state is "an absurdity" he'd like to end in his lifetime. Other Caribbean leaders agree, demanding an apology from the British state and monarchy on past injustices relating to slavery.

...and ending it?

To control the streets, police chiefs deployed 29,000 officers in London and under new powers against planned protests under the Public Order Act, arrested 64 republican and "just stop oil" protesters, confiscating placards and a megaphone... which they later apologised for.

In the end, this "absurd" extravaganza hasn't just put into question the future of the monarchy in former colonies in the Caribbean, but it's in question here in Britain. Up to 70% of young people think the monarchy is irrelevant.

However, its use as a national distraction is (and always has been) a reason for the government to retain it: it wasn't for nothing that hard-pressed PM Rishi Sunak (a practising Hindu) read a Christian text about the "son of god"! So this great charade serve its purpose? Unlikely! ☐

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

Lineside Logistics (and Ford workmates) ... all out!

The result of the Lineside Logistics (LLL) strike ballot was 87% in favour of strike with a turnout of 75%! But we'd already demonstrated our will to fight this cowboy company, with a 98% rejection of LLL's pitiful 7.5% pay offer. Finally after months of negotiations, two days of strikes have been scheduled for 15 and 16 May, as far as we know.

Since the union officials began

seriously to talk about a strike, union membership went up. So we would expect a strike to be solid and stop the full works!

At the time of writing it's assumed the strikes will actually happen. But if they do, will those 2 days of stoppages be enough to force LLL/Ford to back down and pay up?

Most of our Ford workmates pledge to



support the action, happy to see Ford get a punch in the nose. They remind us - by telling us about the '78-9 strike - what a real strike looks like, as we gear up to get our well above inflation pay rise, OSP and lay off pay! ☐

• Sawing off their own branch

Management's job-axing spree has now reached their own ranks... we hear about half of HR is targeted. Many are already cut (they were replaced by self-HR booths!), but a job cut is a job cut and we're against it! Do they want to join us, to fight this? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/04/23]

• The Ford we "love"

Illustration of management's cluelessness: last week, Panther

assembly was told we'd be laid off several days... Normal production was to resume on Tues 25 April and Tues 2 May. Well it didn't this Tuesday. So does that mean next Tuesday's off as well? Stupid question, yes, we know! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/04/23]

• Mayhem in the den

In the meantime Lion machine shop went down last week... But so many of us (plus volunteers from Darkside) were moved to Lion assembly that it seemed we'd soon run out of machine parts. Except the clever line broke down, and

broke down again... [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/04/23]

• Keep the in-house in!

We hear that Ford wants to cut all the in-house security jobs that are left. Not one among us agreed outsourcing. But when the sell-out was done over our heads, Ford conceded we could leave on full retirement whenever we decided. And now they want us to take VR packages on lousy bluebook+zilch terms? No way! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 26/04/23]

King's Cross railway station (London)

Train drivers - we need to drive our own strike!

Almost 1 year since our first strike (30 July 2022) and after only 8 actual strike days, train drivers have been offered a below-inflation 4% increase for 2022 plus 4% for 2023. But we haven't had a pay rise for 4 years! And RPI inflation is still running at 13.5%!!

It's already 2 months since the last strike. In the meantime, ASLEF top officials had 8 meetings with the RDG/Rail Recovery Group. And all along, we

were told "progress" was being made... But evidently, there was no progress. So, we can only wonder what they were talking about all this time!

Anyway, now ASLEF leader, Mick Whelan has announced 3 strike dates (12 May, 31 May, 3 June) as well as a ban on overtime (15-20 May and 13 May and 1 June).

It's certainly high time that our fight was stepped up. A good way to do that



would be to join all the other railway workers - and the strikers from the NHS, civil service, education... on the picket lines and in the streets, until we ALL win. ☐

• More delays ahead!!

LNER delays are (as usual) due to signalling, overhead wire problems, objects on the track, even cable theft... There'd be no such issues if the network was checked and maintained frequently enough by NR's workforce. And we know why that's not done: NR has already cut jobs and wants to cut more - the main reason we went on strike! The biggest mistake so far in this dispute was to allow NR to be divided off from the rest for a separate deal - as if our problems weren't the same: pay, jobs, conditions. [King's X Workers' Platform 03/05/23]

• Their flexibility

How come LNER catering staff had only 2 weeks to apply for new rosters? Now, we have to rush to make a decision by 4 May - and as a result these rosters are even less likely than usual to suit us. So we expect managers to be fully flexible, if and when we have to change or swap shifts! [King's X Workers' Platform 03/05/23]

• Stop the music!

Why can't all GN agency gate mates (and some!) be taken on permanently? That would immediately sort the chronic lack of workers... Instead there's this

constant "musical chairs", with all of us being moved between shifts and stations to fill in the gaps.

[King's X Workers' Platform 03/05/23]

• No to atalian's job cuts

The "selected" Atalian workers whose jobs which bosses want to cut, are meant to find out what will happen to us on the 5th of May: we are meant to be called in to be told individually. They claim they have a job for everyone but in fact we already know that some of the jobs they offer are impossible for us to accept and that it's deliberate... What if all of us demanded a collective "meeting"? [King's X Workers' Platform 03/05/23]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

We are voting NO!

The Communication Workers Union leadership came back to us on 22 April with a letter explaining Royal Mail's offer. After 18 days of strike action and 9 months of dispute, they wrote that "we have shifted RM on every single one of their original positions". But no, they haven't!

The current pay offer of 2% for 2022-3, 6% for 2023-4, and 2% for 2024-5, may be "new", since there was never a 3-year deal on the table before. Except the 2% is already imposed - and that goes unchallenged! The lump sum (unconsolidated, but taxable!) is

just £500! We earn £10,000 a year less than the average required to live in London (£29-32,000 pa)!

The union leaders tell us to look at this agreement "in the round"... We're told to focus on the "huge victory" they claim over job security. Yet jobs are constantly being cut: 10,000 job cuts announced last year. And how does a "no compulsory redundancy" agreement have any meaning, if it's time-limited to April 2025?

As for "flexibility" this is now called "agreed seasonal variations" rather

• Letter from the North-West

Everyone is disappointed with the offer. We can't believe that we went on strike for 18 days, voted to strike again and then got made an offer that does not meet the demands we made. We're all wondering what planet the leaders of the union are on.

We will all be voting NO and rejecting the offer. What other choice do we have?

None of us went on strike to allow our mates to be employed on inferior terms, conditions and wages. We are not going to agree to being spied on all the time and being told we need to walk faster. There can be no doubt that the letter carriers are going to suffer the most.

Our message to everyone is to get the vote out. The letter carriers need to vote



than "annualised hours", but what's the difference? This means a compulsory 39-hour week at flat rate and SA (special Xmas overtime, for instance) on higher rates will be gone for good. This, when by now we should have been on a 35-hour week!

There is nothing in this offer that we can support! ☐

and vote in large numbers. The porters and sorters should support the letter carriers because they will be next. Let's make this the biggest vote in the history of the union and make it a massive NO - reject the offer!

PS: the ballot over the offer opens 17 May and closes 7 June.

• Reinstatement now!

So what about the over 400 of our workmates and reps who were suspended during this dispute? We read in this union letter that there is a "completely independent review of all conduct cases"... But the reality is that workmates across the country

are already losing their cases! We don't want a single sacking, period! And that's enough reason for us all to go on strike again - right away! [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 03/05/23]

• A last letter time... when?!

For us on Deliveries, we are told that later starts are capped to 1 hour, which

is already bad enough. But then, we also read that management "reserves the right to seek 90 minute later starts" in some "minimal cases". This, with the 24-minute flexitime, will give managers even more freedom to mess with our finish times! Why would we agree to that? [Workers' fight bulletin, Mount Pleasant 03/05/23]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

BMW's profits soar, while our wages fall

BMW has just released its first quarter (January-March 2023) results. Profits made on manufacturing (ignoring interest, taxes etc.) rose compared to a year ago, by 60% - BMW made £3.25 billion in three months! This is literally a measure of management's cost-cutting over the past year - which we're all too familiar with!

It also shows how BMW, alongside most other car companies, is moving to selling fewer cars, but more expensive

ones. Sales of EVs rose by 83% compared to the same time last year. So now 1 in 10 of all BMWs sold are electric; for MINI, it's 1 in 5! It's reckoned that 20% of all cars sold this year will be electric. With an electric MINI starting at £32,550, it means a hefty jump in profits for BMW.

But even though increasing sales of EVs mean that overall production will fall, we're told there's still a "considerable" order backlog. And they expect us to work overtime and then lay us off for 19



weeks - unpaid - next February!? It's reason enough to lay down our tools right now. ☐

happen! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 25/04/23]

• Rudolph the long-nosed ostrich...

R&H's plan for next year's shut-outs is... not to talk about them! Managers go quiet when anyone points out that we'd be on half-pay for 19 weeks. Let alone when we ask what they're going to do about that! We don't mind coming in every week and working half-time for full pay - which is what management usually does! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 25/04/23]

• No killer shifts!

Managers are asking for "volunteers" for overtime in Body-in-White. But why would we want to "assist" them? What they didn't say is that the overtime would mean we work a 13-hour night shift! They cut jobs and a shift not long ago, and now want us to "help" by working 13 hours? They can go jump! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 25/04/23]

• 8 hours should be max!

For some of us, getting home at the end

of a 13hr shift, it would be almost time to leave to go back to work! Whatever happened to the 8 hour day? Eight hours work, eight hours play, eight hours sleep. No one does it in here now; we need an hours cut, with no loss of pay! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 25/04/23]

• Blood minis

BMW and Rudolph don't even pay lip service to the 11-hour legal gap between shifts for many of us! They've been trying to get some of us on night shift to work on Saturday and Sunday morning... This is just more accidents than usual waiting to

THE WAR IN SUDAN: THE POPULATION CAUGHT IN THE CROSS-FIRE

On 15 April, fighting broke out in Sudan's capital Khartoum, between president General al-Burhan's Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and vice president General Muhammad Dagalo's Rapid Support Forces (RSF): two armies which together seized power in 2021. Nearly 500 people have been killed so far and many more wounded. Shelling continues, despite promised cease-fires, while talks are meant to be taking place in Jeddah between the warring parties.

So far over 400,000 people have fled the capital towards the borders of Egypt, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan. For those who remain, food is scarce, there's a water shortage and power cuts. Most hospitals are shut. The situation is dire: already before this latest conflict, a third of the population needed humanitarian aid.

Reluctant evacuation

British diplomats were airlifted out of Sudan on 23 April, leaving behind up to 4-6,000 British nationals and their relatives who, in a situation of war, should have the right to seek refuge in Britain. They were told to register with British authorities and "wait". In the meantime the French, German, and Swedish governments, among others, had already got their citizens out. In the end the British army airlifted another 1,888 to Cyprus. This delayed and reluctant evacuation left many recalling the chaos at Kabul airport in August 2021 - when Afghans who'd been promised refuge were left to their fate. It's impossible not to compare the attitude of Sunak's Foreign Office to Sudanese war refugees, with the warm welcome given to Ukrainians.

The former colony

If the Sudanese peoples already had to put up with decades of civil wars post-independence (declared in 1956), it was thanks, precisely, to Britain's "methods" of subjugating the whole Nile region to its control from the 1880s onwards. It instituted "divide and rule" over Sudan jointly with its Egyptian colonial government. It separated off the South, investing in the Arab-Muslim north in order to exploit its rich mineral resources. A local hierarchy was created to do their oppressing for them and "islamisation"



People fleeing fighting in Karthoum

was promoted, while the south was left to be "christianised" by missionaries.

The consequence of divide and rule

In the mid-1950s civil war erupted between North and South, until eventually (after oil was discovered) South Sudan separated formally in 2011. As for the north, it had come under Colonel Omar al-Bashir's military dictatorship after his coup in 1989. He introduced Sharia law, legalising flogging, execution by crucifixion and the stoning of women to death for suspected adultery.

Dagalo's RSF Janjaweed militias were created by Bashir in the 2000s. After genocidally putting down a rebellion in Darfur, the RSF captured control of the country's gold mines. Recently it was sent to Yemen to fight with UAE and Saudi forces against Huthi rebels.

Both the RSF and the SAF benefited from the millions of dollars pumped into the country by the EU in 2016 to stop migrants destined for Europe coming to Libya.

Yesterday friend, today enemy

When the mass popular uprising against Bashir erupted in 2019, Burhan saw the opportunity of seizing power and led a military coup, with Dagalo's help, against his former boss, curtailing the mass mobilisation. But the population remained on the streets, so Burhan was obliged to set up a Transitional Sovereignty Council (TNC) along with civilian politicians. In 2021 however, he moved against them,

declaring himself president (with Dagalo as second-in-command). Now they're fighting each other for top position.

Imperialist interests

Behind Burhan and Dagalo are regional and imperialist powers presiding over their own interests. Port Sudan is on the Red Sea, through which 10% of world sea trade passes, controlled by imperialist military bases in Djibouti. Sudan is Africa's second largest gold producer - and then there's the oil...

Historically the SAF was equipped by the US to protect the profits of Chevron, after it discovered oil in Sudan in the 1970s. Trump sent Mike Pompeo in, after the mass uprising in 2019 - not to help the population, but to ensure the uninterrupted looting of the country by imperialist companies. The Egyptian regime (and behind it the US) supports Burhan; its jets have bombed the RSF. On the other hand, the UAE and Saudi Arabia support Dagalo.

Anglo-American and French imperialism are clandestinely supporting both sides, so that they can benefit either way, when and if the war ends.

Obviously, the Sudanese population can expect nothing from the regional powers, nor the imperialists behind them. In 2003 Bush and Blair looked on while tens of thousands were murdered in Darfur. No, the population can only rely on itself - and its own working class army, which has still to be built. □

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.