

# WORKERS' fight



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

## A DANGEROUS, CRUMBLING SYSTEM... LET'S GET RID OF IT!

So politicians, whether Labour or Tory, with their appointed developers, planners and builders, for a whole 30-year period from the 1950s to the 1980s built cheap and nasty public buildings which would only last for 30 years.

Why should anybody be surprised about that? Short term-ism is the name of this system's game. If it wasn't, schools wouldn't be crumbling and, for that matter, there wouldn't be a climate crisis either, would there?

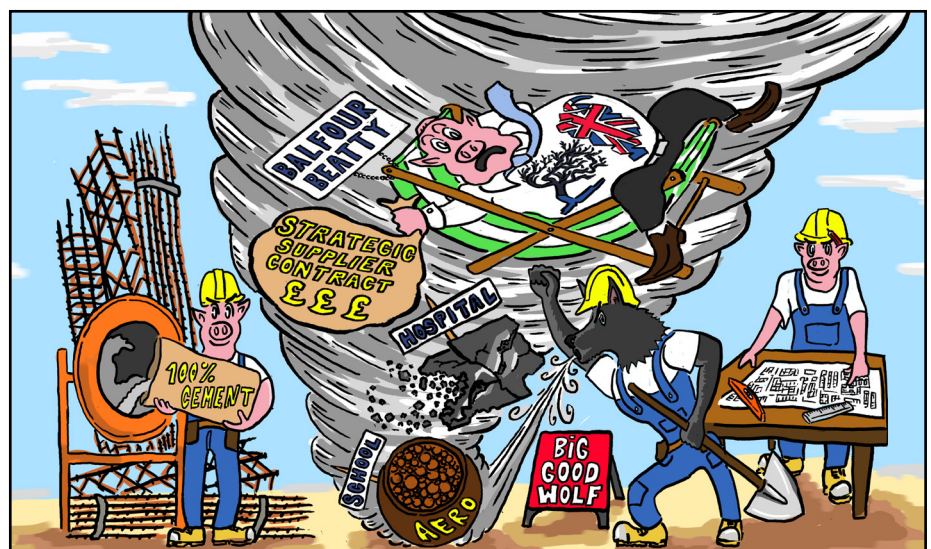
Anyway, this means that today, the kids who're unlucky enough to be told they can't attend school classes because the roof might fall in, can read about the three little pigs and discuss online how it's best to build a solid house... Yes, one made out of strong bricks, which won't crumble or melt like a chocolate aero. And they will be aware, too, that this story is a metaphor for all aspects of real life...

That said, the instigators of building, not just schools, but hospitals and thousands (hundreds of thousands?) of homes using crumbly blocks, knew exactly what they were doing. What's a little surprising, however, is that this well-known "problem" was only revealed to head teachers in affected schools just days before the schools were due to open again after the summer break.

In fact Sunak's government seems to have set itself up in order to be shot down. Did the PM feel he had nothing left to lose? The media rushed to expose the Tories' culpability: former Education Secretary Michael Gove had cancelled Labour's "building schools for the future plan"; Sunak himself prevented the rebuilding of several of the affected schools.

### Feeding the capitalist pigs...

Of course, the aim of government construction contracts has always been to put cash into the pockets of private profiteers, even before the privatisations of the 1980s, with as little regulation as possible... Thus grew a huge number of



billionaire enterprises, bolstered entirely by taxpayers.

Today the list of the government's "Strategic Suppliers" includes 40 super-rich companies in sectors across the whole economy. Names like Balfour Beatty, Amey, Laing O'Rourke, Babcock, BAE Systems, KPMG, Deloitte, Accenture, PwC, Serco, Mitie, ISS, Capita, G4S... Many workers will recognise the names of their rapacious employers in this list...

Undoubtedly, it'll be these "usual suspects" who'll be given yet more millions to reconstruct the public buildings currently at risk of falling down. And it's not just those built with spongy RAAC which are unfit, but also the many botched quick "wonders" of Labour's Private Finance Initiatives, starting in the late 1990s...

And there's some risk: in affected hospitals, staff have been told to plan for "emergency evacuations"; cleaners are meant to recognise signs of imminent danger, like cracks and weird creaking sounds... You couldn't make this up, if you tried...

### ...workers will have to help themselves

So here we are again: the jokers in Westminster are about to pour further zillions into the pockets of their suppliers - including those (like G4S), currently licensed to effectively "jail" refugees...

This, while those who do all the vital work in society are told no money is "available" to increase their pay which has fallen so far behind the cost of living.

And clearly, it's not just low pay which is at issue, but ever-worsening social deterioration, whether broken infrastructure, a crippled NHS, poor, unaffordable housing and transport, or local councils which have been screwing workers' conditions and depriving residents for years - of which bankrupt Birmingham City is just the most conspicuous example.

The working class has a huge account to settle with the bosses and their politicians and their whole rotten system and the sooner it organises itself collectively to do so, the better. □

## TALKING UP NUCLEAR WAR

This June, the western press, echoing US officials, warned that Russian nuclear weapons were being stationed in Belarus. President Lukashenko has, however, only referred to the "possibility" of hosting a tactical deterrent "against western aggression". On the other hand, NATO has gone ahead and established military bases on the territory of its just-admitted new partners, Finland and Sweden, armed with nuclear capable missiles pointing at neighbouring Russia.

Regarding Belarus, however, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) published a report (3 June) concluding: "we have yet to find visual evidence that conclusively indicates the presence of

an active nuclear weapons facility on the territory of Belarus". Remember the official lies over the presence of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, used to justify the US-British invasion in 2003...?

The FAS dates back to 1945 when a group of physicists within the Manhattan Project decided, after the use of the A-bomb against Japan, to oppose all further development of nuclear weapons. Not seeing eye-to-eye with the CIA, they should probably be believed; at least more than US/British politicians or their hand-picked officials...

Interesting too, is a 28 August 2023 FAS report entitled "Increasing Evidence That The US Air Force's Nuclear Mission

May Be Returning To UK Soil", describing upgrades for the hosting of the latest generation of nuclear missiles (the ground-penetrating B61-12 gravity bombs which increase the explosion yield up to 25X) at RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk.

By talking up the "nuclear threat" and pouring yet more weapons into their latest stage of war in Ukraine, the US is reasserting its world leadership, which its politicians feel increasingly under pressure to demonstrate - including on British soil. Yes, as the degeneration of capitalism worldwide continues, and the tensions it aggravates increase, the US-NATO is literally installing super-lethal minefields everywhere it possibly can... ☐

### • When science is harnessed to a barbaric system

So what about Britain's own nuclear arsenal? The Trident program includes 4 nuclear submarines, each able to carry 16 ballistic missiles and each of these with 12 thermonuclear warheads (8X more powerful than the A bomb dropped on Hiroshima) capable of aiming at separate targets within a 7,402 km range. Currently, Britain has 260 of these warheads in stock.

The first British nuclear program, code-named "Tube Alloys", was launched in 1941. Its research backbone was provided by mainly Jewish scientists (some of the best quantum physicists in Europe) who'd initially found themselves interned in Britain's concentration camps as "enemy aliens" - after they'd fled the Nazis.

In 1943, Tube Alloys was merged into the US nuclear programme, the so-called Manhattan project. The American physicist, Oppenheimer, who studied in Britain and Germany before WW2, led the project (he is the subject of Christopher Nolan's Hollywood blockbuster, from which historical context and analysis are conspicuous by their absence...).

As any intellectual of the time, Oppenheimer had been close to the Communist Party, but was never a

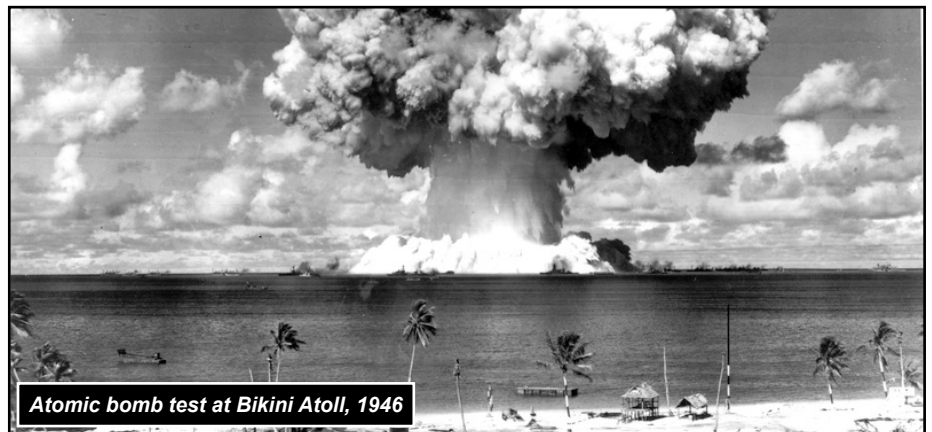
Communist, which may help explain his decision to contribute to the war effort by helping to make the first atomic bomb. He looked to his career; using his social links to drag the best physicists and mathematicians into the project.

The first test took place on 16 July 1945 at Los Alamos, New Mexico, causing irradiation of local native Americans and the contamination of workers on site.

On 6 and 9 August the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings took place. Having played their part, many Los Alamos scientists (including Oppenheimer) were accused of being Communist spies,

tried, imprisoned, or removed from their academic positions.

More bomb tests followed, one after the other: in 1952, Britain detonated an A bomb on the Montebello islands; in 1954, the US tested the first hydrogen bomb at Bikini Atoll irradiating the local population and a passing Japanese fishing ship. In 1958 Britain exploded an H bomb in the Pacific's Malden islands duly incinerating all marine life, corals, etc. In total, 520 outdoor nuclear explosions took place between 1945-1992. And to date, 2,476 nuclear devices have been fired...



Atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll, 1946

### Climate change catastrophe - aggravated by neglect... and war

The deadliest wildfire in the US for more than a century swept the island of Maui in Hawaii, destroying Lahaina, a town of 13,000 people, on 8 August. There's no accurate figure for those killed; many were burnt to ash within minutes. Fire spread rapidly through abandoned plantations full of dead grasses after years of drought. Local government reports had warned of this potential hazard, but the grass wasn't cleared.

But it was Hawaii Electric's old, ill-maintained power lines which lit the initial spark, as they were felled by 70mph winds. The fires spread faster than people could outrun them. Fallen power lines blocked one of the few roads out of town, trapping

victims in their cars as they tried to flee. Early warning systems neglected by the local authorities failed. Some large hotels were still checking in guests as the fire began. Lahaina's survivors are now relying on belated state help and charity, if they can get it.

#### ... and back on the ranch

In North America, extreme heat broke new records this summer. Wild fires linked to prolonged heat waves happen every year, but unprecedented fires have ravaged parts of Canada and the East. In early June, a smoky haze over New York City reduced air quality to the "worst in the world" for days.

Smoke drifting across the Midwest brought the same conditions to Chicago. Heatwaves are getting longer: El Paso, Texas recorded a temperature of over 37°C every day for 40 days. In Phoenix, Arizona it was over 43.3°C every day for a month!

Wildfires followed by floods are still causing havoc in southern Europe. Fires add to fine particulate matter pollution, warming the atmosphere still further.

One might ask: why are those who rightly sound the climate change alarm silent, if not calling for more of the same, when it comes to the vast amount of CO2 and smoke in the atmosphere put there by large-scale military explosions in the middle of Europe?

## THEIR LIES ABOUT WAGE "GROWTH"

We're told by the government's national statistics office (ONS) that between April and June, annual growth in regular pay (excluding bonuses) was 7.8%! They claim this is "the highest wage increase since records began in 2001"! But then they immediately admit that if you adjust for inflation (using the CPIH index, at 7.7% between April and June) this so-called wage "growth" shrinks to just 0.1%! The Retail Price Index (no longer a measure they use... we wonder why!) - currently measures inflation at 12%. If so, wages not only didn't grow, they fell by 3.3%!

But even going by the ONS maths of convenience, it's still hard to explain why the average wage increase is 7.8%, when both public and private sector

union leaders have agreed pay deals well below this rate? Hundreds of thousands of teachers and NHS workers are only getting 5% and 6.5% respectively. In fact public sector pay is trailing way behind inflation at 5.9% anyway - by their own stats...

### More job cuts on the bosses' agenda

No, what skews their figure is first, the inclusion of the pay of top managers in the private sector (and there are very many of them!) and second, April's 9.7% increase in the minimum wage... since it is paid to at least 2m workers... and went up from £9.50 to £10.42/hr. Even this rise doesn't make it a living wage despite

the government calling it the National Living Wage. In fact the Living Wage Foundation London rate is £11.95.

While some workers see their pay increase from one peanut to two peanuts, the government still insists that wage rises could be inflationary and thus "unaffordable". ITV's Robert Peston asked PM Sunak if he "would like to see employers showing more moderation when it comes to pay rises"... To which Sunak replied, that "pay rises should be focused on rewarding productivity increases". They already are: for the bosses raising productivity is a code for job cuts: 1 worker doing the job of 3. The real question for workers is: how much longer can they afford this system? ☐

### Deceptive pay "rise" at BA

This sounded good: last month, British Airways offered a 13% pay rise to 24,000 of its lower-paid workers - to "ease the effect of inflation", after its parent company, IAG, announced a record £1.1bn half-year profits. But what's the context? In fact BA had fired and rehired almost all of its 39,000 workers in 2020, during the pandemic. Most were forced to accept a new contract with lower pay and worse conditions and 12,000 were sacked!

So the pay increase this year will in fact only just bring its workers back up to the pay rate they would have received in 2020 had their wages not been cut. The basic pay of a typical crew member is just £1,700 per month.

Not only are BA workers paid a pittance, but they're also asked to cover for the lack of hands. Air traffic has reached 94% of pre-pandemic levels and BA bosses want to expand short-haul flights to compete with low-cost carriers. Having in many cases doubled fares and with less than 70% of the workforce had in 2020, no wonder this company has record profits.

### Doctors underpaid, over-worked, still striking

Junior doctors show no sign of giving up their fight for "pay restitution" as they call it - to catch up with inflation and make up for a 30% real pay cut since 2008. With a turnout of 71.25%, 43,440, that is 98.37% of them voted to carry on striking. The mandate is now valid up until 29 February 2024.

They've had 19 strike days since March. Now they'll coordinate 4 days of action with consultants on 20 September and on 2, 3, and 4 October. They say they'll provide "Christmas Day" levels of cover. The "juniors" will strike on 21 and 22 September on their own.

The government offer remains 6% on pay, with an extra lump sum of £1,250. Junior doctors in Scotland have accepted a 12.4% pay rise, which the union says is "a start" in increasing pay to 2008 levels.

The doctors' unions say the government needs to restore doctors' pay if it is to "protect" the NHS and retain them at work. As of June 2023, there were still 125,572 vacancies in hospitals; 10,855 of them medical. The government has announced £250m for 900 extra beds for winter - far below the 5,000 beds promised. But as the BMA points out, what's the point of beds, if you haven't got the staff?

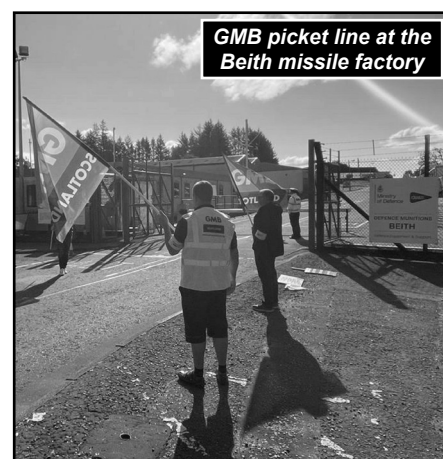
### Missile plant strike: suspended in the name of the war effort!

While the government has been sending missiles to Ukraine ever since the war started, little or nothing has been said about where they come from. But when workers in Beith in Ayrshire went on strike for pay equality last month some light was thrown on this. This site of 250 workers is managed by the MoD's Defence Equipment and Support, and it is where weapons are brought for assembly and loaded for delivery. Ben Wallace was only half-joking when he said: "We're not Amazon!". What's surprising is not to find Amazon UK as a contractor on site!

According to the GMB union, 50 workers

voted by 93% to go on strike for two weeks from August 21 over an increasing pay gap of £18K between skilled and non-skilled workers. The non-skilled get less than £21K per year! They took two isolated days of strike on 14 and 17 July, with pickets and banners at the gates. But then to avoid this going any further, on 17 August, the MoD agreed to talks and the strike was suspended. There hasn't been any update from GMB since, but we can guess that the workers at least won a pay rise.

No interview of the workers was reported in the press, and it's highly unlikely they could express any positions towards the war while employed in the MoD. However, the GMB made sure to use pro-war rhetoric to promote the strike, warning of: "the lack of essential supplies of weapons to Ukraine", whether or not the workers cared about it!



GMB picket line at the Beith missile factory

## Not an energy crisis, just profiteering!

The energy regulator, Ofgem, has announced a further (again, small) reduction in the energy price cap from October. The cap will be set at an annual level of £1,923 for dual fuel households. This reduction saves households an average of £151. That's still over £500 more than an average household paid in 2021. Yes, an 80% hike that Ofgem is now advertising as a "fall in prices"! And that, while wholesale energy prices

paid by suppliers have dropped to 2021 levels.

Ofgem recently estimated the total energy debt owed by those who can't afford to pay their bills is £2.25 billion. Record numbers of people are seeking help from Citizens Advice for energy debt with 7.8 million people borrowing to pay their energy bills in the first six months of 2023. By the end of this year CAB will have seen 26% more people in

need of help with energy debt compared to 2022.

Yet the companies they are indebted to are the same companies whose profits the government chose and still chooses to subsidise - rather than implement price controls against their greed. Throwing millions of households into hardship is their other deliberate choice.

## Their society

### A debt time bomb ticking for the poorest

The level of so-called "unsecured debt" such as personal loans, credit cards or overdrafts, is on the increase - by 6% in the last year alone, reaching £215.3bn (or £7,700 per household) according to the latest report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The cost of living crisis has pushed a large section of the working class into debt, hitting the poorest hardest. There are now 5.7m low-income households with unsecured debts, as they are left with no choice but to rely on credit to cover for the gap created by rising costs and

real wage cuts. A fifth of these families were forced to take on new loans to pay their rent or energy bills - but worse still, most of them (75%) reported that these loans did not prevent them from falling into arrears!

And of course, the growing need to borrow money to make ends meet means that loan sharks are again preying on those worst hit. Over half of low-income households (i.e., 1.2m) who have to borrow to pay bills are getting loans from "doorstep" or "payday" lenders - or pawnshops. One such lender is the

Morses Club. Its website explains: for a "£400 loan repayable over 39 weeks ... the rate of interest being 132.00% p.a. fixed ... the total amount payable is £796.00"!

Behind these "legal" racketeers are even more dodgy sharks offering loans "informally" and asking for repayments that never end. The government said it would "regulate" the loan shark market... No doubt to free it for their friends among the "legitimate" sharks... the banks and big credit companies...!

### After security-tagged Lurpak, come empty coffee jars...

Over the last year, as the cost-of-living crisis deepened, shoplifting incidents increased by 24% and they have almost doubled in the last 2 years, reaching 8 million! While much was said about the "Oxford Circus JD Sports robbery" by teenagers, very little has been said about shoplifting by ordinary poor people who help themselves to basic essentials above and beyond what foodbanks sporadically provide.

In one of the poorest councils, Tower Hamlets, it's reported that Calpol, the pain relief medicine for children, was the most shoplifted item. Baby formula, coffee, cheese and steak followed not far behind. To tackle this, supermarket bosses fitted steak and cheese packets with security tags and

replaced coffee jars with dummy ones. This isn't the first time that supermarkets have stepped up security measures - instead of lowering or fixing their prices! Lurpak butter (500g cost £5!) was tagged last year, when food prices increased by 19.1%.

And why wouldn't the bosses spend thousands of pounds on security staff, CCTV, security tags, and other anti-crime measures to protect their record profits? It's worth remembering that back in April, the supermarket giant Tesco reported profits totalling £3 billion. In the 1970s the state did impose price controls on the food retailers; so it's perfectly possible, of course. In theory. But only if there is a threat, not just of theft, but of a working class take-over..



### ... and relentless pursuit of "criminals"!

On 28 August Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, sent a letter to police leaders congratulating them on updating their "professional practice for investigations" which includes a national commitment to follow up on all crimes, including shoplifting, which she said, is "often wrongly considered to be a minor crime". Her letter is entitled "Shared mission to relentlessly pursue criminals". And this sets the tone.

Up to now, a police caution for a "minor crime" could be given as an alternative to prosecution. A court conviction for

shoplifting however, means going to jail for up to six months - even if the goods taken are worth less than £200. Either way, shoplifters end up with a criminal record.

But why did Braverman suddenly focus on shoplifting? In fact, it's the old story of "oh dear, one thing will lead to another", and forget about the reason why... This bigoted woman claims that "if it (shoplifting) is left unchecked it escalates"... So nothing to do with an "unchecked" cost of living!

As for citing the "cost to the British economy", a 2022 study by the Centre for

Retail Research found that shoplifting took out £660 million in that year. But is that a lot? The total value of the retail industry in nearly £500 billion! This constitutes just 1.3%...

So this is all about winding up prejudice against the poor and blowing hot air about law and order. But what else to expect from these representatives of this rotten society's blood-suckers, who feel totally justified in depriving workers of the decent wages which would allow them to buy their milk and Calpol!

### Provocation after provocation...

Last year Network Rail workers went on strike for higher pay and against radical job cuts and attacks on their working conditions. After 10 months the dispute ended and workers got a pay rise and some of their demands were met, others not. But now the government-boss partnership running this publicly owned company is refusing to pay the £300 annual performance bonus to those workers who took strike action. They intend to make an additional saving out of the wages of 20,000 workers who walked out...

But strikers from NR are not the only ones being targeted for pay cuts. Unison the union says that NHS workers who were receiving maternity pay have lost money

too. Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is calculated on the average weekly earnings (AWE) during the 8 weeks running up to the 15th week before the due date; so any "missed" days during this period, e.g., for striking or for sickness, brings down the average pay. Mothers may not even get SMP at all if their AWE falls below £123!

In fact maternity pay is already ridiculously low for working mothers: during the first 6 weeks of leave, they get 90% of their AWE; and during the following 33 weeks, they get just £172.48/week - or 90% of their AWE - whichever is lower!

The same "striking discount" applies to fathers, whose Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) is £172.48/week or 90% of their

AWE - whichever is lower, and just for 1 or 2 weeks!

#### ... to be fought against

Petitions are being signed on the online platform "Organise" to reinstate NR's bonus. And Unite and Unison unions have joined campaigners against the deductions in maternity/parental pay for strike days.

That's well and good. But what about insisting that the bosses should not benefit from strikes by saving on wage payments - and that they should not only submit to the demands of the strikers for a pay rise or whatever else (Hands off conditions, no job cuts!), but that they should pay workers for all of their strike days?

**Their society**

**Squeeze the bosses like a lemon...**

Earlier this month the Bank of England (BoE) increased interest rates further, to 5.25%. That's the 14th time in a row that rates are upped, taking them from 0.1% to 5.25% since December 2021. And another increase is due on 21st of September.

The Institute for Public Policy Research says these interest rate rises - to a 15-year

high - could push economy into recession - as if it isn't in one already!

Huw Pill, BoE's chief economist, suggested that there is another way of dealing with inflation: by keeping interest rates at 5.25% for longer, rather than raising them now and then cutting them later.

He argues that "squeezing the economy more gently" is preferable. But for whom? Pill should feel free to squeeze the profits out of the bosses' pockets that have been accumulating for years! Wages have been falling behind the cost of living for so long, that there is certainly no "juice" left to squeeze out of workers... ☐

**• Why is Wilko in liquidation?**

Wilko announced that it was bankrupt at the end of July. Everyone knows this 93-year-old chain store (formerly Wilkinson) from their High Streets - and there were lots more after it took over failed Woolworths shops, 14 years ago. In fact Wilko was the largest private - still family-owned - retailer in the whole country.

Its financial problems date back to 2021, if not before. Last year 15 stores were closed; 1,500 workers lost their jobs. Now the fate of another 400 stores - and 1,250 workers - hangs in the balance. There's talk of B&M taking over some shops, but every day the list of closures grows longer.

Bosses blame the 14 interest rate rises since December 2021 and difficulty finding banks to lend them money. Matalan and Superdry are in a similar trouble; Made.com collapsed last November after credit dried up.

But what's pretty scandalous is that after posting a £36.7m loss for 2022, (profits of £4.3m were made in 2021), the Wilkinson family were paid £2.5m in dividends - and then a further £750,000 in February 2022!

The administrator says it'll try to "claw back" some of this money to pay off creditors (workers owed redundancy are at the back of the queue) - but as the working class knows all too well, administrators seldom find their claws.

**• Brexit adds to the cost of living - of course!**

Last month, the government delayed checks on food coming into Britain from the EU. Food safety checks were meant to start in January 2021, when the EU began checking that food imported from Britain met EU regulations. But they've been delayed 5 times since then.

The government explained the delays by saying that the checks would cost British businesses £1bn, and that checks would add to food price inflation. So it admits (at last?) that far from cutting "red tape", Brexit adds substantially to it. That was, of course, obvious from the start. More than 25% of Britain's food is imported from the EU. The London School of Economics claims that a quarter of the rise in food bills since 2019 is already down to increased costs from Brexit - even before the checks on food actually come in!

When, or if, the checks begin in earnest, imports of meat, dairy and fish will all need a vet to sign them off as safe, and there will be a flat-rate charge at the border of up to £43 per "consignment". Businesses will try to pass that increase on to the rest of us... No surprise there, either.

**• Money-making ULEZ expands, hitting the worst off**

The Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) was extended in late August, to cover all London boroughs. The scheme now affects 5 million more people; if they own "non-compliant" vehicles, they need to pay £12.50/day to use them in the affected zone, or switch to a hybrid or electric vehicle.

Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan's scrappage scheme offers £2,000 for cars, and £1,000 for motorcycles. However, there's only £160m available... And while TfL says only 200,000 vehicles circulating through London are non-compliant, the RAC suggests that this number is 850,000. In that case the scrappage scheme would only cover 12% of eligible cars before the cash runs out!

This anti-working class measure (again) leaves those who can't afford to get a new, or even a 2nd-hand car having to pay over the odds for London's public transport (or a bike!). Just a few years ago, everyone was told to buy diesel cars, as they were "less polluting"! But now, all diesels registered before September 2015 are non-compliant, while petrol vehicles registered after 2005 are still OK.

It's said Sadiq Khan may well lose his mayoral seat because of ULEZ, going by what happened in the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election (Boris Johnson's seat!) in July, where Labour failed to win, thanks to the opposition to ULEZ... ☐

**The Home Office took these lives**

On the 12 of August, a boat with at least 65 refugees sank in the Channel. Six refugees died. Two others are missing, presumed dead. These people were fleeing war-torn Sudan and a devastated Afghanistan. Home Secretary Braverman hypocritically said that these deaths were "a tragic loss of life" and again blamed "people

smugglers"... When it is her xenophobic opposition to immigration and the Home Office's murderous refusal to provide safe routes to migrants that has led to their deaths!

In fact, Braverman puts refugees' lives in danger even after they've got here! Refugee detention centres have seen outbreaks of diphtheria and now

39 refugees have had to be evacuated from the prison-like Bibby Stockholm barge - moored in Dorset and supposed to "accommodate" 506 male refugees in 222 rooms - after Legionella (it causes life-threatening pneumonia) was found in the water system... in a barge that has no potable water storage! Then, in late August, the Fire Brigades Union launched a legal challenge over the barge's fire safety, after requests for a meeting with the Home Office to discuss these concerns were flatly turned down.

Braverman claims the barge is "safe for human habitation" and says that one NHS nurse will be on board, 5 days a week, to refer patients to a GP if necessary. But this will not change the inhuman and dangerously overcrowded conditions which refugees find themselves in these quasi-prisons! Yes, borders and the rabid xenophobic policies of the government kill!



## BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

**Let's fight against BMW's "cut and screw" plans!**

In October last year, BMW said it would cut out a shift. So we went from 3 to 2 shifts and 500 of our workmates were sacked, apparently with union officials' full endorsement! But BMW then found itself short of hands. So "2.5" shift crews were retained - and our shift length was extended from 7½ to 9¼ hours. For logistics contractor R&H workers, on 10/12hrs shifts and earning £4/hr less (£13/hr), it meant a pay cut. In the meantime, bosses are pulling "record beating" volumes!

On top of this BMW is planning an unprecedented refurbishment semi-shutdown for 5 months, starting February 2024... So now they're asking us to work an extra early shift every two weeks to try to make up for losing their production next year. If we want further payment during that period we're meant to agree to "overtime arrangements" (so-called Working Time Account, WTA) beforehand. Yes, de facto to produce

the missing 5 months production in advance!

**Desperate measures**

We'd never seen lines rushing at the speeds they went this July... Management tried everything, work on rest days, 30 minutes compulsory overtime on earlies and lates (making it a 10-hour shift!), overtime on Saturday and Sundays... Union officials claim to have rejected many of these changes, explicitly saying that a ballot wasn't called because they were "temporary measures"... We even saw an announcement addressed to "ex-associates" (our workmates sacked in October) inviting them to come back as temps, but on new terms which make overtime compulsory!!

Now, BMW tells us that Friday will become a rest day for everyone (we had 5 teams, each having a different rest day). And after that frantic rush, now they want to sack



another one 1 in 5 of us, getting rid of half a crew. We're also told the shift premium has been cut from 12.05% to 11.65% and some of the "temporary" overtime measures are now permanent. To top it all, that Friday "rest day" will also become an overtime day - to be worked up to 12 times per year. So we're left with 20% fewer people, while being asked to do 10 hour shifts for 5 days a week!

This is why R&H mates are already circulating a petition in order to go on strike indefinitely ASAP! We're asking agency temps and BMW/Staffline to join us. We say no to job cuts! No to pay cuts! No to overtime! We want 8-hour shifts and full lay-off pay! ☐

## Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

**• And yet another tier!**

Welcome to the 90 new temps (apparently) destined for the Panther mini shift. Some of them already had their "Ford" induction... so we hope they enjoyed it... But can Everrat please explain why their contracts are only for 6 months? Is this another example of Ford "flexibility": hire here and fire there, at the very same time - and on any old contract? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• "Deferred redundancy"**

Yes indeed. These "One Ford" bosses still, still, can't meet Detroit's target of 1,000+300 heads chopped at Dunton... But instead of accepting reality, they've come up with a plan: they've asked mates to volunteer to sign up now, and go later... That's a new one. We've heard of deferred pensions, but deferred redundancy...? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• They'd better not try it!**

So what about the trailer work to transport electrified power-train bits from Halewood? This is a TOps job. Or not? Our convenor told us it would be done in-house, by us. But now a rumour is going round that management would rather use cheaper contractors... and chuck us under a bus?! No wonder

they're not saying. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• Another game they're playing...**

One day we're told that TOPs rail can't keep up with the workload coming from Europe - and that this is why management sends ships directly to Liverpool instead of to D'ham jetty. But then we hear that it's management who is cancelling the booked railway pathways from Dagenham to Halewood, preventing Ford trains from "keeping up". What game are they playing? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• As the saying goes...**

In DEP, management was in a hurry to allocate overtime for the remaining 5 months of the year... They want engines all of a sudden, and lots of them. So they told us we'd be doing overtime on Saturdays if we're on earlies and on Sundays if we're on lates... Really? If we were them, we wouldn't count our chickens...

PS: or kittens..? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• National struggling wage...**

It's just impossible to live on £11/hr! This is how little we get when working for the canteen contractor Compass



- and Hamton and ISL workers' wages are in the same ballpark! In fact, we were all promised a +£1/hr increase in our pay, but we got just +19p/hr (!), last April - as we got the National "Living" Wage increase instead of the pay rise expected... It's about time we got a real living wage. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**• Where is the money?**

So a Tata battery factory is to be built in the South-West, providing 4,000 jobs. That twerp by another name (Grant Shapps), is congratulating himself, but won't say exactly how many millions in bribes the government has given Tata to build it there, rather than in Spain...

Ford's own government bribe money, totals £1.4bn: July 2020, £625m "loan facility" to keep R&D at Basildon; October 2021 £230m for power-train at Halewood; December 2022 £750m for "further EV expansion" (!)... The word "Dagenham" is missing here, of course. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 18/07/23]

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****The struggle continues!**

After the agreement negotiated by union leaders with Royal Mail bosses in July, managers everywhere have launched unprecedented attacks against our Ts&Cs. Here at MP, they blackmailed Processing part-timers into accepting cuts in contracted hours, by threatening them with redeployment to who-knows-where (Chelmsford, for instance, which is 1 hour and 40 minutes from London by train) if they didn't. This has meant that

many of us have lost between 1 and 9 hours of contracted work per week with the loss of up to £120 - and we're back on a max of 25 hours per week.

For the sake of "productivity and efficiency", they have now branded workers on certain part-time and full-time duties as "supernumerary", i.e., "spare". Of course this has all proceeded with no assessment of "need" - and everyone knows that as soon as any increase in mail occurs



after the summer, there will be too few hands to do the work. We are demanding that anyone who lost hours (i.e., pay) should get them back! And those of us who haven't lost them, but are now "spare" (meaning managers can move us to any duty according to their whims), should get their old duties back! ☐

**Letter from the North-West**

Back in the day, even pit ponies got some reprieve from their misery when the miners' holiday shut the pits. No such luck for the labouring beasts of the postal industry. Luckily the weather in the north has lived up to its reputation. Because the days of lighter work during hotter days are long gone.

We're hearing and seeing that across the country our brothers and

sisters are fighting back. Stranraer and Hayes have had ballots for strike, or action short of strike, against cavalier managers who've already de facto abolished USO (Universal Service Obligation to deliver letters to every address in the country). The officials down at CWU HQ, on the other hand, seem to have lost their tongues...

We knew there was a north/south

divide. However we were stunned to see that everything costs so much more south of Watford: CWU leaders based in SW19 need to pay themselves salaries of hundreds of thousands of pounds... plus. Yes, we see from their latest accounts that an extra £20,000 lump sum had to be awarded towards their retirement... Well they deserve it... don't they? ☐

**King's Cross railway station (London)****• Enough is enough**

The RMT's Mick Lynch is right: yes, we're sick and tired of being treated with contempt by the government and the TOCs! But we're also fed up with the way that our fight has been (dis-)organised over the past 18 months. It's as if nobody knows how to strike properly any more... If we'd gone out indefinitely and generalised our fight to all the other sectors last year in a BIG collective push, well, it could have been sorted there and then! Instead, almost 18 months later and we've not won anything yet (other than new friends on the picket lines!)... [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• We won't accept cuts**

Reading the letter Mick Lynch sent to the RDG, it's clear to us that RMT officials are looking to reach an agreement as fast as possible. We want this as well. But certainly not at all costs!! We're not giving in to the bosses' cuts nor their derisory pay offer, and despite everything we're still OK to go on strike again... properly! [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• Ticket offices = our jobs**

Keeping that in mind, having

negotiations with each individual TOC, will divide our ranks, and that's always a bad idea. Just as turning the ticket-office closures into a moral issue for the "public" to resolve, was a bad idea. It was and is a collective strike-issue, and there can be no compromise over our jobs. [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• Stand together?**

Why were ASLEF train drivers on strike the day before the RMT (and why only for one day)? And why only an overtime ban while RMT workers were on strike? Is this Mick Lynch's and Mick Whelan's idea of fighting together? They said the feedback they got from us was to go in "harder and longer", together, so what happened? [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• Managers' OTT OT**

Given the ongoing shortage of train drivers - even outside of strikes and OT bans - LNER is still paying managers and extra £500 to "cover" the job. It may just involve working half a shift. And if it's night time, a taxi fare is added - which (to Peterborough!) can be as much as £400! Unfiddled?! [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• We decide!**

Churchill workers got a letter saying that "the Churchill group has become employee-owned", making us "beneficiaries of its future success"! OK! So, as owners of this "business", shall we increase our pay by 100% and cut our hours by half..?! [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

**• Crystal clear**

For Atalian workers, it's more and more clear that we need our displaced workmates back. One of the reasons why they were "let go", was that the Azumas wouldn't need tanking... and Mark4s would be phased out. But guess what: us tankers are now asked to clean the front end of the trains and tank the still un-phased out Mark 4s... Obviously it's too much - and obviously we need our mates back. [King's X Workers' Platform 06/09/23]

## MALI, NIGER, GABON... ONLY WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY "COUPS" CAN EFFECT CHANGE

Below we print part of the 4/9/23 editorial of our sister group in France, *Lutte Ouvrière*, written in response to the series of military coup d'états since 2020 in the former French colonies of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Gabon, as well as a tribute to the Senegalese writer and film director - and life-long Communist - Ousmane Sembène on the 100th anniversary of his birth, who exposed the brutality of French colonialism and celebrated African resistance in his films and novels.

Macron cannot stomach France being pushed out of the Sahel. According to him, the French army would have saved it from jihadism! But the population is well placed to make the real assessment of its Operation Barkhane, launched ten years ago across the region to kill jihadists... its armed gangs continue to extort and sow terror in an increasingly large area.

And what has the French presence in Africa brought to these countries that are among the poorest on the planet? Roads? Dispensaries and schools? No. When France needed roads to transport the mineral or agricultural wealth of these countries, it built them, but nothing more.

Niger's uranium reserves allow nuclear power plants to produce electricity in France, when the majority of the population of Niger is deprived of it! Gabon made huge profits for Elf-Aquitaine and Total, who exploited oil there. And the French group Eramet now exploits Gabon's manganese.

The same type of domination is found in Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Congo, Senegal... For plunder does not belong to a bygone colonial past. It continues in



the present via the corrupt dictatorships upheld by France. This is what makes the "lessons on democracy" for Africans unbearable.

In Gabon, shaken last week by a palace revolution, the Bongo dynasty was in power for 56 years, supported by French presidents from De Gaulle to Macron. It is with their complicity that the Bongo family amassed, in France, a fortune of more than 85 million euros, 33 properties in the Paris region and 11 others on the Côte d'Azur. The Bongo dynasty, as French imperialism's subcontractor, has been handsomely paid.

Let us not be surprised that coup leaders, even if they were the overthrown dictators' generals, are applauded by the population. As workers dream here of replacing Macron, many Malians, Nigeriens or Gabonese are happy to see the back of corrupt rulers, even if they

suspect the new ruling junta will be just as greedy as those it replaces. Nor should we be surprised that some imagine that Russian or Chinese (or even US) "help" will improve things. As long as workers don't trust their own brothers and sisters, they are likely to support the least worst alternative.

In today's fight, they must be able to count on the workers in France, many of whom come from Africa and keep links with back home. Fighting imperialism, its wars and destruction whether in Africa or Ukraine, is part of the fight of all workers.

The working class is an international class, and the only force capable of replacing this rotting world order, of ending the exploitation and domination of rich countries over the poor and ending the imperialist rivalries that are spreading today and threatening to generalise the chaos of war. □

### Remembering Ousmane Sembène and his anti-colonial fight

Ousmane Sembène, the Senegalese writer, film director and lifelong Communist was born 100 years ago. His politicisation began abruptly when he was drafted into the French army at the beginning of WW2 as a "tirailleur" or infantryman. His gruelling movie "*Camp de Thiaroye*" shows the 1944 Thiaroye massacre of over 400 "tirailleurs" who, freed from German concentration camps, were sent straight into a French camp in Dakar. In order to steal the pay due to them, white French officers slaughtered them and buried them in a mass grave.

Sembène was involved in the October 1947, 160-day long, strike on the Dakar-Niger railway - winning equal wages and conditions for French and Senegalese workers and a 20% pay increase. He relates the story in his novel "*God Bits of Wood*". Then, as a docker in Marseilles, he joined the CGT, the biggest French union, then affiliated to the Communist Party.

Sembène was infuriated by the conditions imposed on women by the remnants of semi-feudal religious rule in Senegal - as is shown in his final, most powerful movie, "*Moolaadé*" (2004),

about the fight by women in a village against Female Genital Mutilation and the religious-patriarchy maintaining it.

Today there are 200m victims of FGM. The number is increasing, as western imperialism relies on the most backward religious fundamentalism to control its interests across the world. A majority of girls in Somalia, Mali, Sudan are "cut" today. *Moolaadé* deserves to be widely shown. Not just as a tribute to Ousmane's lifelong dedication to communist ideas, anti-imperialism and women's fight for equality, but because it depicts the kind of activism which can truly change 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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