

WORKERS' fight



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

IT'S TIME TO GET RID OF ALL THE BLOOD-STAINED, HATE-PROMOTING, LYING POLITICIANS!

Defying reality is the name of the Tory government's current game. In the face of wholesale slaughter of Gaza's civilians in a one-sided "war", Sunak continues to support "Israel's right to defend itself". As if this unrelenting bombardment is (or ever was), a question of "defence".

On the domestic front, he and his Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, claim that "the economy has turned a corner", offering tax cuts as recession looms, just when a huge injection of funds from the Treasury would be needed to avert the total collapse of the NHS this winter. For sure, handouts to rich Tory donors come first...

And then there's the "flagship" Rwanda deportation plan, to "stop the boats"... It should be dead in the water after the Supreme Court ruled it "unlawful", but Sunak has now promised that planes full of refugees will be taking off for Kigali, come the spring...

Raising the political dead?

One could say that Sunak and his cronies are deluded. The newly-sacked Suella Braverman certainly is; her egotistical display of far-right bigotry and insubordination was even too much for Sunak in the end. But with the Tories lagging 21 points in the opinion polls, the government has no choice but to conduct a salvage operation. It cannot win the coming election. Many of today's MPs will lose their seats, especially those who took so-called Red Wall constituencies from Labour in 2019.

This is the chief reason why Sunak has brought former PM David Cameron into his government. It's nothing to do with Cameron's abilities or lack of them. In fact his record in office - he gambled on, and "lost" the Brexit vote and describes himself as a "socially liberal Conservative" - would put him at odds with Sunak's anti-EU, illiberal, government.



Facing the coming seat losses, Sunak has no choice but to shift the Party back to its traditional roots - the established capitalist, upper-class, home county "Blue Wall" electorate - of which Cameron is an excellent representative. He must lure back Tory voters who found the vulgar posturing of the Johnson-Truss "New Right" hard to swallow - and chose to vote for the Lib Dems instead. So this is all about cutting the Tory Party's losses to position it for the future.

What's more, Sunak has few options. So cleverly, the ex-soldier (he knows how to follow orders, unlike Cruella) has been given the Home Office poison chalice... And has the remit of trying to stop the unstoppable boats and reintroduce another version of the Rwanda policy! He's being thrown to the wolves.

The real hate merchants must go!

Sunak's government may be one of the most right-wing in Tory Party history,

but on the main issues of day, Labour is shifting to meet it, all the way. Starmer even admits, unashamedly, that this is what's required from a "government in waiting". However, it's not all plain-sailing. A self-confessed Zionist, the Labour leader stands right behind Israel's Netanyahu. But when he instructed Labour MPs to vote against a SNP amendment calling for a ceasefire, for many it was a step too far. Eight front-benchers defied him.

As Gaza becomes a graveyard, working classes all over the world will take note. The across-the-board support from western politicians for this "war" has exposed, once and for all, the depravity of these savages who rule us. They hate our class, oppress the poorest-of-the-poor and continue to devastate the earth and its people through war and exploitation - purely for profit - and then lie through their teeth about it. They and their barbaric imperialist system must go. It's a matter of humanity's survival. ☐

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DOESN'T CUT JOBS... BOSSES DO!

On the 1-2nd November, PM Rishi Sunak hosted the first ever international "Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit" at the historic site of Bletchley Park, to great fanfare. He'd managed to get all kinds of experts to agree to come - including Elon Musk - although not everyone was sure what exactly it was meant to achieve... Except of course, in Sunak's words, to make Britain "a global leader in AI regulation"! Of course.

Apparently Bletchley Park was chosen deliberately, since it's the site where the (American-educated), British mathematician, Alan Turing and his team used the first electronic computer to crack the secret code used by the German military during WW2. The British establishment never tires of boasting about this, in its constant nationalistic exaggerations. However, the breakthrough wouldn't have been made without the previous work of Polish mathematicians and international encryption experts - including from the Soviet Union...

An Elon-gated thought

The highlight, at least for reporters, was when Elon Musk was interviewed for 50 minutes by Rishi Sunak himself, on Musk's favourite topic "AI's threat for humanity". This was shown on TV news programs because of his "shocking" claim that in the future, AI will be so sophisticated that: "it will come a point where no job is needed [...] you can have a job for personal satisfaction". The emphasis was placed by the media on the assumption that AI would one day be able to replace every single worker on the planet!

While we'd all welcome a fully-automated



future, free from exploitation (but, errr... that would have to be under communism) under this capitalist system, until we overthrow it, a job is our only way to make ends meet. At this stage of development of AI, the threat to workers already exists, but only for very specific jobs. For instance actors and media stars can be artificially generated on screen - one reason the Hollywood actors' union was on strike recently... In fact AI has also been used to re-engineer an old Beatles single, literally raising John Lennon from the dead. And that didn't put anyone out of a job!

The threat to jobs is from CEO not AI

For the rest of us the threat doesn't come from AI but directly from these very bosses and their politicians who love attending

lavish summits, be it in Davos or Bletchley Park. For now, it's a question for them of growing their profit margins in the midst of the crisis, by squeezing more value out of fewer workers... Installing automation may play a role, but it also cuts heavily into profit margins, so whenever possible the bosses want labour-intensive production. Workers remain much cheaper than machines.

The Summit ended with everyone holding hands and signing a very long-winded declaration which affirmed "that, for the good of all, AI should be designed, developed, deployed, and used, in a manner that is safe, in such a way as to be human-centric, trustworthy and responsible". One can only agree. But as Mr Musk has already proven by sacking 6,000 Twitter-X workers, we cannot trust any of them as far as we can throw them. ☐

• Their good old statistical lies

The Office for National Statistics generates its unemployment figures mainly via a survey of businesses. So the unemployment rate has always been an estimate based on a small sample. But only 15% of businesses replied to the most recent survey, leading the Financial Times to complain, "we do not know what is happening to unemployment... our economic policy makers are flying blind".

As far as statistics go, we can take their word for it, but the official unemployment rate has always been massaged by governments. The official

definition of "unemployed" is someone who is aged 16-64, and "actively looking for work". On this measure, the official unemployment rate is 4.2% - meaning 1.44 million people who are looking for a job, can't find one. But who is, or is not "actively looking for work", can be counted in whatever way suits those doing the counting.

As regards the "real" unemployment rate, it turns out that another 9 million people are so-called "economically inactive". This number includes students, but the general trend is still clear to see. So what is the "real unemployment

rate"? Nearly 11%? And if statistics no longer lied, would that cause "our economic policy makers" to adjust their benefit system accordingly? The FT would certainly be opposed to Jeremy Hunt diverting (necessary!) more billions to the benefit system!

Class Struggle n° 119

Autumn 2023

- Editorial: Against this "war" on Gaza, conducted with imperialism's full backing
- The postal workers' strikes 2022/2023 - anatomy of a betrayal
- Russia: Putin's war in Ukraine and against his own people
- Niger: The spiral of war

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THE POVERTY THEY PRESIDE OVER... AND PERPETUATE

While a record number of people were living in extreme poverty over the past year, 3.8 million people were living in destitution, that is, unable to stay warm, dry, clean and fed every day. The number has more than doubled in 5 years. A million children are affected.

This is according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Yes, counting the number of poor relies on a charitable organisation, since the government wouldn't want to stare its own appalling record in the face.

In fact Newham in London has the highest proportion of destitute, with Manchester and Middlesbrough coming 2nd and 3rd: people forced out of their homes and onto the street into homelessness, because they just can't afford their bills. It's the "cost of living crisis" says the Trust, low incomes, rising prices of essentials and high levels of debt. In fact, it's a situation reminiscent of Victorian times: almost two-thirds of people who experienced destitution in 2022 have a disability or a chronic health problem.

And the context is a welfare system stripped to its bare bones by successive governments. Over half of these destitute

households have a weekly benefit income of less than £85 a week. But over a quarter (28%) are not getting any welfare payments at all!

The government says it's helping by tackling inflation, raising the minimum wage and "helping people into work"... But today, unemployment is rising again.

The Joseph Rowntree Trust argues

that there's a lot more that governments can do - like increase welfare benefits. And that's very true. But it won't change the fundamentals - a capitalist system which relies on a reserve army of unemployed precisely to keep its costs at a minimum and its profits at a maximum: meaning that poverty won't end until capitalism is ended. □



• **Dying from cold: another symptom of this sick system**

As winter arrives, the poorest are in even more of a life-or-death situation. "Excess winter deaths" - that is, the increased number of people dying during colder months - were 13,400 in 2021-2022, according to (another charity) End Fuel Poverty Coalition. It said that 3,186 of these deaths were due to people living in cold and damp homes. This figure climbed to 4,706 last winter. In fact, the World Health Organisation estimates that around 30% of excess winter deaths in Britain are due to poor housing conditions - where many sleep on bare floors.

The government claims that it helps with energy bills; but (yet another charity) National Energy Action says that last year alone, it underspent £45m of the Warm Home Discount - meant to take up to £150 off the energy bills for households with low incomes and energy-inefficient homes - and underspent as much as £399m which provided £400 to households under the Energy Bill Support Scheme. One of the reasons is that those needing this help the most are sometimes not even registered with an energy company. This year, the death-toll due to the cold will likely be even higher, as these schemes have now closed, even though energy costs (especially if you use a payment-meter in a rented property) remain unaffordable for many.

In September, energy regulator Ofgem prohibited energy companies from forcibly installing pre-payment meters in the homes of those aged 75

or over without "domestic support", those chronically ill or with children aged below two. But it's closing the door after the horse has bolted, as many of these meters have already been installed. While Britain is the second richest country in Europe and certainly not the coldest, it has the sixth highest death toll from the cold.

• **Social housing crisis continues**

Everyone knows there is a housing crisis! For many people, social housing remains the only feasible option due to the widening gap between Local Housing Allowance and increasing market rents. The fact that there are currently not enough social homes to meet current demand, is not news. But the scale of the problem is. Over 1.2 million households are on the waiting list for social homes in England alone. Almost 100,000 households are living in temporary accommodation, including 120,710 children. This means that councils spent £1.6 billion on temporary accommodation in 2021-22 alone. How many apartment blocks could have been built using this huge amount?

But never mind the crisis, the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is celebrating having met the target of starting 116,000 affordable homes by March 2023, under the Affordable Homes Programme 2016-23, which was funded by a £4.82 billion government grant. But this isn't the social housing which is needed. Meanwhile, £23.7 billion has been put aside since 2013 for "Help to Buy" loans that profit the construction sharks!

• **Prison overcrowding? Lock up more of the poor!**

Since the end of the pandemic and the deepening of the economic crisis, the prison population in England and Wales has skyrocketed to reach 88,016 in October - a 13% increase in just two years! Britain has the highest incarceration rate per capita in Western Europe, at 134 per 100,000 inhabitants! Unsurprisingly, two thirds of the prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded, which means that some prisoners are left locked in cells for days on end. The conditions are such that the suicide rate among inmates has increased by 24% in just one year.

This is of course, the doing of successive governments' "tough-on-crime" policies i.e., tough on the poor policies - against the backdrop of the economic crisis. In fact, more than half of those sentenced to prison every year get short sentences (less than 12 months) and the primary reason for these sentences is... shoplifting. Stealing a bike can land you 6 months in jail!

And now, in their crack-down against the poor, the government has announced plans to force judges to impose jail terms for petty crimes that would normally have resulted in a "community service" order. It's certain that James Cleverly will continue seamlessly to impose Braverman's repressive plans. For instance to roll out facial recognition technology to catch repeat offenders (and whoever the government doesn't like?). As for the overcrowded jails, there's a suggestion that the government could rent prison cells from other countries... But wasn't it already deporting offenders?

Their society

Rishi Sunak, hot on the heels of Biden, told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that "we will stand with you in solidarity. We will stand with you and your people. And we also want you to win".

And while Suella Braverman may now be the ex-Home Secretary, Sunak certainly never disagreed with her that the protests against the Israeli government's war on Gaza were "hate marches" or the claim that the chant "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is a "chant for the erasure of Israel from the map". So under the pretext of showing zero-tolerance to antisemitism, police chiefs have been asked to take action against anything that "might indicate support for terrorists". Robert Jenrick, the immigration minister, has even commissioned officials in the Home Office to consider how they could revoke visas and expel foreign students who "praise Hamas".

As it is, the restrictions on speech arising from the Public Order Act, the terrorism laws and other assorted legislation are already far-reaching. Just waving a Palestinian flag could lead to an arrest under the Public Order Act. This Act - which received royal assent in May 2023 - was justified as a way to prevent climate

HANDS OFF OUR RIGHTS!



change activists from blocking roads and stopping traffic, but it gives police the power to deem any act of protest illegal and to charge organisers and supporters for even minor disruption.

Unsurprisingly, former Public Prosecutor and Labour leader, Keir Starmer, goes along with Sunak's pro-Netanyahu line and the public order crackdown. He instructed

Labour's general secretary, David Evans to warn members, councillors and MPs against attending pro-Palestine demonstrations and has forbidden debate on Israel-Palestine in local party branches. So it was good to see this blow up in his face when his front-bench MPs disobeyed his 3-line whip and voted for the Scottish Nationalists' amendment calling for a cease-fire. □

• One anti-working class law after another...

The clamp-down on working class rights continues. The "Strikes Minimum Service Act", after being passed in July, is now law and can be enforced. Bosses must, however, meet with union officials to consult them over the workers who'll be expected to come to work in order to comply with the minimum service they want. Only then can they issue their "work notice" to the union concerned.

And there lies the rub, as they say... because for each category of workplace (transport, hospitals, borders, fire and rescue, schools, nuclear plants) a

separate piece of legislation is required... and these are still waiting for the rubber stamp of parliament at the time of writing. For the railways, we know that 40% of trains are meant to run. However, the law is not likely to be "ready" for the strikes just announced by ASLEF, the drivers' union for 2-8 December (or the overtime ban from 1-9 December).

Then there are the increased police powers. Police can already clamp down on "disruptive" public protests. But in November the King's Speech included new liberties for the cops, who will now

be able to test people for drugs on arrest, enter premises without a warrant (on the pretext of "seizing stolen goods"), and access the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database to identify "criminals" (didn't they do that already?).

However, as we saw with the furore over the Gaza war protest on Armistice day, so far, the right to hold a march remains in the discretion of the police - until that law is also changed. And the London Met police chief, who "had" to agree that the march could go ahead, has "suggested" that it should be...

• Anticipating Budget 2024 - austerity 2.0!

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt is to outline plans for cuts in taxation and therefore, further cuts in public spending in his Autumn Budget Statement on 22 November (not yet available at the time of writing!).

The "big five" of Britain's business groups - the Confederation of British Industry, British Chambers of Commerce, MakeUK, Institute of Directors and Federation of Small Businesses are already meeting with Hunt to ensure he

makes the "right" choices for them.

But while Hunt proclaims economic growth to justify his handouts, official economic experts say that Britain is heading for a recession. (Unofficial ones say there already is a recession!). For that, there has to be shrinkage of the economy for two successive quarters. Over the last two quarters the economy hasn't grown, but nor has it shrunk. It's stagnated. So whether this is a recession or not, is actually down to

semantics. In the meantime, the Bank of England has downgraded its growth forecast for 2024 to 0% - 0.5%.

The Resolution Foundation warns that public spending is set to fall in real terms by 16%, or £20bn a year, between 2022-23 and 2027-28. Hunt has already said he is targeting welfare spending. And never mind the consequences for 14.5m people already living in poverty today?!

DID BRAVERMAN WANT TO DEPORT THE HOMELESS TOO?

With rents soaring, the number of evictions and homelessness has increased exponentially. According to the government's own figures, between April 2022 and March 2023, 300,000 households sought help from local authorities on the grounds of being homeless or the threat of homelessness. That's a 6.8% increase on the previous year and probably under-counted.

Even the Financial Times, which should have no problem with rich landlords, wrote about a typical case of a homeless single mother "Lucy", who was evicted because the landlord wanted to sell the property. She can't find a new flat for herself and her youngest son on her budget. As the FT points out, "the problem is more acute for single mothers... A one-bedroom property cost more than half their average income in the East, South East and South West. In London, it cost 106 per cent!"

This situation has, of course, led to an increase in people forced to sleep in the streets: in London alone,

10,000 people were spotted sleeping rough in 2022/23, an increase of nearly 20% on the previous year.

So what was the now former Home Secretary Braverman's "solution"? She wrote on social media that "we cannot allow our streets to be taken over by rows

Their society

of tents occupied by people, many of them from abroad, living on the streets as a lifestyle choice". The idea being to remove them... Of course, homelessness could be seen as a "choice", but one made by the landlords who put up rents and lawmakers who let them. □



• Teachers say the grass is greener on the other side

Just like NHS doctors, more and more teachers are leaving the job. The National Foundation for Educational Research found that teacher-vacancies in England in the first 5 months of the 2022/2023 academic year were 93% higher than in the same period before Covid. Last year alone, 40,000 teachers left the job. Only half of the required number of secondary school teachers are being recruited in England, and 1,500 fewer primary school teachers.

One of the reasons is pay: the starting salary of a newly-qualified

teacher is £30,000. But, for example, at an international school in the United Arab Emirates, a just-qualified teacher can get £38,000 - and tax-free.

The strike over pay didn't help: for teachers in England it yielded a miserly 6.5% increase and in Scotland, 14% spread over 3 years - when at its peak RPI inflation was 14.9%!

For the newly-qualified teachers of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), there's a "special offer" from the government of £1,500 to £5,000/year, but it's often "paid" against

what they might owe on student loans.

The real issue for most teachers has nothing to do with pay, of course. It's the workload, the constant, dictatorial memos prescribing what they must do, the narrow-minded curriculum, overcrowded classes, lack of equipment, pupils in poverty and buildings falling apart... And the shortage of staff, due to actual cuts and the vicious circle of sickness absence, means teachers are always covering many other classes in addition to their own... There can't be no real "fix" for this other than a social revolution!

Ramped-up Big Brother in our schools...

Within days of the Hamas 7 October attack inside Israel, teachers in many schools across Britain were told by heads not to bring up "Palestine, Israel, Ukraine or Russia" in lessons. This policy was then reiterated in a letter from Gillian Keegan (Education Secretary) claiming that it was in order: "[to prevent] an atmosphere of intimidation and fear". However predictably, many pupils asked teachers about these wars - some who are directly touched by them, but many just concerned to know more.

Kids can decide

Some kids showed their support "for Palestine" by colouring flags, wearing pins, or sometimes organising their

own small demonstrations in the playground. And no wonder, since the official position of the school was to remain completely silent on the topic. But teachers were asked to intervene by removing flags etc., and shutting down dialogue. There was to be no attempt to explain the history of the region, nor the recent events.

This censorship was explained to teachers as a "Solutions-not-Sides" approach and was supposedly aimed at reinforcing "British values" like "the rule of law" - side by side with... "freedom of speech"! Obviously, pupils are still waiting for the "solution" bit. But they luckily got force-fed a talk about the "poppy appeal" on the week of armistice day!

Their surveillance state

If teachers say anything "unofficial", they are threatened with being reported under the "Safeguarding Concern" procedure! This is far more serious than a disciplinary, since it involves the police as part of the "Prevent" counter-terrorism measures. This program was introduced in the aftermath of several terror attacks and it's administered within schools by designated "safeguarding" officers. Pupils typing what these guys might regard as suspicious words on their keyboards are immediately flagged up under an electronic surveillance system - and face investigation under "Prevent". Indeed, "Big Brother" already permanently installed in schools, is once more on high alert.

King's Cross railway station (London)**RDG proposal to the RMT: We're voting no!**

Let's be clear. We cannot agree to the latest proposal from the bosses in the Rail Delivery Group. So we'll vote "NO" in this "electronic referendum". And some of us already have.

Mick Lynch said the proposal "is different from before". But in fact it's not. If anything it's worse. Why? The "unconditional" pay offer for 2022-23 (and it's still 5% when inflation was 3X as much at the time!) is actually conditional on us agreeing the whole process, which kick-starts the talks over cuts

to everything, company by company, meant to start in February and end in April. Our strength in numbers is also lost.

In the meantime our strike mandate is cancelled, so it's a "no strike agreement"! Then in April 2024, if we want to fight the cuts which the train operating companies definitely want to make, and we vote for a new strike, the RDG threatens us with compulsory redundancies! In fact the so-called "job security" Lynch talks about, which is only granted till the end of



2024 anyway, would be out the window! This proposal belongs in the dustbin. ☐

• Railway ticket offices to stay open: U-turn or 360-degree turn?

Under the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, English train operators were required to consult London TravelWatch and Transport Focus over the proposed 1,007 ticket office closures which would have cut around 4,000 jobs. The consultation ran between 5 July and 1 September 2023, following an extension by train operators in July due to "lack of documents".

After months of campaigning by

organisations representing the interests of the disabled and elderly, the unions, passengers' groups, and constituency MPs, the government's U-turn was no surprise.

Even the Director of Strategy, Policy and Reform at the Office of Rail and Road stated that "I genuinely do not understand some of the proposals that have been put forward. I do not think there are answers yet to some of the proposals, so already we are starting to

think, 'Well, how would that work?'...".

The government officials and Parliamentary Transport Committee were, however, only concerned that the proposals "go too far and too fast", implying that smaller and slower steps towards achieving these proposals would have been acceptable. This is precisely the worry of ticket office workers; that the cuts will still go ahead, by stealth.

• GG needs a strike

So at last, there's a strike ballot organised over pay at Gate Gourmet. According to the RMT, the bosses refuse to discuss with them, or just don't turn up to negotiations. We aren't surprised. We know the only thing that'll make GG sit up and pay attention is if we actually go on strike.

[King's X Workers' Platform 15/11/23]

• 40% of trains?

The Strikes Minimum Service Act was introduced on 7 November. Transport Secretary Harper says he wants to ensure that "at least 40% of a standard timetable remains operational on strike days". RMT and ASLEF officials have convened a special conference to discuss how they'll "react"... We suggest they laugh Harpy out of court. [King's X Workers' Platform 15/11/23]

• Why bother?

Atalian cleaners are meant to get new uniforms soon, with the "OCS" logo on them, after OCS merged with Atalian earlier this year. However, if the fabric's as cheap and the uniforms as bad as those we have now, the bosses won't see their new logo anywhere: we'll carry on wearing other clothes which we can actually work in. [King's X Workers' Platform 15/11/23]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**BMW Cowley: resisting the bosses' chaos!**

On 13th November, the new shift pattern, the so-called "Gear 1", finally came in - almost a month later than BMW had planned. It has meant that BMW has got rid of 1/5th of our agency workmates from Staffline - across the assembly line and the paint shop (around 600 workers!) - some of whom have been working in the plant up to 4 years or more!

As for R&H (logistics contractor), even if there have been no job cuts announced, the night shift which will now be expected to work just 4/5 days, has had its pay cut by 20%. On

top of this, workers have the prospect of 9 unpaid weeks of layoffs next year and a new overloading "logistics system" - so they are currently having a strike ballot!

In fact, in the run-up to this "shift change" things didn't go quite as planned for BMW. Many of our workmates - including some who weren't dismissed - left in advance, resulting in regular stoppages of the line. Management tried unsuccessfully to fill the gaps by getting us to learn more processes, and in the end had to resort to begging Staffline workers who they



had selected for the sack, to stay for a few more weeks... Many said no. As the saying goes: the boss needs you, but you don't need the boss! ☐

• Are they winding us up?

What's the hold-up confirming our leave requests for Xmas? Many of us have far-away places to get to, and need to book our flights. And while we can afford to, instead of waiting while BMW sits on our requests and the prices climb sky-high!

[Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/11/23]

• Just pay the lay-offs!

BMW tells us that 26 February-1 March will be a full shutdown, which we are "required to take as annual leave". Is that in order to get paid? And what if we've not got enough annual leave after all the other shut-outs BMW imposed on us? Or just don't want to take our holidays then? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/11/23]

• Whack a mole hole

When managers want us to know 10 or more processes, it's not so that we can have better job rotation! No, they just want to move us wherever and whenever they want, to fill in the gaps in their stoppage-ridden line. No matter how much they move us, there's always a gap somewhere. Funny, that! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 07/11/23]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

They're still trying to cut our jobs

Those of us branded supernumerary and destined for redeployment have had to meet with special "redeployment managers". We were given a booklet entitled "Choices", where we read that by cutting our jobs they were providing us with a "fantastic opportunity" to find "brand new roles" and "up-skill" ourselves! They even brought in someone to tell us to consider becoming self-employed and setting up our own businesses!

In Distribution, where there aren't any "supernumeraries", managers are cutting all morning shifts. They want more of us starting at midnight - or even 2, 3 or 4am!

• Letter from the North-West

The trials and tribulations against the union reps sacked during our strike go on and on. We are all still waiting for our mates to have their sackings and suspensions reviewed. Justice delayed is justice denied. Some have waited so long they've given up and got other jobs. Others remain stuck in limbo waiting for their cases to be gazed upon by someone they'll never meet.

And what about these trials for the letter

Not only would this end whatever social life we have left, but it would have a knock-on effect on Delivery mates, whose working day would end as late as 7.30pm (as opposed to 2.30pm). Never mind that the businesses we all deliver to would be closed by then...

Despite arguing that so many of us are surplus, RM bosses just got fined £5.6m for not meeting 1st and 2nd class delivery targets under the Universal Service Obligation. By posting a loss of £319m for the six months to September, they're making the point that the USO should be dumped (or subsidised!); the new CEO of parent company IDS, says it's



"simply not sustainable to maintain a network built for 20bn letters when we're now only delivering 7bn". Parcel delivery, on the other hand is profitable and RM's parcel super-hubs are ready, along with a reorganised delivery network. And no doubt, that is where all "fit" redeployed supernumeraries are bound... if the bosses have their way... ☐

• Too little, too late!

Union officials sent us a "Letter to Branches" (LTB) saying that out of over 400 workmates dismissed during our strikes, a decision has been reached for... only 82! And apparently out of these 82 cases, 2 are still accused of "misconduct", 10 cases require a "mediation" process and 11 are referred

back to the review panel for further investigation. So only 59 workmates have got their jobs back, out of 400?! What happened to all the rest? [*Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 15/11/23*]

• The smallest score wins!

Parcel Sorting Machine managers stopped posting on the wall our individual "scores" of parcels processed per shift. They'd

No one can believe in the latest bribe scheme (a conditional "bonus") we are being offered over the busiest time of year. Part timers get less but have to do the same work, sorters and porters will only get it if the letter carriers deliver everything and everyone only gets part of the cash if every office across the country gets rid of everything. We'd sooner have a packet of seeds (yes, that used to be our Xmas Box!) than empty promises!

hoped to make us compete against each other to increase our speed... but we didn't fall for their stupid nonsense. It hasn't stopped them from coming to tell us what they think about our individual "scores". They don't even realise that these scores aren't comparable - and depend entirely on the size and weight of the parcels we each have to deal with! [*Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant Mail Centre 15/11/23*]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)

• Rejected!

We had a chance to say what we thought about Ford's miserable pay offer at the union mass meetings! And later during the week, shop stewards told us the final result from our vote was 71% for rejection! What we want now is our strike ballots, ASAP! [*Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 19/11/23*]

• They dug the hole, they can lie in it

So DEP management gives machines

away to Halewood, then suggests we might "like" to work a 144 shift as a result, to get the required machined bits for Panther Assy? Who do they think they are - and what do they think we are? [*Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 08/11/23*]

• We're not dying for this

Those of us who've worked a 144 pattern as a result know how it messes us up: 12 hour shifts are a killer, in every sense. There's an old saying which Ford should learn from... "cut your coat according



to your cloth". If there aren't enough machines - or workers - then the output has to suffer, not the outputter. It's quite obvious. [*Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 08/11/23*]

The end of the United Auto Workers' strike

The United Auto Workers union in the US ended its six-week strike after reaching agreements with Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, the parent company of Fiat-Chrysler. The new "militant" UAW leader Shawn Fain has hailed it as a "record contract". He claims the union has won a 25% pay rise. But that's not true. Workers will get an 11% raise this year, but then 14% is spread out over the rest of the 5-year

(not 4-year as was reported!) contract, and includes extra COLA (cost of living allowance) payments. This definitely does not make up for what workers have lost over the past decade - which comes to as much as 46%!

Most importantly, the union's demands included an end to the multi-tier workforce. But beyond some minor improvements, such as reaching full-pay faster, the deal does not end tiers in the workforce, nor the use

of temps. The UAW leadership's insistence on calling out selected workers at a few plants at a time and thus refusing to use the collective power of the whole workforce, let alone addressing non-auto sections has resulted in minimal gain. What's more the workers themselves had no say whatsoever over the conduct of their strike. But next time they won't be duped. So it's a lesson learned.

Their economy

The bosses' favourite magazine - *The Economist* - had a leading article on the 2 November entitled "*The world economy is defying gravity*". It went on to explain that while the US economy, which sets the mark for all others, "*roared in the third quarter, growing at a stunning annualised pace of 4.9%*", but that "*this good cheer cannot last. The foundations for today's growth look unstable. Peer ahead, and threats abound*".

The truth is that the capitalist economy in its declining years literally exists on "*a wing and*

a prayer". It no longer has the strong foundation of solid material production of real value - but relies on speculative (financial) markets to multiply "profits" from interest - that is out of credit and debt. And today the bulk of this debt and corresponding interest is generated by governments... It's what makes "*the world go round*" right now - and it's why interest rates are acting as brake and/or accelerator of the economy and why whether they go up or down is so crucial - and not to only home owners with mortgages!

TEETERING ON THE BRINK

The IMF says the states of Britain, France, Italy and Japan are all likely to run huge budget deficits in 2023 of at least 5% of GDP. And that in the 12 months to September America's deficit "*was a staggering \$2trn, or 7.5% of GDP*". *The Economist* calls this "*jaw-droppingly reckless*". And points out that government debt in the rich world is now higher, as a share of GDP, than at any time since after the Napoleonic wars... This is economic crash territory. And everyone knows what happened after the last big one. ☐

• Bankers: getting what they wanted?

The Bank of England formally announced the decision to lift the cap on bankers' bonuses from 31 October.

In 2014, the European Union introduced this in order to limit these ridiculous bonuses to 100% of basic salaries - or 200% with shareholder approval!

This was supposed to curb risk-taking in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, since these guys would be among the speculating elite...

At the time, the City, via their men in government, the Cameron-Clegg coalition, were quick to call this restriction

a "scandal"! And they were only forced to back down after the European Court of Justice rejected Britain's challenge to EU legislation.

Since then of course, banks had already found loopholes to lavish money on their executives, with Barclays increasing salaries by a third to compensate them for any future "loss". But the bankers would rather there were no rules restricting their great appetites.

So in autumn and winter 2022, the two Chancellors of the Exchequer who followed each other - first Kwasi Kwarteng and then Jeremy Hunt - both announced

they'd scrap the cap. Their argument? To make the British financial services industry "*more globally competitive*"! Whether this is enough to get the banking HQs which left after Brexit to come back, is another question.

• Super-rich let off the hook

The Panama, Paradise and Pandora papers were a series of over 30 million documents leaked between 2016 and 2021, revealing the hidden bank accounts and corporate ownerships set-up in tax havens by the super-rich to dodge the taxman. Most of these tricks, however, are absolutely legal. The rich and powerful are able to reduce their tax bills to peanuts - not like the PAYE working class! The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which first published the papers, says that between 2012 and 2021, authorities opened just 23 cases against bankers and other financial insiders for failing to report money laundering suspicions - an average of just 2 per year!

That the capitalist class is made up

of thieves, is no big news. But given the revolving door between these thieves and government, it was a bit surprising when earlier this year, ministers said they would be doubling the maximum sentence for tax fraud to 14 years. Has this acted as a deterrent? Probably not. When the super-rich are caught red-handed, the consequences almost always turn out to be nil. Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone (exposed in the Pandora papers) admitted £400m in tax fraud and didn't get one day in jail. Next to be shown leniency was Tory donor and JCB boss Anthony Bamford (exposed in the Panama papers), who's dodged £500m in taxes! Of course when working people miss even a penny in their tax returns, HMRC is on our case in a flash!

Getting fried by the full force of capitalist law

Sam Bankman-Fried, the 31-year-old founder of FTX, one of the largest cryptocurrency exchanges in the world, was convicted by a jury of fraud and money laundering in New York on 2 November and is due for sentencing next year in March. According to the Financial Times, he would face 110 years in prison if he received the maximum penalty on all counts on which he was convicted! He will appeal...

Cryptocurrencies are of course dodgy. They were first used precisely to avoid any scrutiny or regulation by banking authorities - in other words by crooks. Their value is very volatile. Several have collapsed already. However, FTX didn't collapse because of the inherent dodginess of crypto, but because of the inherent dodginess of Bankman-Fried. Instead of using his own assets to pay his expenses or to pay his creditors, or fund loans to his other companies, he stole investors' money for these transactions and then covered it up.

The irony is that Bankman-Fried made his name in the first place by giving money away, and even said it was the purpose of his business. He gave Biden's presidential campaign \$5.2m and tens of millions more were given to Democratic party campaigns and even pandemic prevention research. He faces another trial next March for defrauding banks and bribery, before final sentencing. It's likely he'll be sent to prison because defrauding "your own" is one of the crimes the capitalist class can't forgive.



ex-PM Boris Johnson with Tory donor and JCB boss Anthony Bamford

REFUGEES CAUGHT BETWEEN AFGHANI AND PAKISTANI REACTION

International

On 3 October Pakistan's interim interior minister, Sarfaraz Bugti, announced that all "illegal refugees and migrants" had until 1 November to leave the country. An estimated 4.4m Afghans are - or have been - resident in Pakistan. Many have lived there since 1995 when they fled from the first Taliban regime, others since 2001 when the US invaded and still others who came recently, when the US finally left Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

Bugti blames Afghans for the almost 300 terror attacks in the country this year, claiming (without evidence) that of the 24 suicide attacks, "14 were carried out by Afghan nationals". He accused the Taliban of giving safe haven to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a home-grown Pakistani fundamentalist Islamic organisation, which he claims organised the attacks.

Blasts from the past

This isn't the first time refugees have been blamed for domestic terrorism. When the TTP was most active, between 2016-18 as many as 2.6mn Afghans were expelled and a finger was pointed at the then US-backed Afghan government for "sheltering terrorists". Never mind that the majority of TTP members were, and are, Pakistani!

Of course, Bugti's decree comes in the context of the approaching January 2024 general election and a severely aggravated economic crisis in the context of huge food price inflation (up 27%) linked to the Ukraine war and disastrous recent floods. But also an utterly corrupted government. It is always handy to have "foreigners" to blame... but also to expropriate!

Indeed what has been perpetrated against the Afghans is an act of large-scale robbery. Businesses and assets have been confiscated. Each family was only permitted to take with them Rs 50,000 (£143), limited belongings and they had to leave all livestock behind! Robbing and then expelling 2m people allowed Pakistan's ministers



(and military, of course) to fill their own pockets and reduce the population.

The expulsion

From 3 October, municipal corporations began to bulldoze Afghan homes and shanty towns. Police arrested and beat Afghans on the street. The government converted colleges into detention camps in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Attock for those who did not leave by the deadline. This brutal intimidation was defended by caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, who said, "we will push the aliens back to their country".

More than 2m Afghans had to pack up their lives and cross over the border. Many of them face certain persecution. And many were born in Pakistan and have never been to Afghanistan before! Worse, the Afghan state is already reliant on humanitarian aid to feed its population. After 40 years of war the country remains devastated; there are no jobs and the recent earthquake left 114,000 people fully dependent on humanitarian aid! How is it supposed to cope with this huge influx?

Imperialism's responsibility

Then there are the 2,000-plus ex-British Army employees, who have the right to be resettled in Britain. Very few have been resettled in the last two years.

Those remaining in Pakistan have either had to go into hiding to avoid the Pakistani police or are forced to return to Afghanistan where they face execution.

However it's not just these former translators for the army. etc., who should be entitled to the protection of the imperialist powers which invaded their country and occupied it in 2001. They owe all of the Afghans, big time.

It is incredible how, when the catastrophic withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan took place in 2021, they left the country utterly devastated, seizing and then keeping the whole of the state's assets and plunging the country into even worse deprivation, if that was possible.

Today, once more, the victims of their decades-long policies are meant to pay the price.

We should remember that all of this began when US backwoods politicians decided to play out a Cold War End-Game against the Soviet Union by arming as their proxy, fundamentalist Afghan nationalists. They were the direct forerunners of Al Qaeda, the Taliban itself, the TTP and the latest and most extreme, ISIS-Khorasan, organisations which all remain active today and which come back to bite their creators time and again, proving that there can be no end to this imperialist "game", unless it involves the end of imperialism itself. □

Ukraine war: Zelensky is running out of soldiers - and western credit

It is now more than 600 days since the Ukraine war began. And despite the stalemate at the front (unchanged since June), the bloodshed continues.

There are repeated offensives to try to capture territory in Russian-held East Ukraine. But fighting in the Donetsk region's heavy mine-fields means as many as 800 deaths per day.

Russia has officially recorded 310,650 deaths, but Ukrainian figures remain undisclosed. Some say the total for both sides could be as many as 700,000. However we do know that the fatalities include 9,806 civilians (on both sides) - relatively few compared to

the 12,000 Palestinian civilian deaths in just one month.

By now, the average age in the Ukrainian army is 43, as most young soldiers (conscripted starts at 16) have perished at the front. A soldier who was asked about firearms not being issued said "we don't have the men to use the weapons, even if they came back with it". The army is running out of men to throw into this proxy war against Russia, which NATO has no qualms about fighting "to the last Ukrainian".

On 4 November, Euronews quoted a senior Ukrainian military official, General Valery Zaluzhny, as conceding that

Ukraine could not win, and a 35-year-old fighting near Bakhmut: "I've been saying that for some time now already. Step by step we're losing the war".

The government has carried out reshuffles of draft officers in an attempt to prevent soldiers from bribing them for leave. Generals are refusing orders to launch offensives. There is discontent among the population due to scarcity and corruption scandals. Nevertheless Zelensky is resisting pressure from the West to start peace talks. He told *Time* magazine that "Nobody believes in winning this war like I do!" But then again, it is hardly up to him.

India-Bangladesh

LETTER FROM INDIA: MODI'S ABOUT-TURN ON PALESTINE-ISRAEL

PM Modi took to Twitter within hours of the Hamas attack on 7 October to declare "we stand in solidarity with Israel". This signals a complete break with this country's past support for the Palestinians. Accordingly, on October 27th, the delegate to the UN abstained when the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, objecting that the text did not condemn Hamas.

India's independence was "granted" by Britain just one year before the creation of the Israeli state. The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was among the few who voted against this at the UN in 1948, stating that it would disenfranchise Palestinians. India was the first non-Arab country to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the legitimate representative of Palestine in the 1970s, giving it full diplomatic status. And diplomatic ties with Israel were only established in 1992.

For guns and pogroms

Modi's support for Israel is no surprise, of course. Over the past decade, the Indian military has become the Israeli defence

industry's biggest foreign customer, accounting for 46% of Israel's weapons exports! These include missiles, drones, border-security equipment and surveillance software. Gautam Adani, the Indian billionaire businessman close to Modi, paid £1bn to "acquire" the Israeli port of Haifa this year!

But "standing with Israel" also serves Modi's domestic policy, which has always played on anti-Muslim bigotry, (very often lethal) and particularly in the context of an upcoming general election. That said, the Zionist state which proclaims Israel for the Jewish people, as "chosen race", has long been a model (and fairy tale) for Modi's BJP, whose policy is to turn India into a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu-only state), based on "ethnic purity".

A BJP Member of Parliament (MLA), Basangaouda Patil, tweeted on 8 October, that India "may face the situation that Israel is confronting today if we don't stand up against politically motivated radicalism". All Muslims are placed in the same category as Hamas. The BJP used WhatsApp to urge Hindus to arm themselves and boycott Muslim businesses: "In the future, India could also face conspiracies and attacks like

Israel". An anchor on a right-wing Indian news channel told viewers: "The same radical jihadist Islamist terrorist thinking that Israel is a victim of, we are a victim of as well ... Israel is fighting this war on behalf of all of us".

Bans and proscriptions

In line with this escalation against Muslims - and it has never just been a matter of words; there is constant communal violence orchestrated by the government-linked quasi-fascist thugs of the RSS - the government has outlawed all solidarity for Palestine, as being "pro-Hamas". Demonstrators in Delhi and Kolkata protesting the bombardment of Gaza were beaten and arrested. Lectures, plays and film screenings about Palestine have been banned, with police cases made against the organisers.

Of course an escalation of anti-Muslim and communal attacks by Modi's thugs was to be expected. But the Israeli government's attack against Gaza has given Modi's government the chance to impose a repressive clamp-down on any and all opposition. Suella Braverman would feel welcomed here. ☐

Bangladesh: the garment workers' strike continues

Since 22 October, garment workers in Bangladesh have been taking militant strike action for a pay rise, demanding an increase in their monthly minimum wage from Tk8000 (£59) to Tk20,393 (£151). Their strike continues at the time of writing, despite attacks against strikers organised by the thugs of the ruling Awami Party and police, which have already resulted in the death of several workers.

Bangladesh is the world's second largest garment exporter with 3,500 factories employing 4m mainly women workers who make clothes for brands such as Levi's, H&M, Zara and Gap. After the rise in food prices over the past period, their already very low monthly pay of £59 has become a starvation wage. It's barely a quarter of the £247/m needed to pay for the minimum necessities of life, and even way short of the union demand.

They spread their action

The strikes began in 68 factories in Dhaka's industrial districts after bosses refused to offer an increase to more than £77/m. After Awami League thugs entered a factory with iron rods and beat one of the workers to death, the workforce armed itself with wooden sticks and marched through the

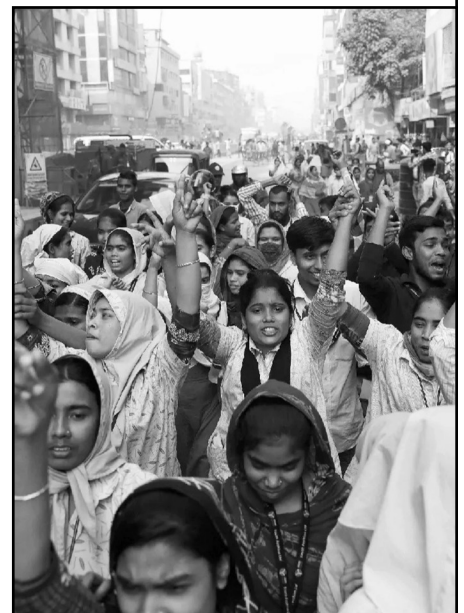
industrial district calling on all other workers to strike, throwing bricks at the windows of working factories. They blocked roads and burnt down four textile plants. The police reacted with rubber bullets, tear gas, sound grenades, water cannon and baton charges. But this only helped spread the strike further, and by 2 November, 600 factories were shut.

On November 7, government, bosses and union representatives announced a new pay offer of £93. In protest, 10,000 workers took to the streets. The police opened fire, killing another worker. For now 25,000 workers from 100 factories are still on strike. But it seems (from a distance) that the tide has turned. The bosses have launched a partial lockout closing 150 factories, while the government has started an offensive against the movement, arresting 112 workers and filing cases against 11,000. It continues to use paramilitary forces against the workers (Bangladesh has a special Industrial Police force to police the industrial areas). There is no new wage offer.

The profiteers who benefit

It's not just local bosses, police or Awami League thugs and cops who have these workers' blood on their hands,

however. Behind them are the shareholders of western brands who make billions, thanks to the industry's dangerous, sweatshop conditions. Who can forget the 1,134 workers sewing clothes for Primark and Bonmarche, crushed to death in April 2013 when Dhaka's Rana Plaza building collapsed on them? The garment workers' cause is the cause of all workers.



TRUMP'S SO-CALLED "ABRAHAM ACCORDS" AND THE "OLD" 2-STATE NON-SOLUTION

Palestine-Israel

The 7 October attack by Hamas put paid to the signing of a "normalisation" agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Some would argue that this was its main aim.

Normalisation was part of a process initiated by Donald Trump, under so-called Abraham Accords, whereby all of the Arab countries would sign recognition treaties with Israel, breaking with their former commitment to make this conditional on Israel's acknowledgement of the Palestinians' right to a state. It means de facto, the abandonment of the so-called 2-state solution. In fact Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates,

Morocco and Sudan had already signed, although under pressure of today's events, they've expelled their Israeli ambassadors.

That said, by now, few believe in a 2-state solution - originally put forward under the Oslo Accords by international peacemakers in 1993. For Palestinians on the West Bank and living in East Jerusalem, the relentless further expropriation of their homes and land, along with the blockade of the Gaza Strip from 2005 onwards has exposed the Accords' absurdity. But it also makes little sense to Israelis who live in a militarised, virtual police state which, due to the exclusion of

Palestinians (aka, apartheid) only renders their own lives more and more insecure. Recent polls among Israelis and Palestinians show that only 32% and 28% respectively, think that 2 states is a feasible way forward (quoted in the Economist 1/11/23).

Despite this, Biden has now revived talk of 2 states, the last version of which (designed by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner), was "almost laughingly biased in favour of Israel, and dead on arrival". Of course, the only viable future for all the peoples of this territory - Israelis and Palestinians - would be to share it on equal terms. □

• Gazan workers tortured and expelled

In the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attack, Israeli authorities began rounding up Palestinians from Gaza who were working in Israel. At least 3,000 were arrested, tagged and sent to the Anatot and Ofer military prisons. There they were beaten up, interrogated and tortured into "confessing" that they had links with Hamas. At least one worker, 61-year-old Mansour Warsh Agha, was returned to Gaza in a body bag.

Of course, the Israeli military knew perfectly well who these workers were, since the 18,500 Palestinians from Gaza, who had only recently been granted special work visas, had all been through extremely thorough security checks.

Some workers were released from jail and dumped on the West Bank. When they were finally allowed to return to Gaza, in early November, many of them found their homes destroyed and learnt

that family members had been killed. Obviously no Gazan worker is now permitted to return to work in Israel - if they would want to, given the current situation. But their jobs were a lifeline for their families in a blockaded enclave where over 60% of the population was unemployed. For now, however, given the current situation, their main problem is how to stay out of range of Israeli bombs.

• Jewish people say "not in my name"

Before the 7 October attack, Netanyahu's government was probably the most hated in Israel's 75 year history. The horror of the Hamas incursion did for a time unify the population behind it, but today it's only just clinging on to power. The families of 239 hostages, still held in Gaza at the time of writing, organised a long march to Jerusalem, accusing Netanyahu of having the hostages' blood on his hands. They point out that his indiscriminate bombardment could already have killed some of them.

Many Jewish voices are raised in Israel against the war, and given the rigor of their media, they're even more audible there. This underlines the fact that opposition to the Zionism espoused by Netanyahu - for a Jewish-only state of Israel, from the river to the sea - has come above all, from

Jewish people themselves. Throughout the world, "Jewish Voice for Peace" organises anti-war protests. Another US-based group, "IfNotNow" wrote on 7 October: "We cannot and will not say today's actions by Palestinian militants are unprovoked. The strangling siege on Gaza is a provocation. Settlers terrorizing entire Palestinian villages, soldiers raiding and demolishing Palestinian homes... These are the provocations of the most extreme right-wing government in Israel's history".

Today, Israeli activists defy arrest for organising anti-war meetings and support for Palestinians after a severe clamp-down by the police and the MI5 equivalent, Shin Bet. They're clear that they live in an apartheid state. The irony is that if they said that over here, they'd risk being accused of a "hate crime"!



Solidarity... or strikes?

Here in Britain, Palestine solidarity activists have held sit-ins and protests at London's King's Cross, Liverpool Street and Glasgow train stations - which Transport minister Harper has tried to prohibit. They've also targeted the weapons industry, in particular, the Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems which operates several sites across England.

The gates to Instro Precision in Kent which supplies weapon sights and

targeting devices to Elbit were blocked by individual members of different trade unions, responding to a call for solidarity from Palestinian unions. Protestors also occupied the roof of an Elbit drone engine factory in Staffordshire and sprayed red paint on Elbit's headquarters in Bristol, and on Thales (Elbit's partner) HQ in London.

Conspicuous though, was the lack of communication between activists and the workers in these factories and offices. Nor was there any attempt to

involve railway workers in the station protests. Which means that these "solidarity demonstrations" remain just that; demonstrations by outsiders. It would be quite another matter if workers in weapons factories stopped production or train drivers refused to move military equipment. Belgian transport workers' unions and the union of Barcelona's dockers have said they will refuse to transport any arms shipments for this conflict. Maybe that's a start.

Palestine-Israel

THE WAR ON GAZA: CONTAINED WITHIN "ISRAELI" TERRITORY... FOR NOW

From the start of the Israeli declaration of "war to the end" against Hamas, there has been concern that this could spark a much larger regional conflict, or worse...

In the first days, the US sent 2 of its aircraft carriers to the East Mediterranean and additional forces to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Britain sent 2 Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, the Lyme Bay, which is a huge landing ship, "able to deliver troops, vehicles, stores and ammunition" (according to the navy's website), and support "ongoing waves of an amphibious assault" - and the Argus, which is a fully-equipped 100-bed hospital ship with 40 medical staff. It's also sent two sophisticated Poseidon 8 surveillance and attack aircraft, 3 Merlin helicopters and a company of Royal Marines. And of course there are already 3,500 British soldiers stationed permanently on Cyprus. So apparently the imperialist armies are "ready". But given these impressive resources, have they done anything to offer help to the 2.3 million Palestinians trapped by the Israeli army inside the tiny Gaza strip and being bombed to dust? Apparently not.

Talking up the threat of Iran

In fact there are also around 30,000 permanent US military personnel stationed across the Middle East. And since the beginning of the conflict, they've been carrying out so-called "preventive" bomb attacks in Syria and North Iraq against militias which the US claims are "linked to Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah".

Never mind that the Iranian leadership has made it clear that it has no intention of interfering in the conflict and that it has vehemently denied supporting Hamas's 7 October assault inside Israel. Lebanon's Hezbollah is, however, involved in an ongoing exchange of fire on Israel's northern border, a conflict which has its own history and dynamic, since Lebanon has been home to Palestinian refugees ever since 1948, which has led to many violent Israeli incursions into this territory.

So what about the wider region? Arab League leaders - part of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (with Turkey and Pakistan) - have convened 2 emergency summits. But they are confining themselves to rhetoric. They condemn "Israeli aggression" and make



pleas to the "international community" to "compel Israel to abide by international humanitarian law and the UN resolutions". As for practical help, only the Turkish regime has done anything - sending 2 hospital ships which are anchored off Sinai, but so far they are denied direct access to Gaza by both Egypt and Israel.

Very awkward alliances

The West's hysteria over Iran-Hezbollah recalls the pretexts which prefaced the war on Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11 in 2001 - the famous "weapons of mass destruction" lie. It is evident that the Iranian regime, unlike Israel, has no nuclear weapons - and that it has no desire to get involved in a war it cannot win. As for Egypt, it remains obedient to the US hand that feeds it.

There are many ironies and contradictory positions among the Arab countries. So for instance, the Houthi leadership in Yemen is the only regime which has so far acted on its word in support of the Palestinians. It has sent several cruise missiles (apparently all shot down) into Israel. But since 2014, the Houthis, who are allied to Iran, have been subject to a brutal war waged against them by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates - with British and US weapons - which has seen over 400,000 people killed and millions displaced. Western leaders promoted this horrific slaughter,

since Iran was backing Yemen's Houthis. But it has hardly featured on western television screens, even though the UN described it as "the world's worst humanitarian crisis".

The real threat is from the "ground"

Evidently the current conflict has set a cat among the Arab regimes' pigeons: they are now obliged to appear unified against "Israeli aggression". And not least because of the huge groundswell of support among their populations for the Palestinians, with whom so many ordinary Middle Eastern people have long identified, and whose resistance and uprisings are regarded as heroic and an example to be followed...

These populations of poor workers and peasants can be in no doubt as to the "progressive role" played by the leaders of the rich imperialist world, but also the abject submission of their own leaders. And that is the real "regional threat", which these leaderships have always tried to counter through sponsoring organisations which glorify national, religious, ethnic or racial difference. Yes, their biggest fear is the threat of the poor masses joining together across all these divisions which have been carved into their ranks - and fighting for a collective future based on their identity of interests as one unified, international class. □

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

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

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