

# WORKERS' fight



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

## THEY LIE AND THEY SPONSOR KILLERS: AND THEY CLAIM TO BE FIT TO RULE OVER US?!

Cynical lies have been the daily fare from Westminster's politicians over the atrocities perpetrated by the Israeli army in Gaza up to now.

Workers are used to this when it comes to government policy, which has collapsed the NHS and tripled the number living in extreme poverty. But the 100% support for Netanyahu's systematic slaughter - and against public opinion - seemed incomprehensible. Except that it's not unprecedented; it happened in Iraq.

So when the Israeli ground offensive against Rafah was announced, Channel 4 news invited Israel's official gas-lighter in chief, Eylon Levy, to justify it. Incredibly he claimed that if civilian deaths resulted, it would be the fault of "humanitarian organisations" who failed to "help" the Israeli army find a "safe place" for the over 1m Palestinians to flee to! And this, when the Israeli regime no longer talks to the main humanitarian organisation - the UN - accusing it of supporting Hamas!

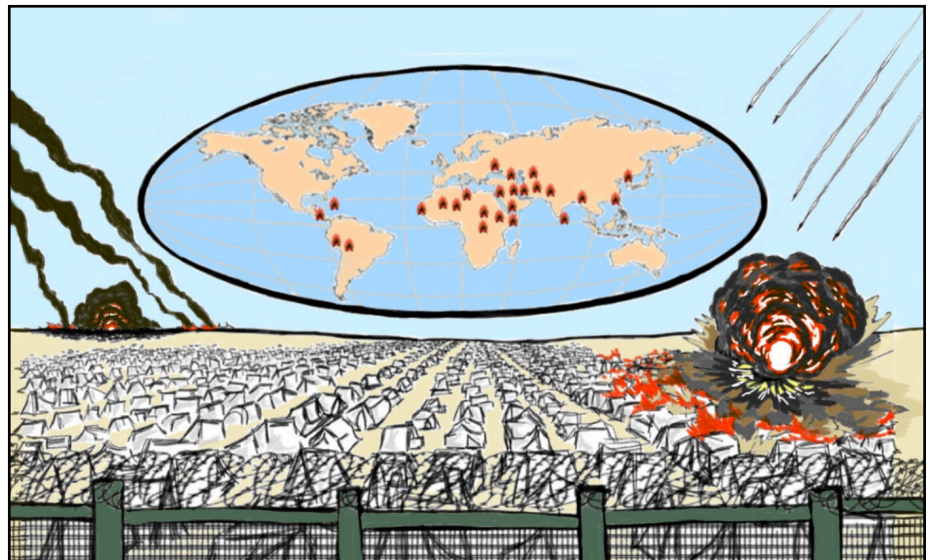
### **...4 months and more limbless children**

It's been nearly 4 months - while Israel's destructive army has swept from the north to the south - before any western politician has even dared to "caution" Netanyahu over his merciless brutality.

In fact he has every reason to think he can get away with what many consider to be genocide, given the support he's received from the US and Britain. He even claims every precaution is taken to avoid civilian deaths. Yes, after over 28,000 killed, at least half of them women and children.

Do Israeli warmongers and their backers really imagine that thinking people in the rest of the world - or in Israel itself, where Netanyahu polls just 15% - go along with any of this?

Netanyahu treats people as idiots - claiming that his aim is to eradicate



Hamas. Which he knows that he cannot do - and that the more he carries on with his bloody campaign, the more recruits for Hamas there will be.

### **They feed the conspiracies**

So, in the context of such spectacular cynicism on all sides and the mass revenge taken against a whole population, it's not surprising that Labour's Rochdale by-election candidate, Azhar Ali, could claim that Israeli security forces deliberately allowed the 7 October Hamas incursion. Such "theories" are widespread on social media.

Having suspended Ali for this, Labour was left without a candidate. And Starmer has no way of digging himself out of the hole he created for himself since his declaration of unreserved solidarity with the killer Netanyahu. Indeed, Ali was only chosen in the opportunist hope that he'd help Labour regain the support of voters of Muslim background, who'd vowed never to vote Labour again.

Ironically, Tory Foreign Secretary, David Cameron may even have one over on Labour, having asked Netanyahu, to "think again" and talking about recognition of an independent Palestinian state. An empty declaration, but nevertheless opposing Netanyahu's de facto takeover of Gaza.

In the meantime ministerial war talk continues. Do they really intend to engage in a war with Russia, or Iran? Or is this really about the economic disaster of their capitalist system and the tried and tested blurring of class lines, using the spectre of a "common enemy" to avert class war at home - the only war we need!?

Workers can have no truck with these cynical liars, Tory, Labour, nor the rest. We need our own political party fighting for our interests and those of the workers and poor across the globe - Palestinian and Israeli included - against the exploiters and warmongers. It's the only way to ensure that in the future, we'll be free and at peace. ☐

## Middle East

### HANDS OFF THE MIDDLE EAST!

As the death toll among Palestinians reached 28,000, the London protest against the Israeli state's war on Gaza again gathered thousands of demonstrators: probably as many as 200,000.

These demonstrations are the largest in Western countries, most likely due to the diaspora from former British colonies - not only from the Middle East, but also from countries with large Muslim populations like Pakistan, India or Bangladesh. In addition, this time numerous Jewish organisations joined the march, expressing their opposition to Netanyahu's brutal war.

#### The killing goes on

Israel's bombardment of Gaza has intensified in February, particularly in the south. Rafah wasn't spared, despite the fact that this was meant to be a "safe" place. Yet now 1.4m Palestinians are trying to survive there, after the mass exodus from the North, which has been reduced to rubble. In their makeshift tent encampments, now famine and disease also threaten to kill.

But the Israeli army is also intervening on the West Bank. Since October, Military

operations have targeted Jenin, Tulkarm, Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus, resulting in 350 Palestinian deaths and over 3,000 arrests. This ongoing terror campaign by Israeli forces is an attempt to control the West Bank's population and prevent it from organising any kind of fightback in solidarity with Gaza.

#### The wider war

The US has been bombing targets in Iraq and Syria ever since the Gaza war began, ostensibly to cripple militias linked to Iran. On 2 February, one of these strikes killed at least 34 people. US president Biden claimed that this was in retaliation for the deaths of 3 US soldiers in Jordan, killed by a rocket fired by an Iraqi Islamic militia. Then, 2 days later, multiple targets were again struck in Yemen, against the Houthis "threat" to ships entering the Red sea, with British bombers and naval vessels joining in.

It takes the boundless arrogance of Western leaders, who stand with Netanyahu and his Gaza butchery, to pose as victims who "do not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world" (Biden) and who were forced to retaliate in "self-defence" (Sunak)! These

are the leaders of imperialist countries who have plunged the Middle East into a permanent state of war, including a 45-years long embargo of Iran, the 1991 and 2003 invasions of Iraq, the support of Islamic militias during the 2011 Syrian war - and of course the support of Israel in its wars against Lebanon and the Palestinians.

#### An axis of western aggression

And it's these bombings, killings and occupations that recruit to the ranks of Islamic militias, although western leaders never cease to blame the Iranian regime for arming or supporting Hamas, Hezbollah or the Houthis - the so-called axis of resistance.

The imperialist powers - and their axis of aggression - set alight a Middle East tinderbox in 1991 and they have fuelled regional conflict ever since. As for the war against Gaza, Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners would have been forced to call it off long ago, if the US had cut off their supply of weapons and aid. Instead, 5% of Gaza's population is already dead and most of the Strip is already reduced to rubble. ☐

### Northern Ireland: Public service strike "rescues" Stormont!

On 18 January, 170,000 public sector workers across Northern Ireland went on a 24-hour general strike. In Belfast, despite the freezing cold, 100,000 teachers, nurses, civil servants, train and bus drivers, but also the road gritters who joined in support, marched to the City Hall demanding an overdue pay-rise.

The absence of a working government for almost 2 years has meant, not only that the low-paid public sector didn't receive a pay rise, but they also had to contend with a huge leap in their cost of living: in October 2022 inflation hit a high of 14.2% and it's still +5.2% RPI! The NHS waiting lists (the worst in the British Isles) are so long that a third of the population is de facto deprived of any health service... And then there's the housing crisis: there are as many as 32,000 homeless. Four in 10 young people live with their parents.

This strike, which united workers

of all parties and loyalties (whether unionist, republican or neither) not only won workers a pay rise but it also got the Northern Ireland Assembly up

and running again! Yes, after 2 years of stalemate thanks to the Democratic Unionist friends of the Tories, it's back to work... Goes to show, doesn't it!



### ... and behind the scenes

In fact the strike not only forced Britain's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris to pay the money he'd been withholding from the NI public sector workers (£583m) but he also came up, in record time, with a deal which appeased the far-right Democratic Unionists over their supposed Brexit grievances...

They'd been claiming for 2 years that Brexit controls and the "border in the Irish Sea" threatened the "United" Kingdom, and

made a united Ireland more likely. They thus refused to take their own seats in NI's devolved parliament at Stormont Castle. But was that the real reason? In fact the Brexit arrangement, by giving NI the best of both worlds, actually favours NI business...

No, the real reason for this stance by the far-right DUP was that they had been roundly beaten by their rivals, the republican Sinn Fein (29% vs 21.3% of the vote) in the 2022 election, and therefore for the first time, they

would have to bow to a Sinn Fein First Minister - Michelle O'Neill. It was too much to bear!

One can only wonder what other incentive - since the Heaton-Harris deal only involved a very slight rewriting of a few words in the Brexit Windsor Framework - might have been offered to the DUP bigots this time to get them back to Stormont... It's very unlikely to have been a threat - the Tories are hardly hostile to the DUP's gripes, misogyny and ultranationalism!

**This society**

**BUILDING UP TO WAR?**

The largest NATO drill since the end of the Cold War, mobilising armed forces from all 31 member countries including 20,000 from Britain, began in early February. And the generals talked up the prospect of war, citing "Russia" as a "threat".

**Calling for conscripts?**

Chief of staff General "Sir" Patrick Sanders warned in a speech that the regular army and reserves are too small and suggested a "citizen army" might be necessary. Another former general, Nick Carter, estimated that the British military would be able to resist the Russian army for no more than two months.

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps

warned that we are in a "pre-war world", with war possible within 5 years against Russia, China, North Korea and Iran... While a Commons defence committee reported that equipment shortages and an ongoing recruitment crisis mean that Britain's military would be ill-prepared to fight an all-out war.

**"Join the patriot game!"**

Is this serious? Time will tell. But for now, Sunak and Shapps are under pressure to restore the professional army to its former strength (100,000 soldiers in 2010 compared to 74,000 today).

This decline is mainly because young men and women don't want to join up

and if they do they don't stay. The "job", risky or not, pays badly, provides substandard housing and then there's also the bully-ethos.

So after all the recruitment tricks failed and the navy in particular is suffering shortages of sailors, Sunak and Starmer are trying to outdo each other in patriotic rhetoric: it's a duty to "defend your country".

When workers were sent to their deaths in their millions in WW1 and 2 to defend the nation's capitalists and bankers against their rivals, they were told the same lie. As Karl Marx said, workers have no country; the only war we should be fighting is the class war against our exploiters. □

**• The army needs you, but you don't need it!**

In the midst of all this war-talk, the government is trying to prepare the population, but in particular the youth, for war. Whether it's a war against a "foreign enemy" which they have in mind, or war against the working class (given the 2022-3 strike wave!) is still not clear and it's probably both.

The General Sir Patrick Sanders quoted above, has also suggested that young people taking a year off before starting university or a job, could be paid to take part in military summer "boot camps"!

The media has a major role in pro-military propaganda, running advertisements about the wonders of

being "made in the British navy" for instance. They've even promoted the army as a path to "self-improvement" (a bit like yoga?)!

In fact the total number of British army reservists, plus the army regulars is the lowest since the end of the Cold War (currently 102,520). The peak was in 1952, when there were as many as 871,700 military personnel! But these figures are really not comparable, since at the time there was National service (see below)...

To get numbers up, the government is trying moral persuasion... But in boot-camps it'll probably be crude brainwashing to try to instil the love of flag, king and country - after all, they want young soldiers to be prepared to die for any of the three... On our side, we'll have to bet on the resistance of youth and their healthy cynicism - arming them against falling for any of it!

**• National Service is alive and killing**

Today 44 countries around the world have national service, including, in Europe, Greece, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, and Denmark. France abolished it in 2001. The USA decided it couldn't impose the "draft" after losing the Vietnam war in 1973: during its last days, soldiers "fragged" their officers by throwing hand grenades into their tents.

But because of widespread economic deprivation in the working class, the US army has, since then, always managed to find enough recruits for its ranks...

This is what the British government website tells us about Britain's National Service "during peacetime", which was abolished over here, 60 years ago:

*"It came into force in January 1949 and meant that all physically fit males between the ages of 17 and 21 had to serve in one of the armed forces for an 18-month period. (...) In 1950 a further National Service Act lengthened the period of service to two years. During the 1950s national servicemen took part in various military operations in Malaya, Korea, Cyprus and Kenya. National Service ended in 1960, though periods of deferred service still had to be completed. The last national servicemen were discharged in 1963".*

Although those in the know say it's unlikely that National Service will be brought back, who knows, given the difficulty the British military currently has with recruitment. There's always that possibility. So, we the working class, had better get our act together soon, before the beat of the war drum gets too loud. Because overthrowing this capitalist system - here and in all of the rich countries - is the only way to stop war - all wars - for good.



**A social care sector using "indentured labour"?**

Last December, Panorama's undercover investigation into the Prestwick Care Group, exposed the appalling working conditions of care workers on less than £11/hr. But today, for foreign workers recruited into the social care sector (almost 100% private and "for profit") it's even worse, with the full collusion of the government: 5-year contracts are offered to workers on "social care" visas, stipulating that from

day one, they owe the company for one month's accommodation, plus airfare and other travel costs, amounting to £600! To this is added another £650 to "facilitate visa application online and to assist with Head Office visa enquiries".

If they decide to resign, they must wait 6 months before they can work for another care company and pay back the £1,250 immediately! Private care

providers feed on the fear of foreign care workers that they might have to forfeit their visas. What's more, from March this year, the new anti-immigration law will forbid foreign workers from bringing in their dependents.

One can judge a society not only by the way it treats its elderly, but also by the way it treats those workers who take care of them.



## Their society

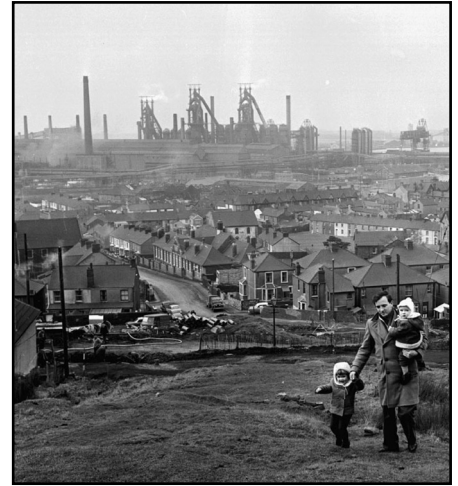
### Tata Steel job cuts: pretending it's good for the environment!

Tata Steel has confirmed 3,000+ job cuts in South Wales over the next 18 months. Two blast furnaces in the historic Port Talbot steelworks, which use coking coal, are to be shut down and replaced with electric furnaces, which, Tata says, need fewer workers to operate. Tata is playing the green card, claiming this would cut the plant's carbon emissions by "85%", resulting in a "1.5%" reduction in Britain's emissions. However, during a transition period, semi-finished steel would need to be imported from the Netherlands or India - where highly polluting methods are used!

Never mind that though, nor the devastating effect on Port Talbot town, "suffering death by a thousand cuts": 2,800 out of the only 4,000 remaining

jobs are under threat and another 300 in nearby (already cut) Llanwern (and another 140 across Wales and England). In 2022/2023 Tata Steel made £773m in net profit. But Sunak's government is nevertheless "helping" Tata implement its plans with a £500m taxpayer subsidy!

Unite, GMB and Community unions, while calling for the renationalisation of what's left of the steel industry, are not balloting for strike. Protests and demonstrations are organised, like the #SaveOurSteel on 17 February. The truth is, however, that only workers' collective action could force Tata to keep everyone in a job. The work could be shared (on full pay) and with much healthier, reduced hours of work. It's the only acceptable solution! ☐



### • "Free childcare for workers": needed, but won't happen

Last March, the government announced £140m for free child care from this April, partly justifying it as a way to get parents into the shrunken workforce. It's an election ploy, of course, but working parents desperately need it. The cost of private provision is exorbitant and there are only a limited number of local authority/state-funded places.

#### The theory...

So, in addition to the 30 free hours/week already provided to working parents of 3-4 year-olds, now their 2 year-olds will get 15

free hours/week. Then, from September 2024, 15 free hours will be extended to children over 9 months. And from September 2025, 4-5 year-olds will be eligible for 30 hours/week free care.

#### ...and the practice

But even if a child is "eligible", there aren't enough nursery places. In England, almost a third of the nurseries run by not-for-profit groups closed between 2018-2022, while "for profit" companies only increased by 10%. The number of places has fallen (by 5% nationally), largely because the pay is

so low that staff leave to work in Tesco... To get round this the government increased the permitted staff to child ratios: for 2 year-olds it's now 1:5 instead of 1:4 - and for 3 year-olds+, 1:8 or even 1:13! Total madness.

In February the government started a recruitment campaign... but without offering higher wages. Some private centres are just opting out by not offering free places at all. So it seems that parents will have either to pay, or stay home. Access to free and universal childcare is going to have to wait for a revolution!

### • Ofsted's cover up: how many more Postmaster scandals are out there?

On 31 January, Fujitsu, the Japanese IT giant which designed the Horizon accounting software responsible for the postmaster scandal declared: "we want to work on appropriate compensation (...) we want the facts to become clear from the statutory inquiry". But the 2,000 sub-postmasters who saw their lives turned upside down by fictitious debts, 900 of whom were convicted, have still not been duly compensated. On 10 January, Sunak's Horizon Scheme providing £75,000 to all is still aiming at: "ensuring that any sub-postmasters guilty of wrongdoing are still

subjected to prosecution"...

#### School inspectors suffer wipe-out!

On 3 February, a similar "error" was revealed in Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education), the government body which inspecting schools. The Electronic Evidence Gathering software (EEG) introduced in 2019 has been regularly malfunctioning. The app is so unstable that the notes taken by inspectors on tablets or laptops are sometimes wiped out. There have been complaints from inspectors and schools ever since the EEG's introduction - pointing out, for example,

reports headed with the wrong school name...

#### It made Rain

But Ofsted's response was to blame inspectors, after instructing them to "make up" any missing notes! And so far there has been no mention of Rainmaker Solutions, the contractor which developed the app.

This is probably not surprising coming from Ofsted, which like the Post Office, has a reputation for infamy. Its ruthless inspection methods led to the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry in January 2023, after her school was downgraded to "inadequate".

## Labour hopes to win this time - but its bomb-proof manifesto has already blown up!

It's 100 years since the first ever Labour government took office, in 1924. But Labour didn't win the election outright; it formed a minority government with Liberal Party support, and lasted only 9 months. Winning over the majority of voters in the world's first capitalist country where the middle - petty bourgeois - class is the largest voting class means a "real" Labour party aiming to represent workers - is not likely ever to win.

In fact, out of the 32 general elections

since the party was formed, it's won only 8. And three of those were under "Tory" Blair. Yes, the Conservatives are the "natural party of government", and Labour only gets a look-in, if it manages to occupy the Tories' political space.

For this year's general election Starmer hopes to do just that. He already said Labour won't overhaul the social care system nor restore the NHS, nor upgrade schools to their former less-underfunded state... and he

blames it on the state of the economy he'll inherit from the Tories, since he, like Sunak, promised not to increase tax! He's also dumped the promise to abolish the House of Lords.

As for the "New Deal for working people", the banning of zero-hours contracts and "fire and rehire" - well that's hardly going to go down well with the bosses, so we can expect these pledges to disappear too, along, perhaps, with Angela Rayner, who made them...

**Their society**

**• Capitalism on a cliff edge? The capitalists think so...**

Last year, the US bank JP Morgan made £40 billion profit – the most money that any bank has made ever in one year, according to the Financial Times. And why now? Apparently a large chunk of these profits comes from the difference between the interest rate the bank pays to its account holders, and the rate it charges when it lends money. With the rise in

interest rates last year, the difference between these two was even bigger.

JP Morgan still pays 0% interest on its depositor's accounts. So why does anyone keep their money there? Simply because, it's seen as a "safer" place to keep money. Since the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, and a couple of other smaller US banks a year ago, even more money has been

moved to JP Morgan "for safe keeping".

So, we're told, the bank's profits are a result of more capitalists seeking a safe-haven for their cash, fearful for the stability of their own capitalist system. JP Morgan is the epitome of the "too big to fail" bank. But we've been here before - the bigger they come, the harder they fall...

**• The magical "benefits" of Brexit**

January 31st was the 4th anniversary of Brexit, and Kemi Badenoch, Business and Trade Secretary, gave a speech celebrating the "wealth of Brexit benefits". It was quite hilarious - as long as you weren't a boss on the losing end...

So, topping the list of achievements were booming sales of honey to Saudi Arabia, pet food exports to India, British pork heading to Mexico's supermarkets, and beauty product sales "leaping" in China, "thanks to barriers being smashed"!!

The trade deal with Canada, which Liz Truss (in them days!) boasted about, has collapsed. And cheers to her brilliant deal with New Zealand, its cheap lamb undercuts British lamb, which (formerly pro-Brexit!) farmers protesting at Dover list among their grievances, along with cheap imports from Ukraine... Yup, leaving the EU meant leaving the "level playing field"! And now it's the wild west out there!

As for getting rid of "burdensome red tape" you ain't seen nothing yet, since controls on "medium-risk goods" like plant and animal products, cut flowers and some fruit and veggies are only just

coming in this May.

Says the Financial Times: "British businesses have... (already) been spending an average of nearly £100,000 navigating the post-Brexit customs

border over the past three years" - and 70% have seen a fall in profits.

In the meantime Brexit continues to try to get "done". Until perhaps business asks for it to be undone?



**• Sunak's "right to defend" Israel and his shares in Infosys...**

Sunak's wife, Akshata Murty, is the daughter of Narayana Murthy, founder of Infosys, the second biggest IT company in India - worth £79bn! Her shares in Infosys are worth £481m, without counting her other investments, bringing the Sunak family fortune to £520m. They own a landed estate in Yorkshire, a mews house in Central London and a flat in South Kensington. And Murty has "non-domiciled" status which exempts her from taxes.

In Britain, Infosys benefits from public sector contracts worth £172m, with TfL, the Home Office, various universities, local councils, etc. But since Infosys has operations worldwide, Sunak's interests also lie abroad... Indeed, back in 2012, Infosys signed a "cooperation for industrial research" contract with the Israeli state related to surveillance. In 2015, it acquired the Israeli tech company Panaya, hiring as head of R&D Tal Arnon, an Israeli army intelligence

veteran. And in 2020, Ure Levine, an IT entrepreneur who came out from the infamous Unit 8200 - Israel's Cyber Spy Agency - became the head of Infosys' operations in Israel.

More recently in May 2023, Infosys obtained a partnership with BP worth £1.2bn, and in late October BP became one of the candidates to exploit the gas fields off Gaza's coast. So, all in all, a lot at stake for Sunak and his capitalist friends...

**• Labour's "Securonomics": keeping capitalist profits totally secure**

Labour made its election pitch to British business at a special conference on 1 February. In front of representatives from 600 businesses, chancellor-in-waiting Rachel Reeves claimed that Labour was now "the only party of business".

The focus of her speech was how a Labour government would not hesitate to put the resources of the state at the service of the capitalist class. She told the representatives of British business,

including giants such as HSBC and Aviva, that the world was in a "new age of insecurity". Therefore, a Labour government's first priority would be "security of national economy", which she termed "Securonomics".

So what does this mean? In fact she announced specific policies such as capping corporation tax at 25% for the entire term of the future Labour government and not capping banker

bonuses! But Reeves also talked about how her party would "tear down" barriers to industry, and help business "seize opportunities in an insecure world".

Yes, Labour will have businessmen's backs. So in case anyone still had the illusion that Labour has workers' backs, (like repealing anti-union laws etc...), sorry for that! In fact it never did. The working class needs its own party to do that.

## King's Cross railway station (London)

## ASLEF strike: where is this going?

At the time of writing, the ASLEF drivers' pay dispute with 17 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) is still "on". During this 19-month dispute (our first strike was on Saturday 30 July 2022!), we've had 14 one-day strikes and there have been 53 days of "action short of strike" i.e., overtime bans. From 29 Jan-6 Feb there were 5 days of "rolling" strikes and OT bans for 48 hours against each TOC on different days of the week...

Last time the government threatened to use the new Strikes (Minimum

Service Levels) Act, against the strike, imposing a 40% minimum train service. In response, the ASLEF leader, Mick Whelan, threatened an additional 5-day continuous strike against LNER. So the government immediately withdrew this threat. That said, even rail experts think this Act is misconceived and tricky to enforce. In this case it would've meant co-ordinating a 40% timetable with all affected TOCs and of course, rostering drivers who'd voted to strike, to work.

Now another strike is due on 1 March, but only for LNER and Northern



drivers. The leadership says that "we're here for the long run"! The run has been too patchy and too long already. Clearly if we want to win, and speedily, the decision-making has to be here on the ground and not in union HQ! ☐

• **Pettiness**

A couple of weekends ago, there were no trains running from KX to Peterborough. But LNER still wanted drivers to come in to KX, as spare/standby... And they offered no transport to the station! Were they trying to make us angry? They

succeeded. [Workers' Fight bulletin Kings' X 07/02/24]

• **We have to get together**

Do LNER managers really expect us to do a full catering service on busy trains when there is only one oven working? (This could mean preparing 100 breakfasts over

2 hours). Maybe us chefs need to get together to discuss our point of view? Like: we don't do full English breakfasts unless there are 2 ovens, 2 chefs (with a bigger kitchen!) and at least 3 CSAs in First Class on the morning trains. In the meantime, they can offer everybody an apple! [Workers' Fight bulletin Kings' X 07/02/24]

## Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

## Letter from the North West

What a time to be a new starter in the postal industry! The old hands tell us we've just worked through the hardest peak period they've known. We worked just as hard as our mates on the "legacy" contracts, yet we got only a fraction of the bonuses paid out. Unlike our comrades with the ability to say no to the gaffers, we got messed about the whole time. Just like the couriers in the industry do. And where was the CWU?

Many of us have been given contracts on the bare hours that do not fit with the duty structures. This means

we're working seven days a week, every week, just to earn a living. Not only are we working every day, but we aren't getting any breaks during these days. We've been told by our mates that the Union promised there would be no race to the bottom. But here we are, the new starters, right at the front of the stampede to the bottom.

There is one thing we are equal with the old timers on - how much it costs us to be a union member. We pay the same yet get nothing in return. When you have to wait a whole month to be paid, the expense of being a CWU



member is a luxury we cannot afford. Being a salaried worker is no fun on poverty wages. Maybe union officials like Dave Ward and Martin Walsh can help us by giving us a cheaper rate until we win the same terms and conditions as our mates? ☐

• **RM shareholders should be on the hook**

Ofcom's report on the Universal Service Obligation, published last month, claimed that Royal Mail could save £650m by going to a 3-day delivery. And it could still save a couple of hundred million by going to a 5-day letter delivery, apparently. In the report, Ofcom also claimed its "suggestions"

reflected what the public wanted, citing a survey which "showed" the public didn't care so much about 6-day letter deliveries. Except that it asked only a few over 7,000 people...

The Guardian newspaper, among others, has published many stories bemoaning the privatisation of Royal

Mail, and the subsequent deterioration of the service. Clearly many punters wish for 6-day deliveries and already aren't getting them! In the meantime, shareholders' profits have gone through the roof. Yes, thanks to the labour cost "savings" the bosses have already made by cutting our jobs and Ts&Cs!

• **In the same boat**

You wouldn't believe what we've seen in some of the Delivery Offices where "supernumeraries" have been sent. In East London, managers are so short of vans, they've ended up renting and sticking A4 paper notices (!) on them saying "This vehicle is hired by Royal

Mail". In another DO, only one functional toilet was available for 100 postal workers. Yup, we're all facing the same c\*\*p! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 07/02/24]

• **Royal mess**

And no wonder conditions in Delivery Offices are going down the drain.

Management is "redeploying" many of us from Processing onto Deliveries, but these offices weren't made to accommodate so many workers. Meanwhile, by sending us over to DOs, they create a shortage of workers in Processing. Like musical chairs in reverse: too many duties and not enough workers! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 07/02/24]



**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****Let's vote for strike!**

We're currently being balloted for strike action over Ford's pay offer. Super-profitable Ford (£3.4bn net profits in 2023!) offered a miserable 2.5% pay "rise" (when RPI inflation rate is still as high as 5.2%!) and a 2.5% "non-consolidated lump sum". Even the most senior workers amongst us haven't heard of a below-inflation pay offer, ever! What's more, many of us have seen huge wage cuts recently, due to the loss of shift premiums.

The offer was rejected by 54% of us (1,156 votes to 1,002). Dagenham

engine plant workers (and new temps!) voted by a large majority to reject (701 to 275), as did Daventry workers (226 to 13). But Transport Ops accepted by 434 votes to 109 along with the few workers left at Halewood (82 to 7) and semi-skilled at Basildon (198 to 113).

Why did they accept this rotten offer? In the case of TOPs, is it because they haven't had their shift and wages cut? In any case, the vote exposed what's missing in our ranks: regular contact across the different plants, so we can organise together across Ford's



divisions!

And yes, despite being a lot fewer workers than during our last strike in 1988 (32,500, with 13,000 in Dagenham!), Ford still needs diesel engines and power-trains - it can't do without us! So we can definitely still make the most of this! ☐

- **You already cut our pay!**

In an attempt to persuade us not to strike, the manufacturing boss posted an "update" to "clarify" that Ford isn't intending to cut allowances, grades or shift premiums for existing employees. Never mind that Ford will continue to cut the wages of every new employee!

And what about the shift premiums they've already cut? Many of us have had a massive pay-cut of ~30%! Ford owes us (very!) big time! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/02/24]

- **Their "one ford" and ours**

Some of us ISL workers doing quality control

are working on the minimum wage! It's no surprise that "one Ford" keeps bringing in cowboy contractors paying peanuts... All of us in LLL, G4S, Hamton, ISL, need to get together with Ford workers to decide how we support any action that takes place: OUR version of "one Ford"! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 13/02/24]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****Ten weeks of lay-off, paid with OT – or jobs**

From March to July, during retooling, the two crews at Plant Oxford will each work early shifts for alternate weeks. BMW wants to impose the whole cost on workers.

It expects permanent and agency production workers to work unpaid overtime, before and after, to get paid for the 8 or 9 weeks off! Back in 1998, BMW-owned Rover threatened a plant closure to get the unions to recommend this horrendous "working time account" system, which it systematically uses to

lengthen shifts and impose weekend and rest-day working, instead of paying for lay-offs!

Nearly all of us risk losing pay. Logistics contractor Rudolph & Hellmann, where workmates just accepted a lousy pay offer after a re-ballot, because of the threat of 400 redundancies, says it will suspend permanent workers' contracts on request so they can find work elsewhere for the duration. BMW's agency Staffline even "invited" workers



to work in BMW plants in Germany! But hundreds of agency workers for R&H and other contractors have no guaranteed work, nor pay! ☐

- **Time to stop BMW's screw**

BMW kept complaining about production going down, as justification for cutting jobs in November. But it's crazy how many (more or less compulsory!) Friday WTA overtime shifts we've had since then! Now, we see the targets

scheduled after the slowdown, and surprise, surprise... production is planned to ramp up again! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 13/02/24]

- **Time for ourselves**

In Paint, after working Volume Protection Overtime some nights and WTA shifts, we

now hear we might be laid off a week early for the extended "slowdown", because we've already filled the buffer. So what was the point of all that overtime?! What's the point of any overtime in fact, other than helping management out? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 13/02/24]

**Elon Musk's anti-union stance backfires: Scandinavian workers fight back!**

On October 27, 130 technicians in Tesla repair shops in Sweden went on strike for the right to have a collective agreement over their terms of employment. Their union, the IF Metall (the main heavy industry union) was repeatedly refused negotiations by Elon Musk who has called their strike "insane"!

In November, railway workers, dockers, lorry drivers, postal workers,

electricians and cleaners decided to undertake a joint action by refusing to transport/unload Tesla cars, deliver Tesla license plates, service Teslas, and clean Tesla's offices in what has become the biggest action - and solidarity action - against the company since its creation in 2003. As we write, thousands of workers across Norway, Finland and Denmark have also joined in with a

boycott against Tesla.

While there are no Tesla factories in Sweden, the second biggest plant, the Berlin "Gigafactory" with a 10,000 strong contingent of workers, has the same problem, as do the US plants and all others. So Musk is right to be worried about the dispute spreading. We hope Tesla workers will not return to sanity anytime soon!

## ELECTIONS EVERYWHERE, "DEMOCRACY" NOWHERE

There are 71 elections happening across the globe this year. Yet while there are elections everywhere, there is "democracy" nowhere.

### **Bangladesh: one party state**

Take the Bangladesh elections, which took place in January. PM Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL), who'd been in power for 15 years, had refused to concede power to an interim government last year, although mandated by the country's constitution. This, and the country's deep economic crisis led to massive opposition rallies and a powerful textile strike. Hasina responded by crushing the strike using paramilitaries and jailing members of the opposition Bangladesh National Party, which then boycotted the elections. Few Bangladeshis saw the point of voting: turnout was only 30%. Hasina remains in power with 222 of 299 parliamentary seats.

### **Pakistan: the generals rule**

In August 2023, a military-controlled interim government was appointed to organise Pakistan's elections. In the same month, former PM Imran Khan of the Pakistan Movement for Justice, the PTI, was jailed on multiple charges of corruption to prevent his participation. He'd already been removed from power in 2022 after alleging that the military, together with Washington were plotting to overthrow him - which was probably true. In the run-up to February's election, PTI activists were



Elections in Pakistan

jailed. In the end many candidates had to stand as independents. Nevertheless they won more seats than any other party.

However, Nawaz Sharif leader of the Pakistan Muslim League, who returned from exile in London to contest the election, is claiming victory. He'd left in 2019 to avoid jail for corruption himself, but has now made a deal with the military which will, of course be ruling from the shadows, whoever eventually forms a government. Because in Pakistan, "democracy" goes only so far as the generals allow.

### **Senegal: elections postponed**

Senegal's President Macky Sall, who'd completed the maximum two terms in power, has decided to postpone this

year's elections. Security forces stormed Parliament, removing 30 MPs who were blocking the vote ratifying his decision. Candidates who tried to begin their election campaigns anyway, or protest, were arrested and the internet was shut down. Today over 1000 opposition activists are in prison, and several news channels have been taken off air.

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Democracy under this system - worldwide - has always been a smokescreen for the dictatorship of the capitalist class. But today, this class and its politicians are in such deep crisis that they cannot afford even this illusion. If ever there was a time for the working-class to overthrow this rotten system, it is today! ☐

## MODI'S BIGOTED "HINDUISM" CAN'T STOP THE CLASS STRUGGLE

On 22 January, Indian Prime Minister Modi kicked off his ruling BJP's campaign for general elections (due April-May) by inaugurating the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Bollywood stars, judges, businessmen and politicians were flown to the £174m semi-built temple. Far-right Hindu activists across the country held public screenings of the ceremony, raising the far-right slogan of "Jai Shri Ram" ("Victory to Lord Ram"). Muslims and the poor stayed indoors for fear of their violence.

The Ram Temple has been built on the site of a 16th-century mosque, the Babri Masjid, which was smashed to the ground in 1992 by far-right Hindu activists claiming the mythical god Ram was born on the spot. Terrible communal violence targeting Muslims followed, in which over 2,000 were killed.

Modi's ceremony was an attempt to divert attention from the deep economic crisis. There's widespread unemployment and worsening poverty.

### **Indian workers sent to Israel**

And now Modi is recruiting Indian workers to take the place of over 100,000 Palestinian workers whose work permits have been suspended by the Israeli government. The Haryana and Uttar Pradesh governments advertised 10,000 jobs at a monthly wage of £1,304 - more than 5 times higher than the average wage in Haryana (£235) and 7-times higher than Uttar Pradesh (£185)! In what the bourgeois press loves to call an "emerging superpower", workers showed up in large numbers at recruitment centres, saying they'd rather take their chances in Israel than die of hunger in India. But not

everyone is impressed by Modi's extravagant shows.

### **The class struggle continues**

On 29 & 30 January, over 10,000 demonstrated in the city of Patna against the lack of railway jobs on offer. Despite 260,000 vacant posts - resulting in the dangerous lack of critical workers (the main factor in one of India's worst rail disasters last year, which killed 295 people) - the government put out a call for only 5,696 railway driver vacancies. The Patna mobilisation comes two years after a massive campaign of demonstrations and railway track and station occupations across the poor states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar against railway job cuts, and just months after large protests by rail workers over changes to their pension scheme. Undeterred by Modi's Hindu right-wing chauvinism, more rail workers' rallies are planned in the coming weeks.

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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