



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

## AGAINST THEIR BIGOTED ANTI-WORKING CLASS LAWS, AND THEIR MALIGN WARS

A watershed moment, apparently, on 13 April: it was the first time Iran had launched a direct attack on Israel... So yes, it was significant. There was also significance in the fact that US, British, French, but also Jordanian jets, helped the Israeli Defence Force and its "Iron Dome" repel the 300 Iranian missiles and drones.

It looked like a video-game-show, and that was exactly its purpose: both sides knew what the outcome would be. It was meant to be a demonstration of possibilities and for the Iranians themselves, no doubt also a test. In fact it ended up proving why their side, even with all its allies, could never win a war against imperialist might and its ever more reactionary proxies like the armed-to-the-teeth ultra-nationalist, Israeli regime...

The hysteria which followed, however, and the "will he, won't he?" speculation over Netanyahu's next move was also deliberately over-the-top. But nobody should be surprised by this either. Official propaganda has been in overdrive, trying to convince the public of the legitimacy of the government's support for the collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza/the West Bank and the multiple Israeli strikes against targets in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Foreign Secretary "Lord" Cameron even went so far as to say that *"the truly malign actor in the region is Iran"* - in the context of the over 34,000 Palestinians killed by the Israeli military under instruction of the (non-malign?) Netanyahu war cabinet, fully backed by his own (non-malign?) lordly self and his US/EU counterparts! This verges on conspiratorial thinking.

Of course, the political stakes for Netanyahu, but also for Biden, who sits on his one shoulder and for Sunak, on the other, are high...

### ***They don't restrain themselves***

As the melodrama over possible



escalation to full-scale regional war continued, world political leaders talked about "restraint", cited international law, the rules of engagement, the right to defence, right to attack, etc...

But their law only applies when it suits them. Did the US/British imperialist leaders exercise "restraint" during their invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq? And wasn't the 2003 Iraq war "illegal" under international law? It's illegal to torture prisoners, too, but they did it. And the killing of civilians in Gaza? To underline this "legality", a BBC Radio 4 presenter was officially reprimanded for referring to Palestinian deaths as "murder"!

It's not only on a world scale where the system of law exposes itself as a convenient and one-sided smokescreen for profit-protection and the interests of the international - imperialist - establishment and its institutions (and a lethal one, let's not forget!), but close to home, as well.

What else can be said about the daily revelations from the Post Office Horizon Inquiry? The Post Office may have initiated, but the state and successive

governments presided over the conviction of 900 sub-postmasters for theft, condoning the destruction of their lives and driving at least 4 to suicide, over a period of 23 years - and not one institutional eyebrow was raised.

Belatedly, it's called a *"miscarriage of justice"*! But this is the normal justice of a system which routinely deals out penalties, unfair dismissals, jailing and indeed physical and mental violence against ordinary working people who try to stand up against it.

### ***They're rotting... but fragile***

It may be difficult to understand how politicians like Cameron, Sunak and Starmer can maintain their grandiose bigotry. But what else can be expected from the personnel of a capitalist system whose foundation is the exploitation of the majority in favour of a tiny minority? Today, however, their innately fragile system is in a state of growing degeneracy. And that's good news for the working class: the weaker they are, the easier it will be to topple them. □

## International

### USA: Arizona bans all abortions and returns to 1864...

Women's right to abortion is not just under attack in US states like Arizona; even here in Britain, backward elements in the Tory party, but also religious fundamentalists of all political hues, are trying to revisit the 24-week limit and bring it down to 16 weeks or less. Or ban abortions altogether!

However the case of Arizona is extreme. Its own Supreme Court just decided to impose a law dating to 1864 and the time of the Civil War, which makes all abortions a criminal act, regardless of how early they might take place and including in cases of rape. Termination would only be legal if needed to save a woman's life.

It was the June 2022 US Federal Supreme Court ruling which overturned the 1973 Roe v Wade decision (guaranteeing women nationwide the constitutional right to an abortion, de facto up until the final trimester of pregnancy), which opened the door to individual states imposing their own abortion restrictions.

The 1864 law which Arizona's Republican state attorneys resurrected,

### ... and predictably, abortion is now on the ballot

The issue of abortion has always been highly politicised. The reaction of many US voters against the June 2022 Republican-dominated Supreme Court ruling which gave state courts the green light to restrict abortion, has already boosted the Democrat vote - and meant lost votes for the Republicans.

This has led Trump to make new and utterly contradictory statements on the issue in the run-up to this November's election, such that it's no longer clear whether he's "for" or "against" and in which circumstances... While he reiterates that he thinks "it's a bad thing", he hasn't dared to repeat that he thinks



now intends to criminalise anyone who helps a woman terminate a pregnancy - even by supplying abortion pills. They'd risk 2-5 years in jail. Already, 14 US states ban abortions completely, but would allow them in cases of rape and to save a woman's life. Others ban them after 15 weeks. Only six states, plus Washington DC, still allow abortion

without restrictions - always at a cost, of course.

No better proof is needed of the backward trajectory of society in this period of degeneration of capitalism than the denial of the rights of women - and the abolition of those small gains which were made in the 1970s. □

women who have abortions "should be punished".

States which had banned abortions after 15 weeks, like Florida under governor Ron DeSantis, (the former Trump rival for Republican leader), are about to pass even more restrictive laws: banning terminations after 6 weeks, before many women even know they're pregnant. However, to try to prevent the Democrats from gaining advantage, Florida has now added a vote on abortion to the November ballot paper! The electorate must vote on whether the law should be able to "prohibit, penalize, delay, or restrict abortion before viability

or when necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider".

In fact Trump and the Republicans are likely to win the election anyway, if polls are to be believed. And if that's the case, it might be back to square one for women's right to abortion. But on all other issues everybody knows that whether Trump or Biden, Republican or Democrat, their policy is the same: make the working class pay for the crisis, assert the right of US might (and its corporations' profits) over the rest of the world - and keep weapons flowing to proxies in Israel and Ukraine.

### Russia-Ukraine: running out of soldiers and western weapons

This is what the business daily, the Financial Times, saw fit to write about the current situation in Ukraine on 13 April: "Ukraine's top commander warned that his outmanned and outgunned army is struggling to halt a multi-pronged and intensifying Russian offensive, as Kyiv pleads with western partners for more air defences and a critical military aid package remains stalled in the US Congress. 'The situation on the eastern front has significantly worsened in recent days,' Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky wrote on Telegram during a visit to the eastern Donetsk region on Saturday".

The Trypilska coal-powered thermal power plant near Kyiv has been totally destroyed. The Russian army's bomb systems which have a range of 25-37 miles are forcing back Ukrainian

forces. Ukraine's General Yuriy Sodal who commands troops in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine told Kyiv's parliament that "the enemy outnumbers us by 7-10 times, we lack manpower". New laws to widen conscription by reducing the age from 27 to 25 and extending duty at the front, despite frontline soldiers' exhaustion, are to be passed.

The Ukrainian regime is clearly losing this war. NATO leaders, who've been using Ukraine as their proxy and its male population as cannon fodder for their own aims - i.e., to cut Putin down to size and gain access to Russia's vast natural resources - may have underestimated the challenge. Or maybe they did not. At any rate, they would prefer to call a halt, given the fact that they've been paying for this

war, if not in human lives, like Ukraine, but in pounds, euros, dollars and cents. And perhaps, on its side, the Russian regime is ready to negotiate, even if it hasn't been damaged as much the NATO leaders had hoped.

So yes, perhaps Biden, Sunak, Macron and Jens Stoltenberg have achieved as much as they were likely to achieve by now. However, their problem is how to row back down from the "victory to Ukraine" they promised Zelensky. The Ukrainian population may well be war-weary enough to accept defeat, even if Zelensky isn't, after the river of blood which has been flowing between them and their Russian neighbours since 2014. The next step for the working classes on these opposing sides, will be to bridge it.

**Their society**

**Israel provokes Iran with impunity, but what next?**

What did Biden say to the Iranian regime after the Israeli military bombed Iran's embassy in Damascus on 1 April? "Don't!", meaning do not dare retaliate. "We are devoted to the defence of Israel. We will support Israel. We will help defend Israel and Iran will not succeed".

In this imperialist world, of course, the "right to self-defence" cannot apply equally, and certainly has never applied to Iran - not since the 1979 revolution, which kicked out America's "puppet" Shah, but was then hijacked by the religious fundamentalists who remain in power today.

The attack on Iran's embassy in Damascus, which the drones and missiles were responding to, on the 13 April, wasn't the first nor the worst which Israeli forces have launched against Iranian personnel or bases since 7 October. There have been multiple strikes in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. Indeed the US military showed the way: in January 2020, Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani was killed by an American drone strike near Baghdad International Airport.

The "independent" think-tank on military affairs, Chatham House, described the Damascus bombing as "an unprecedented escalation by Israel against Iran in Syria", and part of a strategy to eliminate the Iranian military wing based in Syria, which is responsible for relations with Iran's ally, Hezbollah. But it also warned that this "could be the spark that ignites the Middle East".

So what now, after that "unprecedented" rain of Iranian drones and missiles over Israel? Is the hysteria over the threat of all-out war justified? In fact, Iran's attack was forewarned and thus almost all drones and missiles were intercepted, video-game style, by Israeli, US, British and French jets and Israel's Iron Dome. As to a spiralling "tit-for-tat", the ball is entirely in the US court, even if Netanyahu is seen as a loose cannon who might send bombs over Teheran.

It's common knowledge that the last thing the Iranian regime wants is a war - not with Israel and not with the USA behind it. Indeed, the Iranian leaders would far prefer an end to ever-damaging western sanctions; some of them even aspire to a membership card of the "friends of imperialism" club, which Saudi

Arabia and the Gulf States - and Egypt - still have... Even if, for now, these cards are in their back-pockets, while they rhetorically "stand with Palestine".

However there is another factor in all of this: both Biden - who faces an election this year - and Netanyahu, who is facing protesters calling for his resignation, have an interest in appearing tough. Biden would gain if seen to successfully restrain Netanyahu, while Netanyahu would lose.

In other words, the fate of penned-in Palestinians in Rafah, or the possible igniting of all-out war in the Middle East, depends on their political self-interest. Which says everything about the reprehensible imperialist order that they uphold against us all. □



**• Starmer's "contribution"**

Just like Sunak, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer fully supports Netanyahu's ongoing slaughter in Gaza.

In November, he instructed his party not to vote for a motion in Parliament calling for a ceasefire, although 56 MPs ignored him. In February, he decided to call for a temporary "humanitarian ceasefire", when the death toll had

already reached 30,000, and most of the Gaza Strip had already been flattened.

Now he is "X"-ing his support for Netanyahu's deliberate provocation against the Iranian regime and condemning "the Iranian regime's decision to subject Israelis to these unacceptable attacks". As far as this former lawman is concerned, the right to defence is not

granted to all those who are attacked, but only to some. He repeats after Sunak that the peace and security of the region are threatened by Iran... Does he really think that his prospective electorate does not know who the real aggressor in the region happens to be? And which regime has been undertaking "unacceptable attacks" for the past 6 months?

**• The immigration policies that kill**

So far this year, 5,435 migrants have put their lives at risk to cross the Channel - the highest number between January and



March in any year on record. And 8 have died in the attempt, including a 7 year-old girl.

But while the Channel becomes a graveyard, Prime Minister Sunak and his government are using these record crossings to push through their so-called Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, which aims at detaining and deporting asylum-seekers to the "safe" country of Rwanda.

Ten House of Lords amendments, including a clause requiring the legislation to be in "full compliance with domestic and international law", were rejected by parliament before Easter - and another string of amendments are likely to be

rejected in the coming weeks. In the meantime, at least 4 refugees fleeing Rwanda have been granted asylum in Britain in the past 6 months - showing how "safe" Rwanda actually is!

It shouldn't come as a surprise that a British government which backs the Israeli slaughter in Gaza, is prepared to shake hands with the murderous Rwandan regime. Nor that Sunak tries to appeal to the most reactionary, anti-migrant electorate ahead of the general elections. When in fact, the only way to "stop the small boats" would be to give all migrants wanting to come to Britain a safe passage and offer them any jobs they are qualified for and wish to take on!

## Their society

### A "mild" recession? No, not for the working class!

The government obviously needs to "talk up" the economy and boast about the good job it has done in bringing down inflation - even though the main (only!) tool in the box has been the increase in interest rates imposed by the "independent" Bank of England. And even though real inflation is much higher than their last available CPI measure of 3.8%.

But when the Office for National Statistics figures confirmed that in the last quarter, the economy shrank 0.3%, and that it had shrunk for 2 consecutive quarters, it had to admit that this was now a "recession". The official line was that it was "mild"... And in February the ONS let it be known that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had "grown" by 0.2% in the three months to February 2024!

#### No recovery since 2008

However this is hardly a true reflection of what's going on in the economy from a working class perspective. If instead, "real" GDP is taken as the measure of economic growth - that is, economic output per head of population (GDP per capita) - the British economy has been declining not for 2, but for 8 consecutive quarters! In other words for two years, incomes per person - and therefore household incomes and living standards - have been falling. If "disposable" incomes are taken into account, the situation is even worse - as the underpaid working class knows all too well. In fact on average, real incomes are lower than they were in 2009. In other words, for workers, there has still been no real economic recovery since the 2008-9



Soup kitchen for the poor in central London

banking crash. A Bank of England survey found that "banks fear the biggest rise in loan defaults since the 2009 Credit Crunch". Does this mean that they fear another financial crash? As for industrial production, this has fallen by 5% in the past 5 years.

#### And the Brexit effect; poverty at record levels!

It is economic fact (even Brexiteers have to admit it) that Britain is poorer as a result of Brexit and that its direct effect has been to shrink the economy by 4-6%. The full effect is still not felt. Just after Easter, the 'common user charge' was introduced, to be levied on imports of animal and plant products from the EU.

The effect will be to add 10% to importers' costs and that in turn will

mean yet higher price inflation in the shops for the rest of us. Yes, at a time when 18% of the population is now in absolute poverty (the sharpest rise in 30 years), and when there has been a 6.8% increase in homelessness.

The pro-Brexit Daily Torygraph, itself, has identified Brexit as the "prime suspect in the death of the stock market". Of course, nobody among the working class gives a damn about the fate of City fat cats and speculators, but this means that workers will be asked to pay for their losses, through jobs cuts, wages and conditions cuts and above all the deterioration in public services like the NHS, schools, transport, etc... The only answer to this is a general fightback against every cut, and sooner rather than later. ☐

### • No homes? Go to jail!

The Government wants to replace the 200-year-old Vagrancy Act which made begging and rough sleeping a criminal offence in England and Wales. It was brought in in 1824, at the end of the Napoleonic wars when hundreds of thousands of people were destitute, a crisis exacerbated by the countryside enclosures. All "idle and disorderly Persons, and Rogues and Vagabonds", fortune tellers, "every Common Prostitute" and anyone exposing "Wounds or Deformities to obtain or gather alms" - including penniless former soldiers

and sailors, were to be imprisoned and sentenced to hard labour. As the housing crisis hit, this Act was used again: since 2018 alone, almost 4,000 people have been arrested under its provisions.

The Tories' replacement, the Criminal Justice Bill is currently in its committee stage. It would give the police/local authorities new powers to act against "nuisance" rough sleeping - i.e., anything from excessive "smell" to "looking as though intending to sleep rough". And it will carry a fine up to £2,500 (as against £1,000 under the Vagrancy act) or

imprisonment.

The cross-party group of MPs calling for its repeal are not against it out of sudden concern for the homeless, however. After all, these are MPs who, like their predecessors, have presided over the total dismantling of social housing. No, their real issue is... that the jails are already full! Male prisons have less than 250 places. So the government is building 3 new "super-prisons" - in Lancashire, Leicestershire and Buckinghamshire. Yes, they build more prisons instead of the social homes so urgently needed!

### • A prison system which reflects the capitalist system

Prison governors have been told by justice minister, Alex Chalk, to send prisoners home two months early to free up cells. Not out of concern for prisoners well-being, but due to the lack of space for new prisoners: 99.7% of prisons are full and operating at 104% capacity. Super-prisons can't be built fast enough!

In fact England and Wales have the highest imprisonment rates in western

Europe. With a combined prison population of 85,851 this is 146 prisoners/100,000 of the population. It's more than double the Netherlands (65 prisoners/100,000) and Germany (67 prisoners/100,000). Scotland and Northern Ireland also have imprisonment rates well above the western European average. Out of the 8 countries with the highest rates in Europe, the "UK" takes the first 3 spots.

And what it means, is that while violence, self-harm and suicide rates are at record levels (778 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) there is little or no rehab; many prisoners spent 22 hours locked in their cells. Around 60% of released inmates go on to reoffend within a two-year period - one of the highest rates of reoffending in Europe. Proof that "Britain" really does do it better...

**Their society**

**• Can the NHS get any worse?**

A British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey this March reported record-low levels of public satisfaction with the NHS (24%!). No wonder: this April it transpired that 2m more patients were on waiting lists - a total of 9.7m - almost 30% higher than official NHS figures (7.6 m), which don't include

patients who have started treatment and are waiting for follow-up care.

Apart from being understaffed, the NHS lacks capacity and infrastructure. The average number of beds per 1,000 people in OECD EU countries is 5, but Britain has just 2.4. Germany, by contrast, has 7.8

and France 5.8. As a direct result of bed shortages, patients wait an average of 12 hours to be admitted to a ward in England; and shockingly, it's estimated that these long waiting times have contributed directly to 14,000 excess deaths.

**• Social care in England and Wales should be socialised!**

It's no surprise that only 13% of the public who were surveyed thought elderly social care was "satisfactory". In fact, accessing care has become a luxury: in 2021/2022, in England, only 43% of those requesting support from local authorities received either short-term or long-term care; 30% didn't get any at all.

Then, there's the cost: on average, care homes cost £800/week. But living in understaffed care homes is risky too. Underpaid staff leave for better paid jobs, and new, casualised workers, are seldom offered proper training. And then there's the scandal which was recently exposed over indenture-like conditions imposed on overseas carers by unscrupulous agencies. The health of the most vulnerable of society should have never ended up in the hands of these ruthless private exploiters; it must be taken out of them!

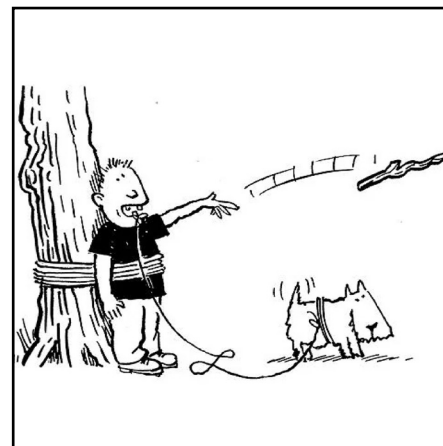
**• 21st-century Britain, Victorian dentistry**

How come that in Britain (a rich country!) people are pulling out their own teeth? In fact it's got to the point where seeing a dentist is close to impossible - especially in rural areas. And for many, even subsidised NHS dentistry is unaffordable. The only choice people with serious dental problems have, is to call 111 or show up at A&E. Or resort to "DIY dentistry" at home..!

Dentistry was excluded from the NHS "free at the point of use" provision from 1948 onwards and a system of payment was imposed, except for children and the unemployed. Today - if you can find it - it's offered in 3 bands: Band 1 allows for examination, x-rays and cleaning and costs £26.80; for Band 2 (fillings, root-canals and tooth extractions) you pay £73.50. Band 3 treatments (crowns, bridges and orthodontics) cost £319.10. Of course, private clinics don't have such price caps, so can charge thousands of £s.

According to the Nuffield Trust,

NHS dentistry is in its worst state ever. Given what dentists consider a too-low rate government subsidy, they leave for the much higher remuneration (and Porsches) they can get by going private. Today, 9 out of 10 NHS practices aren't taking new patients. The British seem doomed to remain the Europeans with the worst teeth.



**• Who do Royal Mail bosses think they're kidding?**

The "public consultation" on the Universal Service Obligation (USO) which forces Royal Mail to deliver letters 6 days/week to all 32m addresses in Britain, closed on 3 April. Royal Mail bosses have now published their proposals. Instead of cutting deliveries to 5, or even 3 days/week, as expected, they say they wish to revise 1st and 2nd class delivery targets.

At the moment, 1st class letters are meant to be delivered within 1 working day, Mon-Sat, and 2nd class within 3 days.

Everybody knows that these targets have long since been discarded as parcels were prioritised over letters. And this is still the case, despite the £5.6m fine imposed on Royal Mail for this USO "breach" last year.

As for 2nd class letters, the idea is to deliver them every other day and only on weekdays. So a 2nd class letter, posted on a Wednesday, might not arrive until Tuesday the following week.

Royal Mail claims this would allow another 9,000 delivery duties to be cut,

amounting to 1,000 jobs, saving £300m, which would be destined for shareholders' pockets.

The bosses are selling this to union leaders by claiming delivery workers would benefit through having shorter rounds and more Saturdays off. The workforce knows better. Already 10,000 job cuts over the past 12 months have meant delivery offices are routinely piled high with undelivered mail and posties' rounds are heavier and longer than ever.

**• Beware: don't drink and don't swim!**

Even the bosses' Financial Times declared England and Wales' privatised system of water supply and sewage treatment a failure... after the losing Oxford University crew in the annual Thames Boat Race complained of poisoning from the sewage-polluted river!

For years now, sewage treatment works have been permitted to discharge untreated human sewage direct into rivers for hundreds of thousands of hours every year. Last year, this rose to 3.6m hours. Licences allow discharges at times of heavy rain, otherwise the (unmodernised and inadequate) sewers would be overwhelmed and flood homes and gardens. But today,

these discharges have become regular, because extreme rainfall is far more frequent.

**Only their greed is pure**

Thames Water is the worst offender. Its ancient pipes, sewers and treatment works needed comprehensive upgrading long before water privatisation in 1989. But privatisation, claimed the government of the time (under Mrs Thatcher, and never reversed by Labour) would attract vital investment.

Fat chance. Instead of renewing the pipes, private companies handed more than £72bn to shareholders. By now,

drastic leaks mean companies have been forced to undertake huge works, like it or not. And now they're in the red, owing £60bn. Thames Water owes £18.3bn. Its shareholders refuse to cough up more funding unless the regulator, Ofwat allows bills to rise by 56%(!!) by 2030!

There's no question that water provision needs to be a public service (as in Scotland, Northern Ireland and most of the rest of the world): after all, does Thames water pay the sky for raining? As many said at the time of water privatisation "soon they will want to privatise the air we breathe"! They might still, of course, but in the meantime there must be clean water to drink!

**King's Cross railway station (London)****Why not try the old "all-out" strike?**

At the time of writing, the ASLEF drivers' dispute over pay continues into its 22nd month. Since July 2022, drivers working for 16 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have had 17 days of strike (14 days with all of us striking together and 3 days of "rolling" strikes against each TOC on different days of the week). And 67 days of overtime bans! But what is the result of all that?

We are told that the only offer on the table is still the one from April 2023, when the Rail Delivery Group (which comprises all the TOC bosses plus

**• We say, no deal!**

In February, RMT officials began separate negotiations with each TOC, over proposed changes to our Ts&Cs, which were part of the last pay offer. The bosses want to introduce these changes by May 2024.

LNER, for example, wants to review sick pay arrangements and introduce a "multiskilled" workforce (i.e., fewer

Network Rail's CEO) offered us a 4% pay-rise in exchange for ripping up hard-won terms and conditions. For instance, they want to increase the maximum number of driving hours before a break, introduce a 7-day week, and cut driver-training times.

Despite ASLEF officials' repeated requests for more negotiations, no meetings have been held between the union and the RDG for a year, nor with Transport Secretary Mark Harper since December 2022... After all this, we're even more sure than ever that we need

workers doing more). They also want to cut pay and Ts&Cs for new entrants, creating a 2-tier workforce. And if we accept all this, they promise to give us a 4% pay "rise" for 2023-4! This amounts to a real-terms pay cut given that over the course of 2023, average RPI inflation was 9.7%!



to step up the fight by having an all-out strike. This is the only way to be sure that our demands are met, whoever is in government! ☐

The problem for RMT officials is that they've tied their own hands due to a de facto no-strike deal - which binds them until the end of April. In the meantime the negotiations are happening behind closed doors: we're told little or nothing and have no say. But our hands are not tied, and neither are our feet!

**• No protection, no work**

Cleaners are always at risk of getting bad reactions from the chemical products we use while cleaning. Since Covid we haven't had essential protective equipment such as aprons, masks and proper gloves. Some of us have resorted to buying our own masks. But why should we? [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 03/04/24]

**• Same conditions for all!**

We hear that new LNER workers on board will have special rosters where they have to rotate between early spares and late spares. For now they're on the same Ts&Cs... But why aren't they integrated into the existing roster - which is full of gaps? [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 03/04/24]

**• Can't organise the basics!**

LNER guards (aka train managers) and catering staff are fed up: we come to work every day and run the service, but we can't get the essentials which are needed! It's like a lottery. On many Azumas, the boiler isn't working so there's no hot water, and we're often short of cold drinks too. We ask ourselves why LNER even pretends to run a catering service?

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****Letter from the North West**

Every day working in Royal Mail is like being in BBC3's Cardinal Burns' Crystal Maze spoof, where a postal worker tries to rescue an item while avoiding getting trapped inside an unsolvable puzzle. Imagine waking up to hear just how irrelevant your job is and how much profit it is failing to make and then walking into your place of work where you (re-) discover how the country's electoral system simply would not function without you.

The new starters were agog at all the poll cards. They simply could not

believe that they all had to be delivered and as quickly as possible. Of course, the deliveries had to be made to all addresses including on walks where jobs have been taken away. The old timers chuckled when they were told those jobs weren't needed any more. The frames with all the work inside were right there in front of them.

It's times like this when we could do with a union. Billy Bunter lookalike, the new deputy general secretary of the CWU, Martin Walsh, says he has told the full-time union officials to come and see



us. But there's still no sign of them. We all wonder what they're scared of? Are they ashamed at how they've failed us? However, they weren't shy when it came to asking for us to vote for them in the election to these cushy jobs of theirs. We've all had letters in the post begging for our support. They went straight in the bin. ☐

**• Recruit them permanently**

This is the third week that management has been bringing in casuals. These workmates tell us that they sometimes get their allocated hours from the agency only a day before they're supposed to start. It's obvious managers can't do without them, so if they don't start treating them better

(including by offering them equal pay and conditions, guaranteed hours and proper contracts!) they will find themselves in big trouble! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 03/04/24]

**• Unsocial and insane!**

On Distribution managers announced that they want all night workers to start at midnight from 17 June onwards. Just

like that! Starting in the middle of the night is bad enough. But what's worse, we'll be right in the middle of rush hour traffic in the morning. It's totally out of order. How can we agree? And as for those of us driving to work, are they offering to pay the congestion charge? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 03/04/24]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)****Re-balloting until we're fed up?**

Assembly and machining had a 3rd round of balloting over Ford's pay offer on 4 April. Transport Ops workmates vote on the 15th. But we were surprised about this re-ballot.

The pay offer was presented to us last October and we rejected it (a below-inflation 2.5% pay rise, non-consolidated lump sum plus changes in collective bargaining). Shortly afterwards, 54% of us across all plants voted to go on strike.

But union officials didn't announce strike days. Instead they sat down with Ford to renegotiate. The result was a "clarification" which was circulated by

Ford and a new ballot which they hoped we'd agree to. But this time nothing was said about pay.

Ford's leaflet explained that changes in Ts&Cs were merely necessary "streamlining" given the much smaller total workforce. So for instance, why shouldn't they negotiate with just one plant convenor rather than all convenors etc., etc... And they repeated, against our demands that the 2-tier workforce was here to stay, and that new temps wouldn't qualify for the pay rise...

So of course, we've rejected the offer yet again. But now what? Will they get



us to vote over and over until they get the result they want? The fact that Ford has just issued a statement announcing that president and CEO Jim Farley was paid £21m in 2023, equivalent to a 26% increase, only makes us more determined to fight super-profitable Ford. We want strike dates! ☐

**• The mini-Quinn**

Unite National officer, Des Quinn's nothing like Quinn the Eskimo!\* He says if we strike, we might risk losing all the work which Ford claims its taskforce is looking for, like busy bees! Should we remind him that our last strike was in 1988? And that since then the number of hourly-paid has been cut from 32,500 to 2,200? If anything, this is due to the lack of strikes! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/04/24]

\* counter-advice, thanks to Manfred Mann's Mighty Quinn (1968) against hard work and speed-up: "When Quinn the Eskimo gets here, everybody's going to jump for joy!"

**• Asking for us to go too!**

On Panther, us LLL workers, keep seeing our agency workmates go, one after the other... and in the meantime we're left to do even more work?! We can't do it - and won't. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/04/24]

**• Our premium or theirs?**

The lay-off mania continues, this time with 3 days announced for us in the Darkside. And what's the excuse management comes up with this time? The usual lower "volume demand", but also... "reducing premium freight of constrained components" (WTF?). So they will make savings on freight? More than enough

to ensure we're paid in full on any lay-off day... [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/04/24]

**• With apologies to Aldi shoppers**

The terrible quality of the Transits we're "re-working" in AutoTech is all due to Ford's cost-cutting tricks: so for instance, the wings have been thinned and clamps have been made with such bad quality and cheap material, that they can be bent by hand. Ford says it plays in the Waitrose league, but it barely makes it to the Aldi league! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 10/04/24]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****When a slow-down is a speed-up**

Here at BMW Cowley, we're now in the 6th week of the "slow down" due to a new set-up being installed for the latest Mini Cooper model. There are 3 more months to go (until July!). This means we've been relying on lower pay and only working alternate weeks. Or, for those of us employed by logistics contractor R&H 2 weeks in and 2 weeks out.

The only way some of us have been able to compensate for the loss in pay has been through using up the overtime hours put aside during the previous months and held in BMW's "Working Time Account". But some of us working

for R&H, have been forced to go home without any income at all, taking what the company calls "sabbatical leave"...

But there is nothing "slow" about production right now! Despite being in "training mode" for the new jobs coming with this model, the lines are producing well over 230 cars per shift! Yes, in fact it's a speed-up!

This is resulting in hundreds of faulty Minis, which need to be repaired. And so the bosses are laying on overtime on nights and weekends. They've even announced new measures which allow them to extend our shifts by 30 minutes



and an additional Friday shift. Yet they insist that we should still be laid off on alternate weeks without pay? Time to say no. ☐

**• Asking for a mile...**

We got an eight-page document from BMW about the changes it wants to make to shift patterns. And it's asking us (well, BMW contract holders) to "approve" these in a ballot next week. But none of these so-called "flexibility levers" is good for us! Why would we vote for 12 more compulsory overtime shifts a year? Or vote to allow BMW to be more flexible with VPO or lengths of

shifts? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 09/04/24]

**• Why give them flexibility?**

So, for example, managers want the option to call (compulsory) Volume Protection Overtime whenever they like. At the moment, if they call and cancel VPO during the week, they're not allowed to call it again until the following week. While we're against VPO as it is, we're certainly against making it worse.

[Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 09/04/24]

**• Drowning in grommets**

This new model couldn't have more clips and grommets! It's no surprise these cars are coming out full of faults. At the current speed it's just impossible to fit them all in... If BMW want to produce this new model at all, someone's going to have to push the "slow" button. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 09/04/24]

## Letter from India

### Modi's authoritarian regime against the poor and minorities: part 3?

As elections approach in April-May, the Modi regime is trying every trick in the book to ensure its victory. So far, all has not gone as planned, however.

#### **Indian "democracy" bought and sold**

In March, the Electoral Commission published the details of political donations made through electoral bonds. These bonds were introduced by the Modi regime in 2017, supposedly to eliminate "black money" in politics by giving businesses a legal yet anonymous way to donate to political parties. Modi's intent was to force businesses to donate mainly to the BJP: since the party could arm-twist the State Bank of India (SBI, the sole issuer of electoral bonds) to find out which companies were donating to which parties, it made sure state contracts and subsidies were given to "loyal" companies. Meanwhile, black money continues to account for most corporate political donations and has probably increased, given the rising costs of elections.

In February, applications by legal activists forced the Supreme Court to declare electoral bonds unconstitutional and the SBI to make their details public. The released data is opaque: a third of bonds were bought by "unknown sources" (!) and some of the largest donors gave more than their paid-up capital and profits combined, so they must have been used as conduits for other companies to buy bonds.

Between 2019 and 2024, 50% of the value of electoral bonds went to the BJP, while only 12% went to their main rival, the Indian National Congress. The BJP also received 90% of funds from direct donations and electoral trusts. Soon after companies bought these bonds, they were awarded state contracts, given subsidies and charges for tax evasion and fraud against them were dropped. But companies sometimes fund both the BJP and opposition parties, when the latter hold power in regional states. This ensures they receive state contracts. But it also ensures that the opposition does not raise thorny questions in parliament, regarding the company's activities.



**"A young Indian ragpicker looks over the city after collecting usable material from a garbage dump at the Bhalswa landfill site in New Delhi (AFP/Getty)"**

Corporate money buys the largesse of the BJP and the silence of the opposition in the "world's largest democracy".

#### **Jailing the opposition**

Although the Indian capitalist class strongly backs the current regime, that has not ensured its unrivalled popularity across the country. In March, the government arrested Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi and National Convenor of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, the Everyman's Party) - the first time a sitting Chief Minister has been jailed in Indian history. Kejriwal stands accused of receiving bribes from liquor barons after he changed the city's alcohol tax regime. The timing of the arrest suggests Modi wants to prevent an increasingly powerful rival from campaigning: the AAP is in power in Punjab and Delhi and has influence in Modi's home state of Gujarat.

Another rival, Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Hemant Soren, was similarly accused of corruption and arrested at the end of January. As for the main opposition Congress Party, it's had its bank accounts frozen for not declaring cash assets of £14,000 in 2017-18. So despite the international press' conviction

that Modi's victory is certain, it seems Modi himself is not so sure.

#### **Mobilising the Hindu Right**

Apart from intimidating his rivals, Modi is trying to mobilise his right-wing Hindu base. In March, the government finally implemented the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which allows minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who arrived in India before 2015 to be given citizenship in India - as long as they aren't Muslim... The CAA was passed into law in 2019, but wasn't implemented due to powerful protests. In fact this law discriminates against Afghan and Rohingya Muslim refugees, raising fears they could be deported. But because it defines Indian citizenship on religious grounds, Indian Muslims fear it could result in their own citizenship being challenged. Most do not have a valid birth certificate/ID, which would be needed to prove their nationality; alongside the CAA, a new National Register of Citizens, which would force everyone to prove their citizenship, is waiting in the wings. Whether it too will be brought into law, remains to be seen. □

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:

BM Workers' Fight - LONDON WC1N 3XX.