

# WORKERS' fight



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

## THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REVERSE STARMER'S "TOUGH CHOICES"!

Chancellor Rachel Reeves, very conveniently found a financial "black hole" in the public finances when she stepped into Jeremy Hunt's shoes. She said she was "shocked". So, said Reeves, there was no choice but to make big cuts... And since the "black hole" is due to the Tories' mess, Labour's cuts are the Tories' fault!

Yes, including the "tough choice" to leave the NHS underfunded and in a collapsed state.

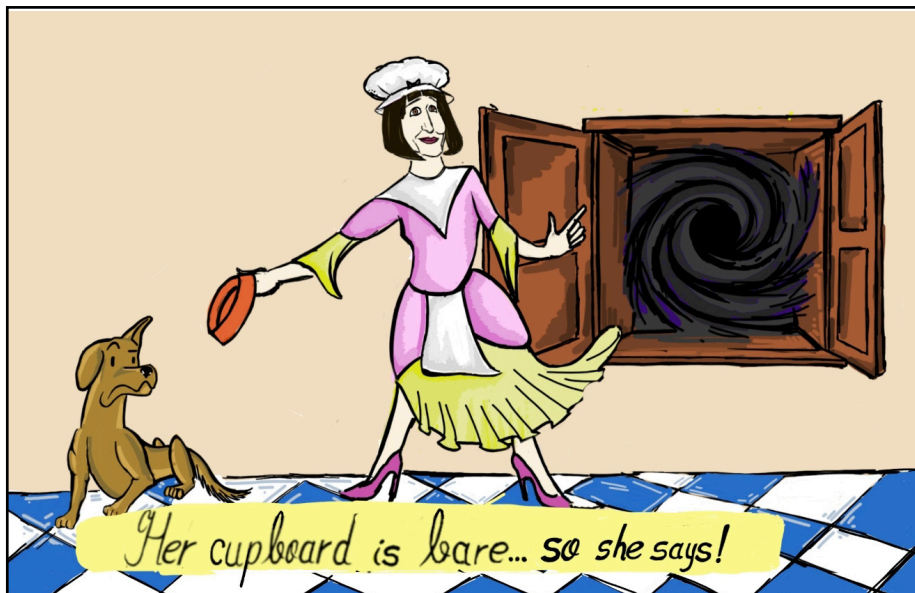
Indeed, it seems the report on the broken NHS by Labour peer Lord Darzi, which offers no actual solutions, was published in order to prove that the scale of the problem was too great to fix! "Reform or die" was Starmer's answer. And for now, apparently, there are no funds available to prevent death!

This, when even the bosses' favourite Financial Times wrote in its editorial that "given how central health is to all public services, and to boosting growth, fixing the NHS is surely this government's paramount domestic policy challenge". Indeed, one would have thought so! But it seems cuts come first.

### Protecting the rich

Starmer took the opportunity of the Trades Union Congress annual get-together - which always opens conference season - to address delegates over his government's "difficult decisions". He said that he intends to provide the right sort of environment for the bosses, so that they will start to "grow the economy"; also known as "them growing even richer"... And how else but at the expense of the rest of us?

Of course. And beyond that is the general context: the global crisis of the capitalist system, in which all the politicians in power are making similar choices in favour of the capitalists' greed, by cutting public and social spending, impoverishing their working classes and, some would say, providing political space for the far-right.



Accordingly, Labour's "toughness" is reserved for use against the marginalised and the poor, who anyway, are no longer considered to be its electorate. After all, abstention was a record high on 4 July election day, as were votes for independents. It's probably only a matter of time before the "Labour" party changes its name!

Reeves had scarcely put her feet under Number 10's Cabinet table before the announcement came that pensioners' fuel allowance of £200-300 a year would be her first target, to recoup (just) £1.3bn for the Treasury! She claims this to be an essential first cut to "stabilize the economy"!

Some Labour backbenchers pointed out that taking money out of the pockets of the elderly wouldn't be a "good look" for the government, especially since last winter the elderly poor were already choosing between heating and eating. But Starmer and Reeves stuck to their guns - aimed literally at 10m pensioners. They have also refused to abolish the 2-child benefit cap.

### But surely that's anti-labour?

Starmer told TUC conference that he "sees" the problems, but has a "mandate for economic stability" which he refuses to "risk". Yes, a "mandate" from the less than 20% of the electorate who actually gave him their vote! Nevertheless, ministers are fully committed to using the perverse outcome of the election to force austerity down working class throats at the behest of British business, with whom Starmer now boasts of a "new, positive relationship".

Union leaders patted Starmer on the back. No surprise there: workers are still paying for the sell-outs these guys signed up to after the 2022 strikes.

Of course, it's true that Labour could "tax the rich", as one or two TUC delegates shouted out, during Starmer's speech. Except he already said he won't. So the working class has its "work" cut out. And this time it can't leave the organisation of a fightback to union leaders. It will have to start on the shopfloor. ☐

## International

## Gaza and the West Bank: bombs and bulldozers... and now, polio

There is no respite for the Palestinian population. Even their tents on the Gazan beaches are being bombed. Impossibly, each day the death toll increases. The Israeli army still claims it is "targeting Hamas", but nobody among Gaza's population (or anywhere else, for that matter) can believe that any more.

In the meantime there has been a renewed and unprecedented offensive on the West Bank since 28 August. At least 47 Palestinians have been killed across Jenin, Tulkarm, Tubas and Hebron - but also a Turkish-American peace activist, Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, who was shot dead by Israeli forces while protesting against illegal Israeli settlement expansion in the town of Beita.

Streets have been ploughed up and homes bulldozed. In fact by now, as many as 699 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 7 October, and 10,400 mainly young Palestinians have been thrown into prison without trial.

**Polio returns after 25 years**

The only actual pause in the bombing and shelling of Gaza was in order to allow World Health Organisation staff to vaccinate Gaza's children against polio. The Israeli army was forced to agree, given the fact that the virus (thought to have been eradicated for the past 25 years!) could spread to its own population. But this was the briefest pause possible.

In fact a variant polio virus type 2 was found in 6 out of 7 water samples



Gaza: where the polio virus thrives

from Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. Already 3 children (aged 1 year, 5 years and 10 years) had been diagnosed with the acute flaccid paralysis caused by this virus. The reason for the outbreak was obviously the sewage-contaminated water and destruction of sanitation caused by the war. But also the fact that war disrupted Gaza's excellent vaccination programme. Hopefully now most children have received the 2 rounds of oral vaccine which are needed...

**Playing the Egyptian card**

Whether Biden's ceasefire deal will eventually be agreed upon remains in question. Even if this happens, it comes too late for the Gazan people. As for the Israeli hostages whose freedom the deal is meant to secure, already half their number are dead.

To incentivise the deal, Egypt has just

been given \$1.3bn (£1bn) in military aid by Biden. It will, said a US spokesperson, advance "regional peace and Egypt's specific and ongoing contributions to US national security priorities... [help] finalise a ceasefire agreement for Gaza, bring the hostages home, [secure] humanitarian assistance for Palestinians... and help bring an enduring end to the Israel-Hamas conflict".

Of course, the means to end the conflict was always in the hands of Washington. The reason it has not done so is because its regional policy in the Middle East was historically guaranteed by the Israeli regime. But sticking with the reactionary (some would say maniacal) Netanyahu for this long into the war has become critically dangerous. Whether shifting their finance-fuelled diplomacy to Egypt can belatedly achieve a deal, however, remains to be seen. □

## Ukraine: Zelensky's latest gamble

Earlier in August, Zelensky claimed "Ukrainians know how to achieve their goals", after Ukrainian military forces penetrated into the Western Russian province of Kursk. The result: dozens of deaths (neither side gives any figures of casualties!), another 130,000 civilians displaced - and Russian retaliatory attacks, with the Ukrainian population at the receiving end.

But never mind! Despite the heavy price paid by the populations on both sides, this limited incursion into Russian territory - Ukraine's military claims it controls 500 square miles - allowed Zelensky to claim his goal was achieved. He is now using this military success as proof that he can win and has renewed his demands for more weapons from the West!

**Upping the ante...**

Indeed, Zelensky has been complaining that the West is not providing the military supplies he needs, especially long range missiles that would allow him to hit targets inside Russian territory.

Obligingly, David Lammy has met the USA's Anthony Blinken to discuss whether British- or US-supplied missiles should now be fired into Russia, with the risk, of course, that this further escalates the Russian military response...

The announcement of provision of long range missiles (worth £162m) was already made by new Labour defence secretary John Healey at the latest NATO defence summit in Germany, where defence ministers and military leaders coordinate their action against Russia.

Healey insisted that under Labour there would be "definitely no change" as far as supporting this proxy war goes. And the US, by far the largest military "donor" in Ukraine (£45bn so far) followed by Germany (£9bn) and Britain (£7.5bn), also promised a further £190m package which includes long-range missiles.

This, apparently in response to the threat of Russian ballistic missiles being used against Ukraine - which Iran has been accused of supplying in order to provide yet another pretext to sanction the Iranian regime.

**... to sue for peace?**

But while the Western powers keep (drip) feeding this proxy war, its leaders face an ever-growing contradiction. The imperialist powers cannot allow their Ukrainian "ally" to be crushed by Russia, they also cannot afford a defeat of Putin's regime, which could destabilize a gigantic region with risky consequences. This is why a growing section of Ukrainian allies, including the US administration, is pushing for the opening of peace negotiations between Kiev and Moscow. It is also why, in order to enter these negotiations with a stronger hand, Zelensky wants missile-strike power inside Russian territory - or as he put it during the Ramstein summit: "we need to have this long-range capability ... so that Russia is motivated to seek peace".

But there is also something that remains at the back of every Western leader's mind, and indeed Zelensky's and Putin's: their fear that the more this war drags on, the greater the anger among their populations, increasing the likelihood of a popular explosion - which would inevitably turn against them... □

## New government, same (or maybe even worse!) health and social care crisis

## This society

The crisis in the health and social care systems is an emergency. It was already the case before the Covid pandemic and since then this situation has only got worse. The report by "Lord" Darzi on the NHS published on 11 September, saying it was in "serious trouble" just confirms what everyone already knew. Darzi doesn't offer solutions. He wasn't asked to. And when Starmer responded, he said there'd be no extra money "without reform": it's "reform or die"... But without urgent extra funding many patients are going to die, because of the long queues for diagnosis and treatment. That's the truth of it.

### Social care privatised

What was not discussed, was social care, however. This all but collapsed during the Covid pandemic, exposing systemic inadequacy: chronic understaffing, workforce super-exploitation, and abysmal standards of care.

The root cause was, of course, the separation of social care from the NHS, initiated in the 1980s, under the Thatcher government and its opening up to the private sector.

In 1993, John Major's government also removed long-term care from the NHS. Facilities within hospitals - including dementia care wards were closed; "care in the community" became the watchword. And since "care-giving" doesn't easily lend itself to profit-making, much of it just disappeared, while the rest became paid-for. Local Authorities had to step in to help, but few could provide facilities; instead they act as a broker, deciding who pays for private care and who gets paid for



by the state.

### ... paid by public money

Care packages are subject to means-tested charges, which often mean the elderly must sell their homes to pay the bill before the state will step in to fund their care. And almost all authorities rely on the costly private sector to provide residential places and day-care at home.

Blair's Labour government and every government thereafter ignored Royal Commission recommendations to reform this system. So today, while English local authorities may manage social care services in their own areas, they end up beholden to the private sector, whose profiteering is then paid for out of public money!

Inevitably, however, at some point almost all of these residents become sick and frail and require frequent admissions to the NHS, where they get stuck because

of the shortage of residential beds! So, it's back to square one!

### The "integrated" non-starter

It was the May and Johnson governments which announced that social care and the NHS should be merged back into one system. Since then, 42 "Integrated Care Services" have been proclaimed across England. These bodies, incorporating general practice and other primary care along with health authorities are meant to develop (integrated!) health and social care services for each area. But they have not even got off the ground, because the necessary infrastructure (funding and trained personnel!) doesn't exist.

It remains to be seen what the Labour government, now talking about "preventative" healthcare (and which has already said the money isn't there), is going to make of this situation. But improvement is not in sight. ☐

## • Thames Water: footing the bill for its stinking mess?

Thames Water wants to increase water bills by 59% by 2030 - a ~10% increase each year - and that's excluding the added cost of inflation! It means that an average household water bill would go up from £443/year to £638/year, if the government's regulator, Ofwat, allows the company to get away with it.

In July, Ofwat had set a 23% bill increase cap for Thames Water, but the water bosses said that wasn't "enough", and asked for a 44% increase - later

raised to 59%. The final decision on this bill hike and proposed increase by 15 other water companies across England and Wales, will be made in December.

Having failed to invest and paid out billions in shareholder dividends, water companies are now accruing huge debt - in total £60.6 billion. Thames Water alone owes £15.2bn, and claims it will run out of money by next May unless it puts bills up. This comes in the middle of scandals around sewage

spills, pollution and chronic pipe leaks in the industry - for example, Thames Water more than doubled its sewage discharges in 2023.

But even if renationalisation may be the only way to clean up Britain's water, new business and trade secretary Jonathan Reynolds has already made it clear he intends to see Thames Water's issues resolved without "government involvement"!

## • Killer work shifts... for your "well-being"!

Under Labour's new workers' rights legislation, the right to work 4 days a week instead of 5, is to be "strengthened". And of course, this has nothing to do with cutting working hours so that workers can rest more and work less! Labour ministers have proclaimed that "flexible working is actually good for productivity". The idea is that the 40-hour week can be squeezed into 4 days, so that instead of working 8 hours a day for 5 days, workers can do 10 hours a day for 4 days.

Contrary to expectations, however, this

hasn't gone down well - especially not at workplaces where any kind of exertion, mental and/or physical, is required. So for instance in July, Asda shelved a four-day week trial after staff complained that longer shifts were too tiring.

At engineering and industrial supplies company Allcap, the boss admitted that: "As opposed to 10 normal workdays, we found that once [employees] got to their scheduled day off they were exhausted" and, he added, "Once we factored in holidays, sickness and caring

responsibilities, we also struggled to find cover for an employee on their rest day"... Yes, precisely!

A 10-hour day is too long; even 8 hours is, if there aren't substantial breaks - and not just after 6 hours, as the law prescribes! Already back in the early 1800s, at the height of the industrial revolution, utopian socialist and mill-owner, Robert Owen divided the day into thirds - 8 hours work, 8 hours recreation and 8 hours sleep. And a century and a quarter later, workers are offered the "right" to work 10 hours?

## Their society

An ITV Tonight documentary on the racist riots which took place on Britain's streets at the beginning of August argues that "online posts fuelled the flames". However by documenting the number of hits and shares, which certain key online posts received, it appears that they actually caused the riots and then spread them. That is core far-right activists, like Tommy Robinson and other former English Defence League (EDL) leaders, consciously orchestrated this violence.

The figures are undeniable: 3 days after the Southport violence, Robinson's post encouraging people to react against "migrants and asylum seekers killing our sons and daughters" received 434 million views! By blaming the deranged killing of 3 girls in Southport by a mentally compromised British-born teenager on a "Muslim on an MI5 watchlist", Robinson was consciously inciting violent anti-Islamic racism. In Southport, within hours of a vigil for the victims, a mob attacked a local mosque and then turned on the police.

As for Nigel Farage, by questioning whether the authorities were deliberately "hiding the truth" about what happened in Southport, he helped fan the flames.

It's certainly the case that the British media played a role in this too. If, right

## The riots: orchestrated by racist, far-right, online activism



Mob trying to set fire to Rotherham hotel

from the start of their reports of such killing sprees, they made clear that these are invariably the actions of the severely mentally ill, it would go some way to pre-empting lynch mob responses.

ITV reported how online activity reached a fever pitch on 4 August, the day when rioters tried to break into and set fire to hotels housing asylum seekers in Tamworth and Rotherham. It was also on the 4th, that Elon Musk stuck his oar in, posting that "civil war is inevitable"!

The reaction of ordinary people against the damage caused by the riots was instant. They went in with brooms and bin bags and cleaned up the mess. And when far-right posts threatened 23 more riots, up and down the country, advertising time and place, local communities and left-wing counter-rioters got there first and in large numbers, effectively putting an end to this far-right initiative. For now, at least.

## Seven years after the Grenfell fire: no "remediation"

On the eve of the publication of the final report of the Grenfell enquiry, fire broke out at a 7-storey block of flats in Dagenham. It was having its flammable cladding removed. The fire, which was sparked by equipment on the



Burnt out Dagenham flats

scaffolding erected around the building, spread within minutes to the whole block. It rapidly burnt out, despite the best efforts of over 200 firefighters. A hundred residents have been left homeless, but fortunately, this time, all are alive.

The latest (official) government data shows that, 7 years after the Grenfell fire, remediation work has begun or been completed on only 50% of the 4,613 residential buildings (of 11 metres in height or more) which had been fitted with "unsafe" cladding. So to date, there are still 2,331 buildings still housing around 500,000 people, which remain unsafe.

### Their vested interests

Much of the time this is because the owners and freeholders refuse to pay for the work to be done and have handed the very large bill to residents who cannot pay. And so these potential fire hazards remain!

Yet this situation could have been safely sorted out straight away, if, 7 years ago, the government had taken full responsibility for organising - and paying for - the immediate removal of all inflammable cladding everywhere, as the matter of urgency which it was - and is!

And yes, once the threat of fire

had been removed, then all the parties responsible in the first place, could have been made to stand trial and be sentenced for their criminal negligence and their lethal greed. Government ministers' heads - of all stripes - would also have had to roll.

### No change nor justice while profit rules!

But no. The government of the day, Theresa May's in this case, just passed the buck. No surprise really, since the ignorant parrots of the capitalist class in parliament consistently supported "a bonfire of red tape"; the red tape of health and safety regulation. It makes them just as much arsonists as the construction companies whose interests they represent. They not only cut safety regulations to ribbons, but cut the fire service, under-equipped it and ignored all of the many warnings from residents in the run-up to the actual fire on 14 June 2017.

Indeed the Grenfell fire was a fire fully foretold. Today Grenfell survivors demand justice and change. But the reality is that this will only come through revolution: when the profit system is completely overturned and replaced - and its supporters and parrots duly relegated. □

**Their economy**

**• “The cupboard is bare” says Chancellor Hubbard. And she won’t fill it.**

A few days after being elected, Labour discovered that “*financial black hole*” of £22bn. Just like Old Mother Hubbard, new Chancellor Reeves has turned round and said, that “*the cupboard is bare*”. So the “poor doggies” that is the rest of us “will get none”!

Of course, she was “*surprised*”, and claimed that, to rectify the situation, she needed to act “*urgently*”. That is, start Labour’s austerity policies immediately,

such as retaining the cap on child benefit and removing winter fuel allowances for pensioners.

But how could this be such a “surprise”? Firstly, the Institute for Fiscal Studies had already warned well before the election, that any new government would have to deal with a shortfall in public finances of about £20bn. And not only that, but this “black hole” is, not so surprisingly, about the same as the cost

of the cut made to National Insurance back in April, by the then Tory chancellor Hunt... with Labour’s support!

Just like the “poor dog” in Ella Fitzgerald’s version of the Mother Hubbard nursery rhyme, we might say to Reeves: “*If you can’t get a bone, Hubbard, bring me some meat!*” There’s certainly lots of “meaty” profits in this society - it’s just a matter of looking in the right pockets...

**• Stabbing pensioners in the back**

Up until now, all pensioners in England and Wales, if born before 23 September 1958, qualified for a Winter Fuel Payment. But the new Chancellor decided that cutting it was to be her first priority, despite the obvious “bad look” this was for a new “Labour” government.

This payment was never a great amount: it was increased from £200 to £300 per year during the pandemic. But certainly it helped, given soaring energy costs. And these costs are due to soar again - by 10%. Energy regulator, Ofgem has just raised the cap to £1,717 per year from October. And for households who don’t pay by direct debit or have meters - the poorest - the price will rise even more.

Of course, pensioners on social benefits (pension credit) will still receive the fuel allowance. But to receive pension credit your income has to be under £218.15 per week and the state then tops it up to just that amount - and

no more! Even someone earning the minimum wage for 30 hours a week earns over £300/ week... In other words, pensioners passing the means-test are dirt poor. And they need a lot more financial help than an annual Winter Fuel Payment.

Starmer’s defence is that the “Triple Lock” which raises the state pension in line with inflation will “*more than compensate*” for the loss. But a loss of £200 remains a loss. Nobody will forget where Reeves and Starmer chose to aim their first axe.



**• Why not means-test pensioner Charles III’s sovereign grant?**

If there was ever an ill-timed pay increase it was the £45m allowance given to royal pensioner, Charles III, just as his fellow-pensioners are facing a cut in theirs! To be precise it’s the so-called “*sovereign grant*” for the Royal family which is going up by 50% to £132m (from £83m last year), thanks to a big rise in Crown Estate profits.

And this “windfall” is a literal one: it comes from leasing parts of the British coastline to offshore windfarms, since the Crown Estate owns the territorial seabed out to 12 nautical miles and around half

of the foreshore! Strangely enough, this “ownership” though sounding like a feudal remnant, was granted as recently as 2004 - and by Tony Blair’s Labour government!

One might well ask, given the government’s switch to means-testing of pensioners when it comes to the Winter Fuel Allowance - why the King isn’t also means-tested for his royalty allowance. And by the way he was also eligible for the (now erstwhile) Winter Fuel Allowance, too! But given his personal fortune - according to the 2024

Sunday Times Rich List his net worth is £610 million (up by £10m this year) does he really need any allowance from taxpayers at all?

We read: “*funds from the grant have been used to renovate (erstwhile Prince Harry’s) Frogmore Cottage, replace the household’s 15 year-old aircraft with two new helicopters, and to convert the King’s two state Bentleys to run on biofuel...*” A referral to Lewis Carroll’s Red Queen is surely in order... “*Off with his grant!*”

**British prisons, not far behind the US!**

Prisons in Britain have been bursting at the seams. Their capacity rate was already at 107% before Starmer announced that prisoners would have to be released early to provide space for new inmates. And no wonder. Britain has the highest incarceration rate among rich European countries, with 133 per 100,000 people!

It is the USA, however, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world: 629 per 100,000 people. However there is an even higher rate of imprisonment for black Americans: 1,096 per 100,000! But for US presidential candidate Kamala Harris to speak against mass incarceration, as she has during her election campaign,

is the height of hypocrisy! She openly defied US Supreme Court orders to reduce overcrowding in California prisons for over a decade, while serving as the state’s attorney general, because the state’s businessmen were against losing the near-slave labour provided by inmates!

**Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)****• Running down the USO before it's cut**

Last month, RM announced its USO quality of service figures between April and June - 94.1% of Second Class mail delivered within three working days and 79.1% of First Class mail within one working day - i.e. it failed to meet the USO requirements. But we're surprised the figures are even this high! And not only us: according to Citizen's Advice Bureau, one in four customers don't trust a second class letter will arrive when it should, so end up buying a more expensive first class stamp. That's exactly the direction that RM and Ofcom want to take the USO - a barely-existent second class service, so that people are forced to use the more expensive first class.

**• Extortion!**

And we all know that stamp prices have risen astronomically. In just 5 years, the first class stamp price has basically doubled - 70p in 2019, and now £1.35!

**• A done deal**

At the end of July, Labour Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds met with Daniel Kretinsky, and then announced that his takeover of RM would be investigated by under the National Security & Investment Act. It means the takeover is suspended

until October, probably. Apparently, the government is investigating Kretinsky's "links to Russia". But nothing about ensuring the USO continues or anything like that!

**• "Training" us to see thru the b-s**

Delivery Offices everywhere are taking on lots of agency temps... who get an "induction"... which mainly consists of telling them that parcels come first! What they do learn pretty quickly is that duties are just impossible: as spares, they rarely get to prep the same frame or do the same walk twice. And sometimes end up cobbling together a parcels route because the Postal Digital Assitant doesn't work! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 04/09/24]

**• Criminal misnomer**

It remains the case that there are more positions/jobs/vacancies here than there are workers in this place. No matter to management: they still call a large number of us "supernumerary". Of course we're not surplus to requirements at all. They know it and we know it. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 04/09/24]

**• No to such nonsense!**

But now they want us to "pick" a job - they call it "Repick 3.0" which is "available to displaced and supernumerary staff".



Worse, these jobs are supposedly part-time, and involve working Saturday and Sunday! And worst of all, some Saturdays are 10-hour or 12-hour days: midday Sat to 10pm, or 6pm Sat to 6am on Sunday!! [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 04/09/24]

**• Admission of guilt**

And then, Processing managers have the cheek to bring in casuals? It's an open admission that they're short of hands in almost every area during normal week days! Why aren't they designating those duties as permanent jobs, that we (and casuals) can "pick" from? [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 04/09/24]

**• Not good enough!**

A couple of weeks ago, RM-PFS cleaners got a self-congratulatory letter from Union officials, saying they'd negotiated a great pay deal on our behalf... which comes to just £13.15/hr (£12 outside London)! And they think that's good? Let them try living on it. [Workers' Fight bulletin Mount Pleasant 04/09/24]

**BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)****• When is cancelling not cancelling?**

BMW cancelled the Friday Working Time Account (overtime) shift last week - and imposed Volume Protection Overtime on each shift instead! That's four hours, as opposed to the minimum five on a Friday, added to shifts that are already too long. All we could do on Friday was recover! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• Shorten shifts and share the work**

Yes, we've had more than enough already of four or five ten hour shifts, give or take, with no rest days! And all so that BMW can get skeleton crews banging out cars at a speed that's been filling Rework for six months? No. If BMW wants the production volume of more than two crews, it needs to get a third crew back! [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• Anyone remember "right first time"?**

The situation in rework is an ongoing shambles. And managers are just throwing endless overtime at the problem! Since

August, we've been asked in every weekend, Saturday and Sunday! But there's still more than twice as many cars in rework as there "should" be... [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• Rush. Lay-off. Rework. Repeat!**

Management is also stopping Assembly shifts early, or cancelling them altogether to avoid rework filling up too much. But we can't carry on like this - rushing production (yes, the line still running at a ridiculous speed!), only to be laid off while most of the cars get reworked. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• Their flexibility, our strait-jacket**

When BMW brought in Working Time Account, we heard a lot of propoganda about how it offered us "flexibility". The bosses stopped pretending that long ago. And now, even if we've got enough credit already, they impose WTA hours on us whether we want them, or not and would rather have the money! Does that mean more lay-offs which they haven't told us about yet? [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• What do they expect to happen?**

We hear rumours (again) of moving to one shift at some time next year, i.e. more job cuts! But it's the job cuts last year which have caused a lot of the current mess, because managers are trying to get too few of us to do too much, and obviously it can't be done. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**• BMW can talk...**

Rather than blame itself for the mess of course, BMW blames faulty parts. Sure, there certainly are many faulty parts! But that's due to BMW and its suppliers cutting corners (and jobs) to boost their profits. So yeah, it's no surprise that "quality" (if they ever had any) suffers. [Workers' Fight bulletin BMW Mini Oxford 11/09/24]

**King's Cross railway station (London)**



**Rail renationalisation... on a shoestring?**

Transport Secretary Louise Haigh launched Great British Railways on 3 September with the motto: "move fast, and fix things" after the necessary Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill passed through the House of Commons. True to her word, announcements have been coming in fast, but as for fixing things, that's another story!

In fact the renationalisation promised by the new government is only meant to be complete by the end of its 5-year term in office... although Haigh says

that her department could speed up the process by taking over private franchises before they expire, but only when "poor performances breach contracts".

Of course state ownership, in and of itself does not guarantee an efficient and safe rail service. It was the underinvestment and deliberate running down of the formerly nationalised service by successive governments in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, which allowed rail privatisation to become an "acceptable" alternative in the first place. Today the service is again run down; so now

the government has to put the engine into reverse. As for the fast fix Haigh promises, railway workers know better than to hold their breaths... ☐

**• Still paying us short**

So finally there's a pay rise for train drivers - after nothing at all since 2019... And the rest of us non-drivers can expect no less! A backdated 5% increase for 2019 to 2022 (3 years), 4.75% for 2022 to 2024 (2 years) and 4.5% for 2024 to 2025 (1 year). That's 2% per year averaged out - when it covers the period when RPI inflation hit 14.2% (October 2022) and was still 9.1% in August last year! [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 04/09/24]

**• There will be strings to come**

The only good thing about this deal is that there are no strings attached... for now. Which is precisely what the Transport minister is being criticised for, so we had better watch out for the strings to come - and be ready

with our hedge-cutters! In fact that applies to the whole of the railway workforce... [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 04/09/24]

**• It's over?**

Then there's the LNER drivers' strike which LNER bosses and Mick Whelan agreed - above our heads - to call off. Apparently managers who drove trains during the strike and during the rest day working ban have agreed not to do so in the future... altho' this isn't exactly stipulated in the new agreement. And it doesn't begin to address the other "issue" which is the driver shortage across the whole network which has made rest-day working (unsafe, full stop!) in all TOCs "normal"! [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 04/09/24]

**• Since they like to drive...**

Since nobody should be driving on rest

days anyway, increased overtime pay or not, one possibility could be to get these manager enthusiasts to carry on driving, but demote them to "driver"... and of course they'd have to forego the £500 they were getting as a little tip... and join the union. [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 04/09/24]

**• Ban these rosters**

The 4 consecutive night shifts of 12 hours continue to over-tire and over-stress GN station staff. This kind of shift working should be outlawed. True, we hear over and again how "workers want to work these shifts because they get 4 days off as a result"! Maybe so. But working these shifts will kill us prematurely, that's for sure. Even a 4-6 hour night shift - which should be the max - isn't good for anyone over 45... [Workers' Platform bulletin Kings' X 04/09/24]

**Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**

**• Must we bring our own?**

We came back from shutdown to find all the chairs around Tiger assembly lines were gone! Apparently Ever-rat decided these chairs were a left-over from Covid times and threw them in a skip!? Well, that won't do - we need to sit, so he'd better acquire new (comfy!) seats for us pronto! In the meantime our own folding camp-chairs can serve as temporary sit-ins. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

**• Farmyard frenzy**

Some fed-up workmates on the Chicken Farm decided to leave on early retirement, even without enhanced terms... Yup, it's that bad. We're told the target is 420 per shift, but then managers push for 450! Panther workmates have been brought in to make up numbers, but even so they still want us to work overlap overtime. And then what? Next week, they lay us off? [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

**• Permanent temporary solutions**

On Lion machining, we're back to full-shifts, apparently because of orders from Argentina, etc... So there's lots of work, but not enough of us to do it! True, management sends Panthers to help, so the back and forth between areas continues: there's never a full complement of workers anywhere! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

**• We'd never agree to this**

What's this mystery new sick leave procedure in DEP/DDC? Apparently if we're off more than 9 days, managers will put us on stage 1... which will last for 2 years!?! Did the JWC/shop stewards committee sign up to this? If so they'd better un-sign and get back to us sharply to explain themselves! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

**• Way too busy already**

Management keeps going on about Lion machining being 1,000 engine (pieces)



behind... They've already arranged for 12-hr overtime shifts on Saturday/Sunday to catch up. And now we hear they'd like to bring back the 144? We've made it clear, time and again, that we'll never work those killer shifts! [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

**• We want full osp!**

This new Lineside pay offer is worth a 2.5% pay rise and only 5 days of occupational sick pay - with the first 3 days unpaid! So Unite union officials had better not dare to agree anything - we know all of their tricks! Or maybe incompetencies... for example they presented this latest offer while still circulating the previous one through their What's App group. [Workers' Fight bulletin Ford Dagenham 12/09/24]

## International

### Bangladesh: what next for the working class?

On 5 August, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had to flee her residence after it was stormed by thousands of protestors. Led by youth and students, angry demonstrations against her regime had been growing for weeks despite being met with the bullets of the police and army. It's now known that at least 1,000 protesters were killed, in what's said to have been the most violent period in Bangladesh's history since the 1971 independence war.

The anti-government protest was sparked by Hasina's re-introduction of a "jobs-quota", reserving jobs for descendants of the veterans of the 1971 war - in the context of growing white collar unemployment. The youth struck a nerve among a population confronting growing poverty, a soaring cost of living and the 15-year long authoritarian dictatorship of Hasina - who "won" serial elections by banning and imprisoning opposition politicians.

#### **A military-backed interim government**

Finally on 5 August, in face of the massive, angry crowd the army held its fire and "advised" Hasina to resign. To avoid a vacuum of power the Nobel prize-winning "economist" Muhammad Yunus was invited to take over as interim leader. Yunus is credited with the so-called "microcredit revolution", but now provides loans to small businesses at extortionate interest rates through his Grameen Bank. He is meant to organise elections within 90 days.

However, the main political parties have little more to offer the population than Hasina's Awami League. As soon as she fled, members of the main opposition party, the right-wing Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) started struggling amongst



themselves for control of the Awami League's money-making rackets. And the now unbanned Jamat-e-Islami's youth wing is demanding that Islam play a greater role in public life, for instance by demanding that the Quran be recited in the formerly secular universities.

#### **Workers make a stand**

But what about the working class? After all, Bangladesh is the low-wage destination for the world's fashion brands, with large industrial areas near Dhaka housing hundreds of thousands of workers.

Fearful that textile workers might join the protests, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturing Employers' Association (BGMEA) had kept the textile mills open, despite threats made by the protesters against mills owned by Awami League

notables. Nevertheless, on 31 August, striking workers closed down over 200 factories, blocking roads around Dhaka, demanding pay rises, transport and food allowances and longer maternity leave.

Yunus has sent the military and industrial police against them and the BGMEA sent its own armed thugs. That said, striking pharmaceutical workers have already won a pay rise and the regularisation of casual workers. So textile workers are not giving up. At the time of writing, they remain on strike.

For now, the social situation remains fluid. Most of the police force remains in hiding, fearing reprisals from the population. Of course, the capitalist class, backed by the military, wants a stable new regime. But the working class could well continue to thwart their efforts. □

### Africa's Mpox epidemic: spread by a sick world health system

On 5th September, Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC) received its first vaccine doses against Mpox since the start of the epidemic in 2022 - a delay that has cost 1,151 lives! In fact, already in May 2022, the WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) after a Londoner came back sick from a trip to Nigeria.

So far, in 2024, 103,446 cases and 225 deaths have been reported worldwide (90% of these in DRC and of course most of them in Africa, among children) - hence the WHO's second PHEIC declaration this August. However, DRC has only received 100,000 vaccines out of the 3 million needed

to contain the epidemic.

The WHO's warnings didn't get more vaccines sent over from Western governments. Instead, they started stockpiling in a way reminiscent of the Covid pandemic - in which 524 million excess doses (£5.1bn!) were wasted... And so, the stock value of Bavarian Nordic (Danish) and Emergent BioSolutions (US) - the two manufacturers holding the Mpox vaccine patents - increased by 18% each.

At £110 per dose, Mpox vaccines are the latest (and most profitable...) generation of the very first vaccine ever made! Yet they are nothing more than Smallpox vaccines - a simple vaccine developed in 1796 by Edward

Jenner. Indeed, the DNA of Smallpox and Mpox is 98% identical.

Smallpox is the only (global) viral disease to have been totally eradicated. This was achieved thanks to a worldwide vaccination campaign led by the former Soviet Union, which provided 1.5 billion (free!!) doses between the 1950s and 1970s (85% of the world's output). This, using a (public!) process based on freeze-drying, centrifuges and cows! But now, under the purely "for private profit" system worldwide, a new Poxvirus - albeit a "softer version" of Smallpox - threatens to become endemic, again. □

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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