

WORKERS' fight



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

UNEMPLOYMENT, WE'VE HAD ENOUGH!

The Con-Dems claim that their "growth review", due on 29 November, will reverse the past 4 years of recession, factory closures and job cuts. But will it? Because, on the basis of what has been leaked so far, it looks like a package for "profit growth"!

Remember how Osborne boasted that private jobs would make up for his public sector job cuts? It didn't happen, did it? Yet, the promise of new jobs in his "growth review" is based on the same assumption.

Handouts to the capitalists

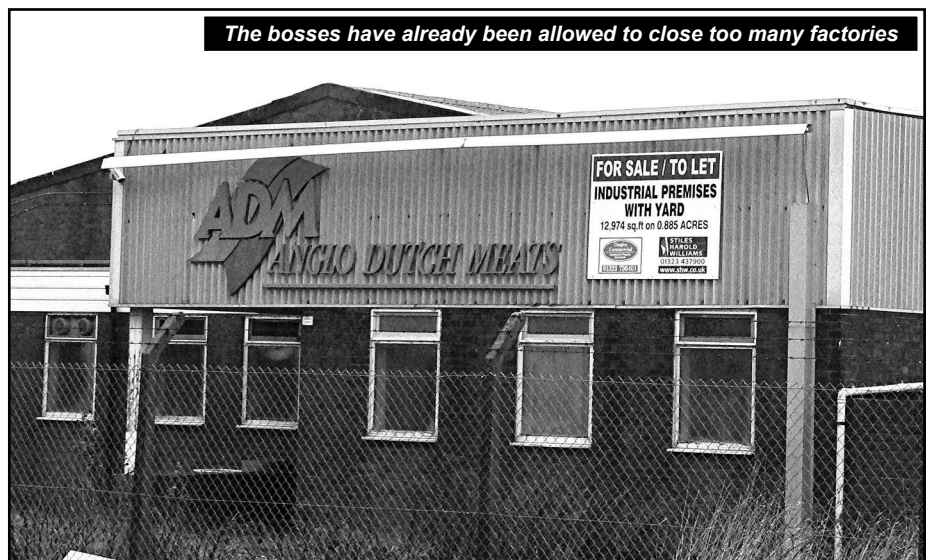
Of the package's two main elements, the first would be a "credit easing", similar to the "quantitative easing" used to pump cash into the financial system. Except that, this time, the banks would be offloading corporate bonds (i.e. loans they have made to companies).

This would be a double handout for the capitalists. On the one hand, the banks would get rid of a growing pile of dubious company loans. On the other, it would allow a number of heavily indebted businesses to be treated more leniently regarding their repayments.

However, just like "qualitative easing", this "credit easing" would have one major drawback: it would create yet more inflation, since it would be funded by new money printed by the Bank of England. And those at the receiving end of this inflation would be, once again, workers who have no other income than wages and benefits!

The second element in Osborne's package would create an "infrastructure fund", in which pension funds and insurance companies would be "encouraged" to invest up to £50bn, to build or take over large infrastructure projects, such as roads, railway lines, etc., which they would then manage.

In other words, it would be another version of the Private Finance



Initiatives used by past Labour governments to build hospitals and refurbish council estates - on a gigantic scale. But the result would be the same: the "partners" would repay themselves by milking profits out of these facilities for decades to come. And as a Commons committee recently showed, the cost of these infrastructure projects would be considerably higher than what it would have been, had the state taken direct responsibility for them.

A job for all!!

Will this package actually create jobs? It is very unlikely.

The "credit easing" would put a lot of cash in the coffers of the banks, while cutting companies' costs. But would companies invest in new jobs and would banks lend to consumers at an affordable rate? They certainly haven't so far. And yet, it wasn't because they didn't have the resources!

Likewise for Osborne's "super-PFI" plan. Even if it does result in some new infrastructure projects, which is not even sure, they will use the services

of construction companies, which will just add a few casuals to their existing workforce, before sacking them as soon as the project is completed.

This is obviously no way of ending unemployment, which would require providing permanent jobs not only to the 2.5m who are officially unemployed, but also to the 2m+ "inactive" workers who would like to find work.

As last summer's riots showed, we are facing an employment emergency. No society can leave millions out of work, without risking a catastrophic degradation of its social fabric.

There is only one way to deal with this: by making all redundancies illegal and by ensuring that the available work is shared between all available hands, without loss of pay for anyone. This would dent the profits of the capitalist class, of course, but since they caused the crisis, it would only be par for the course! And since the capitalists and their politicians won't do it willingly, this will have to be an objective for the struggles to come. ☐

London housing benefit caps - a time bomb

London may be Britain's richest city, but the consequences of the crisis are as potentially explosive there as anywhere else, if not more.

When housing costs are considered, London has England's highest rates of poverty. Outer London saw the sharpest rises in claims for housing benefit from private tenants last year - the highest, 62%, in Redbridge (which includes part of Iain Duncan Smith's constituency!). About 80% of housing benefit

claimants in London are employed, but low-paid. No surprise then, that 220,000 people live in overcrowded, mostly private-rented, accommodation - 60,000 up on 10 years ago.

Since April, housing benefit to private tenants was capped, while there is no question of capping rents. As these caps are far below inner London private rent levels, poorer tenants are pushed out to the suburbs and beyond - increasing demand, and rents, there.

Public services in the outer suburbs, often way below inner London levels, are set to get stretched further. Bexley, for instance, has already twice the number of people per GP as Lambeth.

There's one comforting fact, though: the huge numbers of London's housing benefit claimants could represent a real collective force if they got organised - to fight for the construction of adequate, affordable social housing. □

Osborne looking for more ways to squeeze the poor

Indexing welfare benefits such as Job Seeker's Allowance to the lower measure of inflation, CPI, rather than RPI, will not save the Treasury what it was meant to. September's CPI figure of 5.2% was the highest for 20 years. As this figure is used to calculate annual benefit increases, this added an estimated £1.8bn to the benefits bill next year, compared to previous forecasts. So now

Osborne is floating yet more ideas for cutting the benefits bill for people of working age, telling Treasury officials to draw up proposals to scrap inflation-linked rises in future. He would rather link benefits to earnings, which are rising more slowly if at all.

The government also admitted it overestimated the saving from the changes to Employment and

Support Allowance, which will limit payments to one year. So it will be looking to cut a further £1bn from the welfare budget over the next five years. The Disability Alliance says that some claimants - including the terminally ill and seriously injured - are already set to lose up to £94 per week.. Allowing these cuts to go through simply isn't an option. □

• Cuts fuel child poverty

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) warned in October that government changes to tax and benefits will put 800,000 more children into poverty by 2020, with 3 million in absolute poverty by 2015. Average incomes will fall by 7% over the 3 years before "Universal Credit" is brought in - which is meant to guarantee that even if someone takes the lowest-paid job, they won't suffer a net loss of income through reduced benefit entitlement. But the 7% income fall, combined with the reduction in benefits due to CPI indexing, will mean that Universal Credit has little or no chance of impacting on poverty, even if it does what it says on the box, which is unlikely!

• Being poor is bad for your health

The question of how long we can be expected to live is supposedly answered every few years by the official Department of Health's life expectancy report.

So, apparently, in England, women can expect to live until they are 82.4 years old - which is 2 years longer than you could expect to live ten years ago. And men can expect to live to 78.4 years.

But hang on, if you live in a

The IFS projections show the government will even miss the "legally binding" target to ensure that fewer than 10% of children are living in poverty by 2020 - not just marginally, but by millions. Even the reduction of child poverty by 25%, between 1998 and 2009, was a failure: by then child poverty was meant to be halved.

The fact that in a world as rich as ours, such targets should have to be written into the law, is already a scandal. That these targets should not be achieved, is surely conclusive evidence that this capitalist system should be written off!

"deprived area" (like Barking and Dagenham or Hackney in London for instance, Coventry, Hartlepool, St Helens or Wolverhampton...), men and women can expect to live two years less, even if they, also, are living longer than they were ten years ago.

There it is in black and white, as if we didn't know it. Poverty damages health.

• Copping a degree

Oxford Brookes University has a new undergraduate degree course: the Foundation Degree in Policing. For between £6,000 and £9,000 a year, students will have lectures and carry out on-the-job training as special constables.

At the end of their two-year course they can apply for a job in the police, but have no guarantee of acceptance! Nonetheless, it is estimated that between 20% and 50% of new officers could join up via the degree pathway.

From the point of view of the government, it is a "win, win" situation. The police can cut down on the current 36-week training course that is internally-funded and during which police recruits are paid a salary of £3,259 pa. They can of course keep out any hopefuls who they feel will not fit in with the constabulary's "ethos". Last but not least, police chiefs can expect a cushy life lecturing at Brookes, after they've retired on full pension aged 50.

Whoever said a copper's lot is not a happy one?

30th November

For a rising tide of protest

The government is certainly worried at the prospect of millions of public sector workers walking out on November 30th. Teachers, lecturers and civil servants have already taken a day's action over pensions, on 30th June. This time, NHS and council workers are included in the ballot - and the results show how strongly workers feel across the board. Unison's ballot of 1.1 million members (health service and local government) got a 75% majority for strike action. Even the union of head teachers, which has never before voted to strike, got a 75% majority in favour. In total 22 unions have balloted their members.

Of course, it's not just the pensions issue which is making public sector workers angry, but also job cuts, wage cuts and cuts to services. And in this, all workers are really in it together!

While the union leaders have not organised a national demonstration for the day, there will be local rallies and marches up and down the

country. So everyone who is against the attacks on jobs and pensions - whether in the public or private

sector - can come out and show it on 30 November! Let us all use this chance! ☐



London: assemble 12 noon at Lincoln's Inn Fields, march to Victoria Embankment for rally at 2pm.

Oxford: assemble 2pm at Cowley Plain, rally 3.30pm Broad Street

Maude's fifteen minutes of fame?

Was it wishful thinking on Francis Maude's part when he suggested that public sector workers should make a token 15 minute protest on 30 November, instead of going on strike? Or did the Cabinet Office minister seriously think that public sector workers would be moved by his plea?

This is the government's latest, dubious, attempt to head off the strike of up to 3 million public sector

workers planned for November 30th. It claims to have offered "concessions", but that "hard line" union leaders refuse to call off the strike.

Let's hope the union leaders maintain the "hard line" against these "concessions" - because they amount to next to nothing. The government makes it sound as if workers within 10 years of their retirement age will not be affected, but it's not true. Like everyone else, they

will still be contributing more for a smaller pension. They just won't be as badly affected as younger workers, who will be retiring later, on top of paying more for even less.

So, yes, public sector workers still have every reason to fight the government's attack on their pensions. Not for 15 minutes, nor even for one day - but for as long as it takes. ☐

• Cutting bus routes is an attack on the poor

Those bus users living in rural or other areas off the main bus routes face a future that is "bloody murder" as one pensioner who lives on the Burbank estate, in Hartlepool told Channel 4 television. Due to the slashing of the government's bus subsidy and to additional local council's cuts, the bus that he relied on to get to the shops has been axed. Car-less and unable to afford £5.20 for the return taxi trip, he has to bring his shopping home on foot.

Hartlepool may be an extreme case, as it has cut all its bus subsidies. But in fact 90% of all councils have made cuts and it is the poorest who are

suffering. But why shouldn't profitable operators like Stagecoach, which has salted away a fortune since bus operators were denationalised in 1985, chip in? Considering the importance of buses (70% of public transport), users have a right to a cheap service everywhere. If Stagecoach and others won't maintain them, then bus services should be taken away from these cowboys and put back into public ownership where they belong.

• Neither in the same boat, nor in the same coach!

Until 1st November passengers who were disabled or over-sixty could travel on inter-city coaches at half price. Last year National Express alone provided

2.9m concessionary journeys - which accounted for up to half of all sales on some routes. This enabled generally low-income earners a measure of independence and mobility. Now they have become another victim of government cuts and must pay the full price - that is, if they can afford it - or stay at home.

Once again, as if it was needed, the government's claim that we are all in this "together" is exposed as a lie. The money saved - a mere £25m or so per year - won't make much difference to the public debt. In other words, this particular stinginess is nothing but social discrimination against the poor.

How the capitalists cream the crisis

Despite the world crisis and a stagnating economy, big British non-financial companies have shown a breathtaking increase in profits and dividends for 2011, thanks to their slashing of jobs and conditions. Dividend payouts to shareholders from companies quoted in London are expected to reach £67bn this year. That's 18% more than last year - and back to pre-crisis levels! - with an average 23% increase for industrial and utility shares!

Companies are sitting on an estimated £650bn cash pile. So, in addition to distributing higher dividends, many have offered to buy back some of their shareholders' shares - which has the advantage of boosting share prices on the stock market.

Profitable though this is for individual shareholders, who can gamble or hoard these windfalls as they please, this is a total waste for the economy as a whole.

This goes to show that those

who tell us that companies "have to" cut jobs and "can't afford" to keep wages and pensions at their current levels are lying through their teeth. The problem is not that there is not enough wealth in this society, but rather that too much of it is not being used. Forcing the capitalist class to invest its hoarded cash in decent jobs, decent wages and socially useful production, should be an objective for the future struggles of the working class. □

We all need a 50% pay rise!

The pay of the top 100 company director increased by 50% over the past year - to £2.7m, while the pay packets of chief executives rose by 43%.

Meanwhile, average pay in the private sector rose by only 2.6% on average.

Since this figure also includes top management and directors,

the real average increase for ordinary workers has been much lower, and in any case far lower than the 5.6% inflation rate - meaning that private sector wages have been cut by more than 3% over the past year. As to public sector workers, since their pay is frozen, they have lost even more.

With rising inflation and

deteriorating pay deals over the past years, wages have been steadily going down the drain.

By now, there's only one way to catch up - a big wage increase across the board. And since company directors are showing the way with their 50% pay rise, why not the rest of us? □

• Banks thrive on job cuts

British banks' profits are soaring despite the on-going havoc in the banking system.

So, over the 3 months to September, HSBC made £4.5bn, although over half of this was due to an arbitrary increase in the estimated value of its subprime loans in the US (but such accounting tricks are common in this world of fancy money, where what matters is the good looks of one's balance sheet!). Barclays made a healthy £2.4bn, almost ten times as much as in the equivalent period last year.

Similarly, among the state-controlled banks, RBS made £2bn compared to a loss of £1.6bn last year, mostly thanks to continuing job cuts. As to Lloyds, it looks like the "poor" guy of the whole lot, with "only" £644m profit! But that's because of the huge losses it is still making on reckless speculation by HBOS in Irish real estate.

For all these banks, however, it is the savings made from cutting tens of thousands of jobs that contributed significantly to their profits.

Of course, the one thing they don't have to pay for is the subsistence of the workers they've deprived of their livelihoods. And yet, that's exactly what their profits should be used for!

• Billions anyone?

According to Action Aid, 98 out of the 100 top British companies (the FTSE 100) have around 38% of their overseas subsidiaries located in tax havens and could be stealing more than £18 billion from the public purse through tax evasion!

Of course, some noises against this can sometimes be heard - for instance, former Lib Dem Treasury spokesman, Matthew Oakeshott, called on the fat cats themselves (non executive directors & shareholders) to reveal where the cream is hidden. Fat chance!

The CEO of Arcadia, Philip Green, recently appointed by the Con-Dems to head a review of government expenditure, is one of the country's most notorious tax dodgers.

UKUncut estimates that with the lost annual income to the Treasury due to Arcadia's tax evasion, it would be possible to pay the

wages of 20,000 NHS nurses. But the likes of Green would certainly see this as a "waste" of government spending!

Oh, and in case there weren't enough cherries on the cream, the last budget gave banking and financial companies a tax break worth £80million per year!

• Oil profits boom goes on

"What crisis?" oil company bosses might well ask. BP's boss hailed its £3.2bn profit for the third quarter of 2011 as a "turning point" after the Deepwater horizon explosion last year - though even at the height of the clean-up in the summer of 2010 BP still profited by £1.07bn! Shell reported a profit of £4.4bn for the same period and Exxon Mobil saw profits rise to more than £6bn - 40% up on last year.

We are constantly hearing that "the money isn't there" to maintain even basic living standards for millions, in or out of work. The money is there - ask the oil companies!

"Occupations"

Following the Wall Street occupation, others have been developing in the US and elsewhere. We present here extracts of an editorial published in the American Trotskyist fortnightly *The Spark* (#902 - 17 October).

"We Are the 99%" (...) It's certainly true. It's outrageous that the top 1% of the population owns 35% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 80% holds only 15%!

A lot of the "Occupy" protesters have picked up this slogan as an expression of anger toward that one percent who have benefited from the Wall Street bailouts and tax breaks for the rich. But while the slogan taps that anger, it hides important class differences in the population. It hides first

99%? Not exactly!

of all the fact that within this 99%, not everyone is suffering the same way.

It's true that some lawyers and even some stockbrokers may have been out of work for a while, or middle-class college students may not find the jobs they expect (...) But the problems facing this layer of the population dim by comparison to the problems all parts of the working class have faced: the large number out of work for over a year and have run out of unemployment cheques; those who were forced onto welfare because they ran out of money, only to have welfare pulled out from under them; those whose wages have been cut in half; those who have lost their homes to a mortgage scam that was consciously directed at them; those whose children are pushed into ever more crowded and dilapidated

schools; those who literally starve a little every day.(..)

We ignore these class differences at our own peril. To put everyone together into the same "99%" disarms those who would fight, in much the same way that the unions forging partnerships with the bosses disarm the workers.

Lumping everyone together in the "99%" clouds the questions of which class, which social force, can have real power in that fight, the potential power to strip away the bankers' hold over the society. That class is gathered together - in large and small workplaces, factories, offices, hospitals. Its force comes from the fact that it produces the goods and services that the whole society needs. That class - the working class - makes the economy run. The workers' position in the economy gives the working class the possibility of shutting it down. (..)

A fight made by the working class, with its own forces and for its own interests, can change things massively. In their fight for jobs and a decent wage - the essential basis of any fight - they can attack the problem not only for themselves, they can pull behind them some other PARTS of the 99% to join in making that fight. □



St Paul's camp: a kind of graffiti against the establishment

The "Occupy St Pauls" campsite where around 200 tents remain, in emulation of "Occupy Wall Street", enters a 5th week at the time of writing. Having started out as "Occupy the Stock Exchange", protesters may not have succeeded in threatening the interests of the finance kings and queens, but they did manage to upset the Church of England - which after all, is one pillar of the British establishment!

Having initially welcomed the demonstrators, after police stopped them from reaching their target, the sight of the tents and realisation that protesters may have come to stay, turned the church leadership's hearts to ice. The occupiers were accused of upsetting tourism to St Pauls (£14.70 a visit) and endangering health and safety. The cathedral was closed for the first time since WW2. Which was a big mistake. Two clergymen's resignations and plenty of public outcry later, the Church re-welcomed the protestors and is now leaving it to the Corporation of London to get rid of them.



In the meantime the protest probably draws more visitors to St Pauls. And even the government's own business secretary, Vince Cable, has said "I have sympathy with the emotions that lie behind it", admitting that while a small number of people have done extraordinarily well in the crisis "often undeservedly", large numbers of

others who've played no part in causing the crisis have been hurt by it. Yes, so he knows it. But he can't and won't do anything about it. Only the class struggle can - a struggle in which the tented protesters here and elsewhere, haven't yet chosen to play a part. Maybe they will in the future.

EUROZONE CRISIS

The eurozone's financial havoc has already brought down four governments and caused a drastic cut in working class living standards in its most embattled countries.

However, contrary to the lies peddled by politicians here, the eurozone crisis is not due to the euro as such, nor does it herald, for the time being, the demise of the euro. It is just another episode in the same capitalist crisis, which has engulfed the world over the past 4 years. And if it shows something, it is that no country, no matter how rich, is protected from the destructive power of this bankrupt profit system.

An economy gone mad

Like every other country, those in the eurozone were hit by the boomerang of the financial bailout. The huge sums they borrowed from large international banks to bail out their own banks and big companies, left them with ballooning debts and interest payments. As a result, many of the world's smaller economies are in a state of virtual bankruptcy. But who, here, would care about these distant small countries or the fate of their populations?

However, faced with similar circumstances, the weaker countries of the eurozone have attracted international attention. Not because they were more badly hit than others, nor because they "could not manage their currency themselves" (as it is claimed by commentators here). No. The only reason is that the financial sphere has become so divorced from the real economy that it produces its own self-fulfilling catastrophist prophecies.

So, Ireland (the first victim) was threatened with bankruptcy by

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Another devastating episode

having to borrow money at extortionate interest rates on the "market". But this "market" is controlled by Ireland's banking creditors, which, therefore, made it more difficult to get their money back!

At the same time, the very same banks, which also control the government bond market, were raking in profits by betting on a fall in the prices of Irish government bonds, thereby undermining Ireland's position even further - and, by the same token, their own chances to be repaid! And this was how the prophecy of Ireland's bankruptcy became self-fulfilling.

But, by the same token, this wave of betting triggered more betting against the other weaker eurozone countries, thereby spreading the crisis.

This system needs replacing

Why, however, should the richest countries of the eurozone, like Italy now - and, some say, maybe France tomorrow - be affected? This is not just due to the euro, as the terrified face of Cameron shows, whenever he speaks about the crisis in the eurozone. His motto is always: a "solution needs to be found" - i.e. public money needs to be thrown at the eurozone financial system - in order to "reassure the markets".

Because Cameron knows better than to believe in his own fairy tales

about Britain being a "safe haven".

He knows that just as, since last August, the variation in the ups and downs of stock markets across the world reached the 40% mark, the government bond market as a whole could suffer in the same way, if the big banks triggered a speculative panic over the euro.

Then, no amount of austerity measures by the ConDems would "reassure the markets" and the comparatively small economic weight of the pound, compared to the euro, would be incapable of resisting the speculative tide.

The fact is that there is nothing rational in the large banks' speculation against the euro, or against any other currency, be it the pound, the dollar or the yen. This is the main problem for the rich capitalist classes.

And there is nothing, or at least not much, they can do about it. Because this irrationality is neither a matter of legislation nor regulation - it is built into their profit system.

Nothing short of overthrowing capitalism will bring this madness to an end. □

of the same world capitalist crisis

EUROZONE CRISIS

Greece - workers refuse to pay for the crisis!

Over the past two years, Greek workers have responded to public sector cuts and record unemployment (820,000 jobless, including 42% of the youth) with numerous strikes and protests.

While the wealthiest Greeks escaped unscathed by squirrelling their money abroad (also "investing" in London's booming property sector!), the vultures stepped in.

Buyers scooped up empty shop premises on behalf of multinational food retailers for rock-bottom prices.

Others have had their eyes on the nationalised industries. For instance, this summer Deutsche Telekom bought 10% of the national telecom provider, OTOE - paying a quarter of the price it would have paid 3 years ago...

Meanwhile, public sector workers had their wages cut by 40% and in some cases up to 70%! 17,000 part-time teachers have been sacked and 1,976 schools closed or merged.

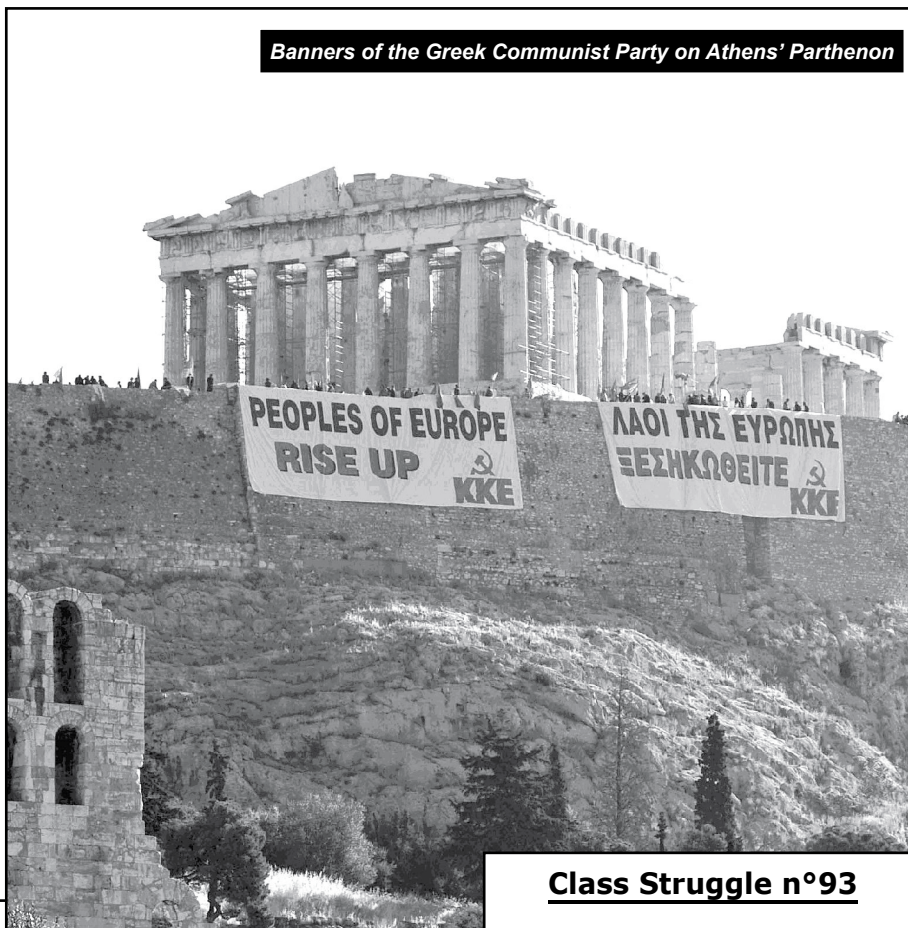
Civil servants' pensions, already slashed, could be halved in the years to come.

Such drastic cuts have resulted in the economy shrinking rapidly - by over 7% in the first half of this year. Following a 10% VAT rise

(to 23%) in shops in September, customers are being squeezed and shopkeepers and market traders face ruin.

So, yes, the Greek working class has every reason to resist. Why should it be made to pay for the bosses' crisis?

Banners of the Greek Communist Party on Athens' Parthenon



Class Struggle n°93

In the November-December issue of our journal:

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• The only real democracy is in the streets

When Greek prime minister Papandreou announced he wanted to hold a referendum over the EU's latest bail-out, the European leaders fell off their chairs. They were horrified at the idea that the Greek population might be given a say. Hypocritical hot air about "democracy" for Afghanistan, or Libya, is one thing, but not if it can affect financial markets.

And this time it did. Papandreou was immediately summoned to the G20 summit in Cannes, as if he was to be court-martialled by the eurozone's "godfathers" (Germany and France).

Surely, after all the effort they had put into putting this package together, Papandreou should have done what was expected of him!

As to Papandreou, his problem was not democracy, of course! After months of protest, the feelings of the population regarding his past austerity measures were obvious.

His problem, rather, was the political future of his party and maybe his own. He had to avoid being seen conceding too easily. It was all about politicking and posturing!

In the end, Papandreou had to resign. A new prime minister is to lead a "national" government, formed by Papandreou's socialist party (PASOK) and the right-wing opposition, in a bid to force the Greek working class to toe the line.

But the odds are that it won't!

"Euroscepticism" - a xenophobic gangrene

The current resurgence of the "euro-sceptic" strain within the Tory party doesn't come as a surprise. After all, this kind of demagoguery has long been the mainstay of on-going factional rivalries within its ranks.

While the Tories were in opposition, these rivalries were concealed by their common desire to return to power. But now that they feel solidly established in government, they are back with a vengeance and, predictably, the "euro-sceptics" are on the frontline.

A cover for British capital

Beyond the Tories' in-fighting, however, this euro-sceptic demagoguery is primarily used as a cover for the responsibility of British capital in the current crisis.

This is why Cameron and Osborne took the lead themselves - blaming the eurozone for everything that was going wrong here, while repeating that they will "never" use British taxpayer's money in a "euro bailout". Which, of course, is just sweeping under the carpet the exorbitant cost that the working class has already paid and will

still have to pay for the bailout of the pound - that is, the bailout of British bankers.

Meanwhile, the same Cameron and Osborne boast that, thanks to their policies, Britain is far better off than the rest of Europe. Well sure! Britain has one of the highest public debts in Europe in proportion to its economy, the highest rate of inflation, the most expensive public transport system, the costliest universities, and a health service which is among the most under-funded! Talk of being better off!

A danger for the working class

There is a xenophobic stench to the Tories' euro-sceptic overbidding which is particularly dangerous today. At a time when British companies are cutting jobs, wages and conditions, it is designed to channel any discontent away from British bosses, turning it instead, not just against the eurozone, but also its workers.

In a period comparable to the present crisis, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, a similar logic provided the rationale

for Hitler's Nazi party to enslave German workers for the benefit of big business - and eventually, to force them onto the killing fields of World War II.

Although anti-semitic, Hitler's demagoguery was, above all, nationalist and xenophobic. It was aimed at "foreigners" who were allegedly undermining the German economy and the well-being of its population - precisely the same kind of demagoguery that the "euro-sceptics" are peddling today against the eurozone.

These Tory "euro-sceptics" are not Nazis, of course. They are just pathetic, small-time politicians who use this demagogic rhetoric in order to boost their petty careers. Nevertheless, they are giving a veneer of respectability to xenophobic ideas, which, if allowed to gain ground against the backdrop of a deepening crisis, could become a lethal threat for the working class. And this is why this xenophobic gangrene cannot be tolerated!

Workers have only one enemy - capitalism!

The fact that the euro-sceptic rhetoric is effectively endorsed by some union leaders with slogans such as "British jobs for British workers" or "Buy British" - or by some Labour MPs who champion Britain's withdrawal from the EU, does not make its content less reactionary.

The future of the British working class does not depend on whether policies are decided in London or in Brussels. Nor does it depend on whether it uses the pound or the euro.

Either way, in this capitalist society, all decisions are made by politicians and implemented by institutions whose role is to serve the capitalists' interests. And there is nothing to choose between the various capitalist classes.

In fact, as we can see today, they are all implementing the same attacks against jobs and wages, and the same austerity measures against the working class, in order to maintain their profits despite the crisis they have themselves

created.

Against the capitalists' offensive, the only perspective that the "Buy British"/"No to EU" camp has to offer, is for workers to take even more drastic cuts in their wages and conditions, in order to make themselves even cheaper, so as to face up to "foreign competition". Because, like it or not, the British economy is totally dependent on its trade with the world market.

So, no, the future of the working class cannot be secured by adding more "protectionism" to a system which is already terminally ill. This system needs to be replaced not patched up.

In the meantime, the British working class can only rely on its collective strength and its ability to fight off the attacks of British capital. And for this, it needs all the allies it can find within its class, in Britain and in Europe (and beyond)!

• A xenophobic storm in the Tories' tea-cup

The Tory euro-sceptic bandwagon didn't waste the opportunity of the Commons' debate held on 24 October, over a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU. Although the debate was triggered by an e-petition on a government's website, they immediately tabled a motion in favour of such a referendum.

Of course, this had nothing to do with what they call "democracy". It is not as if these euro-sceptics were in the least concerned with the public's opinion. Did they demand a referendum over the decision to bail out the bankers using public funds, rather than nationalising the whole lot of them? Or over the Con-Dem cuts in jobs, services and welfare? Of course not! In fact, they voted in favour with both hands!

Ironically, it was the euro-sceptic Cameron, who cracked the whip against his euro-sceptic backbenchers, causing the motion to be heavily defeated. Predictably so. His masters in the City would have found the joke hard to laugh at, given that well over half of their exports are bought by the EU!

Using demagoguery and political posturing may be a convenient game for politicians at times. But for Cameron, protecting the bosses' profits was obviously too serious to allow such folly...

Temps agencies' equal pay avoidance

Since the "Agency Workers' Regulations" (AWR) became law on 1 October, the avoidance of paying temps "equal pay for equal work" and giving them the limited equal benefits they should be entitled to, after 12 weeks in a job, is becoming a business in its own right!

There already were obvious loopholes: like sacking workers before 12 weeks is up, and rehiring after a 6 week interval, which is legal if done twice (but not 3 times)! A job or job title can be changed, or pay altered by a few pence; workers can be compelled to convert to self-employed status...etc.

Or, bosses can do what Tesco, Morrisons, Carlsberg and DHL at Jaguar-Land-Rover are doing - also known as the "Swedish Derogation". They can get umbrella companies, or agencies themselves, to issue new permanent contracts for the workers they supply, so that AWR doesn't apply. These contracts can provide "pay between assignments" - at a rate not less than the minimum wage and for a minimum of 4 weeks in a year, but the hours to be paid for are not specified.

At Halewood's Jaguar-Land-Rover, 800 workers presently provided by the agency Staffline to

JLR's subcontractor, DHL, are being "offered" such contracts. This way, Staffline won't have to pay them the £200/w increase which the AWR would have made mandatory. Instead, Staffline has offered 15p/hour increase under the new contract, and 5 days guaranteed work/week for the first 300 who sign up, but only 2 days/week for the next 300 and for the last 200, who'd been taken on only for the launch of the new Land Rover, it is the sack by Xmas! These workers are now balloting for strike. They are right: no way should JLR/DHL/Staffline get away with this. □

• Unfair dismissal rights: not scrapped but shrunk

The Con-Dems want to reduce claims for unfair dismissal. So, a report was commissioned from venture capitalist Adrian Beecroft, which among other changes, proposed scrapping the right to claim unfair dismissal altogether. Beecroft wanted to replace it with compensation packages to be agreed individually with "underperforming" workers. So far, Cameron seems to be unsure and has only announced that the qualifying period

to claim unfair dismissal would be doubled to two years (excluding 3m workers at a stroke), while introducing charges for tribunal claims.

Whether the ConDems go further, in particular by endorsing a CBI brainchild - "protected conversations" with workers about underperformance, which they won't be able to use in an Industrial Tribunal - remains to be seen. But ministers can be expected to look into every

possible trick to help bosses to fire (but not hire) workers at will.

Any attack whatsoever on workers' rights should be resisted, of course. But ultimately, it is not so much what the law says that counts. It is the relationship of forces built up by workers which, if it's favourable enough, makes the bosses think twice before putting their profits at risk by provoking a militant response.

• Inflation, a weapon against the working class

Just one month after governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, insisted in a public speech that the inflation rate had peaked, the September figures, published in October, showed yet another increase. The RPI measure of inflation rose to 5.6%, due to gas and electricity price rises on top of petrol and transport, while the lower CPI measure went up to 5.2%.

Both increases were predictable, coming after the £75bn of "quantitative easing" announced by Mervyn King in the same speech. One of the consequences of printing money - which is what "quantitative easing" is - is precisely to boost inflation. No wonder, this time, King chose to keep quiet on these new figures!

For the bosses, who pass their inflated prices on to their buyers,

but obviously don't proportionally increase the wages they pay their workers, rising inflation is a convenient way of increasing their profits by pushing real wages down. For the working class, it means a drop in its living standards. It is time for the demand for a "sliding scale of wages" - that is, automatic wage rises in line with inflation, on a monthly basis - to be put on the agenda!

• Energy racketeering

Energy companies are set to make record profits. According to the regulator, Ofgem, each one of us who has gas and electricity bills to pay, generates an average of £105 profits for these sharks.

What it means in practice is that more and more people can't afford these costs and will keep their heating switched off. Age UK has warned that the rise in heating bills could result in up to 200 people dying each day this winter from cold conditions. A report by the London School of Economics found that 2,700 deaths in 2008-2009

were directly linked to fuel poverty (spending more than 10% of one's income on fuel).

Energy companies have claimed that their "overheads" were not taken into consideration, yet they don't invest or modernise. Yet last year the combined total profits of the big energy firms were £8.6 billion! And with last winter having been particularly cold, it's little wonder that this year's profits are likely to be even higher. British Gas alone is set to beat its 2007 record annual profit of £571 million!

Ofgem huffed and puffed about these super profits at consumers' expense. But since it has no teeth, the

companies have nothing to fear - they can carry on laughing all the way to the bank...

• A sham "market"

With the great energy racket obvious to all, Cameron could only call for people to shop around for better deals. As if this helps the elderly or the poor, who are least likely to have internet access, or to be able to afford long phone calls to call centres! And as if the deal was not always essentially the same con, because the choice is between one of a handful of big players - a de facto monopoly dressed up in different colours.

King's Cross railway station (London)**• East Coast's very dirty trick**

East Coast has long used agency workers as a cut-price part of the workforce, often keeping them in the same job for years, without offering them a permanent position. It seemed that the Agency Workers Regulations, which came into force on October 1st this year, might at last change this, by forcing employers to pay agency workers the same rate of pay as permanent workers doing the same job.

East Coast did invite agency workers on the platform to apply for

permanent jobs - but on a new grade of "station support assistant". At £13,250 (plus £2,514 if working in inner London), this grade is paid about £6,500 (30%) less than existing platform workers, yet the "assistants" are supposed to be able to do everything other platform workers do, as and when required. In other words, East Coast found a way to carry on paying ex-agency workers at the same low (or maybe even lower) rate that they were paying them before. At the



same time, it divides the workforce and makes the higher-paid workers a target for management cost-cutting.

It just goes to show that you can't rely on the law to ensure fair treatment - like everything else, it has to be fought for.

• We might stop altogether

East Coast made a 'profit' of £183m last year. Of course, taking EC back into government hands was never supposed to stop management trying to squeeze every last drop out of us. That £183m could pay for all the extra hands we so badly need, not to mention the big pay rise we need just as badly. East Coast's boss says there'll be no 'slow

down'. Well, that's not up to her... [King's X Workers' Platform - 01/11/11]

• When are we coming out?

Over 300 cleaners working for Carlisle cleaning and Support Services on Virgin West Coast went on strike last Friday, over pay. They'd been offered a pay rise of only 6p an hour (1%), which is a pay cut in the context of inflation which is

(officially) 5% and rising. So they're right to take action and good luck to them! But what about all the other under-payers around here? Especially ISS bosses, who are bottom of the dirty heap, having offered us nothing but the legal minimum for the past 11 years? When payback time comes, it's going to be huge! [King's X Workers' Platform - 01/11/11]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Ford's hidden strings - more like ropes**

Ford's "final" pay offer to hourly-paid workers in its 7 British plants was a 6% pay rise in year 1 and inflation plus 0.25% in year 2. But hidden in the small print were 2 killers: first, the end of the final salary pension scheme for new starters and second, the introduction of a 2-tier workforce. This latter, inserted in a single line under "other items" explained that from 1 April 2012 there will be a "distinct standard grade for new employees"! Around £3/hour less for the same work! Ford already introduced 2-tier in the US in 2007, where newer workers

get only half the "first tier" workers' rate. With "2-tier" Ford can have a low-cost workforce, save the trouble of "outsourcing" - and drive a wedge in workers' ranks.

When the offer was put to in-plant ballot of hourly paid workers, 4 out of 7 plants refused - led by the Dagenham Engine plant with 1,347 votes "against" to 758 "for". The staff union officials also rejected the offer and walked out of talks. Unite officials, on behalf of the hourly-paid, are asking Ford to come back and negotiate. But it's hard to see what there is to



talk about. Thanks to union officials' willingness to "negotiate", Ford already imposed a pension reduction by switching to CPI to calculate increases, earlier this year - without workers being able to express their opposition. A strike ballot across all the plants - to make clear the intention to fight all of Ford's attacks, collectively, is obviously the only way forward now.

• 2-tier has to be binned

Some temps went to ask the DEP convenor if they'd be affected by the 2-tier proposal and didn't get a clear answer. But Ford said in the detailed "first offer" document that the new (lower) Standard Grade Rate "will not apply to fixed term contract employees hired on or before 31 March 2012 who are subsequently offered a further fixed term contract without a break in service" or who become permanent, without a break in service". So no, they should not be affected - provided Ford keeps them on and doesn't fire and rehire

them. Unless Ford makes it a condition of permanence that they accept lower wages! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 8/11/11]

• Ouch!

The mass meeting over Ford's pay offer for the South Estate was literally a pain in the neck - you got a real "crick" looking up at the convenor and JWC near the roof! We know they think they're above us and above being held to account. But we didn't think they needed to go to such heights to demonstrate it! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 8/11/11]

• He tried to look both ways!

A poor sound system in DEP meant some couldn't hear (also in S&TO), though many realised the offer was rotten. But there's no excuse for the rottenness of officials who refuse to be questioned and refuse us time to discuss the issues! Ford had even cancelled production on most engines for the day, so there was plenty of time. The real problem is that officials don't dare to be heard going against Ford too much. Which is why many of us weren't sure whether the convenor recommended acceptance or rejection! It sounded like he did both! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 8/11/11]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)

• **Scrooge wages for Xmas casuals**

This year 95,000 workers applied for the 18,000 Xmas casual jobs with Royal Mail. This is up from 70,000 applicants last year, despite the fact that RM is paying over a pound/hour less than last year (and despite inflation!) - at £5.95/h plus 50p/h shift pay. The recruitment was a sham-bles - many were told their application forms were accepted, only to be unable to arrange an interview using the computer booking system. Others turned up for the first shift to

be told all positions were taken. No doubt this has something to do with the fact that Royal Mail has set up its own in-house recruitment agency for temps - called Angard - run by RM bosses! A recipe for utter chaos, as any postal worker will tell you!

As happens every year, casual workers mostly do the same work as permanent workers, but now they are doing it at an even more super-exploitative pay-rate. Given that the bosses are finding more and



more ways to get out of paying equal wages for equal work, isn't it time we workers used the one tried and tested way we know, to enforce this fundamental principle?

• **Just reverse all the cuts**

We see that RM has "strongly denied" reports that it treats 1st Class mail as 2nd class... on Saturdays. "First class mail always has the priority over second class mail at all times," said RM "There has been no change at all in the service specification for first and second class mail". No, maybe not the specification, but certainly the service: thanks to the jobs massacre, we're so overloaded, they just can't deliver all the mail (let alone Door-to-Dustbin). RM's answer? Hire casuals

ad hoc... to deliver the junk - as priority! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 1/11/11]

• **Listen to the man talk!**

The Postal Services bill passed on 1 Oct. It's not implemented. Privatisation/mutualisation can still be stopped. But guess what? The CWU campaign to "keep the post public" has already disappeared into thin air. What was it Billy Hayes told a conference in Washington in September about "his" struggle against RM's privatisation? "All we know is that if you fight you get a better result than if you give up." Too true.

[Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 17/10/11]

• **WCM not needed**

Now it's fashionable to apply kaizen everywhere even where's nothing manufactured (except grief!). You can see how this could catch the imagination of some here, given the clueless-ness of many MP bosses, who've ways of disorganising things which have made our hair stand on end for years! But since the ultimate aim is to exploit us even more, the CWU is right to boycott WCM. [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 17/10/11]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)

• **How BMW thanks us**

Why on earth is anyone in big business complaining about the Agency Workers' regulations? The latest loophole to emerge, albeit temporary, is that any break for annual leave "pauses the clock" in the qualifying 12-week period for equal pay. Of course BMW proposes to take full advantage of this, even for mates who have been here 5 years and have covered most of their leave already with working time account! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 1/11/11]

• **One wheel on my wagon**

The wheels in BiW are falling off. With breakdown after breakdown the senior manager who went through BiW Maintenance like a dose of salts a year ago has been drafted back from Assembly to sort the problems out!! Fitting really, after he boasted of saving the company thousands...! During a recent meeting with the maintenance team and the new German director, he was reminded of this and told that current problems are the aftermath of his cuts a year ago! We wonder if the new director will see where one cut back really

needs to be made. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 1/11/11]

• **No more nasty surprises!**

When we heard that 11 working Saturdays were provided for under the pay agreement covering this year, we were told BMW wasn't likely to use them to the full.

Now it seems like every other Saturday. And we weren't told to expect final written warnings for no-shows either (to be appealed, of course!). We didn't agree this collectively, by any stretch of the imagination, and we need to strike it out, asap. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 1/11/11]

• **Rh's contract con**

Rudolph & Hellmann are offering permanent contracts to their agency workers. Earning a measly £7ph, you might think this is hardly a job for life.

But it gets worse. If you become permanent, you're expected to accept a pay cut to minimum wage level (£6.08) with only the promise of overtime. But these mates already work 12 hour shifts (48 hour weeks). They'd have to work an extra half day just to make up the loss of earnings! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 18/10/11]



• **Manoeuvres in the dark**

We're supposed to be one month into the trial period for the "team bonus". But in rework we haven't even had it explained yet, like the size of the "team", how it will be assessed, etc. Presumably BMW still hasn't worked out how best to screw us over and pay as little as possible. In any case, it's more important that we stop them doing that on our pay deal - about which we've also heard nothing! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 1/11/11]

• **Let them weld cake?**

BMW set up an in-house training course in welding but have had to suspend it. All hands to the pump in production, was it? Er, no. They ran out of metal! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 18/10/11]

Tunisia

Tunisia, where the "Arab Spring" began in 2010, has just had its first election. The official results will come out later in November, but so far the winner, by a huge margin, is the Ennahda ("Renaissance") Party, with 90 out of 217 seats - and 37% of the vote.

On this occasion, the same western governments which got the Tunisian generals to oust ex-dictator Ben Ali before the protesters could do it themselves, were keen to hail this election as a "democratic" achievement. Which was why they emphatically described Ennahda as a "moderate Islamic party".

But "moderate" or not, this party's roots are deeply reactionary - in the old Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In its early years - and possibly also while its leaders were in exile, from the early 1980s, under British protection! - it even organised terrorist attacks against its opponents. So, while, for the purpose of the election, Ennahda pledged to respect "political pluralism" and women's rights, it remains to be seen how long this respect will last.

All in all, in an election in which 110 parties stood, secular parties took only 25% of the vote. And

The bitter outcome of a "revolution" in which the poor never had their own voice



there were many fishy goings-on. To begin with, there was the fact that only 46% of the 7.57m potential voters were actually registered. In other words, the 91% turnout and Ennahda's 37% score (less than 20% of the potential electorate) were far less impressive than they may seem. Besides, Ennahda had vast amounts of cash at its disposal which was used to bribe voters in some constituencies, while it also made use of intimidation of

opponents and undecided voters - both of which certainly played a role in boosting its score.

So, Ben Ali the dictator may be gone, thanks to the angry uprising of the poor. But in this process, the working class and poor never have the chance nor the time to raise the banner of their own political interests. This, they will have to do in the coming period, against the threat that political Islam represents for all the exploited. □

Tunisia

It is not clear what NATO's regime change in Libya has achieved, except paving the way for more bloody clashes. Certainly, Gaddafi's regime is no more, after 9 months of direct military intervention, 23,000 NATO sorties and 10,000 bombing raids. But already, anyone known to have supported Gaddafi is now facing barbaric mob-lynchings, torture and confiscation of their property - something to which not only the National Transitional Council (NTC), but its western sponsors are turning a blind eye.

The NTC had long been endorsed by the West as the legitimate rulers

Gaddafi may be gone, but the threat of the militias remains

of Libya. But this council is such a motley crowd of conflicting interests that it is already showing signs of cracking up. In particular, it is proving unable to contain the increasingly frequent deadly clashes between rival armed groups, jockeying for positions and control of the weapons which flooded the country over the past months. And the stakes in these rivalries are all the higher as billions of dollars of Libya's assets abroad (previously frozen) are in the process of being released to the regime.

One thing on which the NTC

seems to have reached a consensus, though, is the principle, formulated by its president Abdel Jalil, a former justice minister under Gaddafi, that Shariah law will be the main source of future legislation! For the time being, however, since the new constitution is yet to be written, the issue of women's rights, for instance, is left aside.

As to the western powers, as long as Libyan oil wells are filling up the tankers of their oil majors, what do they care about what happens to the Libyan population? □

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

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

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