

WORKERS' fight



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

"TRIPLE-DIP RECESSION"? DOUBLE NEED FOR A FIGHT BACK!

A "triple-dip recession" is said to be on the agenda. The economy shrunk by 0.1% in 2012, instead of Osborne's 3% promised growth. The 0.3% fall in the last quarter means that if any shrinkage occurs in the next 3 months officials will tell us that we are facing the third recession since 2008.

For the working class, however, this is the same crisis, with more of the same attacks on jobs, conditions and wages. But then, these attacks began long before the crisis, although they were aggravated by it. Didn't workers' conditions go down the drain during the so-called "prosperity", due to the bosses' drive to casualise employment?

The bosses' class war

What lies behind these abstract figures, however, is the destruction of large chunks of the economy. Thus, manufacturing and construction - where real value is produced - shrank by 2.5% and 9.3% respectively in 2012. And if services are up, by a very modest 1.2%, it's only temporarily, because of the short-lived boost from the "Games"!

This destruction of the economy reflects the class war waged by the bosses against the working class to shore up their profits. And this is on-going.

In January alone, 400 job cuts were announced at Rolls Royce. Another 800 jobs will go at Honda, on top of the 325 temps who were already sacked.

Meanwhile, more high-street retail names are disappearing. HMV is to close its 240 stores, throwing 4,500 workers on the dole. Most of Blockbuster's 528 shops are also to be closed, affecting 4,190 workers. This follows photographic chain Jessops with its 187 shops and 1,530 workers, electrical retailer Comet, with 200 stores and 6,900 workers, clothing chain Peacocks



More and more productive jobs are destroyed, like at Honda-Swindon

with 611 stores and 9,600 workers.

In fact, every industry is hit: from airlines (4,500 jobs to go at IAG, 300 at Flybe) to banking with government-owned Lloyds axing another 1,300 jobs (after cutting 25% of its workforce) and 5,000 more to go later in the year.

And, of course, all this comes on top of the on-going public sector job cuts which, for instance, mean that up to 100 NHS jobs disappear every week!

Responding in kind

Of course, ministers are quick to boast about last year's 510,000 "new jobs", claiming employment is at a "record high". But around 20% of these "new jobs" are just getting workers to work for their dole money. As to the others, most are casual, often part-time, jobs!

Workers' standards of living are also going down the plug-hole. The real average wage went down 4% last year. And since wage inequality increases, this fall in the average wage conceals a

much steeper fall for the low-paid.

The low-paid are also hit by benefit cuts - especially housing benefit. And they will be hardest hit by the expected increase of council tax - by as much as £600/year - while council tax benefit is to be drastically reduced.

Meanwhile, profits are soaring and share prices are back to pre-crisis level. It's enough for a company to announce a new round of "savings" (i.e. job cuts) for the price of its shares to go through the roof. Despite of the crisis, and in some cases, because of it, big companies are making a killing - yet again!

For the working class, however, the common experience of these attacks affecting all sections can bring all of us together, in a common fight for jobs, wages and conditions. No section, however small should be left to act on its own. We are all in the same working class boat. But it will only stop sinking if we decide to use all of our many arms to row it. □

Final word on Olympic cost? Not yet!

The final bill paid by taxpayers for the Olympics won't be known before 2014, if that. But already, the National Audit Office (NAO) is patting the ConDems on the back by describing the Games as "good value for money" and highlighting the £377m still unspent out of their funding package.

Except that, not only has funding for the various Olympics public agencies almost quadrupled to £9.3bn - from an original £2.4bn estimate - but this total doesn't even include almost £2bn directly spent by the government. And there's more to come, judging, for instance, from West Ham's bid for the Olympics' stadium, which is likely to involve an additional £20m state subsidy, on top of £38m from the Games' unspent funding and up to £70m lent by Newham Council (which has money for professional football, but



not to pay youth workers nor develop sports facilities!).

But then, of course, what the NAO

really means is that the Olympics were "good value" for big business!

Yes they were. ☐

• The price of a day's "work"

The security fiasco in the run-up to the Olympics, meant soldiers had to be rushed in to cover for G4S' failure to recruit enough security guards. In total, 135,000 "army personnel days" and 12,000 "police shifts" were "used" during the Olympics.

None of this came for free. The MoD's bill was £36m (£265 a day) and the Home Office's was £6m (£500 per person, per shift!). So that's how much the government considers the "labour" of its own men to be worth? Assuming that half of this went to transport, accommodation and food, shouldn't the other half - a good £250-worth, per shift - be

considered an acceptable benchmark for the minimum wage?

• Blacklist conspiracy

Among the less glamorous aspects of the Olympic Park was the blacklisting of construction workers when it was being built, as happens on most big construction sites, by the big names of the industry - Balfour Beatty, Skanska, McAlpine, etc..

A raid on the offices of the so-called "Consulting Association", in 2009, lifted the veil of secrecy on this system. It revealed that the "Association" was collating data on "troublesome" workers, which it sold on to companies. It had more than 40 customers among

construction companies and held on its books the details of over 3,200 individual workers, mostly trade union activists. Some of them had been blacklisted for two decades.

Though it is illegal to discriminate against workers because of their union activities, the law usually turns a blind eye. After the 2009 raid, the only person who was fined was the Consulting Association's CEO - and he only had to pay £5,000. But there were no penalties for any of the companies which used its services. Such leniency wasn't likely to stop the blacklisting of workers whose only crime is to stand up for their rights and those of their workmates. Nor was it meant to.

Anti-immigrant politicking

From the ConDems...

Cameron's wooing of anti-immigrant prejudices has already backfired from within his own party, with Boris Johnson objecting to his visa policy. Even Cameron's City backers are unhappy with it. According to the Financial Times, for instance, CBI head John Cridland, "for the first time called on Mr Cameron to scrap the totemic Tory target of cutting net immigration to 'tens of thousands' by 2015". Both accuse the Tories' immigration policy of deterring rich foreign students from coming to Britain - thereby depriving the "£15bn higher education market" of valuable funding - and making it difficult for British-based companies to recruit international high-flyers.

Of course, no-one expects the likes

of Johnson and Cridland to admit that, like anybody else, all immigrants should have a right to live and work in this country without being constantly under threat of detention or repatriation. But for the working class movement, this goes without saying - because, ultimately, an injury to one is an injury to all, regardless of colour or nationality!

... and from Labour

This is, however, yet another working class tradition that Labour has forgotten. Milliband is arguing for "better integration policies" but, at the same time, hinting that he might back Cameron's immigration reduction targets and claiming that more immigration may facilitate a race to the bottom for British workers' conditions.

What a convenient sleight of hand to explain away the bosses' drive to cut workers' wages and conditions! Miliband is blaming the robbed for the robbery! Then, of course, this is nothing new. When Labour was in power, Home minister David Blunkett used to cover up his government's responsibility for the shortage of schools, social housing, hospitals, etc., by claiming this was due to the increasing numbers of immigrant users. As if this rich society couldn't, under the right organisation, cater for the needs of all!

Blaming the system's failures on the poorest and most vulnerable - whether they may be the jobless, disabled, or immigrants - is a worn-out ploy used by all pro-business politicians. Such lies have no place in the working class movement.

Posturing over the EU

After a long wait, Cameron's "great speech" on Europe turned out to be somewhat of a damp squib, which reflected the catch 22 situation in which he has allowed himself to be trapped.

Cameron and Osborne have been whipping up anti-European prejudices by endlessly blaming on Europe their own economic impotence. As a result, the fear of losing votes to UKIP - and their seats to Labour - has rallied many Tory backbenchers behind the eurosceptic banner, in an attempt to pull the carpet from under UKIP's feet.

But, at the same time, Britain's

big business wants no politicking over the EU. The profits of many among the biggest companies depend far too heavily on EU trade and the City would lose its glitter if it wasn't for the massive flows of euros which are traded there day-in and day-out. What would be left of all that, should Britain leave the EU?

So, Cameron produced what one commentator called a "sandwich" speech: its filling was spiced to the eurosceptics' taste, while the rest was meant to re-assure big business that there is no plan to leave Europe. As to his famous "in/out" referendum - the cherry on the top - it

• The "renegotiation" sham

Cameron's plans to "renegotiate" EU treaties and "repatriate powers from Brussels" are designed to be music in eurosceptic ears, while wooing potential UKIP voters. But what exactly does Cameron propose to "renegotiate"?

In fact, the only concrete "renegotiation" suggested by Cameron concerns Britain's opt-outs from certain EU directives - first, to allow British companies to undercut the rest of Europe in terms of wages and conditions, and second, to enable the City to wreck financial markets without any interference from Brussels.

Yet, on the first account, Britain already has heaps of opt-outs. After all, the Agency Worker Directive, supposed to provide equal pay for agency workers, is by-passed by British bosses using the so-called "Swedish derogation". And didn't Blair secure an opt-out of the Working Time directive, meant to put a 48-hour/wk ceiling on working hours, which makes a mockery of this directive?

On the second account, hasn't the City and its "light-touch regulation" been a magnet for speculative trading - including for the euro - regardless of Brussels financial directives, because, by operating in London, German and French banks benefit as much as Barclays and HSBC?

So is it really "renegotiation" - or is it, rather, posturing?

• Leadership fantasies

Cameron wants to have his European cake and eat it. On the one hand, he wants to boost his image by playing the international statesman - backing the French in Mali one moment, offering to broker a free trade zone between the EU and the US the next. On the other hand, he's playing to the anti-Europe gallery at home.

Unfortunately for him, his desire to play a leading role in Europe is not

exactly helped by his empty threats that Britain will flounce out if the others don't cave in to all his demands. He can't have it both ways, as many of his European counterparts have tactfully, or not so tactfully, pointed out. They must be laughing up their sleeves at Cameron's posturing.

• In? Out? They want both!

The Eurosceptics seemed to be pleased by Cameron's speech on Europe. After all, they claim they want out, don't they? But although "sceptical" about Europe, they're not sceptical about its perks. Among the 73 British MEPS (Members of the European Parliament), 11 are members of UKIP (the "Quit the EU", anti-Brussels party) and quite a few others are notoriously eurosceptic Tories. Do they boycott the EU Parliament? No way! They wouldn't give up the trappings of their parliamentary seat for an empire, not even a British one!

But why be in when they want out? One clue might be the 91,980 euros salary they get (about £76,650). Add to this 50,424 euros (£42,020) for office costs - not to mention travel expenses. More than enough for them to want to keep their seats warm in Brussels while talking about leaving.... some day?

• All quiet on the euro front

Over the past few weeks, the pound has been sliding against other currencies - and against the euro most of all. There are fewer euros to the pound now than at any time in the last 14 months. The government hastened to point out that this is "good for exporters". But it means that workers will be hit by a rise in the cost of living.

Not long ago, the government was smugly looking at the economic turmoil in the Eurozone and congratulating themselves that Britain had had the "wisdom" to stay out of it. They even speculated that it could be the end of the euro altogether. And, of course, they

Europe

might take place in 2017, but only if the ConDems are re-elected in 2015, which is a big "if" - the kind of promises that cost nothing to make!

So, now, experts are rushing to Osborne's rescue. Apparently we've entered a "triple-dip recession" - so there must have been a rise in the economy (thanks to Osborne!) to dip from! What a load of cobblers! There never was a recovery for the working class over all these years - just one long crisis! But if profits recover, nothing else matters for these politicians and their "experts"! □

patted themselves on the back for the fact that the British economy was not in that kind of mess - or so they claimed.

So what have they got to say now about the health of the British economy compared with the Eurozone? Despite all the talk about Europe, there's a deafening silence on that score.

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Barnet to Cornwall – an outsourcing too far?

The Tory-controlled London Borough of Barnet is due to outsource nearly all its services in April to the service giant Capita, which won a £320m, 10-year contract last November. Whether this will be delayed by a judicial review of the contract, granted to a disabled Barnet resident who fears losing her care services, remains to be seen.

Perhaps more likely to force a change of plan is the public outrage against other outsourcing and cuts

Barnet has already made. For instance, a library, due for closure and sale to property developers, is being kept open by squatters.

Meanwhile Barnet town centre traders are furious about the outsourcing of parking management to a company which replaced parking meters with payment by phone – if you can get through. Cornwall Council was also set to give a similar contract to BT, until councillors themselves

ousted the leader and voted to transfer 340 workers instead of nearly 800. In each case, councillors pushing the outsourcing deals have promised big savings – around £1m per month. Since the likes of Capita and BT have shareholders' dividends to pay on top of wages and running costs, they can only be planning further attacks on the conditions of workers and the level of services to make these savings. □

Letter from Sussex

Late last year, East Sussex County Council's NHS Overview Committee rubber-stamped plans to "rationalise" hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings – i.e. close departments. This was despite overwhelming public opposition which the Council just ignored.

Now it wants a new road to be built between Hastings and Bexhill (between Eastbourne and Hastings), saying that it will encourage growth. No doubt hospital "rationalisation" will be used as justification, since it does require better means of communication to rush patients to the right place. The road will pass through several designated "Sites of Special Scientific Interest" and a lot of people are strongly opposed. There have been the predictable tree-climbing protests and police evicting protesters.

The Council had been trumpeting its "green" credentials, especially its programme aimed at boosting biodiversity. Last May, though, this was all but closed down. The Council leader was recently interviewed on TV, telling conservation groups and protesters to "shove off". He also said that the protest was a threat to democracy. What democracy? When were we ever consulted on hospital "rationalisation" or on how this road should be drawn?

• Council tax "un-rebated" for jobless

Council tax has always been meant so the jobless and low-paid (and pensioners and single people) have had less to pay. No more. This ConDem government cut the support it gave councils for means-tested council tax benefit by £500m and said they must choose how they pass this benefit cut on...

Out of the 325 council only 38 said they would maintain the benefit as before. The rest have announced minimum charges for council tax which vary from £80 to £330 per year – this latter figure

being applied by Labour-controlled Ealing council to residents unemployed for more than 12 months! Brentwood, the London constituency of the Tory minister responsible for this axe, the notorious Eric Pickles, would charge poor families the full whack of almost £3,000/year, regardless of income, if they live in large, band F-H houses – advising them that if they can't pay, they should move elsewhere or take a lodger!! This punitive scam stinks. "Can't pay, won't pay" should be back on the agenda!

• Ways and means of making us talk?

Connected to the government's cut of support for council tax benefit, is the drive by some councils to find other ways and means of making applicants talk... to identify fraudulent claims. This came to light when (surprisingly), a Tory Cornwall councillor resigned publicly and let the cat out of the bag: the council was to use lie detectors to identify stress and emotion in claimants' voices via Voice Risk

Analysis (VRA) software and "trained advisors" supplied by the well known monster Capita – a company that only exists thanks to getting government contracts.

The joke is that the Department of Work and Pensions already tried this in 2008-10 and found it useless. Capita claims it will work alongside other "ways and means". And if it's meant to save money, how much is Capita paid?

Lewisham - no closures, no sell-off!!

On Jan 26th, in South East London, a second protest march involving 25,000 people took place against the proposed closure of Lewisham Hospital's Accident and Emergency department, the cutting of other essential services – including maternity – and the sell-off of 60% of its buildings. This would mean just one A&E for the 750,000 population of Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley – located in a remote part of Woolwich.

These cuts at Lewisham Hospital – recently expensively

refurbished, re-equipped, and financially solvent – are meant to reduce the debts of the bankrupt South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT) – although Lewisham has no link with SHLT. Having tied itself up in Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals, SLHT has run up debts of £150m over the last 3 years, with further anticipated debts of £75m for each of the next 3 years. And this is what Lewisham Hospital is supposed to pay for – to line shareholders' pockets!

Since the march, Health Minister Jeremy Hunt has tried to be "reassuring", saying the A&E will not be closed, but merely "downgraded", dealing with minor injuries, rather than urgent care. In other words, the fight goes on!



A "job-rich" depression, they say!!

On which planet do economic pundits live? After 23 January's Employment figures showed employment had risen for the second quarter running, "the Economist" journal decided this was a "job-rich" depression. How, it asked, could the economy be dipping for the third time in as many years and yet employment be growing? Well there's a clue in the margins they're talking about: "growth" in employment is a pathetic 0.1% and the fall in jobless just 0.1%. So no need to write home about it, nor coin new phrases! And just wait! Because we know there are no good jobs out there - most are part-time/casual - which are double and triple counted!

Anyway the numbers could be plain wrong - the fault both of the way

counts are done and how people are classified. "Employed" includes everyone doing 1 hour or more work a week, those on training programmes, in unpaid work and those doing internships!

As for the unemployed - the rate of 7.7% doesn't include the economically inactive who make up almost 20% of the population anyway! And this (growing) group includes those excluded from the unemployment register for many spurious reasons. Count them



and we may find the figures interesting. In the meantime we'll see them as just more lies... □

• "Living wage" pitfalls

Back in November, Boris Johnson announced that the so-called "living wage" - paid voluntarily by "good bosses" (what are they?) - would rise by 25p - to £8.55/hr in London and £7.45/hr outside.

Only 11,500 workers qualify for it, so far, however. The instigators - the Living Wage Foundation (LWF) - whose main backers are big white-collar City firms, like business consultancy KPMG and insurance giant Aviva, aim at an "alternative" minimum wage, which would be more acceptable to semi-skilled workers, because it's higher than the statutory minimum wage, and to the bosses, because it's low enough. But since it's only slightly above today's minimum wage of £6.19/hr, you'd still have a hard time making ends meet!

Significantly, Milliband endorsed this "living wage" campaign, although only 11 of the 75 Labour-controlled councils did. What Milliband likes particularly, is the LWF's idea of "class harmony" - with bosses "seeing the light", while workers rely on their employers' goodwill.

This is a non-starter. No such sweet-talking can replace the class struggle as the only reliable means to win the decent, inflation-proof wages workers need.

• Wage cuts don't create jobs

Whether under the ConDems, or under Labour yesterday, the official line was always that by making themselves "cheaper", workers would make their employers more "competitive", encourage them to invest and to create jobs.

Except that this fairy tale never stood up to the test of reality. Since the 1980s, and especially with the rise of casualisation, labour costs have been falling. By 2008, the share of the wealth produced by the economy which goes to

the working class in wages had already decreased by 10% - and even more so, after the crisis broke out. But has this generated more investment? Quite the opposite, in fact. Investment fell from 80% of the value of profits in 1980, to 50% in 2010 - and now, it's under 45%.

For the working class, the race to the bottom thanks to the bosses' squeeze on wages, in the name of "competitiveness" was always an unacceptable blackmail - and this is even more so today, because of the crisis. But there is a way to counter today's rising under-employment: by ensuring that all the available work is shared out between all available hands and forcing the bosses to pay decent wages out of their accumulated profits.

• Poverty and the crisis

An EU-wide analysis says that 23% (14m) of Britain's population suffer from poverty and social exclusion. Yet, the number of those earning less than 60% of the average income dropped between 2008 and 2011 - but this is because this average has fallen.

Nine questions were asked checking to what extent EU citizens had become "socially excluded". Two answers were particularly shocking concerning Britain: 36.6% of households can't afford an unexpected but necessary expense (like a new boiler), while nearly 30% can't afford a week's annual holiday. Hardly surprising, then, that Britain lags halfway down the EU league. Not that Germany and France have much to boast about: they have fewer poor than Britain (with 19.9% & 19.3%), but more than the less industrialised Czech Republic (15.3%). What's needed is a 10th category showing each country's list of super-rich parasites and the social destruction they cause - with British capitalists in pole position!

Working longer and for less!

A government white paper outlines plans for a single-tier state pension of £144pw (up from today's £107.45). As it is inflation-linked and won't be introduced until 2017, the actual starting amount will be higher. This is not overly generous: today's pensioners with no additional income have their state pension topped up to £142.70 by the minimum income guarantee. However it does mean that pensioners will not have to undergo the means-testing which probably explains why 30% of today's pension top-up is never claimed!

The extra £37pw will be (more than) paid for by making people contribute for 35 years, instead of 30, and by raising the pension age (to 68 by 2046). With the scrapping of the state second pension which enabled participants to boost their pensions, not to mention the phasing out of extra money for the over-75s and over-80s, the white paper admits most pensioners will be worse off than today's after 2060! Only women staying at home looking after their families and the self-employed (providing they have 10 years of National Insurance contributions) will gain. With no increase in overall pensions' provision, most British pensioners will continue to be among the poorest OAPs in Europe.

King's Cross railway station (London)**• Rewarding the parasites**

After the collapse of the West Coast re-franchising process, the government has just announced its revised plans for the other three train-operating franchises which are up for grabs - Essex and Thameside, Great Western and Thameslink. The government will extend the Great Western and Thameslink franchises by 28 weeks and negotiate a franchise extension of up to two years with all three of the current train operators: c2c, a subsidiary of National Express, which runs the Essex and Thameside franchise; First Great

Western, owned by First Group, which runs Great Western; and First Capital Connect, also owned by First Group, which runs Thameslink.

But these sharks all have a record. Having defaulted on the East Coast franchise, National Express reneged on its promise to pay hundreds of millions of pounds to the government, due in the last years of the franchise. First Group pulled the same trick when deciding not to extend its Great Western franchise beyond April of this year. It has also provoked questions in



parliament because of passengers' anger at its woeful service on First Capital Connect. These companies should be kicked out of the railway altogether, along with all the other private parasites - instead of feeding them yet more state funds.

• Leave it out

Companies like Railgourmet and ISS give us the legal minimum annual leave, so you'd expect that at least we'd be able to choose when we go on holiday and for how long. But no! Both ISS and Railgourmet try to force us to take a maximum of 2 weeks at a time. Lots of us have to pay expensive air fares if we want to visit family abroad, so if they insist we cut our visits short, are they planning to pay our travel costs? We doubt it very much, so we need to be able to take all our holiday in one go, full stop. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 08/01/13]

• Only improvements allowed

Talking about annual leave, East Coast is stealing it from us. On Board workers and guards have to take 5 days if we want a week off, even if the shift pattern means we are working fewer than 5 days that week. Management admits that, as a result, we are getting less than our full entitlement. But instead of just changing their policy on this, they want something back, in exchange - ie worsening our conditions in another way. Why should we?! Our conditions are not for sale and we'll only tolerate improvements in them. [Workers' Platform - King's X - 08/01/13]

• Bring back our mates!

ISS has got rid of 6 cleaners from Bounds Green, supposedly because they don't have the "right papers". But everyone has their papers checked when they are taken on. And ISS has happily made use of our mates' labour for years. Now, when it suits them, they find a convenient excuse to dump them. This is a favourite trick of theirs - demanding to see papers over and over again, to intimidate workers. But they're not so hot on "papers" themselves, are they? What about the contracts they've failed to give us, which is illegal? ISS itself should be sacked and our fellow workers brought back pronto! [Workers' Platform - King's X - 22/01/13]

Mount Pleasant mail centre (London)**• 91% for the strike - but it's called off!**

It was incredible: it was the Friday before Xmas, and there us Romec cleaners (and engineers) were, ready to strike, for our first time ever! But suddenly a "victory" is announced and the strike is called off at the very last minute!! By s-m-s!!

The CWU told us that the 3.1% over 15 months offer was "good enough" for them to call off the action, pending a rebalot (we presume!) Well, the latest inflation figure - using the RPI - is 3%! So how is this 3.1% going to help us keep up with rising bills? It just can't and just isn't! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 09/01/12]

• A wage fight for all of us is looming

The CWU said the new offer should take everyone over the "living wage". In London this is reckoned to be £8.55/hr - but of course even that's pretty hard to live on! Actually, we only

get above the living wage thanks to the London Allowance. (Our basic is just over £7/hr).

But since all of us here at MP are struggling on our wages, and since the 3-year RM 2010 Beyond Belief Agreement comes to an end this year, won't all postal workers be looking for a big wage increase? Romec workers will then be able to join in for a 2nd (real) round of the fight!! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 09/01/12]

• No more full-time job cuts!

So now management is offering EVR - and they want replies back by 1 February - in just over a week. What will this mean? Anything between 30-50 or so more full-time job cuts! And what about the 75% full-time to 25% part-time ratio which was part of the 3-year 2010 Beyond Belief Agreement? Of course, it was never ever stuck to by RM bosses and now they're jumping the gun by cutting yet more full-timers - before this so-called "agreement" has even expired! Should we let them cut more full-time



jobs? Especially when there are so many part-timers here who need full-time? Absolutely not! [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 23/01/12]

• The mount zoo

We hope the mice (and rats?) which now populate the Mount in increasing numbers are keeping warm enough. Or maybe that's precisely why there are so many about - because it's so nice and cosy... (sure!). We heard that the building works revealed some secret tunnels - dating back to when there was a prison here? Could be where the new furry visitors come from. But what else is down there?? [Workers' Fight Mount Pleasant 23/01/12]

Ford Dagenham estate (Essex)**• Waiting for mass meetings!!**

We see that Unite's Vince Passfield is quoted by the papers saying: "Unite was looking at all options" re Ford's planned closures. This was interpreted as: resistance is still on the cards. There were meetings with S&TO officials over the questions we have, but we're told there are "3 meetings scheduled for January". So, who's invited?? Shouldn't we all be there, at least from north and south plants? [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 16/01/13]

• Against any job cut

Now DEP mates are being told that "just" 150 from S&TO will transfer, after being told previously that 400 were on our way over, any day soon!! Well, let's be clear, we don't plan to move one millimetre. What's more, the fight against closure hasn't really even started yet (altho' at Genk, the

pickets at the main gate, which began on day one, continue). So pinches of salt, if not shovels-full may be taken with everything which is spread about from up above! [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 16/01/13]

• Time to cure ls's bad habits

Line Side mates sure do need a pay rise - but the 4% offered isn't anywhere near enough, so, despite being told to accept it by officials we voted "no". Question now is whether LS will deliver what we expect - or whether this lousy outfit should be taught a lesson and face its first real strike. After all, it's taking the proverbial, over and over again. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 16/01/13]

• No, we can't accept this!

We just heard that the DEP Works Committee signed up to all Ford's demands for "efficiencies" connected with the new Panther Engine, including:



- outsourcing MP&L
- outsourcing cutting and grinding, maintenance
- staggered tea and dinner breaks across the board to gain an hour's extra production out of us for free.

No discussion with us, no asking what we think, let alone a vote! They say they've no choice but to sign. It's the same old BS as with the VD agreement. Did these lousy yes-men ever really try to say "no" to anything? Well it seems the rest of us will have to show them how. We don't have any choice either. [Workers' Fight Ford Dagenham 30/01/13]

BMW Mini centre (Cowley, Oxford)**• Against their divisive bonus "culture"**

Most workers would swap a bonus for a decent guaranteed wage. For Cowley's 800 agency workers, a permanent contract is top priority. That said, when news got out last April that workers in BMW's German plants were each getting £7,650 following BMW's record profits in 2011, ears pricked up. Shouldn't Cowley (and other British plants) get their share too?

Finally in December a £500 bonus was announced, to be paid in January - a mere 6.5% of that paid to German workers. The company's

Christmas address confirmed the bonus was for agency workers too. For them at least, some of the sting went out of BMW's 6-week shut out (forcing workers to use up holiday and "banked" unpaid overtime).

However, January's payslips showed the £500 had only been paid to permanent workers - who complained, where was the other £7150? Meanwhile agency workers approached shop stewards complaining they'd got nothing. They were told it was a "misunderstanding". The January bonus had only



been meant for permanent workers.... But some agency workers will not take this quietly, in the light of the company's statement. One thing's for sure: BMW has plenty of spare cash. If both groups of workers stood together, wouldn't they be unstoppable?

• Laugh him out of court

The manager who organised this shameless raid on government training subsidies (said to be £900 per worker!) was so miffed that some of us didn't show up and others didn't sign forms when there, that he is threatening disciplines. So far this has only been greeted by the laughter it deserves - and if he goes through with this, there will be more. After all, what are we guilty of? Disqualifying BMW for a state handout they certainly haven't earned! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 23/01/13]

• New agency workers being ripped off

Whether Gi (with BMW backing) will

be paying the next batch of new agency workers even less than the much reduced starting rate of those hired since September for the first 12 weeks, remains to be seen. What neither can deny is the much lower tariff (£12-13) being paid during the remainder of their first 2 years. This might be acceptable in return for a contract at the end of it. But they'll get nothing except the anger you get from knowing you've been ripped off up to £10,000 over 2 years. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 23/01/13]

• Of madness and managers

The 1 contract in Logistics is the end of a drawn-out saga which began when drivers were told they'd get a contract if they worked 6 months in Assembly. With no guarantee of a return that put off many

(as it was meant to!). Two who applied were told that they "didn't fit the criteria". So how come they'd worked 10 years in Logistics and are still there! And the lucky mate who did get a contract? He didn't have to transfer to Assembly anyway! [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 23/01/13]

• New apprentices, beware

Being a BMW apprentice comes with a catch. If you want to become, say, an electrician, it's not guaranteed. Only in the final year will you be "placed". This could be in an area you want but not always. Not to mention the unlucky ones who don't get placed and are "invited" onto the line. [Workers' Fight BMW Oxford 23/01/13]

Mali

Another war to defuse a western-made time-bomb

Since the war in Mali started on 11th January, 3,700 French troops and as many regional soldiers have regained control of the territory taken over last year by Islamic militias. After the brutal enforcement of sharia law by these militias, French soldiers seem to have been welcomed with relief by the population.

But this doesn't mean that the French intervention will resolve anything for the Malian people. The Islamic militias may have fled into the desert in front of the superior military power of the French army. But they haven't disappeared.

More importantly, the factors which led to the militias' emergence and past successes remain: the country's extreme poverty; the virtual collapse of its state after two military coups last year; the thuggish corruption of its army, which was more interested in racketeering the population than in defending it against the Islamic militias; and, finally, the ethnic tensions inherited from the artificial borders drawn by France, the country's former colonial master.

Once again, the imperialist powers are mopping up a mess of their own

making - which began with the western bombing of Libya. Far from "liberating" the Libyan population, the western powers only paved the way for the brutal rule of Islamic militias in this country. By the same token, they boosted the ambitions of Islamic forces across the region, who followed the example of the Libyan militias and took advantage of the flow of weapons coming from the collapse of Gaddafi's army, to bid for power in their own countries.

These time-bombs set in place by the rich countries, first during the colonial days and then during the war in Libya, are now backfiring. But, as was shown by Iraq and Afghanistan, they won't be defused by another western intervention - in fact it is more than likely to stoke



even more explosive power, not just in Mali, but across the region. The imperialist powers are part of the problem, not part of the solution. All western troops out of Africa, now! □

The stench of uranium, gold and oil

The French intervention was supposedly requested by the Malian "government". But this is a rather cynical alibi. The truth is that Mali is at the heart of the French capitalist class's African backyard. No surprise then that France has a permanent military presence in seven of Mali's neighbouring countries. The French troops are there primarily to protect the interests of the western companies operating in this part of Central Africa - and, by the same token, to ensure that the political regimes are sufficiently "western-friendly".

In particular, what probably triggered France's military intervention was the fact that the Islamic militias

which had occupied the north of Mali were threatening to spread their operations to neighbouring Niger, which is the world's 3rd poorest country, but also the world's second largest producer of uranium and the main supplier of the French nuclear industry.

Although French companies dominate a large part of the region's exports and trade, many other western companies have set up shop there as well. In particular, the biggest gold operators in Mali - which is Africa's 3rd largest gold producer - are two London-listed companies, AngloGold and Randgold, while another British company, Heritage Oil, has an oil concession in northern Mali.

All this goes a long way towards explaining Cameron's anti-terrorist outburst when he trumpeted his support for the French intervention, declaring that the Islamic militias are "a global threat" which "will require a response that is about years, even decades, rather than months." The return of Blair's and Bush's "war on terror" in Cameron's rhetoric was also prompted, no doubt, by the fact that the Amenas gas facility which was taken hostage by an Islamic group around the same time, is part-owned by none other than BP - which has many other such facilities in the region. Yes, it is a "global threat" - for shareholders' dividends, that is. □

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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