

# WORKERS

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## WORKERS SET THE AGENDA



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# WORKERS

“ If anything needs stopping, it’s the EU

**LABOUR SAYS** Vote Labour to stop the BNP. The Tories say vote Tory to stop the BNP. The Greens say vote Green to stop the BNP. The Church of England and the European Commission say vote to stop the BNP. The Times on 11 May said we must vote to stop the BNP. When Labour, the Tories, the Church, the European Commission and The Times all agree, workers should smell a rat.

Are these fascists really so strong that we have to drop everything to stop them? Are they really? They have no MPs or MEPs, few councillors, few members and few voters.

So why all these calls to vote against them? The answer is simple: the political establishment wants us to vote to prove we

support the European Union. And the BNP is a handy bait to lure us into voting for the EU.

But most British people don’t support the European Union – and even fewer back the BNP – so we shouldn’t vote for any of the would-be quislings.

The EU leaders’ concern for democracy is as fake as their Euro-elections. A Populus poll of 9-10 May found that 82 per cent of people agreed that, “If Ireland and other countries ratify the Lisbon Treaty on the future of the European Union, Britain should hold its own referendum on the issue.”

They say they want us to vote, well, let’s have a referendum on their Lisbon Treaty and then we’ll vote.

## Blame the system

**FROM FRAUDULENT** mortgage repayments on second homes to calculated nepotism, the sliding scale of rottenness would seemingly now apply to all 646 MPs. Like the bankers before them, they were only operating ‘within the system’.

Politicians or bankers, it makes no difference – caught with their hands in the till, they all make lame excuses and blame “the

system” for their own greed.

But what is this system? Whether the 17th century bourgeois system of parliamentary privilege (once used by Speakers against a tyrannical monarch, but now sucking the people dry) or the excesses of an unregulated City of London, it is all part and parcel of a single system – the sickly and moribund system of capitalism.

Cover photograph of the Visteon Enfield occupation by Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com



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# Birmingham march for jobs

ON 16 MAY, 7,000 Unite union members from every region marched through Birmingham to demand government protection of jobs. They were joined by self-styled Brummie and former CBI chairman Digby Jones, who explained that he was "losing his marching virginity" (there had been no student politics for him). But this was more than just a union stunt. It was an honest response by people who care about British industry to a government which doesn't care, and which has replaced industry with credit and speculation.

Although confined to the Midlands at this stage, the march was in reality a national demonstration, with workers from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England all making their case. When it comes down to the nitty-gritty, workers do not allow themselves to be weakened by divisive notions of devolution.

The march was held against a background of the worst depression since the 1930s. Manufacturing has been particularly badly hit by the banking crisis. In the worst six months on record for the car industry and a fall in production of 60 per cent, the weakened pound has done nothing to save jobs. Union members were taking action of their own accord at oil refineries up and down the country and at Visteon. It was inevitable that the union should want to be seen to be doing something.

Statements on the Unite website did nothing, however, to inspire confidence that the union had any inkling of the size of the problem or what the remedy should be. The leadership offered by the joint general secretaries has been woefully lacking in political astuteness. Patronising the membership with praise for their talent, ingenuity and hard work, they could only urge them to "trust the system", "obey the rules", "help the community", "save to become homeowners", "retrain", "work harder", and campaign for "fairness". Then when this did not work, feign surprise and disappointment at the extent of job loss, repossessions, poverty and misery, which they ascribed to "the greed and irresponsibility of the few".

This is deception. This recession is not on a par with previous recessions. It will be longer and deeper. Already, the working class is being primed by Labour to expect swingeing cuts in public services, based as they are on tax revenues from the City. The much-trumpeted windfall, mistaken for a real increase in the tax base, has all gone. Responsibility is being shifted to workers for "living beyond our means for years".

Yet, as Digby Jones told the marchers, British manufacturing is "fit for purpose". This is "not bail-out time". The government has to come up with subsidies to keep people in work, particularly the young. We do not yet know how many decades of debt will burden them. However, we do know that it is not the fault of a few bad apples, but the inescapable consequence of living with capitalism, and delegating responsibility.

**If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us or fax on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to [rebuilding@workers.org.uk](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)**

## SCHOOLS

### Whistleblower reinstated

THREE TEACHER union reps at Copland Community College in Brent, north London, who had been suspended when they revealed that huge bonuses had been paid out to the head, Sir Alan Davies, and senior managers, have now been reinstated.

The head, on a salary of £103,000, had allegedly pocketed another £300,000 in bonuses. The chair of governors said he was "worth every penny". Other members of Davies' family employed at the school also raked in bonuses. A number of classes are being taught in leaking huts.

But ATL rep Hank Roberts had compiled his facts carefully, and sent a dossier to government auditors. Now it is the head's turn to be suspended, along with deputy Dr Richard Evans and bursar Columbus Udokoro. Brent Council has taken over the school finances, and Roberts and his colleagues are back in the school. Political greed and corruption are mirrored in many workplaces and need to be exposed.

## ECONOMY

### Debt and declining investment

NATIONAL DEBT is now £754 billion, 53 per cent of GDP, up from 35 per cent just two years ago. This is the highest level since 1975-6. Revenues have fallen by 10 per cent, while government spending has risen by 5.3 per cent.

Business investment fell 6.8 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter. Bank lending fell 0.2 per cent month-on-month in April, the first drop since data began in 1982. So all the billions we have given the bankers have not gone into investment.

## EUROBRIEFS

## The latest from Brussels

**Whoops – they got it wrong**

IMMIGRATION MINISTER Phil Woolas admitted on 12 May that the government's policy on EU immigration had been wrong and that the government had not predicted the scale of new arrivals after the EU expanded in 2004.

The final three months of 2008 saw 29,000 applications to work in Britain from migrants from the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004. Since then the number of employed UK nationals had dropped by 200,000 and the number of migrants in work has grown substantially. Lord Mandelson told Parliament, "...nationals coming here from the [EU] are helping to fill gaps in our labour market our British nationals are either not available to fill or are unwilling to fill." He continued, "There are jobs available for British nationals despite the circulation of workers that has resulted from EU enlargement."

**Zone of failure**

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION in the eurozone was down 20.2 per cent in March 2009 from March 2008, the steepest annual drop since records began in 1991. GDP for the whole eurozone shrank by 4.6 per cent on last year; Germany's GDP was 6.9 per cent down.

**Free to create crises**

AN ARTICLE in the FINANCIAL TIMES earlier this year argued that the strain of the economic crisis was opening up divisions within the EU. But it went on to say "the [EU's] four freedoms – free movement of goods, people, services and capital – are huge and tangible achievements. It would be terrible to see them rolled back". No mention was made of the relationship between the "four freedoms" and the crisis.

**No comment**

ON THE BBC'S DAILY POLITICS SHOW of 19 May, the presenter pointed out, "When I have interviewed in the past week Caroline Flint and a leading Conservative and I've asked them if they will insist that MEPs' expenses are made public for the past four years, I cannot get an answer out of them."

MEPs still do not publish their expenses. Both the Conservative and Socialist groupings in the European Parliament backed an amendment to ensure MEPs' expenses remain secret.



Steelworkers from Corus on the Unite jobs march in Birmingham, 17 May.

Photo: Andrew Wiarid/www.reportphotos.com

## Job cuts sweep Britain

THERE IS NO corner of Britain unaffected by the banking disintegration, collapse of the housing market, and recession. Some recent examples include the Bombardier aerospace site in Belfast (350 jobs lost), IT and communications in Scotland (500 jobs at Siemens, 150 agency workers sacked at HP), Barclays (400 IT staff in London), and Indesit washing machines in North Wales (300 jobs). L'Oréal is to move back to France from Britain.

Air Products Wrexham – the only manufacturer of large air-separation units in the country – is to cease production here; instead, units will be made in China, leaving no British supply chain manufacturer in the run-up to clean coal technologies.

Pay freezes, short-time working and lay-offs, closure of final salary schemes, contracting out, redundancies and site closures are reported up and down the country, even where companies are in profit, as at Barclays, Coca Cola, Unilever, Cadbury, Imperial Tobacco and Hewlett Packard (imposing a 5 per cent pay cut across the board, despite doubling its profits).

Opportunistic attacks on terms and conditions using recession as a pretext is blatant war on workers. Executives who appear to take a cut in basic pay themselves are in practice often rewarded with bonuses for sacking staff. In construction, contractors invoke EU law in order to supplant British workers with cheaper foreign labour.

Among the worst affected sectors are chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, print and papermaking, IT (on a massive scale), and metals, with Corus axeing 2500 jobs in Britain. In just one example, Pfizer is to cease manufacturing at its site at Sandwich, Kent, with the loss of 900 jobs. At least 1,700 jobs are to go across Glaxo, AstraZeneca and Unilever. Invista Textiles at the former ICI Wilton site will close with loss of up to 5,000 jobs.

## MINIMUM WAGE

### Violation of human rights?

THE MISLEADINGLY titled Tory-sponsored Employment Opportunities Bill clearly demonstrates that the perversion of the English language continues unchecked within the party and demonstrates a centuries-old unbroken despising of workers.

The Bill is proposing the abolition of the national minimum wage on the basis that it

“violates” workers’ human rights by preventing them from voluntarily accepting lower wages.

It wants to “introduce more freedom, flexibility and opportunity for those seeking employment in the public and private sectors”.

So the freedom to starve, the freedom to work unrestricted hours, the freedom to be exploited, to institutionalise pauperism, are the new human rights dear to parliament and to capitalists old and new.

## Failing forecasts

SINCE 1997, unemployment has never been less than 1,398,000. It is now 2,220,000, according to official figures. In the past 18 months, redundancies have risen more every quarter – 109,000 in December–February 2008, 120,000 in March–May, 147,000 in June–August, 225,000 in September–November, and 286,000 in January–March 2009. A record 857,000 are officially not in work, education or training. Yet the government says the recession has “done little long-term damage to the economy”.

Manufacturing output has fallen by 5.5 per cent in the last three months, the worst fall since 1948. The economy shrank 1.5 per cent in the three months to the end of April. The government predicts 1.25 per cent growth next year (the IMF predicts minus 0.4 per cent). The government predicts 3.5 per cent growth in 2011 and 3 per cent plus in 2012.

How good are these forecasts? Earlier, the economy was predicted to begin to recover this summer, and the Chancellor, Alastair Darling, forecast in November that the budget deficit for the year would be £38 billion. Now it’s saying the deficit will be a record £175 billion.

The recent budget paves the way for public spending cuts and tax rises worse than Thatcher’s. It is proposing 17 per cent annual cuts in investment spending from 2011-12. Debt interest payments will grow by 8 per cent a year, forcing public spending down by 2.3 per cent a year in real terms. By 2017-18, every family will be £2,840 worse off due to these tax rises and spending cuts.

The headlined “squeeze on the rich” will bring in £7 billion at most, when the government wants to borrow £700 billion from the banks over the next five years. The national debt will double; interest payments – £43 billion a year – will cost more than education does. The government is bailing out the banks, so that the banks can then bail out the government. It is borrowing not to invest but to strengthen capital at the expense of the working class – earnings are 6 per cent down on last year.

Child poverty is no less than in 1994-5, nor is pensioner poverty. Families with disabled children are twice as likely as others to be living in poverty. 800,000 more working-age adults are living in poverty now than in 1998. Incomes are more unequal.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### Unions reject pay offer

THE FIVE TRADE unions in higher education institutions – Unison, UCU, Education Institute of Scotland, GMB and Unite have all jointly rejected the employers pay offer of 0.3 per cent.

The employers say a wage increase would equate to job losses. The unions have countered with the demand for a new national agreement on job security and avoidance of redundancy. The miserly pay offer follows the previous three-year deal which forced them to improve wages due to the reopener inflation clause.

Only UCU – the University and College Union – talked about balloting for

industrial action, but the ballot has now been withdrawn, thus avoiding pointless sabre-rattling..

In further education and 6th form colleges the Association of Colleges has made a slightly higher opening offer to the further education trade unions of a 1 per cent pay rise. Again, this has been dismissed as derisory.

Both in further and higher education a dance around pay misses the fundamental point that the government and employers’ stewardship and management have placed the entire provision at risk, terminal risk.

Saving further and higher education, creating a unified education service away from the market, is the radical plan that now needs to emerge from the trade unions and workers in education.

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### JULY

Friday 17 July to Sunday 19 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival and Rally  
Tolpuddle, Dorset

Music, speeches, and the annual march through the Dorset village to commemorate the struggle of the agricultural labourers transported to Australia for forming a union. Free.  
[www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle](http://www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle)



## EUROPEAN UNION

### Referendum, says poll

A NEW POLL by the Taxpayers’ Alliance/ICM has found that, if people were asked in a referendum whether or not they would vote for Britain to sign up to the Lisbon Treaty, 62 per cent said they would vote not to sign up to it; 28 per cent said they would vote to sign it; and 9 per cent said they didn’t know.

When asked the question, “If other countries wouldn’t let us take back powers or renegotiate our relationship, should the British Government ...?”, 37 per cent agreed with the option that the government should abide by that decision, and 57 per cent agreed with the option that the government should take the powers away regardless of what other countries or the EU said.

When asked, “Some people we have spoken to have said that none of the main political parties adequately represents their own views on Britain’s future relationship with the EU”, 67 per cent agreed and 28 per cent disagreed.

Asked if the government should comply with EU rules on working time and VAT, 28 per cent said the government should “always abide by these rules”, but 69 per cent said the government should “abide by those rules the British government agrees with but not others”. Asked if Britain should pay fines imposed by the EU for breaking EU rules, 38 per cent said Britain should pay the fines, and 60 per cent said they should not pay the fines.

## The end of the village

**TRADITIONAL VILLAGE** life is in danger, according to the National Housing Federation, as the cost of country living drives young people into the cities. More than 100,000 under-35s are expected to migrate from villages and market towns across England to urban areas by 2012 because of a "chronic shortage" of affordable places to live.

It warns that schools, shops and transport services could face closure because of the exodus as young workers are priced out of villages by an influx of commuters, second home owners and retirees. Some parts of the countryside have already experienced dramatic changes. For example, in east Dorset, where the average house costs 16 times the average annual income, the number of residents aged between 24 and 35 fell by 38 per cent between 1997 and 2007, with similar falls in west Somerset and south Shropshire.



Waiting lists for affordable housing have risen by 40 per cent in rural areas during the past five years, to 700,000 people. The federation said the number of young people in rural areas had been declining for more than a decade, with 341,000 people aged between 24 and 35 leaving the countryside between 1997 and 2007, the equivalent of 22 per cent of the age group.

The federation warns that traditional village life will die out unless more affordable homes for young people are built and the exodus is stopped. It wants 100,000 homes to be built in rural areas. Government and local authorities to draw up plans to address community needs, it says.

In yet another area of national life, de-regulated capitalism has been found wanting – distorting and undermining rural communities. Planning, housing controls and a national rural programme to fulfil pressing social needs must be forced on to the agenda, else the anarchy of capitalism will ruin rural life.

## A second victory has been chalked up in construction industry. But, as ever, the value of lessons learned...

# Victory over employment of

ON 6 MAY, a demonstration of construction workers took place outside the site of the Olympic stadium in east London to highlight the refusal of employers engaged on that project to employ British workers. This went largely unreported and without the official support of the unions. While the demonstration was relatively small, what also went unreported was that a number of sites were shut down as a result.

It is in the nature of class struggle that it will ebb and flow, interspersed with flash points. It is not possible to maintain a high level of activity if our forces are unable to sustain it either due to lack of numbers or clarity of line. As was reported in the March edition of *WORKERS*, the issue of the use of foreign labour had not gone away after the Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) dispute and would resurface again. Such a point was reached when engineering construction workers walked off the job on 19 May at the South Hook LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) terminal being built near Milford Haven in South Wales.

The dispute was sparked by the refusal of Hertel-UK to employ any more British ladders, choosing instead to bring in workers from Poland. Action quickly spread to the nearby Dragon LNG site followed by Aberthaw and then to some 15 sites across England and Wales, including LOR, the focus of the previous explosion of struggle earlier this year. The speed of the response to this latest attack forced Hertel to back down within two days with the employers (and no doubt government) fearing a further galvanising of resolve, not only among construction workers but generally throughout the country.

### What next?

So, a second victory has been chalked up in what is part of the war to secure a future for Britain's construction industry. But, as ever, the value of winning this battle depends on the next steps, lessons learned, and how it is seen outside the industry within our class. The question still remains: What are our demands?

The truth is that British workers are demanding the right to work on British construction projects and under the national agreement – NAECI (National Agreement Engineering Construction Industry, known as the Blue Book) – and there is absolutely nothing wrong or "racist" in the demand. Unfortunately there are many forces at work, "left" and "right", that seek to dilute the clarity of this call. Such is the desperation not to be attacked as "racist" that the slogan "British Jobs for British Workers" is shied away from because the BNP use it in their attempt to con people into thinking that they are for workers – that's easily resolved – just add after it "And NO to the BNP" and kill two birds with one stone!

### Mealy-mouthed

It really is mealy-mouthed to suggest that we are simply trying to make the employers adhere to the Blue Book and the SPA (Supplementary Project Agreement – used on Category 1, major new build sites). Invariably the SPA contains the clause "When recruiting, contractors will give due regard to the recruitment of suitably qualified local labour". So, the employer gives due regard and decides to employ from overseas – rubbish. What we really mean by that clause is that we want any unemployed British worker to be given a job before employers consider bringing in anyone from outside the country – and we all know it! Why else, when we know there are unemployed Brits, does it flare up? That the employer is simply just not playing the game?

We also know the employers, government and the main unions – Unite and GMB – are wedded to the EU and the free movement of capital and labour, and think that somehow it is wrong, or even "racist", to try and control this movement. Is it really accepted that the EU millions have the right to move to any

what is part of the war to secure a future for Britain's  
 value of winning this battle depends on the next steps and the

## British workers – now there is a war to win



Photo: Andrew Wiard /www.reportphotos.com

**6 May, London: Construction workers from around Britain struck for the day to lobby Parliament against the denial of UK jobs to UK building workers. The action coincided with a picket of the Olympics site in East London, and closed several sites across the country.**

other country, to live and seek work without any control whatsoever? (And there we have the unholy alliance of the employers and the leftist Trotskyist groups, for both agree that should be the case.) We know that under EU law the employers can employ whomever they wish from within the EU, that it is illegal to discriminate in favour of any particular nationality and they are quick to remind us of this “fact”. The reality is, that British workers do not accept this and neither do the majority in the EU nor the world. If the employers felt strong enough, the SPA clause would be removed and they would use EU law to enforce it.

From “the other side” comes

desperation to avoid the truth about the EU being exposed for what it really is. Unite has called on Labour MEPs to state their position regarding the right of Britain not to implement in full the Posted Workers Directive.

### ‘Social dumping’

This directive, which came into force in December 1999, seeks to prevent the free movement of labour within the EU from causing distortions of competition and bringing forms of “social dumping”. Apart from this and the call to challenge the recent rulings in the European Court of Justice that render national agreements worthless – interesting that, in recognition of our strength of feeling

against the EU, the outcome of the LOR dispute has not been challenged – there has been little support shown for the plight of our construction industry.

This has led to a number of problems and a potential turning away from our trade unions, either in total or in part, from those seeking more open support from their unions. There is an opportunist move by one faction of the “left” in trying to cosy up to the RMT, partly because of its connection with the offshore oil workers’ liaison committee, partly due to the RMT’s militancy and partly because of its position over the

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European Union. This also reflects an introspective position that concerns itself mainly with the construction industry and at times denigrates not only the public sector, but manufacturing also.

Yet the problems that all unions face over this question are the same. The answer is not to jump ship but to fight to win an anti-EU position within Unite and the GMB. While our unions' democracy still exists it must be used.

### Summit call

Unite has also decided to call a "national summit" stating that the key to resolving the current problems lies in the hands of the shop stewards. Careful over the use of that word 'national' and remember, to be international you must first have national. In addition, Unite says "it is now time for the energy providers to take responsibility for the contractors

**"There must also come a point where the shroud of permanence cloaking the European Union is ripped away ..."**

and sub-contractors and insist that the contractors give UK workers fair access to work and that the national agreement is honoured." So, on the one hand the key is the shop stewards and on the other it is up to the employers to police the employers – and not a mention of the EU and their laws anywhere to be seen.

The summit is called but no date yet has been announced. Meanwhile, the Blue Book is currently up for renegotiation and runs out in December this year. Firming up the SPA clause is one of our demands, while the employers' organisation (ECIA) seeks

once again the removal of the tea break. Negotiations are stalling, and moving quickly to a formal national balloting position is the desire from the cabins.

### Shop stewards

The role of the shop stewards is key and must reflect the thoughts and anger from those on site concerning the right to work in our own country. But there must also come a point where the shroud of permanence cloaking the EU is ripped away and the demand simply to implement the Posted Workers Directive is recognised as inadequate for our needs. A clearer direction is needed and must seek to include our class as a whole.

In the meantime, any peace on our sites can only be temporary, as the employers will undoubtedly test our mettle again in the near future. We have demonstrated our readiness to fight and willingness to respond to the employers' attacks; turning our defence into attack must be the aim.



## New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

**As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the CPBM-L, this pamphlet publishes – for the first time – an analysis of the British trade unions by founding Party Chairman Reg Birch. Available now, price £3 including p&p, from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB. Please make cheques payable to "WORKERS".**

In Britain, the trade unions were created, uniquely, as the "weapons of a working class". They were an "organic coming together of a class out of the conflict of class relationship" – a necessary tool for survival, built for defence not attack, against the employer in an economic system based on class exploitation.

This is the starting point for this speech, given by Reg Birch in 1982, which goes on to outline the history of our trade unions – tracing them back to at least the 14th century – and to analyse their development, peculiar to Britain.

The CPBM-L is re-issuing the text of this important speech by its founding Chairman, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Party, not as an academic exercise or a historic curiosity, but because Reg Birch's analysis raises important questions for us today.

Read it, consider it, and discuss it with your fellow workers.

Attacks on jobs, conditions, pensions, fares and safety. There's a sustained attack on the rail industry – and the workers are fighting back...

## Rail: the fight for the industry



Photo: Andrew Wiarid/www.reportphotos.com

Rail workers outside Parliament on 5 May call for jobs, services, safety and a publicly owned and accountable People's Railway.

RAILWAY WORKERS are facing what unions are describing as a “jobs massacre” as rail employers seek to protect their profit margins. The major transport players First and Stagecoach are slashing station and ticket office staff whilst announcing huge profits. The unions have responded by balloting members in passenger train companies for industrial action.

First has announced £94 million profit in its rail division and an increased dividend to shareholders by 10 per cent. Stagecoach has increased rail profits by £59.1 million while announcing job cuts of over 700 in South West Trains and nearly 200 in East Midlands Trains.

National Express is reported to be desperate to renegotiate the terms of its rail franchises as profits have plummeted.

They have been condemned for introducing charges of £2.50 for seat reservations, and cutting catering on trains. They run the East Coast line from London to Leeds, York and Edinburgh which carries 17 million passengers a year and employs 3,100 staff. Rumours have been rife for months that National Express is in trouble, and the Department for Transport is reported to be ready to take the route back into government ownership in the same way that they did when South Eastern services were removed from Connex.

These companies have made millions of pounds out of a privatised railway that swallows massive public subsidies during a period of huge growth in passenger numbers. They have been engaged in cut-throat bidding for franchises on the basis

of that growth continuing, and the current economic crisis has eaten into their profits. Their response is to get the begging bowl out for even more public funding, and making their employees pay for their greed. The real scandal is that none of these companies is losing money; the attack on jobs is being carried on to increase their profits.

The government is trying to drive down the subsidies, and has so far refused to pay more. Ministers have also refused to intervene to stop ticket office closures and further station destaffing. Rail unions RMT and TSSA have pointed out that both problems could be solved by bringing the rail franchises back into public ownership.

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**INDUSTRIAL ACTION** continues on the London Underground, where RMT members followed up a strike in April with further action in May over safety and victimisation. The action shut the Victoria Line, used by 600,000 passengers every day.

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Railcards have just been increased by 25 per cent, and car park charges have been massively increased as the private operators seek to squeeze every last pound out of passengers. At the same time, the companies are attacking the pension rights of the staff. Pension benefits are being reduced as the Railway Pension Scheme, an industry wide scheme inherited from British Rail, is subjected to continuous 'salami slice' cuts.

Many companies are introducing automatic ticket barriers, designed to force passengers to buy tickets before getting on the train. East Midlands Trains are simultaneously reducing ticket office staff by up to a third, the inevitable result being long ticket queues. More and more

ticket machines are being installed, but they are widely disliked by passengers. They are complicated to use and seem to be designed to rip off passengers who are unable to navigate their way through the complex fare structure. It is hardly surprising that passengers want to speak to a person to ensure they get the right ticket.

Ticket barriers were abolished at many stations many years ago, and the resultant open stations allowed for more entrances to be created. Cities like York, Sheffield and Derby have station footbridges that have become pedestrian routes from one part of the city to another, avoiding circuitous and unpleasant alternative routes. Railway companies welcomed the use of these routes by pedestrians as a means of making stations safer, with many more

people being present late at night.

The proposed introduction of ticket barriers will cut these routes, and this has resulted in outrage amongst communities affected. In Sheffield, the barriers will stop tram passengers from getting to the main Sheffield Hallam University site from the stop named after it! Even more ironic is that Stagecoach run the trams as well as the station – so much for integration!

Both RMT and TSSA members working for East Midlands Trains have voted for industrial action to defend jobs and services, and negotiations continue.

### **Fight over Sundays**

ASLEF train drivers at East Midlands have been "spontaneously" declining to work on Sundays following the company's attempt to force drivers to do so, resulting in a very limited Sunday train service. The union asserts that working on Sundays is voluntary, a position clearly accepted by the predecessor company Midland Mainline.

A similar dispute at London Midland resulted in RMT conductors winning a victory in defending their contractual right not to be forced to work on Sundays, the company backing down after a series of strikes.

There is little doubt that other passenger-train operators intend to slash jobs and make workers pay for their declining profit margins. The unions are preparing to defend their members' jobs, and a summer of strikes looks increasingly likely.

Meanwhile, Network Rail has cut back its track renewals by 28 per cent, potentially resulting in around 1000 redundancies amongst the workers employed by contractors. This move is coupled with reductions in track inspections and signalling maintenance, raising inevitable concerns about safety. RMT criticised this move, pointing out that it was contrary to the government's stated intention to use infrastructure projects to stimulate employment and the economy. The government effectively owns NR, and is the main source of its cash.

The redundancies would result in

skilled engineering staff being lost to the industry, and the unions have launched a campaign to defend the jobs, including taking strike action in companies such as Jarvis.

But there is no shortage of government cash to aid what is effectively further rail privatisation. £5.2 billion will shortly be used to pay off debts to smooth the sale of London & Continental Railways. L&C currently owns the British arm of Eurostar and much of the associated infrastructure, including the revamped London St Pancras station and some of Britain's most valuable development land. It will be divided as required by the EU into an infrastructure company and a train operating company.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow commented, "It is a scandal that in the middle of the worst recession since the Second World War, the European Commission have stepped in to give the green light for £5.2 billion of tax payers money to be poured in to prepare the British end of Eurostar for privatisation. This is an asset giveaway on a massive scale and RMT will be fighting these proposals all the way. We have seen once again today that the EU is dominated by the power of the bankers and big business and that they are pushing on with their plans to privatise the last remaining publicly owned services from

## **"Rail workers are entering a period of sustained attacks by their employers on the very industry itself..."**

our hospitals to our railways."

Ironically, the most likely buyer for the British Eurostar company is the German state-owned rail company DB, which already runs most of Britain's freight trains and the Chiltern Trains passenger services. It also owns 50 per cent of London Overground. DB wants to go head to head in competition with French operator SNCF, exploiting the liberalisation by the EU of European international passenger train services.

### **Rolling stock in sidings**

DB has itself been making job cuts as its freight business has seen a sharp downturn. Over half of Britain's freight rolling stock is now not in use. The unions have called for government intervention to protect the freight capacity of the railways, stating that failure to act will

mean that an upturn in the economy will result in an even greater proportion of freight going on the roads.

The government continues to press the Tyne & Wear transport authority to privatise the publicly owned and highly successful Metro system. Keep Metro Public, a long running and highly successful campaign group led by RMT, and supported by other trade unions and the Regional TUC, is fighting the privatisation.

The unions argue that a privatised Metro will result in the same problems that are faced by the privatised main line railways. It will mean poorer value for money, with public funding subsidising private sector profits. Fragmentation and bureaucratic contractual arrangements will increase costs and inefficiencies, while safety and quality of service will be undermined in the pursuit of profit. The unions predict attacks on pensions, jobs and conditions as the private sector seeks to maximise profits at Metro workers' expense.

Rail workers should be clear that they are entering a period of sustained attacks by their employers, not just on jobs, pensions and safety, but on the very industry itself. The coming battle to defend Britain's railways looks set to be the most intense since privatisation over a decade ago.

## **BADGE OFFER – Referendum now. No to the EU superstate!**

**DESPITE ALL THE promises, Labour is trying to take us into a European superstate without giving the people of Britain a chance to say what they think.**

**The so-called Constitutional Treaty is just the despised Constitution in another form, as even Giscard d'Estaing, author of the first attempt, has admitted. In backtracking on the referendum promise Gordon Brown is trying to wipe out a thousand years of independence and sovereignty using his tame party in Parliament.**

**The will of the British people has been clearly expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll. Now it is time for a poll of a different kind, a referendum. The TUC is already trying to renege on its September vote for a referendum. Don't let power slide over to Brussels.**

**FIGHT BACK with a Referendum Now badge (actual size 25mm), available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to "WORKERS".**



So-called “globalisation” doesn’t work. Even before this crisis, in 1989. But some things do work – self-reliance, controls on capital, and fighting for wages and jobs...

## The acid test for any economy. What works

LOOKING AT the shambles that is the world’s economy we need to apply a simple test to all its features which up to now have been taken as inevitable, permanent. What works? What doesn’t work?

So-called “globalisation” doesn’t work. Even before this crisis, most of the world’s peoples were worse off than they were in 1989. The solution of integrating into global capitalism turns out to be the cause of the problem. Half the world’s workers are poor, living on less than \$2 a day. Over 190 million people worldwide are registered as unemployed, including 76 million young people.

The finance sector doesn’t work. It doesn’t do what it’s supposed to do: get capital into profitable enterprises. The City of London seizes the wealth we create – our savings, mortgages and pensions – and gambles it away. Successive governments, none more than Brown’s, have embraced this treachery in the City.

Free trade doesn’t work. World Bank economists admit, “During periods of trade liberalization...job destruction rates can be expected to proceed at a much faster pace than job creation. Globalization could therefore be associated with higher unemployment rates.” So Latin America lost more than 10 million jobs during the 1990s.

Capitalist crises have cost developing countries a quarter of their output since 1984. But the banks profit: NatWest boasts, “Currency and interest rate volatility provided significant trading opportunities.”

The International Monetary Fund still forces liberalisation on developing countries. Debt Relief Initiatives force countries into Structural Adjustment Programmes for decades, to get the debt cancellation promised as the swift solution to their urgent problems.

Thatcherism doesn’t work, even when it’s Thatcherism with a smiley face or now with a sour face. The problem is not “government failure” or “failed states” but a failed system, not toxic assets but a toxic system. The capitalist model is shattered. The crash is in every kind of

financial asset – there are no firebreaks. Where can any rebound come from? Capitalism has wrecked industry, services, housing and pensions: it has run out of options. Which is not to rule out future flare-ups in the markets.

Two years ago, a Nobel Prize-winning economist said, “the central problem of depression-prevention has been solved.” He should give his prize back. Gordon Brown said there would be no more boom and bust. Inflated reputations, supply-side trickle-down economics, free market policies, are as bankrupt as the banks they serve.

Now Brown wants to restore faith in capitalism, which is Labour’s historic role. He spoke recently to “faith leaders”, fitting, since he leads the faith in the dead god of “free enterprise”. He said, “Most people ... don’t understand ... how some people have grown fabulously wealthy making failed bets with other people’s money.” But this is what capitalism does.

### Labour doesn’t work

Labour doesn’t work – exactly 12 years on and what is it doing? Buying worthless “troubled assets” for £1.3 trillion, sending good money after bad. The great economist Joseph Stiglitz said of President Obama’s similar scheme, “Quite frankly, this amounts to robbery of the American people. I don’t think it’s going to work.” Likewise, when Japan’s credit and property bubbles burst in 1990, its ruling class defended Japan’s finance capitalists – the result? A slump that has not yet ended.

The crisis proves that we cannot just live with capitalism, letting them get on with it so they will let us live in peace. It doesn’t work like that. The EU doesn’t work: 18.4 million people in the EU are unemployed. The EU admits that its free trade policy causes large-scale redundancies in Europe, a “decline [in] employment terms and conditions” and cuts in wages.

The old empires all banned industry in their colonies. Now the EU, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation do the



The free market economics of the City make banks

same to us all. They lie – you don’t need industry, open up to imports of goods, capital, and cheap labour, make your labour markets flexible – and you’ll grow. The government says protection is the road to ruin, yet it supports the Common Agricultural Policy. The EU, led by Britain, tries to force poorer countries to open up their economies. The recent EU-India Free Trade Agreement would cut India’s revenues from import taxes by \$6 billion and let the EU dump subsidised products into India.

The EU’s Global Europe strategy, pushed by Brown and Mandelson, is all about free trade. The EU itself predicts that its proposed Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area will destroy 3.4 million industrial jobs in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Egypt alone is expected to lose 1.5 million jobs. Yet the ever-present Vince Cable says protecting jobs is “beggar-my-neighbour” politics. He also says, “Economic storms, like those in nature, come and go. They cannot be abolished.”

Britain’s hard-pressed MEPs are to get a £13,000 pay rise next month – a 32 per cent rise. They will also get a special EU

most of the world's peoples were worse off than they were in  
 al, protection, national liberation, workers' nationalism and

## ...? And what doesn't work?



...ers rich – but fail the test of the real economy

tax rate of 15 per cent, halving their tax. In a recent poll for the BBC, 55 per cent said, "I want Britain to leave the EU." 84 per cent said the British people must have a referendum before any more powers go to the EU. In the EU elections, the EU's leaders are desperate for us to vote, so they can claim people support the EU.

Capitalism is proving that capitalism doesn't work. The normal functioning of our economy leads to crises, unemployment and poverty. Absolute decline is built into the system, not caused by external shocks like wars or price rises.

### So what does work?

**Self-reliance works.** In Britain during World War Two, arable acreage rose from 13 million to 19 million, wheat production rose 81 per cent and calorie output rose 90 per cent. Unproductive land can be made productive. We grow only 60 per cent of our food. We import foods like potatoes and apples. We must become broadly self-sufficient in food.

Industry works. Industry distinguishes rich countries from poor. Independent developing countries increase domestic

demand, curb luxury consumption and have special purpose banks, like Housing Banks and Development Banks. We need to put Britain, and Britain's industry, first, and employ all our people in making what we need.

**Controls on capital work.** The industrialised countries all used capital controls to protect their infant industries. European countries used them to rebuild after World War II, well before they created the free-market EEC. Japan and the "Asian tigers" used them.

In the 1990s, Asia suffered because most of its states opened up their financial markets. India and China did not – so they coped far better. Capital controls promote investment and enhance democracy and sovereignty by stopping speculators running everything.

The great economist John Maynard Keynes wrote, "Loose funds may sweep around the world, disorganising all steady business. Nothing is more certain than that movement of capital funds must be regulated." But if capitalism could do this, it wouldn't be capitalism. There is no solution within capitalism to capitalism's absolute decline. In each country, only the working class can build recovery.

**Protection works.** In the 18th century, the British government gave bounties to firms to increase production. We had the world's highest tariffs on manufactured imports, and laws enforced the consumption of British-made goods, all to foster our industry. Now our class must impose its own import controls, as the Lindsey workers did to control the import of labour, protecting British jobs and wages.

**Sovereignty works.** Under colonial rule, most Asian countries' income fell because they were forced to practise free trade. But after they won independence, they all grew.

**National liberation works.** The only good regime change comes from within, through class struggle. Occupation by outsiders produces only the sectarian chaos of feuding warlords and clans, as in pre-revolutionary China and now in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.

**"The EU's Global Europe strategy, pushed by Brown and Mandelson, is all about free trade..."**

**Workers' nationalism (see p15) works.** Obama accused Hugo Chavez of being "a force that has interrupted progress in the region". Fidel Castro by contrast said, "Venezuela has the potential to become a model of socialist development with the resources formerly extracted by the multinationals from its rich nature and the efforts of its manual and intellectual workers. No foreign power shall determine its future. The people are the masters of their destiny and they march on to attain the highest levels of education, culture, health and full employment. It is an example to be pursued by other sister nations in this hemisphere and it does not give up: it does not wish to lag behind a plundering empire."

**Fighting for wages and jobs works,** as the Lindsey workers proved. To accept wage cuts, or cuts in our hours, does not save jobs; it only helps to save capitalism. We need to plan to live with full employment, with decent wages and services, and that means without capitalism.

Put together all the policies that work and we have socialism. Socialism works. In the 1930s, only the Soviet Union made progress, turning a wreck into a superpower. Any progress after World War Two was due to the challenge from the Soviet Union, not to a "golden age" of benign capitalism. Socialist Cuba flourishes despite the longest, tightest blockade in history. Here in Britain we have all that we need to live decently – all but the right politics.

This article is adapted from a speech given at this year's CPMBL May Day Rally in London. Further issues of Workers will carry articles based on other speeches at the rallies in London and Edinburgh.

Britain's economy is the key to understanding its foreign policy, magnificently describes: leading to 140 years of devastating inter-

## Consistently malign: British foreign policy



**Sovereignty under attack: Blair signing the ill-fated European Constitution in Rome in 2004.**

**BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY SINCE 1870**, Will Podmore, paperback, 414 pages, ISBN 978-1-4363-4670-2, Xlibris, 2008.

A CONSISTENTLY MALIGN force in international affairs – that's the verdict of this magnificent historical survey of British foreign policy since 1870.

British governments have unerringly interfered to keep down workers and nations intent on improving their lot in order to preserve the earth as a paradise for ruling class pillage, looting and exploitation. British workers have their own reasons, becoming ever more apparent, why a revolution is necessary to address a growing number of domestic economic, political and social crises that endanger the survival of our class and nation. But reading Will Podmore's book we can see the telling evidence of how a revolution is just as desperately needed to remove – once and for all – our rulers as the crucial pillar and driving force of reaction internationally.

This is a compelling sweep of history covering every part of the globe where the British ruling class sought to control

events. All aspects of British foreign policy from the days of empire to recent times come under relentless scrutiny and are examined with sharp insight that is free of jargon and written in a pithy, well-honed style. The book's overarching theme is that Britain's economy is the key to understanding its foreign policy. But the pleasure is just as much in the detail.

The material is grouped into 12 historical eras and the impact of our country's foreign policy on countries and areas is revisited time and time again, revealing in practical terms how it has distorted and crippled the development of huge parts of the world. Therefore, the reader becomes privy to 140 years of unceasing, devastating interventions.

### Indictment

The book is a very powerful record and indictment of our rulers throughout the ages, not only in the 250 pages of historical comment but also in the 113 pages of Endnotes that are a delight in themselves, constantly suggesting other leads to lines of enquiry and containing countless interesting nuggets of

information that linger in the mind.

This review will present a few early and late glimpses of the work as temptation to wander through the whole endeavour.

The book immediately roots the empire firmly in context: "The British Empire's pioneer industrial supremacy was the basis of this pioneer imperial supremacy."

It goes on to outline and produce evidence to illustrate that the empire warped and harmed the development of the British economy. "British investors increasingly put their money into ventures overseas, rather than into expanding production in Britain, seeking the bigger profits gained abroad from cheaper labour power. The shift in emphasis from manufacturing to overseas investment cut back Britain's industrial lead."

Not only did Empire set our industrial economy back, it also stopped development elsewhere. "Britain, first to industrialise and first into decline and obsolescence, could grab huge regular profits for investors from her Empire (although the living standards of the

as a new book  
interventions...

since 1870

people did not derive from Empire but from their work in industry). Her political and economic control over her colonies enabled her to strangle potential rivals' moves to develop independence and industry (as in Ireland, Egypt and India)."

An early section lists the facts and figures of the Opium Trade between India and China which was controlled and organised by the British ruling class: "the most long-continued and systematic crime of modern times."

The scale of this trade from 1800 to the late 1930s expressed in stark figures conveys the enormity of the degradation imposed on two great countries. The book shows the extent of misrule in India and one particular example is quite horrifying.

Throughout the 19th century the rule of Empire produced a series of awful famines with increasing regularity, and British officialdom responded with policies of minimal intervention, citing what it called the sanctity of free trade and avoidance of dependency. George Curzon, India's Viceroy, said, "Any government, which by indiscriminate alms-giving, weakened the fibre and demoralised the self-reliance of the population would be guilty of a public crime." In a single devastating famine in Bombay in 1877, 5.25 million people died.

Later sections of the book look at the question of British sovereignty under attack from the EU. The economic imperative of British capital has remained supreme: "Britain's rulers have always had an external orientation. Their companies invested more overseas than any other country's firms, relative to GDP." It analyses the direction of the EU project and its proposed constitutional treaty. "A consistent policy ran through the Treaty: free movement of capital. It applied no restraints on complete foreign ownership of any public or private institutions, not even the defence or energy industries. The Treaty stipulated the privatisation of coal, rail and post." In short, "It became increasingly clear that the EU threatened Britain's ability to run its own affairs."

Continuing our series on aspects  
of Marxist thinking

# WORKERS' NATIONALISM

Founded in 1968, the Communist Party of Britain regards Britain as composed overwhelmingly of the British working class in all its diversity. Workers are the nation, though the nation is not yet for the working class, nor do all workers yet recognise that their class constitutes the nation.

Britain is where people first overthrew a feudal monarchy and where the scientific enlightenment forged the first industrial revolution and the first working class. It was within the framework of the nation and for the good of its industry that systems of education and health, and the skills of its people were developed, and working class organisation in the form of trade unions was invented and fought for to protect the gains that had been made.

Today's Britain – robbed by finance capital and its apologists in government, its industry deliberately laid waste, its laws dictated by a foreign power (the EU), its parliament anachronistic, corrupt, supine and subservient both to the EU and the US, its reputation now in tatters – cries out to be rescued by its people.

The revolutionary possibility of this country run by workers in the interest of the working class is what we call "workers' nationalism". Workers have the understanding, based on their history, education and the knowledge which comes from work, to put together a national plan for everything from economics and foreign policy to local government and the environment. The nation is key, because workers have no choice other than to fight for a future where they live and raise their families. We know best about our country; others know best about theirs.

Capitalism, however, will resist this to the death. A spent force, so increasingly vicious, it regards the destruction of sovereign nations as the solution to prolonging its life just a little bit longer. Workers' nationalism means that each nation must fight to build socialism in its own land, the only alternative to capitalism.

If you come to live and work in Britain, you become part of our geography, history and working class culture. Join a union and, more importantly, join our struggle to build an independent nation led by workers. Be clear and committed on this national class question. That is the only possible basis for internationalism.

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# Back to Front – Surprised? Really?

**‘If we are not to go down with the sinking ship, we, the working class must take control...’**

**WE SHOULDN'T** be surprised at the behaviour of politicians or bankers, of the Speaker or the Prime Minister. This is capitalism and capitalist democracy in absolute decline, exposed in all its gory details and in beautiful Technicolor.

Workers have no control over this “democracy”. We have no say and are simply permitted to put a cross on a ballot paper every five years. The timing of the media frenzy is also no coincidence, taking the light off the economic crisis that deepens whilst bankers carry on as if nothing has happened.

Meanwhile, the main political parties refuse to address the issue of migration and refuse us a referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty. At a recent Unison “Return to Learn” course for union members held in the North East, participants were split into a number of groups and asked to identify their priorities for a political manifesto. The two priorities common to every group were control of immigration and the EU. Yet this is not, and will not be, reflected in Unison’s policies.

The so-called “left” have contributed to this by successfully equating criticism of mass migration with racism, in the same way that Zionists have succeeded in equating criticism of Israel with anti semitism. These are the rotten politics of rotting capitalism, only surpassed in corruption by the EU parliamentary system and the EU itself.

While some pundits and politicians hopelessly try to breathe life into this dying system, we have to ask, where is the working class at a time when, with one mighty heave, it may be possible to bring it all crashing to the ground?

Alas, from our unions, not a murmur. The Unite union’s national march for jobs

in Birmingham on 16 May, drew only 7,000 supporters despite a three-line whip on all officials, nationally, to be there. Very, very few workers from Birmingham, the centre of manufacturing, took part.

If we are not to go down with the sinking ship, we, the working class must take control. In our workplaces and in our trade unions, we must raise the same spirit as the workers at Lindsey Oil Refinery, and those that supported them around Britain.

One small simple way we can begin to take control is by withdrawing legitimacy for this collapsing capitalist “democracy” by not voting in any of their elections, unless it is a referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty. What would happen if nobody voted for any of them? You can already see their fears of mass abstention. Call it a boycott, voters’ strike or “none of the above”.

As long as its members permit it, Unite will doubtless continue to press support for the Prime Minister who, still in love with the City, persists in encouraging risks with our money, echoed by the current CBI. And in the clearest expression yet of support for an economy based on financial services, not industry, the Chancellor insists: “If we do not fix the banks we will not fix the economy.” Not a word about changing the system to one more suited to working class needs. Changing the system is what the union should be campaigning for – not expecting the old one to have a change of heart.

We all know what this situation means for the young when it comes to their jobs and pay, their housing, their education and their pensions. This is a struggle for a future. We have to ask ourselves whether we are we up for it, or are we going down with capitalism?

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