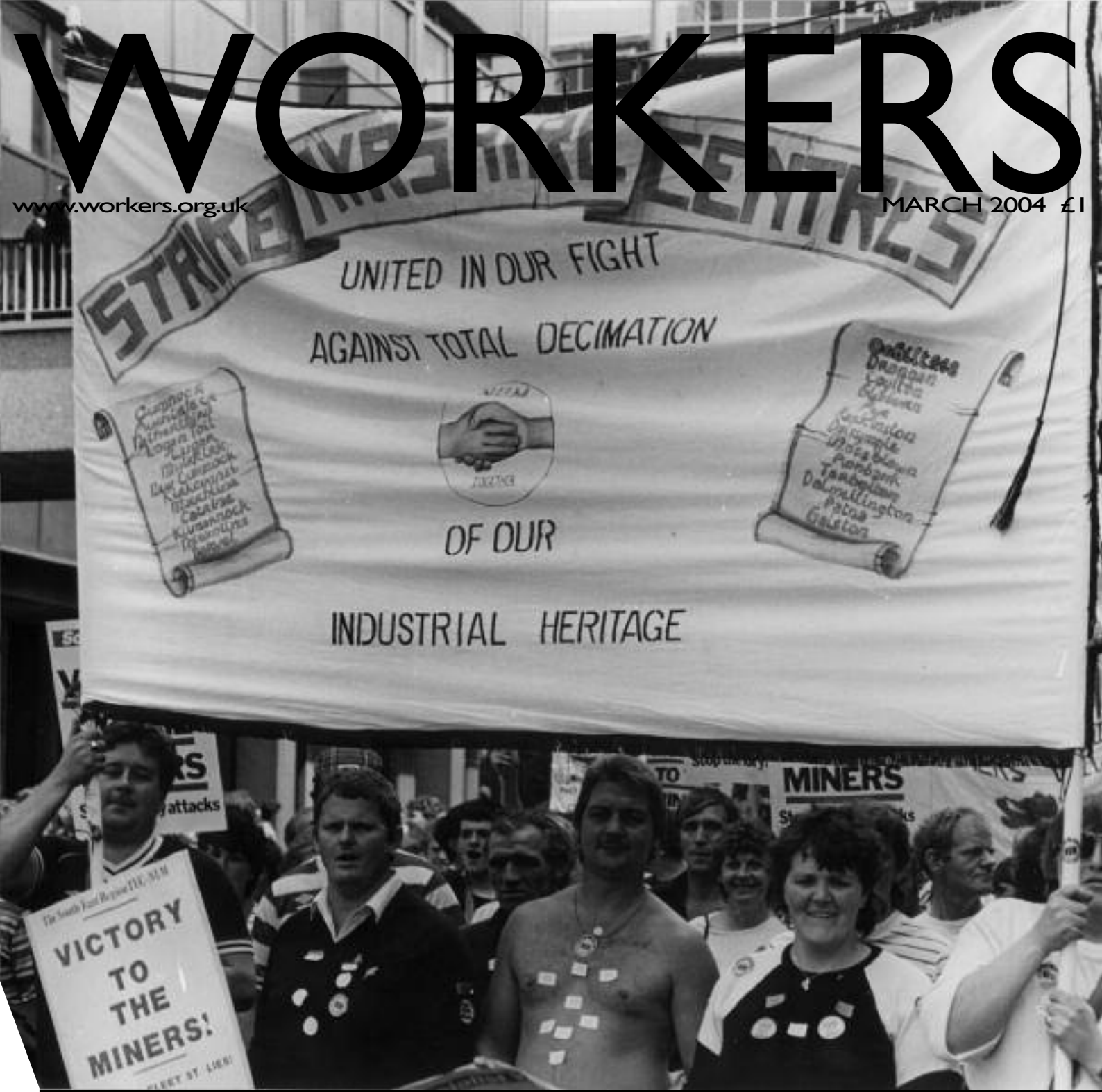


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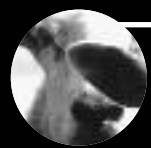
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THE GREAT STRIKE, 1984-1985

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



Something nasty in the food chain

14



A modern slave trade

16

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

RUGGED, RIPE Britain is performing only less well than Canada and Australia and is a haven for capitalist investment. We thrive while the eurozone, also very capitalist, takes a dive.

So a Foreign Minister says well done, Britain is much better than the eurozone. A Chancellor then says, logically, he has no thought about entry to the euro till after the next General Election.

Then the Prime Minister's two best friend zombies Stephen Byers, he of the fish bones, and Mandelson (Millennium Dome and property) start saying this is the time to convince everyone that the euro will save us all. Just as they do this France flogs off what is left of power supply to pay their euro debts and the European Central Bank goes

into panic mode.

And then Blair's second favourite zone, the US, recognises that the eurozone is a bit daft and puts all its dollars in the non eurozone places. Just at this moment the European Commission calls on all existing big spenders in the EU to spend more to help pay for the new enlargement of the EU.

As they do this, the British government wonders how best to afford the investigations into the deaths of migrant labourers and the restocking of devolved Scotland by all sorts of new workers from overseas.

Don't be under any illusion, the euro and EU questions are still essential, even despite their bourgeois and confused government detractors.

Second opinion

ON THE DAY that American arms inspectors were lining up to confess there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, virtue descended on the British government thanks to loyal servant of the Crown, albeit a Protestant from Northern Ireland, Lord Hutton. Hutton defended British soldiers following Bloody Sunday.

That event led to the Widgery Report that equally covered up the tragic events of that day which are only now coming to light. Cover ups like Widgery's and Hutton's only distance people from

the State and its elaborate lie machine with all its smooth words and cruel deeds.

About 15,000 people, mainly civilians, have died as a result of Blair and Bush's illegal invasion of Iraq and toppling of their erstwhile CIA puppet Hussein. The country is being plundered, the assets of its trade unions remain frozen and the multi nationals are moving in and doling out profits to their friends hand over fist.

With war criminals in charge of the country, you surely can't expect more.



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Youth workers vote to fight

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY workers have voted overwhelmingly to take part in industrial action up to and including strikes. Members of the Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU) gave a clear message to the employers that they were no longer prepared to be treated as the poor relations in the education sector.

The dispute is about pay, qualifications and the establishment of a Senior Practitioner Grade. The employers are yet to make any formal offer, which has incensed members. They are sick and tired of the same old arguments about affordability. CYWU has organised three National Conferences/rallies all extremely well attended. At these events speaker after speaker has said enough is enough. A substantial increase is needed for workers in this field to bring them more into line with others in the education sector.

The argument around qualification is an interesting one. While other professions that work with young people either want to increase the qualification required or retain it, the employers in this sector want to reduce the qualification. This would mean that instead of a degree, certificate or diploma, you would need only NVQ2 — and that within two years of starting employment. This is seen by all in this sector to be detrimental to both the profession and to young people and the communities they work with. Workers are already overworked because another 4000 qualified staff are needed nationally to meet the government's targets for the number of youth workers.

CYWU has been arguing for a Senior Practitioner grade for a number of years. At present there are discretionary points at the top of the scale that employers can use. CYWU wants an established grade to recognise the additional responsibilities of those working at the top of the scale not points that can be awarded at the discretion of the employer.

In another twist to this dispute the Staff Side of the Joint Negotiating Committee has had nobody to negotiate with. The employers' side has now got its negotiating team but is refusing to inform the trade unions of who is on it. What have they got to hide or be afraid of? The position at present is that there is no formal pay offer, the staff side do not know who they will be negotiating with, and industrial action begins on 1 March. This will be the first phase of action that could be added to if no real progress is made. Feeling is also running high because the claim was submitted last July, with a settlement date of 1 September.

CYWU members are well aware that the only way they can get anywhere near a decent overall settlement is by taking action nationally for the first time in the union's history. The alternative was do nothing, allow a dumbing-down of the profession, wait for a formal offer on pay and accept the employers' discretion as far as senior practitioners go. For the members there was clearly only one choice.

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

EU ENLARGEMENT

Britain's open borders

FROM 1 MAY, immigrants from the ten new EU members — Cyprus, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Malta — will all be allowed to work in Britain. Every other EU member except Ireland is imposing controls, which funnels would-be migrants towards Britain.

In response to public pressure, Blair is promising to withhold state benefits from these new immigrants. This is another one of his scams. Central government may not have to pay more from its funds, but local authorities will be legally obliged to provide housing, welfare benefits and education — which will mean council tax rises. (See also "A modern slave trade", p16.)

GDP

Fishy statistics

THE GOVERNMENT claims we have a booming economy with an ever increasing Gross Domestic Product. With manufacturing contracting every year, many will wonder how the figures add up.

GDP is a deliberately convoluted and obscure concept. Only occasionally is the true nature of its content revealed. The World Conservation Union says that £3 billion of our annual domestic product each year comes from "recreation". According to the BBC's WILDLIFE magazine this is mostly from angling.

Pensioners and unemployed workers will be pleased to know that every time a new fishing licence is issued, the government can say that national living standards have increased.

EDUCATION

Pile 'em high, teach 'em cheap

A NEW government blueprint for "streamlining" the public sector (cutting jobs) has proposed that support staff could enable teachers to teach very large classes. £2.2 billion could be saved, suggests Sir Peter Gershon's review, by moving Department for Education and Skills civil servants into schools as classroom assistants, so that "good teachers are able to teach very large classes". This follows the DfES's "blue skies" paper by its workforce remodelling team, which last year outlined plans for schools where only the head would need to be a qualified teacher and children could be taught in groups of 80.

Government was quick to deny responsibility for the paper when it hit the education press headlines, but plans now being unveiled make the direction clear. One school praised by ministers as "pioneering", Kemnal technology college in Kent, already runs classes of up to 75, with teachers being helped by support staff.

Plans for a new generation of schools were announced last week by ministers. The Building Schools for the Future scheme will give more than £2 billion to 11 first-wave local authorities to modernise outdated buildings to designs already planned by architects. The emphasis is on flexibility of spaces, making it easier for schools to house classes of 60 to 90 pupils, tying in funding to councils pushing through "workforce reform" which uses classroom assistants in place of qualified teachers.

Education unions are divided over the workforce remodelling proposals, with only the biggest teaching union, the NUT, fiercely against, on the basis that it is an attack on working conditions in schools and teacher professionalism. The other unions signed up, falling for the government line that it will reduce teacher workload.

It seems that capital funding for the new schools is also closely tied in to the Private Finance Initiative. One of the first wave local authorities, Waltham Forest in north east London, is talking about knocking down perfectly good Victorian school buildings owned wholly by the council, in order to build new secondaries under PFI, which will put private companies in charge of new buildings and leave local council tax payers footing the bills for years to come.

Sir Peter Gershon, author of the review, is former chief operating officer for BAE Systems. He now heads the Office of Government Commerce. His review proposes slashing 80,000 civil service jobs, 800 of them at the DfES.

MOTOR INDUSTRY

Strike at Land Rover

THE 24-HOUR strike at the Ford Land Rover plant in Solihull at the end of January was the first stoppage there since 1988. The strike, following on from an overtime ban and work to rule, saw a picket line of several hundred strikers. So much for the "6 pickets only" anti-union law!

The Land Rover workers are striking for pay — they have rejected a two year 6.5% offer — and more importantly for parity over pay and conditions with Ford workers employed at Jaguar. Predictably Ford have said that they will now consider any future development at Solihull — in other words 'behave or we close the factory.' Older union members will remember this as the line they rolled out in 1971! The dispute is continuing.

Prospect heads for struggle

PROSPECT, THE UNION representing a range of engineers, scientists and managers, is moving towards action on a number of fronts.

Its 1,750 members in the Health and Safety Executive are being balloted on a range of industrial action following their rejection of a pay offer which would see pay grow by only 0.5% a year until 2006. The union is seeking a 2.6% increase, affordable within the Treasury guidelines of 3.7%.

Tactics could include selective stoppages and mass "going to work days" in offices where there is insufficient space for the staff based there.

Richard Hardy, the union's negotiator has said, "This is not just about levels of pay, but about HSE's ability to maintain an experienced and committed workforce in order to deliver safe workplaces for all."

The union is also trying to halt the closure of the Bedford-based Silsoe Research Institute. This is a unique engineering research facility with 200 workers. The President of the science, engineering and technology group, Nigel Titchen, says, "If these proposals are enacted it will result in internationally recognised research being axed and the fragmentation of inter-disciplinary research teams with the loss of many fine scientists."

Lastly, staff at the three museums of the National Museum of Science and Industry are taking action over the decision to defer the implementation of their 2003 pay and grading deal for three months. Some staff could lose up to £2,500. They will be working strictly to their hours with a ban on unpaid overtime, which the museums depend upon to keep running.

Management face a deficit of around £600,000, largely because the government failed to compensate the museum for the extra costs associated with introducing free entry. Prospect warns that without further funding increases the museum will be forced into more cuts.

CIVIL SERVICE

Widespread industrial action

WORKERS IN CENTRAL government pressed ahead with strike action last month. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) is in dispute with several departments over low pay.

Talks on last year's settlements dragged on until PCS members voted in January to begin a series of strikes. These are most widespread industrial action in the civil service for over 10 years.

The first action took place over 48 hours from 16 February, including stoppages in job centres, benefit offices and driving test centres. The 85,000 civil servants negotiate with each department separately. PCS is trying to coordinate

action in the face of central government restrictions on pay levels.

At one point it looked as if the Department of Work & Pensions had reached agreement with its workers, but that fell through before the planned strike. The union said that the strike was well supported, with up to 90% of its DWP members involved in the action. The employer claims that few offices were closed.

The focus of the union's pay campaign has been on the low pay of some members. PCS believes they do not get the recognition they deserve, and are easy targets for politicians who want to cut public spending.

A report for the government proposing staff cuts of 80,000 across the whole of central government was leaked the weekend before the strike.

Strike date set for universities

THE 47,000 MEMBERS of the Association of University Teachers have voted by two to one for industrial action over their pay, after employers suddenly called off last-ditch talks over pay and conditions.

Higher education staff overwhelmingly opposed the government's proposed pay and modernisation package. This would end the present system of national pay bargaining and replace it with under-regulated localised negotiations. It would also reduce annual increments, cutting academic-related staff's earnings by £47,000 over 21 years, researchers' earnings by £17,000 over 9 years, and lecturers' earnings by £6,300 over 8 years.

Because of the relative decline of university staff's pay, far too many academics have left the country. In the last five years, there has been a 50% rise in the numbers leaving Britain for jobs in the EU and the USA.

The nationwide industrial action is to start on Monday 23 February in Wales, and spread to the rest of Britain over the week. For the first time, it is coordinated with a week of action by the National Union of Students — students are preparing lobbies, demonstrations and a shutdown of higher education on Wednesday 25 February as part of the struggle against the government's plans for variable top-up fees.



Photo: John Harris (reportdigital.co.uk)

Gangmaster overseeing a gang of agricultural workers pulling and cutting leeks in a field on a farm in the Cotswolds. See "A modern slave trade", p16

MINING

Lifeline for Hatfield

HATFIELD, THE PRIVATISED colliery near Doncaster owned by Coalpower, and last pit of the Richard Budge empire, has been given a slender lifeline by the government. Hatfield was the come-back pit of Richard Budge after he was removed from the company of his own name in a recent boardroom battle.

Budge has advocated the building of a clean coal-burning power station next to

the Hatfield pit so as to utilise the pit's reserves, the largest in Britain. The proposal would save 220 miners' jobs and probably create double that number in future.

Budge can access over £51 million in state funding, if he can also raise £30 million in private capital. But at present he has been ensnared in a funding and regulatory nightmare which may prevent this lifeline to the mining industry ever happening. The government is only funding the pumping and maintenance of the pit until the end of March.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MARCH

Friday 5 March

"A Night of Celebration"

20 years after the miners' strike, a celebration at Loganlea Miners Welfare Club, Loganlea, West Lothian. For more details: alanoneworld@aol.com

Tuesday 16 March

Words of Mass Resistance, 7.30pm to 10pm, St James, Piccadilly

An evening of readings by candlelight of writings in opposition to war. Among the readers will be Jude Law, Tony Benn and Mark Steel. Tickets (£8 wages/£6 unwaged) from the Stop the War Coalition or from St James Box Office on 020 7381 0441

Saturday 20 March, 10.45am–4pm

David Jones/Joe Green Strike Memorial Day

A memorial lecture at the NUM, followed by a social at Barnsley Trades Club. Organised by Yorkshire Area NUM and Justice for Mineworkers Campaign. Details from Rick Sumner, 01964 532954 or email njmc84@yahoo.co.uk

Saturday 20 March

A Year of Lies 20.03.03–20.03.04

National demonstration in London on the anniversary of the war against Iraq. More details from www.stopwar.org.uk

ENERGY

The end of British coal?

THE INSTITUTION of Civil Engineers has predicted that government energy policy will close coal production in Britain by 2016. It says only one nuclear power station will be operational by 2020 and that the target of 10% energy production from renewables such as wind or wave power by 2020 will not be achieved.

The only way to prevent power cuts will be to rely entirely on foreign energy sources. The nuclear industry, currently bankrupt, is bankrolled and bailed out with subsidies of £200 million a year. To save the coal industry and establish the clean coal technological base that would give continued access to 1,000 years of coal reserves would cost £100 million — a one-off subsidy. Silence from the government.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Union mergers

THE IRON and Steel Trades Confederation (33,000 members) is to merge with the Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades (12,000 members). Although the unions have healthy bank accounts, the merger reflects the decimation of manufacturing industry.

Other mergers are in the pipeline. AMICUS, formed by the merger of AEEU and MSF, looks set to mop up the Graphic, Print and Media Union. Again the decline of manufacture is the root, with job losses running at double the rate per week of the worst Thatcher years. How long before Amicus casts its eye on the steel and knitwear merger and gobbles them up?

AMICUS would also like to grow by mopping up a number of professional health groupings and off-shoots of white collar civil service sections. Both UNISON and AMICUS are making approaches to the First Division Association of civil servants over a possible merger or joint partnership working. The UNISON partnership proposal is targeting the 65,000 non-unionised health and related managers earning over £35,000 a year. The FDA cannot survive without a substantial cash input. UNISON can't recruit health managers. Is this a principled approach or a business exercise?

Both the rail unions and the TGWU are vulnerable. The GMB is also struggling with financial difficulties and is selling off share investments and property. Could a merger be the solution? And who is eyeing the Fire Brigades Union?

Another mega-union?

UNISON is talking with PCS – the recently merged civil service union. The agenda is apparently to look at common areas of working and prevent demarcation disputes as civil service jobs are devolved into traditional local government and health areas. This a reflection of how regionalisation works as Britain's traditional structures are broken down under EU dictat. In real terms it offers yet another mega-merger union, dominated by the ultra-left with little or no participation by the members.

The impact of EU regionalisation on Britain's traditional structures will muddy the functions and boundaries of central and local authorities. This may be mirrored in the unions which could become regionalised themselves. Although UNISON espouses the anti-EU line, at the same time it is also rushing into devolution and regionalisation, desperate to grasp every crumb on offer from the EU. The result of jumping on the regionalisation gravy train could be at best be a federated union and at worst a splintered one.

The re-alignment of trade union groupings, especially the moving away from traditional industrial roots by manufacturing unions, is not a sign of health. The trade unions are re-aligning on the EU trade union model – one industry, one union, an unhealthy situation which reflects the lack of struggle among workers to protect their industries.



Lasting over a year, the miners' strike of class consciousness in Britain – a

A class act: the great min

THE GREAT MINERS' STRIKE of 1984-1985, approaching its twentieth anniversary this spring, will be the subject of analysis and reflection. Some will no doubt apportion blame, while some will be from generals of the "if only" army in the labour movement.

There are very few miners who survived the strike and are still working. Of those who participated throughout or supported the striking miners and their families, a high-water mark of class consciousness is etched forever in their experience.

Aspects of the real history of the miners' strike hidden in ministerial files will remain secret for decades to come. Most history is never written down and much history is rewritten, but the 1984-1985 miners' strike will remain on a par with the General Strike, the 1899 dockers' strike, the Chartists and their forgotten forefathers, the Luddites.

The period 1945-1979 in Britain can be likened to the 1939/40 "Phoney War". A false consensus of social democratic politics reigned. Many working class goals pursued for the previous half century had triumphed, gradually accepted within British civil society. The National Health Service had been established in the face of bitter ruling class opposition. The provision of state education, on a scale never before seen, had been achieved. The high unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s seemed to have disappeared. British



Police and pickets at Lea Hall Pit, Staffordshire, 28 March 1984. Photo: John Hall (IFL)

that began in the spring of 1984 represents a high-water mark strike about jobs, communities and the future of Britain...

Miners' strike of 1984–1985 remembered

industry had seen failed private capitalism evolve into state monopoly capitalism, transformed by social democracy and seen mistakenly by some workers as socialist. But it was a survival strategy of British capitalism, which had failed to deliver during the two bloodbaths of World Wars I and II and barely survived. The nationalisation of rail, coal, steel, post, road transport, shipbuilding, communications, British Leyland, forestry, water, gas and electricity, all reflected the propping up of a failed capitalism.

Class forces

Beneath this social democratic consensus, great class forces were grinding against one another. The history of the 1960s and 1970s is one of epic industrial confrontation, with the world's first

industrial working class in headlong collision with the first capitalist class. The defeat of attempts to destroy the trade unions first under Labour (Wilson) and then under the Tories (Heath) meant that the next clash of such industrial giants could only be greater.

Thatcher's industrial agenda on winning the General Election in 1979 was identical to Heath's in 1970, but circumstances had changed. 1970–1974 had seen the ascendancy of the working class with a level of class-consciousness and unity not seen before. This was coupled with a political failure of nerve by Heath to see the battle through.

The period 1968–1974 had been one of unique struggles in Britain. These had been led primarily by the Amalgamated Engineering Union, embracing millions of

manual manufacturing workers. They crashed against the anti-union legislation of the day, strengthened by the 1972 and 1974 successful miners' strikes. At the same time parallel disputes in the electricity supply industry and railways were also taking place. No government of the day was capable of surviving such an onslaught.

From this period the capitalist class regrouped, analysed and prepared for its counter-offensive. Its high point was the 1984–1985 miners' strike. The government proceeded to take apart, strand by strand, the strengths of the period 1974–1986. What made the early miners' strikes so successful? The key factors were: unity across the coalfields; blacking of the

Continued on page 8



Photo: The Worker

Above: the Cortonwood Branch of the NUM on the march — the strike began on 1 March when Cortonwood was told it would close the following month. Below: striking miners at Kellingley Miners' Welfare Club in Knottingley, Yorkshire.



Photo: The Worker

Continued from page 7

nerve by the ruling class. The Nicholas Ridley blueprint for the miners, leaked in part in 1978, was the Tories' attempt to project ahead for future conflict.

From their perspective, such future conflict had to shatter the aberration of social democratic peace during 1945–1979 and reverse the slow equalisation and redistribution of wealth from the rich to the working class. The power of organised workers had to be broken in order to prevent them from reaching for the levers of power and challenging the ability of the ruling class to govern. Also, billions in capital held by the nationalised industries, the “family silver” of the nation, had to be freed. The election of Thatcher in 1979 was about putting political backbone into the ruling class.

Pickets

In February 1981 attempts to close pits in South Wales led to pickets fanning out across Britain's coalfields. But coal stocks of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) stood at only 15,000,000 tonnes. There was lip service to a Plan for Coal. Rather than face a strike on the NUM's terms the government played a waiting game. During 1982 and 1983, coal stocks at power stations and CEGB depots rose to nearly 31,000,000 million tonnes. Stocks of oil were increased. The CEGB procurement plan was to carry not only “strategic stocks” but also reserves of every nut and bolt to effectively rebuild power stations from scratch. Canals to supply coal were refurbished. New gas and oil pipelines were laid. New oil tanks were built. Experiments were made on gas-fired stations.

In October 1983, after rejecting the National Coal Board's pay offer, the NUM implemented an overtime ban. By January 1984, coal stocks had dropped to 28,000,000 tonnes. The CEGB warned that an overtime ban lasting until October 1984, plus a strike, would result in effectively only 12 weeks' coal burn. Some saw shadows of 1972 and 1974 with another Tory defeat, but the Ridley plan

‘Government forces then prepared to move against the miners with the advantage of unprecedented coal and fuel stocks...’

was almost entirely in place. Already coal imports were being brought in by sea to London power stations. The NUM were lured in deep to a well set trap, a stalking horse for ruling class revenge.

The NUM were committed to strike action if pit closures were announced. On 1 March 1984, five pits in Yorkshire were told they would close in April. The first of these were Cortonwood and Bullcliffe. To defend the industry, pickets from Cortonwood, “The Alamo”, started to fan out throughout the Yorkshire coalfield and then throughout coalfields nationally. The provocation was in place, the bait taken, the fuse lit, with the willingness on both sides to engage. Now endurance was to be the order of the day.

The strike was declared official on 8 March 1984. The Great Miners’ Strike was commencing. Until 5 March 1985 the strike was the focal point of class action and solidarity in Britain, highlighted around the world.

Government forces then prepared to move against the miners with the advantage of unprecedented coal and fuel stocks. There were shady figures emerging, associated with government circles, whose role was to orchestrate public opinion against the miners but also to exacerbate divisions in the coalfields. David Hart, Tim Bell, Lord Hanson, the Freedom Association and others, all worked to ensure that the Nottingham coalfield which broke ranks during the 1926 General Strike was groomed to break ranks again.

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Above: butcher's shop in South Elmsall, Yorkshire, close to Frickley Colliery — signs like this were a common sight in the pit villages as shopkeepers realised that no pit meant no trade. Below: no need for pickets at Grimethorpe Colliery in this image from 20 April 1984 — just a calling card for National Coal Board Boss and American Ian McGregor.



Photo: The Worker

Photo: The Worker



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Nottingham was to nurture the so-called “Union” of Democratic Miners (UDM), a government and NCB scab union led by Roy Lynk. There followed a tragic repeat of the 1926 General Strike betrayal. The press invented “Silver Birch”, a legendary and fictitious Nottingham miner who supposedly organised scabs wishing to strike break. Promptly nicknamed “Rotten Stump”, he was symbolically burnt on dozens of picket lines and disappeared as fast as he had been invented.

Police forces, which had been groomed not for civil insurrection but for quasi-military occupation of the mining villages, were deployed across the country.

Solidarity

Attempts to prevent other disputes, which effectively would generate solidarity by other workers on other fronts, were put into place. Only the rail unions — NUR and ASLEF — stuck to previous pledges and refused to move scab coal and oil. These pledges remained in place throughout the entirety of the strike despite unprecedented management bullying. Thousands of scab “independent” lorry owners had been recruited to move coal around Britain. Divisions were fostered between the miners and their allies, the steel workers. An unprecedented anti-union, anti-miner press and media war was loosed.

Two hundred and fifty thousand miners, less those who carried on working in Nottinghamshire, apart from noticeable

exceptions, struck to save the industry. Arthur Scargill, the NUM President, was vilified, yet every prediction he made of pits to close — “100,000 jobs, 100 pits, 100 miners’ communities” — was to be proven correct if not an understatement.

And so the yearlong miners’ strike escalated into unbridled class warfare. Over 3,000 miners were injured, baton-charged, truncheoned or ridden down by police horse charges during the picketing. Two pickets died, crushed by scab lorry drivers. Hundreds of miners were jailed — framed for alleged violence on the picket lines. All sacked miners lost their pension rights — a vindictive government act only partially remedied in the late 1990s.

Every conceivable form of state aggression was loosed against the miners and their families. The funds of the NUM

‘A huge “feed, clothe, house the miners” solidarity campaign swept across the organised working class...’

were sequestered because the NUM executive refused a High Court instruction to hold a ballot. The executive acted inside union rules and did not recognise the capitalist court. All property and funds were seized. Money was chased across the world, with a claim to having recovered over £5,000,000 in Luxembourg. A union leader hid a reputed £1,000,000 of NUM money in his house. Such was the trust and class solidarity. The state violence continued: no state benefits for strikers’ families and no benefits for the retired miners.

Support

The unique development of Women Against Pit Closures — the wives, girlfriends, mothers and grandmothers of miners — emerged. A huge “feed, clothe, house the miners” solidarity campaign swept across the organised working class. Miners’ support groups, twinned with pits and coalfields, stopped the starving back to work of miners reduced to abject poverty and debt.

The police occupation of the mining villages saw open insurrection throughout parts of South and West Yorkshire — Grimethorpe, Armthorpe, Rossington, Houghton, Hadfield, Stainforth. Police snatch squads in riot gear were attacking at every opportunity, with mounted police acting like Cossacks and terrorising communities to break the strike. They failed. The Metropolitan Police and other Home Counties constabularies earned a fortune as Thatcher’s mercenaries. The crime wave in the South went unchecked and ignored.

Set-piece picketing — the so-called



Photo: The Worker

Battle of Orgreave near Rotherham or the mass picketing of Ravenscar in Scotland or Scunthorpe steel works — was a reflection of the tactics used in 1972. But the police had drilled and anticipated such tactics. The mass pickets became routs. Wrong battles were fought in the wrong place. Orgreave, the famed “miners’ riot”, was broadcast around the world until the BBC was forced to play the videos in correct sequence. Then the “riot” became a police cavalry charge on

peaceful pickets. So brutal were the police that a road sweeper beaten to pulp in 1985 by mounted police had to wait until 1992 to receive his damages. These damages, over £63,000, were only paid after the bailiffs moved into the HQ of South Yorkshire Police.

No media trick or lie was beyond the government or the media. Arthur Scargill and the NUM executive were accused of

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Pigeon Men, by Dave Alton (2004)

<p>(1) Young un leading others in tight turning wheel Formation, out over and in?by, free Except the instinct, the invisible Wire always drawing them back: the millet And a tin cup of water. Not flying Rats these though, settling for tourists handouts Before billowing up to crap on hands That fed them. Oh no. These are avian Whippets, a special breed, selected Carefully by generations that proud They bob?bob their heads and coo with pleasure.</p> <p>(2) Terraces hunch shabby shoulders against Bitter wind. Polythene tatters tethered voices Ad hoc by fingers of rain to barbed? wire</p>	<p>Wound around pitiless pithead. Big Once turned these streets into community When earth was being hollowed and it echoed As petrified darkness broke into cobs and slack, shovelled and kibbled, fetched up for Light to be induced from blackness, and steam, rivets and spars with which to engineer Our new world. This suited men, dressed women And schooled children into their Sunday best, Assembling in chapels charged with such power, Peoples pews shoulder to shoulder, Raising Word of Sons of Man, aspiring To realise Divine Kingdom on earth.</p>	<p>Blessed be those god?botherers, because all Were rendered equal by their sacred vision. Even pub and club men shared communion In which their bodies became host and beer The blood surging with ideas and hope. Not that this was ideal, a pre?lapsarian idyll Of noble labour. Those were black bruised backs, Blue knuckled a hunched spine s length, wincing lungs Dry?damped by an underworld miasma of scouring dust. No great loss then except Except the dignity pick and shovel fashioned. And the wage, of course, the wage. It s breakfast,</p>
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Continued from page 11

accepting money from Libya. It was years before this canard was laid to rest and the involvement of MI5 and infiltration at the highest levels of the NUM exposed.

Money and cash did pour in from the trade unions and support groups world-wide. Money from Australia, the USA, the Soviet Union, China, South Africa. Every week a flight landed at the Leeds/Bradford airport delivering cash from Italy and France. MI5 may have smeared but they missed the obvious: that workers throughout the world were digging deep.

Experts and pundits bombarded the NUM with advice. "If only" they had a ballot rather than relying upon their rulebook Nottinghamshire would have struck and the strike would be over in six weeks. "If only" Scargill had been reasonable and moderate in accepting closure of so-called "uneconomic" pits. "If only" he had done a deal with NCB chairman, US import Ian McGregor or board member South African import Michael Edwardes, then Thatcher would have been placated. "If only" the deputies



Photo: The Worker

7 July 1984: miners lay a wreath on Saltley Gates in memory of two dead comrades

Cold outside and wet: so where is the next
 Packet of cereal coming from, then?
 (3)
 There is a purpose to it, sitting on
 Old sofas with the stuffing hanging out
 What would have been once a working
 day. Two
 Mates and a couple of cans each, both
 Scanning the sky for a pony perhaps
 Or a monkey maybe if there s no
 Pigeon fancying hawk en route from
 France.
 Even so, it s a wager not a wage.
 (4)
 Still stands the winding gear, winding
 men up
 By its immobility, seamlessly
 Refashioned as heading a heritage
 Centre. Opposite, a business park
 That has no real business being there.
 Pre?fab
 Building of hope and reasons for failure
 The whole sorry town has been
 undermined.

Memorial! For when there came the call
 Invitation to a slaughter – England
 Expects – RSVP the Pitmen Pals
 Paraded. Lest we forget, in denial
 Of fraternity, they dug down deeper
 Beneath no?man s?land than brother
 Boche
 For there was the madness of it, miners
 Conniving at the explosion of mines. (6)
 Shaken chapel began to crumple then,
 Fa ade cracking and lacerated by
 Foundation shifting blasts. And the
 orders
 Often flown perilously by pigeon.
 Came the homing and heroes returned
 To a cold country, unwilling, it seemed
 To pay for labour and digging of coal.
 In the Heritage Experience there s a
 Rusty old shovel, a Mauser bullet
 Lodged in its handle. Or is it Luger?
 (5)
 Droning tractor ploughing up the
 coalfield,
 Turning up worms into the wet,
 tempting

Pigeons from their flying, homing in on
 This rare succulent treat until seen off
 By bullying seagulls marauding in
 From the buffeted coast where it s too
 wild
 For sea coal, helping themselves to this
 bounty.
 84 and the pitmen proved themselves
 A class act. But, this seam was running
 thin,
 Faulted, too few came running to help
 out
 With this mining disaster. No question
 As to courage: dropping down and out
 of sight
 Demands resolution. Yet, it failed.
 Pigs were always unlucky for pitmen.
 But, who was it violated the crees,
 Snatched the best, the plump, the most
 promising
 Of the flock? Were they simply devoured
 By those too desperate to quell
 famished
 Spirits, or just destroyed by dark figures

and overlookers – NACODS – had upheld their conference and Executive policy to join the strike in autumn 1984.

If the deputies had struck, which they never had, then no pit could work on safety grounds. But they didn't. To this day no satisfactory explanation has ever been proffered on such a signal failure, although heroic solidarity was shown by deputies throughout all the coalfields bar Nottingham.

Spring 1985

So winter 1984 became spring 1985. The power stations had got through on a coal burn that included coal dust, water, oil and, reputedly, telephone directories. Over £2 billion worth of oil had been imported and used at power stations in the South East which had effectively been mothballed since the oil crisis of the early 1970s. Gas fired turbines failed and were rebuilt in Royal Naval shipyards in Portsmouth, to be smuggled in unmarked naval vehicles back to the stations. But only after the work had been authorised by NATO! Another secret of the Thatcher war on the miners is revealed.

By February 1985 spring was breaking.

The near-year-long strike had exhausted the miners and their allies. The government was prepared to expend bottomless reserves in buying oil, funding police mercenaries, paying scabs to work overtime in Nottingham. After nearly 12 months the NUM executive, following an agonising soul searching, voted to return to work but without an agreement because that would have meant surrendering. Instead, the strike was "stood down".

The agonies of the 12-month strike – the state violence, the lost jobs, the imprisoned men, the bloody pickets, did not end the battle for coal and industry.

Between 1985 and 1992 the fight to save the pits continued. The 100 pit closures forecast by Arthur Scargill became 200. The NUM, NACODS and other mining industry unions were obliterated. What followed from the destruction of the pits was effectively the loss of over 1,000,000 full-time male manufacturing manual jobs. This has had a devastating impact on the British working class and draws its parallel with the men killed during the First World War – but this time the casualties were

"economic" as opposed to battlefield. Over £6 billion in public money funded oil, police, scabs, MI5, media scum et al, not counting the millions the pit closure programme cost. An estimated £4 billion has been top-sliced – stolen – by the government from the miners' pension scheme. The pit privatisation programme was put back from 1985 to 1992 – but what was there left to privatise? The mining villages have become the greatest centres for drug abuse, drug smuggling and internal decay. Twenty years on, some ex-mining villages still have over 50% unemployment among men under 40.

The Thatcherite vision – and coal plays no part in the Blair vision either – resulted in the destruction of jobs and communities, the massive theft of pensions, billions looted in assets, scorched earth. Now they let the drugs kill the people. The miners' strike, in stark contrast, was about saving jobs, communities and the future. Reinstating that vision among the working class of Britain would be the finest memorial to the great strike.

Like the diseases that plague it, British food production seems to be in a crisis to another, always diminishing. It's time to take control...

Something nasty in the food chain: capital

THE ANTHEM of Yorkshire celebrating Ilkley Moor has, after suitable translation, recorded the cycle of life and death. You die because you did not wrap up against the cold, your corpse is then devoured by worms, which in turn are devoured by ducks, which in turn are eaten by your friends. Sung usually with a broad accent, the anthem and its import are understood by very few, quite like the debate about what is happening to the food chain and the survival of humanity.

It is not a question of drought and crop failure, as the world is rich in resources and productivity. The intervention of mankind in its own food chain processes is beginning to undermine and destroy the confidence in what we produce and eat.

Crisis

British farming, animal husbandry, fish breeding, arable and related industries are staggering from one crisis to another. The BSE crisis arose simply because the greed to maximise the profit on every ounce of meat produced saw the remnants of animal carcasses fed back to their own species. Some argue this was based upon EU agricultural dictat, which only the British government loyally implemented.

The result was the devastation of British beef herds throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The destruction of Britain's beef industry has parallels with the first exposure of US slaughterhouses as fictionalised in Upton Sinclair's *THE JUNGLE*, published in 1906. So great was the horror associated with what US cattlemen and slaughterhouse owners were doing in Chicago's stockyards that the US was swept by legislation aimed at preventing such abuse. 80 years later similar legislation was sorely inadequate in Britain. Whereas US herds have supposedly avoided the BSE crisis, their intake of steroids and other chemicals may play a part in the tidal wave of obesity in the USA.

After mad cow disease has come its equivalent in sheep, but this paled in comparison to the devastation of the foot

and mouth epidemic. The incredible extermination of sheep and cattle across Britain, costing hundreds of millions of pounds, has ruined the rural landscape. Farmers could not farm or survive financially. The decline in the numbers working the land has been similar to the decline in manufacturing industry. Cynics have argued that the scale of the

Britain's incredible fish reserves have been devastated during the last 30 years since the Tories signed over Britain's fishing grounds to the EU in 1972 — another example of Tory opposition to the EU at the front door while holding open the back door.

To resolve the declining natural stocks of fish, farming of salmon, trout



slaughter was deliberately aimed to destroy animal husbandry in Britain.

The appalling reality is that in Yorkshire, horse racing, horse stud farms and related activities now generate more wealth than farming and manufacturing combined — almost a reversal of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions.

and cod has developed apace. 99% of British salmon is farmed — 160,000 tonnes, worth £700 millions and 6,500 jobs. The US has now declared Scottish salmon a health risk due to the chemicals used to prevent disease and kill parasites. Presumably US salmon is healthy and cheap. If the fishing reserves

to stagger from one ism

have been fished to extinction and farmed fish is inedible, what has or is destroying such great natural reserves of food other than the drive for profit?

The developing crisis around chickens and the Thai bird flu, will do for chickens what beef, sheep and fish industries have all experienced. But it is not so long ago that salmonella all but destroyed the market for eggs in Britain. Only pork seems so far to be free from a bad press!

Rural factory

British farming, with its selective breeding and intensive farming methods, has long been more like factory in the countryside than rural idyll. But scientific advances in themselves have not been the cause of disaster. The last two years have seen the line between profit and criminality crossed innumerable times.

This includes the import of insanitary meat from as far afield as Africa, and the recycling of meat condemned as unfit for humans. Material marked down for destruction has been re-appearing in supermarkets, school dinners and hospital kitchens, demonstrating that vast sums can be made in cheating the public.

The history of fraud, dilution, false substitute and sleight of hand in food production is mirrored by the rise of the market inspector and more latterly — though in insufficient numbers — environmental health, public hygiene and meat inspectors.

Depopulation

In 1975 Britain's agriculture was the most efficient, modern and profitable in Europe. Now, after animal epidemics on a par with the Middle Ages and crippling EU policies for agriculture and fishing, the industry is de-populating and closing down.

To restore confidence in Britain's food industries requires the ability to control such production. To control production means getting the multinational, US and EU snouts out of the trough of profit. Now is the time to re-create a modern skilled farming industry.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via 'faith' schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

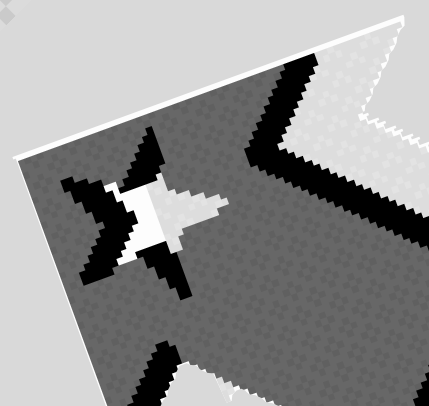
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Back to Front – A modern slave trade

‘Why are the existing laws not being enforced? Because to this government and the class it represents, the free movement of global labour is more sacred than life...’

ON 5 FEBRUARY, 20 (possibly more) Chinese cockle pickers died in Morecambe Bay. How could this have been allowed to happen?

As long ago as the summer of 2000, BBC’s PANORAMA exposed the gangmaster system. Last July, the TUC warned that migrant workers were being exploited across the country, in Scotland, East Anglia, Lincolnshire, Kent, Sussex and elsewhere. Their numbers have risen by 44% in the last seven years, to an estimated 2.6 million. (This is probably an underestimate, given the difficulty of counting illegal workers.) Last September, the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs produced a report on illegal working. Yet the government did nothing.

Morecambe people, including cockle pickers, had warned of the dangers to the Chinese people working illegally in the Bay, but nobody in authority had listened. When police and officials from the Department for Work and Pensions organised a raid to find illegal workers in Morecambe, the Immigration Service refused to help, claiming a “shortage of resources”, and “other priorities”.

Yet when the local MP wrote to the Home Office, immigration minister Beverley Hughes replied, “The Government is cracking down on illegal working and making good progress in removing increasing numbers of immigration offenders...” In fact, in the whole country, only one alleged gangmaster had been prosecuted in 2002, and four-fifths of those who lost asylum appeals stayed in Britain anyway

Now the government says that it will back Jim Sheridan’s private member’s bill requiring gangmasters to be registered, to make them pay the minimum wage and ensure workers’ safety. Yet there are already laws in abundance governing minimum wages, health and safety, human rights, etc. — and unless

every single one has a clause in it saying that it does not apply to gangmasters, the government could enforce them now. A new bill is unnecessary, just a parade of concern.

Why are the existing laws not being enforced? Because to this government and the class it represents, the free movement of global labour is more sacred than life. Workers from abroad, willing to pay £20K to buy themselves into slavery, working nine-hour days for a £1 a day, suit capitalism just fine. The big supermarkets buy from farms and food packaging factories that use migrant labour, then deny all knowledge. A free labour market equals a modern slave trade.

One gangmaster tried to excuse capitalism by blaming the tragedy on ‘racism’ among the cockle pickers, but ‘racism’ is not the problem: white migrant workers from Eastern Europe are equally exploited.

The answer to problems created by the free movement of labour is not to free it even more, by for instance legalising all immigration, as some suggest. Removing even the current, limited controls would encourage more people to come here for work, increasing the competition for jobs, further lowering wages and conditions. To welcome immigration, as the government does, is to welcome low wages and poor conditions.

We need to take control of our affairs. The Immigration Service should be allowed to do its job and enforce the laws against illegal immigration and illegal working. On asylum we should follow Holland’s example, and decide asylum cases within 48 hours, and appeals within 60 days. Rejected asylum seekers are deported at once. Above all, local communities and trade unions need to involve themselves in organising migrant workers wherever they are, forcing the employers to improve wages and conditions.

FINANCIAL APPEAL: June 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the death of Reg Birch, founding Chairman of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). In commemoration of Reg’s life, the first political life of this engineer and communist is to be published.

Drawing upon speeches, articles, previous unpublished photographs and family reminiscences this will be a major

contribution to the history of working class struggle during the 20th century.

WORKERS is inviting its readers to assist in this major publishing event by making a donation to the Reg Birch book. Cheques/donations should be made payable to WORKERS, and sent to WORKERS, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. All donations are welcome.

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