

WORKERS

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THE FIGHT FOR TUBE SAFETY



Goodbye nationalisation, hello to subsidy

06



The future for British oil and gas

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The greed that's wrecking our football

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WORKERS

“ The future worked

AFTER 140 years of deep coal extraction, Tower Colliery in Rhondda Cynon Taf, South Wales, closed on 25 January. Miners and their families marched proudly from the colliery to mark the closure of the last deep coalmine in Wales, and to celebrate the unique achievement of the Tower miners in running the pit themselves for the past 13 years.

Tyrone O’Sullivan, pit manager, spoke of local families’ long history in the mine. The Tower miners fought National Coal Board closure in 1994 as “too expensive to run”, and bought it out with redundancy money of £8000 each. For 13 years they gave the lie to the NCB, making the mine pay and providing jobs. Now the coal has run out. “I am the proudest person in the world” he said. “We have changed the world. We’ve mined the last ounce of coal”.

There is no romantic nostalgia for coalmining here, as the miners look to the future. As the older miners speak you can hear their laboured breathing. John Wood, who entered the pit at 15, has emphysema, bronchitis and white finger. Like many miners, O’Sullivan’s father died in a pit accident. O’Sullivan was 17.

What does industry mean in 21st-century Britain? Not a return to the dangerous old heavy industries of the past; technological advance makes possible cleaner, safer lives for workers who extract raw materials and make what society needs. Have we accepted there is no industrial future here? We need to learn from the Tower miners, and free our thinking to envisage a better future. If we fight, we can change the world.

A little French lesson

THE NEWS has trickled through (good news rarely travels fast) of the action of French workers last month striking back at plans to shift their jobs to Slovakia, where wages are lower.

Workers at the factory, owned by the British car parts company BRS, noticed suspicious lorries outside the plant one Saturday. Fearing a scheme to remove

machinery, they promptly took their British boss hostage and held him until Monday morning. “He wasn’t very pleasant at first, then he accepted he had no choice,” said one of the workers.

A salutary lesson for British capitalists, who think they can go anywhere in Europe and do anything – and for British workers, who let them behave like this in Britain.



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Journalists fight back

AS MEDIA employers – private and public – look to extract more and more profit from their staff, they are meeting increasing resistance from journalists fed up with poor pay, eroding conditions and demands to work longer and harder. The attacks are nothing new, but the resistance is a growing feature of a profession where union organisation is recovering from the effects of the onslaughts of the 1990s.

Membership is back near record levels even if falling slightly, and though with 38,000 members the NUJ is a minnow by current standards, its craft base gives it a strength and clarity sometimes lacking in the new giants – of which, ironically, it might now form a part if the proposed mergers with the print unions had gone ahead in the 1980s and 90s.

The big battlefield is in broadcasting, the most organised section of the National Union of Journalists. At the BBC, the union is calling for a Yes vote in an industrial action ballot over pay, jobs, pensions and conditions. The ballot, which was due to have closed in mid-January, was extended to allow further talks between the corporation and union negotiators. Those talks have produced agreement in principle, sufficient for a further extension of the strike ballot. NUJ General Secretary, Jeremy Dear, said: "We're pleased the imminent threat of compulsory redundancies has been addressed and that all staff required to work unpredictable hours will continue to get a fair deal. These negotiations now give us a basis on which we can address further changes proposed by the BBC." Journalists say quality will suffer if director general Mark Thompson's plans go ahead and, compulsory or not, big job cuts are expected.

On the commercial side, a strong campaign has been launched to save ITV News, which is seen as under threat following a decision to axe local news services and cut regional programming by 50 per cent. The campaign has so far been limited to lobbying activities which have brought the workers at ITV together with their viewers and listeners. In the process, dormant branches have been revived.

Meanwhile journalists at the Reuters News Agency met to discuss the planned merger with Thomson, a Canadian company, and called for a ballot on strike action over Reuters' refusal to hold what the union calls meaningful negotiations over changes to job roles. Myra MacDonald, the NUJ's Mother of Chapel at Reuters, said: "This is a shabby way for Reuters to treat its journalists. Our members are furious that the company's management seems to think it can ride roughshod over its agreements with the union."

And in early February, journalists at the MILTON KEYNES CITIZEN suspended a planned third three-day strike over a below-inflation pay offer and concerns about falling quality, to give the company the opportunity to come back to the negotiating table.

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

US AGGRESSION Slaughter in Iraq



THE US-LED occupation forces in Iraq dropped 1,447 bombs last year, up from 229 in 2006. Since the invasion in March 2003, coalition bombing has killed 116,000 Iraqis.

In Afghanistan, US-led occupation forces launched 3,572 airstrikes last year, twice as many as in 2006, 20 times as many as in 2005. They killed possibly 3,000 Afghan civilians in 2006, far more than the Taliban killed that year.

None of this lethal aggression ever gets shown on any of the TV channels. Instead, they always present the occupation forces as on the defensive, under attack.

UNISON Reclaiming the union

THE POLITICAL sea change in London Unison continues. For the third year running, the members painfully reclaiming their Regional Council from the hands of one or two remaining entryists in the Labour Party and their ultra-left allies, have triumphed again in key convenor and regional committee elections.

The members returning the union to its members – a refreshing sign of maturity and clarity in the trade unions either bereft of direction or mesmerised with meaningless sloganising.

EURONOTES

The latest from Brussels

Blair runs for the presidency

WHICH international organisations have a President and a Foreign Minister? Does the UN? Does NATO? No: only the EU wants to. Blair says he'll be President – but only if we give him more powers, especially over defence.

Disappearing opt-outs

BLAIR SAID of the Lisbon Treaty, "It is absolutely clear that we have an opt-out from both the Charter and judicial and home affairs." Europe Minister Jim Murphy admitted on 21 January, "...the UK does not have an opt-out on the Charter of Fundamental Rights."

An EU ambassador said, "The issues of the EU Foreign Minister and the common diplomatic service will be dealt with last, after ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by Britain, because the subject is too explosive." EU leaders also plan to take decisions, by majority vote, about the role and powers of the EU President if the Constitution has been ratified.

EU usury gets fingers on the Beeb

THE BBC has received £141 million in low interest loans from the EU-backed European Investment Bank to fund commercial expansion. The EIB is "an autonomous body set up to finance capital investment furthering European integration by promoting EU policies". The BBC refuses to disclose what rates the EIB is charging. It has also received £1.4 million in grants from the EU over the past five years.

Biofuels bananas

THE EU Commission wants a law requiring the EU by 2020 to source a fifth of all energy use from renewables, and 10 per cent of transport fuels from biofuels. Britain's target will be 15 per cent of our overall energy use from renewables by 2020 – seven times current levels, needing around 10,000 new onshore and offshore wind turbines. A leaked DTI paper estimated this would cost £5 to £11 billion a year.

Biofuels are the least cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions, especially those grown in Europe. Sugar beet-based biofuels cost over £300 for every tonne of carbon avoided, against a government guideline of £33. The 10 per cent EU target would lead to total annual transfers to the biofuels industry of between 11 billion and 23 billion euros.



Photo: Ness Gorton

STRIKE ACTION over pensions at Goodrich UK sites (formerly Lucas Aerospace) was suspended on Friday 8 February when the company agreed to meet with union reps and national officials to discuss the pensions of the 3,000 current member workers and many others receiving pensions, or due to receive them. The overtime ban ended immediately and the planned one-day strike for 11 February was suspended. The Unite union had also planned to increase pressure by members refusing to travel abroad to complete tasks. Although this may seem insignificant to production its importance lies in the maintenance and safety of aircraft. Above: pickets at the Spring Lane site in January.

RMT guards win jobs fight

MORE THAN 600 RMT guards and train drivers at First Great Western (recently dubbed Worst Great Western by passenger groups) have ended disputes with the company after winning an important victory in the protracted battle with employers following EU-inspired privatisation and fragmentation of British railways. The union has negotiated more than 40 new guards' posts and won unconditional commitments that managers will no longer be used to guard or drive trains, whether to maintain company profits, to mask rostering deficiencies, or to cover for staff shortages.

Guards at the company voted by 71.1 per cent to 28.9 per cent, and drivers by 81.6 per cent to 18.4 per cent, for two 48-hour strikes in January, but the union suspended action in order to allow talks to take place. "Our members are to be congratulated for the determination and solidarity they displayed during these disputes," said Bob Crow, general secretary of the rail union RMT.

Rail safety was a major factor in the disputes, not least because it was unclear what level of training managers had received. According to the union, the pressure on managers themselves to routinely act as guards and drivers caused them to go sick at an alarming rate. It now remains to be seen whether the company will honour its agreements. The RMT will not be holding its breath.

NHS

Secrecy over finances

WHILE STAFF and trade unions struggle to make sense out of the near bankruptcy affecting the four NHS trusts in outer South East London – Queen Mary's (Sidcup), Queen Elizabeth (Woolwich), Bromley and Lewisham, the government uses the Freedom of Information Act to shroud in mystery the report into why this near bankruptcy has occurred.

The joint debts of the four trusts are in the region of £218 million. The interest alone costs £5.4 million a year. But what is being ignored is the Private Finance Initiative debts. Bromley alone pays £32.4 million a year on a 60-year-contract.

The investigation utilises Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act as the report "would be likely to inhibit free and frank exchanges of views for the purposes of deliberations". What this gibberish means is that the public who rely on these hospitals and the staff who struggle to provide the highest levels of health care are not to be allowed to know the full scale of the economic disaster facing them.

So the wonderfully entitled Freedom of Information Act suppresses the very freedom required to have free, frank and meaningful discussion.

While the report will name and shame previous Board figures and senior management from the hospitals it will miss the point: the architect of PFI, Gordon Brown.

ENERGY**Prices and profits soar**

CENTRICA (British Gas) is raising its prices by 15 per cent at a time when profits from residential dwellings were over £600 million in the first six months of 2007— and overall group profits are over £2 billion.

British Gas justifies its price rises on the basis of alleged wholesale price rises and operating costs. Yet the wholesale cost

of gas has actually fallen by 70 per cent.

During the past three years British Gas has cleared an annual profit of over £1 billion, this year doubling that.

Profiteering springs to mind, and if the statistics are correct for British Gas they will also hold up for other energy and utilities companies who continue to effectively print money.

Shell, the oil giant, announced profits for the similar period of over £13.9 billion, this at a time when fuel is at its highest price ever. We must be mad to put up with this daylight robbery!

'No' campaigns gather speed



UNITE – one of Ireland's largest unions – has confirmed that it is to campaign for a No vote in the coming Lisbon Treaty referendum (Irish law dictates that Ireland must hold a referendum, but it seems increasingly likely to be the only member state to have one). Unite Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said that the union would call upon its 70,000 members in the Republic to reject the treaty, criticising the government's "seeming desire to railroad the treaty through without providing commitments on what it will mean".

Several major aspects of EU policy have contributed to the union's disenchantment with the treaty: the government's empty promises and sleight of hand on the exploitation of growing numbers of unregulated agency workers; the European Court of Justice ruling against union representation at Ryanair, which set the clock back on workers' rights 100 years; poverty in old age due to inadequate or stolen pensions; and the shifting of power from smaller to larger states. Ireland is one of the smaller states and has good reason (as do we in Britain) to fear the enabling powers of the Treaty, which could lead to an EU superstate.

Elsewhere, in England, Wales and Scotland, while party whips attempt to silence opposition in parliament, union calls for a referendum grow louder, building on votes won at both the TUC and the Scottish TUC conferences.

And opening up a new front in the fight against the Lisbon Treaty, the organisation I Want A Referendum (www.iwantareferendum.org) has commissioned the Electoral Reform Society to run a series of referendums in parliamentary constituencies across Britain. The idea is to put pressure on the government by showing the real strength of feeling on this issue.

I Want A Referendum estimate that over half a million people will take part in these constituency polls "in the first phase". There have been referendums organised on this issue in local parishes, using parish law, but this is the first time a poll will have been attempted across entire constituencies.

MOTOR INDUSTRY**New jobs, old insecurity**

EIGHT HUNDRED new jobs are to be created at Nissan in Sunderland. The downside is 400 are to be temporary. Meanwhile 400 permanent jobs will be offered to existing temporary workers.

The news – good for manufacturing in Britain – also reflects the employment practices guaranteed to ensure instability amongst the workforce. Temporary

contracts, agency working, zero-hour contracts, short-term contracts – employment is held by the throat by the uncertainty of whether there will be work next week.

Does Nissan need these working practices? No, Nissan is now Britain's largest car manufacturer, employing over 5,000 workers in Sunderland. Ship building has now been replaced by car kit assembly. Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Volkswagen now dominate British car and vehicle manufacture.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MARCH**

Monday 10 March, 6.30 pm

Sexual apartheid, political Islam and women's rights. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Celebrate International Women's Day (which takes place two days earlier) with this meeting organised by the Council of Ex-Muslims and Equal Rights Now, an organisation for women's rights in Iran. Backed by many organisations including Unison. Various speakers.

EDUCATION**So that's how they do it!**

NEW RESEARCH from economists at the London School of Economics has highlighted one measurable way in which state schools lose a valuable resource, namely publicly-trained teachers, to private schools, the dishonestly named 'public schools'.

In their study, "Competition for Private and State School Teachers", the LSE economists show that private schools educate just over 7 per cent of pupils in England, yet employ 14 per cent of teachers. The apparent mismatch is due to the private schools' much smaller class sizes. The pupil-teacher ratio is 18:1 in state schools, 9:1 in private schools.

The private schools have also particularly recruited better-qualified and more experienced teachers, as well as those in shortage subjects like maths and science. So 45.2 per cent of male state school teachers, and 55.6 per cent of male private school teachers, have a higher degree. There is a similar gap when comparing teachers with higher degrees in sciences, maths and engineering. The gap among female teachers is also evident, although less marked.

In 2006, private schools recruited 1,125 teachers straight out of universities and training colleges. They also recruited a net 1,400 experienced teachers from state schools: a "significant loss" on the state's investment in teacher training and a "substantial bonus" for the private schools.

ALBA: a new kind of bank



WITH THE capitalist world's banking system apparently on the edge of collapse, a quite different story is emerging across the Atlantic. New banks are being established to help Latin America and the Caribbean to become independent of the US, the IMF and World Bank and to move towards forms of integration based on respect for national sovereignty.

Members of ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), met in Caracas, Venezuela to establish the ALBA Bank. The President of the Cuban Central Bank, Francisco Soberon, announced "In the face of international financial turbulence, the ALBA Bank guarantees stability and sustainability." Soberon emphasised that "the bank is emerging at a time when the world is more than ever witnessing capitalism's lack of viability." The ALBA bank will allow improved structuring of the financial policies of ALBA members – Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua – and to help develop sustainable social, agricultural, energy and industrial programmes. President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua commented that the ALBA Bank "will bring mutual benefits for our countries. For instance" he said, "Nicaragua is ready to use the bank to support farming programmes at home to supply Venezuela with milk and beef."

The ALBA Bank follows the establishment of the Caracas based 'Bank of the South' by Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia. The Bank of the South will offer loans without the strings attached by the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. Despite the fact that both Nicaragua and Colombia have free trade deals with the US, the concept of these banks, and in particular ALBA itself, is gaining ground in the region with Ecuador, Dominica, Antigua, Haiti and many others queuing up to join. Even Iran wants to join as an observer, with its foreign minister describing ALBA as "a development and cooperative model based on principles of solidarity and mutual respect among the countries that belong to it".

These are somewhat different values than to capitalism's banking system, based on greed and profit. As Cuban foreign minister Felipe Roque said referring to the health, social care, media and energy programmes of ALBA, "We are building the road. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are 33 countries, and almost 500 million inhabitants, with a very significant GDP. If we act in a united way we can be a great force. The results of the ALBA programmes are already visible in our countries. It is not a theoretical discussion and it's not a document to store away in a drawer. These are concrete programmes that benefit our countries."

Nationalisation used to be a favourite run into the ground. Now it's used

Goodbye public owners

WHEN THE Labour Government of 1945 nationalised coal, railways, road haulage, gas, electricity and a range of other assets including the Bank of England, they did so not from a sense of introducing socialism, although there was a high level of support for socialism, but because the economy was in ruins at the end of World War II. The railways were devastated with rolling stock destroyed and the coalmines and energy generation utilities were not producing enough energy to keep the nation warm yet alone to power industry.

Some utopian theories at the time suggested that the railways could transport coal free of charge, or at least subsidised, so that the electricity generators could provide free or cheap electricity for the railways and so on.

But what was really happening was quite straightforward. On the one hand, there was a British industrial and manufacturing culture, both among workers and those British capitalists, who saw the need to get British industry moving again after the war. On the other hand, British capitalism could not continue to run those industries privately because they could not afford the investment that was necessary.

Soon, those industries were up and running and most continued until the 1980s. Other manufacturing assets were nationalised in the 60s and 70s when they got into financial or market difficulties. In 1971, Rolls Royce was nationalised after its trouble marketing the RB211 jet engine. In 1974, British Motor Corporation was nationalised to become British Leyland following strong Japanese competition, and in 1997 we had British Aerospace and British Shipbuilders.

Nationalisation, jobs and skill

Trade unions supported these nationalisations, not because they represented socialism, but because they protected jobs, skills and British industry, and made for rational collective bargaining structures. All this disappeared in the 1980s, when all of these industries plus those nationalised in 1945 were privatised and in many cases asset stripped and sold to foreign companies, while trade union derecognition and pay cuts were the order of the day.

This marked the beginning of the accelerated onslaught on British working class and their organisations that continues today, started by Thatcher and continued by Blair and Brown. Mutual building societies were "demutualised" and turned into private banks, and today even social care, in many forms, has been outsourced and privatised.

Today, we see the accelerated decline of capitalism manifested in the beginning of the collapse of a number of banks after they have tried to extract every penny of profit from the "market" – Northern Rock, Citigroup and Bradford and Bingley to name but a few. Standard Charter is in trouble as is AIG, Prudential, Old Mutual, Scottish Equity, Merrill Lynch and many others.

Gas and electricity prices are rising by around 15 per cent and the price of oil is at a record high because of fuel insecurity caused by British/US foreign policy. Food prices are set to rocket because of increased demand in the developing capitalisms of India and China and the move to biofuels, propelled by lunatic EU targets that will see cars, buses and trucks fuelled by plant food we should be eating.

Meanwhile Brown seeks to reduce pay increases and tie unions to three-year deals at precisely the moment the Bank of England

ired way for capitalism to keep going industries that they had
as a mere stopgap...

ship, hello to the £56 billion subsidy



Photo: Workers

The government is set to nationalise Northern Rock – but just temporarily.

prophesies a serious increase in inflation and the currency begins to fall. Record home repossessions are forecast as most workers are up to their ears in debt.

The option of nationalising Northern Rock to bail out capitalism as it did in 1945 and in the 1970s is no longer available without EU Commission approval. It is more or less outlawed by the EU (and will be by the Lisbon Treaty), and by the UK Human Rights Act, which protects private property from hostile state takeover!

So the government is propping up a collapsing Northern Rock with £56 billion of our money, effectively proving that capitalism doesn't work. It needs us as wage slaves in good times, and puts its hands in our pockets in bad times. It cannot blame the Northern Rock workers for being lazy and unproductive, as it did with British Leyland.

Just think what we could do to rebuild Britain with £56 billion. We could spend £10 billion investing in the training, skills

and infrastructure to make Britain a 21st-century manufacturing country. Then we could allocate another £10 billion to reintroduce free higher education lifting the debt burden off our young people, a £10 billion house-building programme so our sons and daughters can get a decent home and another £10 billion for high-level research into post nuclear energy possibilities. Or how about another £10 billion to refurbish our ailing transport infrastructure?

The possibilities are enormous. But this government is more concerned to prop up a failing capitalism and pour money into the pockets of the likes of Richard Branson. While we face so many threats, there are also so many opportunities to highlight the demise of capitalism and raise positive alternatives.

So where are our unions when we need them most? Well, the TUC has its finger on the pulse. On 12 February, it announced its call for the "2011 Census to record sexual orientation" to coincide with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history month this February. Meanwhile, Unite has announced plans to merge with the United Steelworkers of America, effectively carrying out its philosophy of abandoning Britain in order to lobby the EU and US as "centres of global power". If there was ever a time when we should act as a working class *for* itself, it is now.



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Will Podmore

The London Underground unions have taken up a vital struggle over jobs and safety...

Unions fight attack on station staffing



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Protracted struggle: transport workers on strike over safety and staffing in July last year.

OVER 7,500 MEMBERS of the RMT and TSSA unions are mounting a joint campaign in defence of safety standards and staffing on London Underground (LUL). They have told LUL that ticket-office closures, de-staffing, lone working, introduction of “mobile supervisors”, use of agency and security staff and other disputed policies amount to an unacceptable attack on members’ and passengers’ safety.

Plans to close 40 ticket offices and to cut the opening times of many more were temporarily halted after the unions’ campaign last year led to a public outcry. RMT and TSSA are demanding the complete withdrawal of the plans. But LUL has refused to say that ticket offices will be kept open.

When LUL imposed driver-only tube

trains it assured the public and its own drivers that good station staffing levels would keep the system safe, but those assurances are now being undermined, say the unions. They point out that changes in policy on when and how staff can refuse to work on safety grounds are unworkable and in breach of legislation.

Despite an agreement that jobs may be advertised externally only if there are too few internal applications, LUL is now systematically denying career opportunities to experienced railway staff and recruiting externally. The denial of tube driver jobs and promotion to experienced workers undermines the safety culture, says Bob Crow of the RMT. Both unions are demanding a review of recruitment policy to preserve and encourage a career path for experienced railway staff.

LUL wants to introduce “mobile supervisors” responsible for several stations, and to staff stations recently taken over from Silverlink only during the limited hours decided by the previous franchise holder. The unions are asking what happens in an emergency when the mobile supervisor is in the wrong place – or even stuck between stations on a train. They are demanding that every station is fully staffed during traffic hours, including by station supervisors, in line with existing agreements.

Emergency planning is under attack, as LUL has insisted on changes that water down the staff required on duty and which safety reps believe will undermine the ability to respond to emergencies and undertake safe evacuations. RMT and TSSA are demanding the reinstatement of the original numbers of each grade of fully trained and familiarised station staff.

Agency staff

Agency staff in London Underground uniforms, posing as fully trained permanent staff of LUL, are already carrying ticket-machine cash around on trains. Now LUL wants to staff the new Heathrow Terminal 5 station with staff subcontracted from other firms but wearing LUL uniforms. RMT and TSSA are demanding that the station be staffed by workers trained and employed directly by London Underground.

LUL wants to continue using agency staff on former Silverlink stations. RMT and TSSA are demanding that the practice ends when the training of former Silverlink staff is completed and current contracts finish. They want a guarantee that only directly employed LUL staff will be used for ticketing and revenue duties. The same goes for security staff, subject to normal co-operation with British Transport Police and the Metropolitan Police.

TSSA general secretary Gerry Doherty sums up, “Tube users should be as appalled as our members at the amount of safety issues outstanding, and I hope they will understand that LUL’s refusal to discuss these issues in the round left us with no choice but to tell the company that we are now in dispute”.

Far from exhausted, the North Sea remains an important source of energy for the European Union. And now Brussels wants to end the concept of

There is a future for British oil and gas – but

WITH WORKERS in the North Sea oil and gas industry joining forces to boost their strength (See article in WORKERS February 2008), it is an apt time to take a look at what is a strategic part of British manufacturing and energy assets. Far from finished, the North Sea remains an important source of energy, its control and exploitation coveted by the European Union.

The quest for oil

It could be said that the use and need for oil goes back to the 18th century when the stench of whale oil hung over ports like Dundee and Aberdeen. Textile manufacture and other processes of the early industrial revolution relied on the oil. For over a century whaling fleets worked the Davis Straits and other waters off Greenland. Coming full circle, this is the very area now being exploited with advanced technology for gas and oil by Edinburgh-based Cairn Energy. The exploration area – 52,000 square kilometres – makes it the biggest such operation in Greenland, adding to this company's recent major discoveries in India and Bangladesh.

Apart from the securing or seizure of oil overseas – notably in Iraq, Kuwait and other client states – the quest for 'black gold' goes back to the exploitation of shale oil deposits in Scotland for over a century. By the end of the 1800s, about 2 million tonnes of shale oil were being produced. The chemist James Young ('Paraffin' Young) patented the process for extracting lamp oil from shale in West Lothian in the 1850s, setting up a refinery near Bathgate. This product gradually replaced whale oil and candle wax which were often in short supply. These techniques to refine crude oil were adopted by new companies in the USA such as Standard Oil, set up by Rockefeller. The UK shale oil industry actually survived until the 1960s – dying only after the government withdrew its exemption from excise duty.

The first drilling for oil came in the 1930s at Eakring in Sherwood Forest, which, remarkably, was producing 100,000



Photo: Workers

St Kilda: the centre of massive oil reserves – and a looming dispute over territorial rights, with

barrels a day by the outbreak of World War II. However, the first hints of serious deposits came in 1959 with the discovery of the massive Gronigen gasfield. Geologists then deduced that similar rock formations would extend across the south of the North Sea as far as the coastline of England. Then it was studies of the similarities between ancient basalt and sandstone formations in coastal Greenland and Scotland that led scientists to predict that the sinking of such material as the continents drifted apart over hundreds of millions of years would form ideal traps for energy-rich hydrocarbons.

By 1964 the UK government had issued the first offshore drilling licences and it was in 1969 that the first oil from the North Sea was brought ashore. Amoco, then based in Great Yarmouth, had discovered gas off the East Anglian coast in 1965 but it was in September 1969 that they confirmed the finding of oil, extracted 100 miles east of Aberdeenshire. Moreover, the quality and pressure was

sufficient to ensure a steady flow of oil to the surface. The well had been drilled by BP's Sea Quest and its own Forties oilfield was discovered a year later, followed by the large Brent field found by Shell/ESSO north east of Shetland at the challenging depth of 400 feet. Britain's first commercially producing oilfield went into production in June 1975 – Tony Benn as energy secretary turned on the tap – and by the end of the 1980s almost 100,000 workers were in oil- and gas-related employment.

A squandered resource

Several crises spurred on the desire of capitalists and their powers around the world to get hold of these British resources. Thatcher's privatising drive fatally weakened British control. Funds were needed for her war on workers and the damning verdict of the outgoing chairman of the (publicly owned) British National Oil Corporation (BNOC) on her waste of oil revenues was: "She blew it on

of energy – but its control and exploitation are coveted by the territorial waters for member states...

t not if entrusted to corporations and the EU



the European Union lurking in the background

the dole". She also funded the Falklands war with at least £2 billion of those revenues. Rapid exploitation of these energy resources had already proceeded – a process now seen to be at the beck and call of the US administration. Supplies flowing from the North Sea ameliorated the growing cost of their war in Vietnam and a fourfold rise in Middle East oil prices. Britain lost control of its oil policy to US multinationals and by the time production had peaked in 1999 it was, unfortunately for Britain, at a rock bottom price of \$10 a barrel. In contrast, Norway, which has maintained a firm control over its oil, is still safeguarding 11 billion barrels of reserves while Britain's have diminished to 4.5 billion barrels.

Capitalism stands condemned for its failure to fulfil the potential seen in 1973 when the INVESTORS' CHRONICLE could write: "The North Sea adventure could become Britain's greatest industrial revolution." Instead, multinational capitalism maintains control of this energy resource

for its own benefit. The same can be seen in the growing alternative energy sectors.

Desperate for energy

Yet now that the value of oil is soaring and other sources become endangered, a revival of interest in North Sea oil and gas is emerging among the predators. Symptoms can be seen in the risks taken, the extreme locations, exploration deeper than ever, using cruder oils, extracting from oil sands, etc. With North America consuming over 25 million barrels a day (compared to India and China combined using 10 million barrels a day), desperation is creeping in. The US company Halliburton, of Iraq fame, launched last month the construction of its new £20 million North Sea headquarters in Aberdeen, "highlighting our confidence in the future of the North Sea" as its UK vice-president remarked.

The recent buying of Shell and Exxon Mobil's controlling interests in the Dunlin oilfields northeast of Shetland by the British independent Fairfield Energy is a small move against foreign control. It was followed by a plea for more British investment by Malcolm Webb of OIL & GAS UK: "It's vital that investment is made, because we need to prolong the life of that delivery infrastructure, so it's there to produce these smaller fields that we are now finding."

Despite the rising oil price, last year Britain and Norway were the fastest declining major oil producers. But oil is still abundant. And a killing is being made – Royal Dutch Shell made nearly £14 billion profit last year. Thousands of workers risk their lives for and depend on this industry – 137,000 in the Grampian area alone in 2006 – and capitalism cannot be trusted with their future.

EU to exert control

Among the threats to contend with is the acquisitiveness of the Scottish separatists – their break-up-Britain scenario is music to the ears not only of the multinational companies desperate for a foothold in our North Sea reserves. Behind them and looming large is the European Union and

its desire to control and harness all such resources within its dominion. Its presence is felt in the current dispute over territorial rights to the massive oil rich area around Rockall and the St Kilda archipelago. This is centred about 200 miles from the south coast of Ireland. The closing date for staking claims is May 2009. Iceland is reluctant to compromise with Denmark (for the Faroe Islands), Iceland and Britain, who follow an EU line.

This comes at a time when the EU intends to end the concept of territorial waters for member states. This is envisaged in its 2006 consultation paper "Towards a Future Maritime Policy for the Union". The consultation period is now over (June 2007) and the British government has welcomed the proposal! Moreover, with the new constitution, energy policy would slip out of British control. Item 4 of the Presidency Conclusions of June 2007 calls for an integrated energy policy (under the guise of concern about climate):

"With its decisions on an integrated climate and energy policy, the European Council in Spring 2007 underlined the synergies between these two key areas and paved the way for improved climate protection and dealing responsibly with energy." The next stage is the EU Commission bringing together the Maritime and Energy policy in a European Action Plan. With such whittling away of the control of energy sources goes the continued weakening of our independence as a nation.

The US Geological Survey has assessed the amount of recoverable conventional oil in the world at 3000 billion barrels (with about a third extracted so far) and foresees a huge expansion of natural gas extraction dominating global energy supplies from 2040. This story has a long way to run.

Books for further reading:

The Oilmen: The North Sea Tigers (Bill Mackie, pub. Birlinn)

Why Carbon Fuels will Dominate the 21st Century's Global Energy Economy" (Peter Odell, pub. Multi-science)

If football is our national game, how long will it remain so when overseas players? And now the Premiership wants to play games

Give capitalism enough room and it will wreck



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

“You already have no English coach, you have no English players and maybe now you will have no clubs playing in England.” – Michel Platini

WHY ARE there so many overseas football players in the English and Scottish professional leagues? There were always many Scots and Welsh with English clubs and Irish in both leagues, but few moved outside that circle. In some games in the Premier League 15 or more players from abroad are on the pitch. Even in Scotland and the English lower divisions there are many overseas players, in a far greater proportion than occurs in other countries.

The number of overseas players grew slowly for 30 years until the Premiership was introduced in 1992. It increased rapidly thereafter, as did the number of televised games and satellite TV revenues.

Yet it's not only the players that have changed, many other factors have combined to undermine the national aspect of football. The Premier League's plan to play the "39th game" abroad is ill

conceived, and farcical. Michel Platini said, "It's ironic. You already have no English coach, you have no English players and maybe now you will have no clubs playing in England. It's a joke." There's an element of truth in that. The plan is part of a wider pattern, along with the Bosman ruling that allowed players freedom of contract, and the increase in foreign, debt-based ownership.

The national game?

Once football was always called the national game; everyone watched and played it. Depending on your point of view, it represented a Corinthian ideal of sporting activity or a release from everyday drudgery. Now we hear that the game is too commercial and (again depending on your view) it either sets the wrong example to Britain's youth, or is an object lesson in

the consequences of excessive greed.

The truth is less clear-cut and more interesting. Greed was never far away among club owners. Players showed determination and solidarity to form the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) a century ago, and 55 years later broke the maximum wage rule. Professional players were rarely high-minded, but practical in wanting to protect themselves and earn a better share of the money flowing into clubs. The PFA is still strong today, in a very different era. Despite the high profile of some PFA members, most of its work is done with and for players who never make the headlines.

Players also wanted an end to the "contract and retain" system, which left them no say in where they played. It did not come about from a fight with British clubs or leagues. It was the unintended

the English and Scottish professional leagues are stuffed with
s outside of Britain...

reck any industry – even football

consequence of a court action by one player, Marc Bosman, against his (unreasonable) club. Helped by European Union laws on the mobility of labour, the effect was to give freedom of contract to players for the first time. Clubs could no longer keep players against their will.

What developed was a system where there was an incentive for clubs and agents to move players on before contracts expired, to make money on transfers. And it permitted clubs to bring in players without restriction from anywhere in the EU (or from elsewhere if a suitable passport could be secured). Players, nominally free to move, are still controlled by someone else, even though paid beyond the dreams of earlier generations.

The PFA in its Centenary Year has produced the “Meltdown Report” – an indictment of the decline in home-based professional players over the past 15 years. This decline was well known, but the PFA research shows it is even greater than generally realised. The report says, “The bottom line is a very simple one. Older ready-made foreign players are blocking young English players’ path into the Premier League”. That’s true also for players from Wales, Scotland and Ireland, according to the evidence in the report.

The number of regular English players in the top division is just under 50 per cent of the 1992/93 level – and nearer to 35 per

‘Clubs are now so afraid of failure that they have neither the time nor ability to develop players or teams...’

cent for other home players. The report concentrates on the Premiership; but the same applies to clubs in lower divisions. All are now so afraid of failure that they have neither the time nor ability to develop players or teams in the way that other countries have done. Clubs spend a great deal on training younger players, and then throw it away in the pursuit of instant success. Such expenditure does not necessarily mean a commitment to development.

The Football Association tried to reform junior coaching and football careers. It encouraged clubs to set up academies, and then imposed a rule limiting travelling distances. That was not motivated by concerns for youth players’ welfare, but was an attempt to stop top clubs taking all the promising juniors. Lower league clubs saw it as a way of securing transfer fees that were disappearing as more overseas imports arrived. Again, there was little thought behind the immediate gain. This was exacerbated as money from TV grew

for the Premiership, but melted away for others after ITV Sport folded.

Since hostile takeover of Manchester United in 2005, financed by a huge level of debt, other top clubs have become the target for similar finance-driven buy-outs. Each time this happens the pressure for immediate success increases, as does the attraction of a European League, free of regulation by national governing bodies and having to play “lesser” teams.

The cheap money driving those deals is drying up; it’s hard to see what will happen other than forced sales or squeezing more money out of supporters and TV. That in turn will increase the pressures that led to the current level of imported players.

Football in a country that uniquely has two major professional leagues and an unmatched depth of professional clubs will be transformed. The successful clubs are debt-ridden and forced to hawk themselves around the world to pay off their banks. And the rest are slowly contracting, moving further away from the game that everyone played and watched. Young players who might have had a career in football are becoming more and more likely to drift out of the game, the prospect of a brief appearance in the reserves being the most they can expect to achieve.

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”.



In our third article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML and four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, THE WORKER, we look at the 1969 fight against attempts by the Labour government to shatter

1969: Labour turns on the trade unions



Quite soon after the birth of our Party, the social democratic Labour government headed by Wilson followed up an attempted wage freeze by moving to emasculate the trade unions with a set of proposals in a White Paper promulgated under the slogan, In Place of Strife. In the February 1969 issue of our paper, THE WORKER, our party responded to the government's threat advocating wholesale opposition to the proposed legislation. The first article was headed "Combination Acts 1799" and is reprinted in full. It is followed by extracts from the article "In place of strife?: working class enslavement."

“IF EVER the Trade Unions are to learn from their past errors, then it must be now. Out of the Fabian philosophy of reform and gradualism the Trade Unions spawned a Labour Party whose last product is this monstrous Labour Government. This Frankenstein now stands ready to devour the working class, Trade Unions and all – the Trade Unions which are the first elementary bastion of defence of that class.

The introduction of the Combination Acts in 1799 was the direct evidence that a government is a class power and a class weapon. Notwithstanding all the prattle of freedom in Britain at that time, the ruling class and its Government, alarmed by the awakening of the working class and its industrial army, imposed this repressive measure. A quarter of a century later, through the power of the Unions, it was repealed.

Since that time there has always been

the legend that the Unions are serving one interest, the working class, with which the employers are in opposition and conflict, and that the government of the day is not part of either but above the struggle.

The introduction of the White Paper "In Place of Strife" is the resurrection of the Combination Acts with the modern sinister connotation of corporate state fascism. Unless smothered, these proposals will render the Unions kindred to Dr Ley's Labour Front in Nazi Germany.

The Government has conspired with its masters to cheat and defraud the producing masses. It has ignored stock market manipulation, monopoly price-rigging, fiscal speculation; it has actively encouraged and approved the grotesque profits which have been made through gambling, profits from restrictions of

product of capitalism and the servant of the capitalist class!

In the rising tide of response by the workers to defend such an elementary heritage as trade unionism, whose very existence is now in question, they must beware – beware of the labour lieutenants of capitalism who collude with the Labour Government in the service of capitalism. They will suggest that we might fight the Government's legislation but, in the same breath, they will say we must, as Unions, be more responsible. They argue, we would oppose prison for workers but could accept fines; display demagogic anger about a 90-day cooling-off period and rush to settle for a 28-day cooling-off period. As on the incomes policy question, they will say: reject the Government chains – and fetter yourselves voluntarily.”



February 1969: THE WORKER attacks the Labour proposals.

production, from closures and mergers and take-overs. It stands committed to the idea that "profits are necessary to industry", it subsidises monopolies to dismiss workers under the Redundancy Act; it cares nothing for the millions of days lost from accidents, sickness and lay-offs, arbitrarily agreed and decided upon by the employers.

"This White Paper incorporates the terrible lie that the state must and does have a role in industrial relations, stands in the middle of two conflicting parties as a mediator, that the laissez-faire of these two parties must end and that the state, the Government, has the responsibility of intervening – all as if it were not directly the

We must be clear. This issue involves all in working class society, professional workers, workers by hand and brain – everybody who is exploited.

Oppose any attempt to restrict the civil right of strike under any circumstances; and, in the mounting campaign that must and will surely arise, there must also be the political thought "destroy the progenitors of such proposals; destroy the system, capitalism, that brings it about."

“IN THE January issue of THE WORKER the Labour Government was described as the enemy of the working class. The Secretary of State for Employment had obligingly

By looking at the past
THE WORKER, we look at
to tackle the unions...

confirmed this charge with the publication of the White Paper, "In Place of Strife". This White Paper is the Labour Government's blueprint for emasculating the trade unions, depriving the working class of the faithful servitor of monopoly capitalism.

Ignoring the guff, we can consider the following recommendations of this Policy for Industrial Relations – recommendations which if turned into law will affect for the worse every worker in Britain.

It is proposed to set up a Commission on Industrial Relations which will have an important part to play in trade union reform. Disputes between rival unions for recognition...will be referred to the CIR and the Secretary of State will be empowered to give effect by Order to its recommendations. Financial penalties may be imposed on unions refusing to comply.

Among the proposals which George Woodcock, General Secretary of the TUC, speaking on behalf of the General Council, finds acceptable is the establishment of the Commission on Industrial Relations. The first appointee as full-time chairman of the CIR – George Woodcock!

...In order to incorporate trade unions even more firmly in the governmental superstructure of capitalism, they can apply to the CIR for grants and loans to aid their development along lines recommended by the CIR.

The Secretary of State will be given discretionary power to secure a "conciliation pause" in unconstitutional strikes. Strikers could be ordered to return to work and desist from industrial action for 28 days, subject to financial penalties.

The Secretary of State will be empowered to require unions to hold a ballot on the question of strike action. The Secretary of State would not intervene in the conduct of the ballot apart from giving approval to the form of question to be put to the vote!

Trade unions should register with a new Registrar of Trade Unions and will be required to have rules governing certain matters. Refusal to do so will make a union liable to financial penalties."

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.

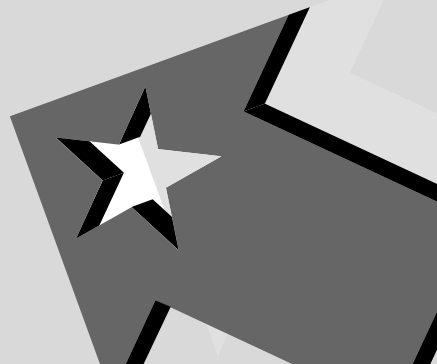
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Back to Front – Goodbye China

‘The capitalist master-plan is that working classes are always going to be thrown up in shorter and shorter periods of time in new places and then left to rot...’

THESE DAYS Hoover and Vax household appliances are made in Hong Kong. And when the owner of the brands warned last year that growing “inflationary” and cost pressures in China were forcing it to look elsewhere for future manufacturing capacity, it was a straw in the wind for this new “workshop of the world”.

The cost pressures listed were the familiar moan of capitalists down the decades: a combination of rising raw material costs, wage inflation in southern China and an increased tax burden.

The company, it was said, was looking to slow its expansion in China and increase its production capacity in low-cost markets where it was close to some of its major customers – perhaps Mexico or lower-cost countries in eastern Europe. (Who knows – perhaps in a few years in Britain, the way the government is driving wages down.)

Capitalism is forever seeking out new, more undeveloped places where it can exploit cheap or cheaper, unorganised labour. This is an immutable law of capitalist economics.

The first “workshop of the world”, Britain, has seen its industrial heritage deliberately destroyed as the capitalist masters moved production out to cheaper countries where workers were less organised and had lower standards of living. The same process has started to hit hard in the USA, and is beginning to be applied to the western countries in the EU, as with France and Sarkozy.

Always the capitalists are looking for new sources of cheap, unorganised labour. Over the years they have been attracted like moths to light by the seductive glare of parts of Latin America, China, India, parts of southeast Asia, now eastern Europe. Where next, Africa?

And now the process of capitalist development of birth, rise and decline seems to be speeding up. Look at the development of industrial capitalism in Britain from its birth in the latter half of the 18th century, its hurly-

burly expansion well into the 19th century and its absolute decline in the 20th and 21st centuries – it has taken its course over a relatively long period. But the industrial “workshops” that have followed it have each in turn experienced much shorter historical spans.

And China, if the Hoover prognostication is correct, is going to have a short period indeed from capitalist headlong expansion to retraction and decline.

The whole structure of world capitalism is unstable and unsteady. The capitalist master plan (if they are allowed to get away with it) is that working classes are always going to be thrown up in shorter and shorter periods of time in new places and then left to rot in declining industrial wastelands as production is taken elsewhere.

Industrial cultures that depend on learning, science, materialist outlooks and widespread interconnections will be created, only to be undermined and denied once decay and unemployment rear their heads and fascism, obfuscation and bigotry can take their place.

Workers throughout the world are experiencing economic ravages from the same callous capitalist class, but they have different economic terrains in which to fight and different objectives to attain. In the ‘traditional’ industrial countries like Britain the desperate task is to fight to hold on to industry, wages and decent standards of living in a situation of diminishing industrial strength. In the new industrialised countries, the task is to organise and fight for better wages and conditions, for dignity and civilisation, in the midst of expansion and turmoil.

In new conditions very different to that of 1848, with the speed of change accelerating, the essential truth in an upside-down world is that Marx is still right in the final words of the Communist Manifesto: “Workers of the world unite: you have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win.”

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