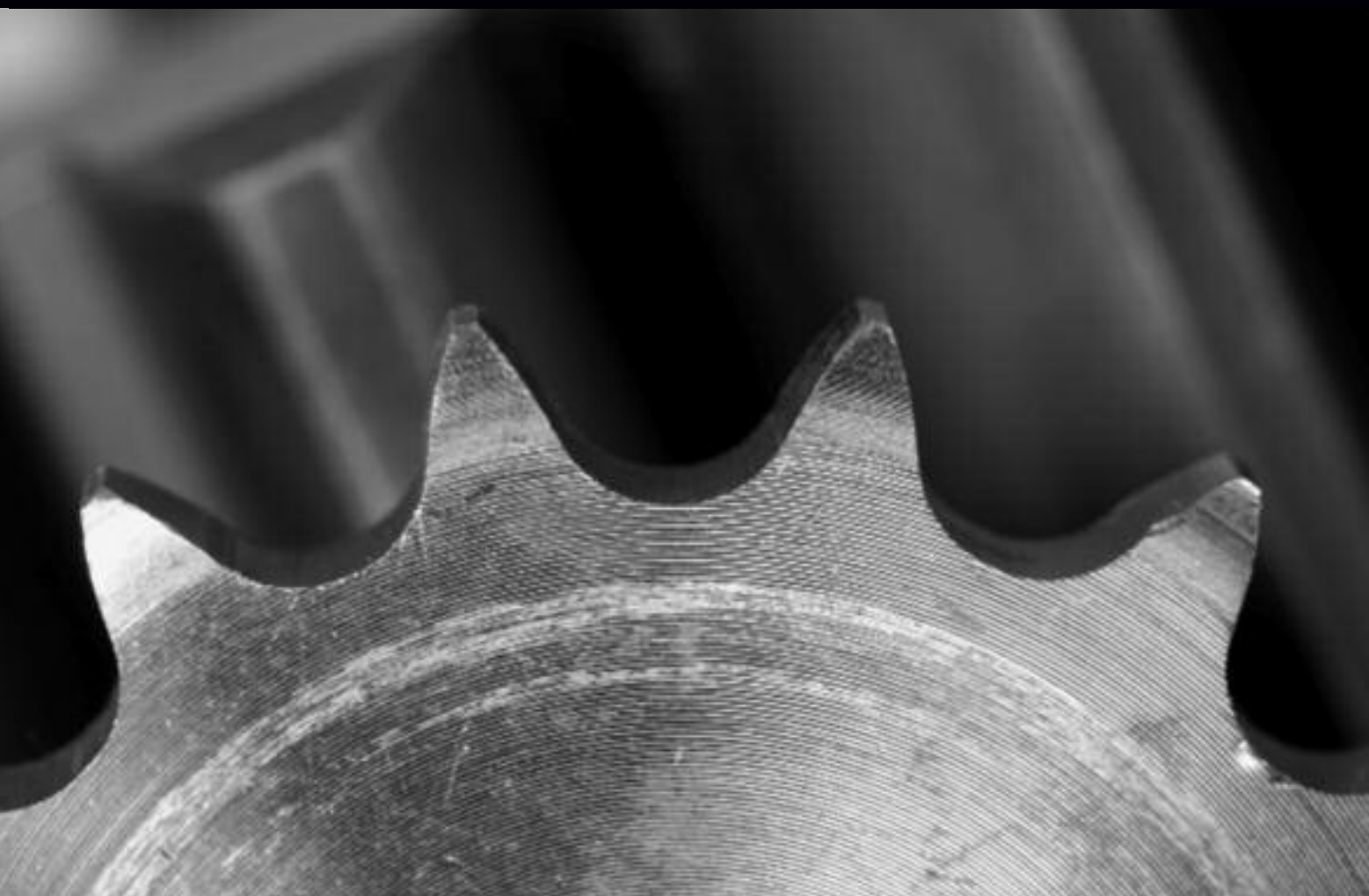


# WORKERS

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FEBRUARY 2007 £1



## BRITAIN'S STEEL: SLIPPING OUT OF CONTROL



Capital and the abandonment of Britain

06



Science – a curriculum for decline

08



Book reviews: The ethics of empire

14

# WORKERS

## Import labour, export jobs

BRITISH EMPLOYERS seem to have only two strategies. 1: if you can move the work elsewhere, then find cheaper labour abroad. 2: if you can't move the work abroad, then go abroad and import cheaper labour. That, in a nutshell, is what that fancy term globalisation is all about.

In early December 16 skilled glaziers who were working on a new NHS building in Manchester and who were employed by Bovis Lend Lease had their contracts terminated. When they had been taken on originally, most had been assured that their contract would run until 2010.

It transpired that Bovis Lend Lease had subcontracted the work to the Dutch firm Sheldebouw and following the termination of contract, it was discovered that the work of the 16 glaziers was now been done by Polish migrants. One of the workers, Martin Kelly, said he and his workmates had paid the price for being a "British worker on a British wage".

One of the "explanations" government ministers frequently give for immigration being a good thing is that the skills are not available in the British population. But here there was no skill shortage and one of the 16 sacked men had recently won an award for dedication and professionalism.

The glaziers were members of the construction union UCATT, which is taking up

the case. Interestingly Hazel Blears, Chair of the Labour Party, has been forced to admit that government claims that immigration helps the economy do not hold sway with voters.

And last month, despite receiving grants of nearly £7 million, National Cash Registers (NCR) is axing 650 jobs at its Dundee factory ... and relocating the work to Hungary. The workforce here are considering a sit-in among other options.

NCR is only one of countless employers going down the relocation route (see Birds Eye, page 3). Employers used to relocate out of centres of traditional industrial union strength, such as London, to new towns and greenfield sites in Britain in the hope of lowering costs and boosting profits. Now, with the European Union, they can pick and choose among 24 countries.

As WORKERS goes to press, British Airways faces a strike by cabin crew following a massive 96 per cent ballot vote for action. Short-term, BA is in a tight spot, and stands to lose more than £100 million. Long-term, will it be tempted to go the way of its contractor, Gate Gourmet, and import more pliant labour? Or go the way of Qantas and set up more cabin crew hubs abroad?

Either way, workers at BA may soon be facing a fight to keep the airline as a truly national carrier.



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## Contents – February 2007

### News

Civil service strike, p3; EU tries to put the squeeze on Belarus p4; TUC report condemns Economic Partnership Agreements as a threat to workers, p5; News Analysis: Rich, poor and Labour, p6

03

### Features

The abandonment of Britain, p6; A curriculum for decline: the state of British science education, p8; Steel: slipping out of control, p11

06

### Book Reviews

Slavery, conspiracy and cover-up: the ethics of empire, p14

14



<b>CIVIL SERVICE</b>	National strike
<b>RETAILING</b>	Wal-Mart casualises
<b>FOOD</b>	Birds Eye factory threat
<b>BELARUS</b>	EU tries to put on pressure
<b>WATERWAYS</b>	Thames campaign rebuffed
<b>EU</b>	Partnership politics
<b>LOCAL GOVT</b>	The pensions pirouette
<b>WHAT'S ON</b>	Coming soon
<b>EUROTRASH</b>	The latest from Brussels
<b>NEWS ANALYSIS</b>	Rich, poor and Labour

# Civil servants vote to strike

PUBLIC & COMMERCIAL Services Union (PCS) members across the civil service have voted for a one day strike on 31 January, followed by other action such as overtime bans. They are protesting against changes in conditions, job losses and reductions in public services. The strike is timed to coincide with the tax return deadline and will affect jobcentres, benefit offices, passport offices, driving tests, courts and museums.

This dispute has been brewing since Gordon Brown announced radical cuts in civil service numbers in the name of modernising public services. For example Revenue & Customs will lose 12,500 jobs by 2008 and a similar number in the following three years. Tax offices will close in many towns too.

PCS wants to get these issues out into the open. It's faced with the government's drive to cut 100,000 civil and public service jobs, widespread use of consultants and below inflation pay offers. And it seems to PCS members that services to the public will diminish rather than improve.

It's easy for any government, especially one under pressure, to appear resolute by attacking the civil service and "cutting red tape". But the game is a tough one; the government's need for cuts is real and not merely window dressing. It's hard to see how it can do that without cooperation from its own workers.

There are difficulties too for the PCS. Its members are fed up with the government: they will not be applauding any ministers, as Treasury staff famously did for Brown in 1987. Over 60 per cent of those voting were in favour of the strike, and more voted for other action. There will be a good turnout for the strike, but support for the future is less certain. Only 36 per cent of the 280,000 members voted – against a background of struggling to maintain membership levels in some areas.

The outcome of the action, other than publicity, is uncertain. The union in effect wants to reverse government policy on job security, pay and outsourcing. Although the Treasury is behind all of this, the PCS has to deal with 200 different departments and organisations – that will take persistence and flexibility.

- Over the ballot period, PCS members heard about job losses and low pay offers in several places. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is to close its London office with a loss of up to 600 jobs. The MOD wants to privatise the training of Britain's armed forces, making up to 2,000 redundant and jeopardising future defence capability. And there are imminent pay disputes in the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) and the Information Commissioner's Office.

## RETAILING

### Wal-Mart casualisation drive

FOLLOWING THE GMB's successful threat of industrial action and negotiating strategy against Wal-Mart in the summer of 2006, the supermarket giant's anti-union strategy – another one – is slowly emerging.

Using computer technology Wal-Mart plans to track customer shopping patterns and maximise staffing to meet demand. In other words casualisation of staff will be maximised, with shifts, hours, wages cut and all misleadingly called "labour optimisation".

Of course, it has nothing to do with labour optimisation, just maximising every second they can screw out of some of the lowest paid workers. As they describe it, "Labour becomes more of a variable cost than a fixed cost and employed when it's needed, rather than wasted." ASDA, Wal-Mart's UK subsidiary, cleared £775 million

## FOOD PROCESSING

### Birds Eye factory under threat

AROUND 600 jobs are under threat at the Birds Eye frozen food factory in Hull, would-be Labour leader Alan Johnson's constituency. The work is to be transferred to Bremerhaven in Germany and other existing capacity at Lowestoft.

The decision is solely driven by cost and maximising profit and will reduce the Birds Eye workforce in the UK by 50 per cent. The company cites "unsustainable overcapacity" and other gibberish. Birds Eye was sold by Unilever in 2006 to Permira, the venture capitalists responsible for the Little Chef and AA debacles.

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

## EUROTRASH

### The latest from Brussels

#### Same old song...

The EU Constitution is back on the agenda after the summit of EU leaders on 14 December. They agreed a timetable to conclude negotiations on a new document by 2008. The German government will then produce a report on the future evolution of the Constitution.

Addressing the German Parliament, Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "I would consider it an historical failure if we do not succeed in working out the substance of the constitutional treaty by the time the next European elections take place." The current Finnish Presidency of the EU believes that most member states are ready to keep "if not all, at least as much of the substance as possible" of the Constitution. EU Commission President Jose Barroso said, "I believe we are going to make real progress during the next presidency."

#### ...but not everyone believes

A majority of French people believe that joining the euro five years ago was bad for their country, according to a TNS-Sofres survey published in December. Giving up the franc for the euro was 'quite bad' or 'very bad' for France, said 52 percent of respondents; up from 45 percent three years ago. Fifty-one percent of those polled said the euro has damaged economic growth and 94 percent said it has caused price rises. The survey found the lowest rate of approval for the euro since its introduction. "While in 2002, 59% of the respondents in the eurozone thought that the new currency was overall advantageous for their country, currently only less than half of respondents hold such a favourable opinion," it concluded.

#### And for the next trick...

Social Democrat members of the European Parliament recently united with conservative MEPs to pass the Services Directive. This allows all those who work in public services to work on the basis of the social laws of their country of origin, not of the laws of the country in which they are working. If it goes through all the later legislative stages, all EU member states are supposed to implement it within three years.



**Campaigners outside Whipps Cross Hospital, north east London, who are fighting to keep it as a fully functioning District General Hospital in the face of pressure to take services away in order to feed a new PFI hospital in Romford, Essex. The campaign is organising a march on Saturday 3 February (see What's On, p5).**

Photo: www.savewhippscros.org

## EU puts squeeze on Belarus

"IT'S INDICATIVE that we see such a vitriolic reaction! We appear to be causing the government some concern, to say the least," said James Howard, Director, International Trade Union Confederation, following a measured and reasonable response by the Belarus government to EU threats to withdraw economic trading agreements with the country under the EU's Generalised System of Preferences. (See December 2006 issue of WORKERS.)

What did the Belarus statement say? "That the EU decision absolutely runs counter to the stated goal of 'providing support to [the] Belarussian population' ...that 'The EU decision is in complete discord with the positive dialogue maintained by the Government of Belarus with the International Labour Organisation' ... "Exerting pressure from outside on the Belarussian people and its state will not yield any results..." Throughout, the Belarus response is transparent, moderate and welcoming to equal and mutual respectful dialogue.

So what is the International Trade Union Confederation? It is a slightly reconfigured anti-Communist cold war 'free' trade union confederation embracing right-wing US, British, Catholic trade union opinion and heavy doses of security services direction.

The US and EU agenda for the eradication of Marxist ideology in the trade unions is heavily slanted towards the emerging East European countries. What is being done in the name of democracy, trade unionism, non-governmental organisations, the free media, and so on, is funded and directed by the CIA and others of its ilk.

## WATERWAYS

### Thames campaign rebuffed

THE GOVERNMENT has ignored the campaign by Thames skippers, crews, health and safety campaigners and trade unionists to not implement an EU Directive which will reduce safety and training qualifications for Thames freight and passenger traffic.

Effectively, 450 years of regulation has been removed to implement a one size fits all EU directive, a directive which has seen significant exemptions elsewhere in Europe

on comparable though smaller rivers.

The government's position is diametrically opposed to those who work the river and who have consistently warned over the safety risks resulting from reducing training and experience. So diametrically opposed are the views that a tragedy will have to happen before this deaf government responds.

The precedent already exists in the numbers of deaths and injuries on the railways since deregulation and privatisation, all predicted by the rail unions, all ignored by those implementing EU directives.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### The pensions pirouette

THE PIROUETTES between the Local Government Pension Scheme employers, the trade unions and the government are beautifully choreographed as the draft regulations are laid, negotiations stagger on, sabres are rattled and members shake their heads in disbelief.

The draft regulations were laid in Parliament on 22 December. New and previously undiscussed changes were introduced to the regulations affecting part time workers, redundancy and ill health.

The significant improvements in the

revised scheme are being belittled in favour of an all-or-nothing strategy over supposed protections of the 1997 regulations on early retirement.

The limited protection of the "85 year rule", which has benefited fewer than 20 people – mainly men – over the past 10 years, according to one London borough, is the rallying cry for those who want to reject the scheme.

Each time the employers and trade unions near agreement the government rolls another wrecking amendment into the equation. So negotiations continue with early February being the point where the possible move to industrial action ballots will be arrived at.

# One-sided partnerships

A NEW TUC report, EPAs: A Threat to Workers, outlines Economic Partnership Agreements being negotiated between the European Union and six regional groupings of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The report strongly criticises EU external policy for trying to impose liberalisation on those ACP countries.

The report describes how developing country governments could be forced to open markets to imports from the EU, and to privatise essential public services, such as water, health, and education. Vulnerable farmers and producers in some of the world's poorest countries will then be pitted against those in the richest EU countries. Industries and producers unable to compete with EU imports face devastation, with a massive impact on wages and jobs. The report gives examples of how economic liberalisation damages ACP countries and their workers. The International Monetary Fund imposes economic conditions before giving loans or the World Trade Organization sets trade rules. Local industries, including manufacturing and food processing, have collapsed in Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana among other countries.

Things are little better where workers keep their jobs. For example, normal working hours in footwear factories in South Africa have increased since free trade policies were adopted. Jobs that were once permanent have become casual. Many developing countries have had to accept the principle of creating Economic Processing Zones where labour standards are deliberately waived to attract foreign investment, meaning few benefits actually reach the people. Tetteh Hormeku, of the Africa Trade Network, summed up this situation: "If EPAs carry through, African countries will have to kiss goodbye to their industrialisation efforts."

This report clearly shows how in its external relations the EU serves the interests of the capitalist class, although the TUC doesn't put it like that. And the EU's internal relations are just as destructive for the working class in its own states – which the TUC certainly doesn't put like that.

## VENTURE CAPITAL

### The filletting of Little Chef

THE LITTLE CHEF roadside restaurant chain has supposedly been saved from closure.

Analysis by the GMB union of how the closure threat arose is illuminating. In 2003 the venture capital company Permira, using £712 million of borrowed money, bought 368 Little Chef restaurants and 22 Travelodge hotels from Compass. Using sale and leaseback they raised £280 million on 130 sites.

They promptly shut 130 sites. The

remaining 238 restaurants were sold for £52 million in 2005. The Travelodges were sold for £675 million in 2006.

So an original investment of £712 million yielded Permira £907 million, a clear profit of £200 million in three years. In addition, it claimed management fees and commissions, plus tax relief!

Permira is the finance company that has recently taken over the AA, resulting in 1 in 3 staff being dismissed, higher prices and a £500 million loan to pay for a "special dividend".

Described as venture capitalism and lauded by the government, it has the hallmarks of highway robbery.

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### FEBRUARY

Saturday 3 February, Waltham Forest, London

March and rally to defend Whipps Cross Hospital

Assemble Whipps Cross Hospital (Forest View Avenue) at 12pm, and march via Lea Bridge Road and Hoe Street to Walthamstow Town Square for rally.

For more information on the campaign, see [www.savewhippscros.org](http://www.savewhippscros.org).

Thursday 15 February, 7.30pm, STUC, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6NG

Cuba and the EU

Public meeting organised by the Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Speakers Liz Elkland (STUC) and Eddie McGuire (Musicians' Union).

#### MARCH

Thursday 8 March, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

London in the 21st century: booming or crumbling?

Public meeting organised by CPBML/WORKERS magazine. All welcome. The catchphrase is "London: World Class city". Is this your experience of London – its transport system, housing, employment and services? See advertisement, page 13.

## MUSEUMS

### NE London closure fight

IN A PACKED meeting on 25 January, Waltham Forest residents denounced and pledged to fight the planned weekday closure of the William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum, which combined with staff restructuring will badly cripple these two institutions in northeast London.

The loss of expert staff, already a problem after earlier cuts, is likely to prove fatal.

The William Morris Gallery is of international repute as the only museum on the life and art of Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, housing the important collection given by Sir Frank Brangwyn. Vestry House, local history museum for the borough, contains its archives, to which by law access must be provided.

Waltham Forest Council hopes to save only £56,000 by these closures, but will lose nearly as much from sales lost on weekdays. Information on the Gallery can be seen at [www1.walthamforest.gov.uk/wmg/](http://www1.walthamforest.gov.uk/wmg/).

## NEWS ANALYSIS

## Rich, poor and Labour

**UNDER LABOUR**, from 1997 to 2002, the number of Britons with more than £5 million in 'liquid assets' rose at the rate of 13% a year. Between 2002 and 2004, the number rose again by 50%. The rich stay rich, and get richer; the poor stay poor, and get poorer. The growing inequality makes British society less mobile. The USA, Britain and South Africa, the world's most unequal societies, have the least social mobility.

Stock markets boom, top salaries and land and property values soar. The gainers are a few thousand chief executives, City dealers, property developers, investment fund managers, landowning aristocrats (80% of the EU's £36 billion Common Agricultural Policy funds go to the richest 20% of landowners), commercial lawyers and bankers.

From 2000 to 2004, the pay, including bonuses and long-term incentive plans, of top executives at Britain's biggest companies more than doubled. By 2004, the average remuneration of a top 100 chief executive was £2.5 million – some 113 times that of the average British worker.

This soaring pay is not due to greater entrepreneurialism, tightening global or national markets, or exceptional skills, or better company performances. Over the same period, from 2000 to 2004, the FTSE 100 index fell by around a third while average earnings increased by only 13 per cent. Britain has a lower rate of innovative activity within firms than France, Germany or Spain, and we are 15th out of the 30 richest countries for productivity growth.

### The crooked casino

"Welcome to the City - the biggest crooked casino in the world." In the last 20 years, the City and Wall Street have creamed off £100 billion by rigging capital markets. This is a corporate cartel, where the top 50 fund managers control three quarters of London's stock market. Financial firms' fees from mergers and acquisitions, which destroy value and jobs, are known as 'the croupier's take'. If the bigger company fails the croupier can gain from that too. A City 'star' admitted, "I could not believe that anyone would want to pay me so much for creating nothing."

The capitalists' last line of defence is to claim that their tax contribution justifies their wealth. Yet Britain is a tax haven for the very rich and our tax system regressive. Tax avoidance is worth possibly £85 billion a year. The accountancy firm KPMG has 400 off-the-shelf tax avoidance 'products'. Only Britain and Ireland allow non-domiciliary status to people, whereby they only pay tax on domestically derived income. Other countries collect tax from residents on all their income.

For the very rich, tax is voluntary. For example, Mohamed Al-Fayed made a secret tax deal with the Inland Revenue in 1985 that he would pay just £240,000 a year – he should have been paying £6 million! The state let him trouser £5,760,000 a year. On top of this, Al-Fayed arranged for £100 million to be paid him in dividends, between 1995 and 1998 alone, to an offshore trust in Bermuda.

There are millions of similar offshore companies designed to avoid tax, which Rupert Murdoch, Richard Branson and Bill Gates all use. These companies hold an estimated \$11 trillion, and a third of the world's entire GDP flows through them.

The working class produces all this wealth; the capitalists steal their cuts from every aspect of life – work, housing, saving.

The gap between what we need  
capitalism provides is yawning  
can only lie in our hands...

## The abandonment of

"BRITISHNESS" is now to be taught in schools. But the class wielding power in Britain is not a British class any more. It has abandoned Britain, moving its interests offshore, only perhaps for now trading shares or making deals here. It has lost any sense of Britain as its attitudes follow its interests.

The core of the ruling class is the financial and business elite. The City of London embraces reckless gambling on the one hand and well-spoken, sharp-suited, sharp practice on the other. The rest of London – indeed the rest of Britain – could disappear tomorrow and the City would carry on quite happily. In fact, they would prefer to be rid of this troublesome nation altogether.

Capitalism is going back to its roots, stripping away all the working class's achievements, undermining industry, nation and class. It is selling off industries, utilities and services, Scottish Power the most recent. But the needs of Britain are quite different. We need to control our own resources and control the movements of capital and labour.

A recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report provides fresh evidence that mass immigration is putting pressure on jobs, wages and public services. It says that the arrival of more than half a million Eastern Europeans since May 2004 – an unprecedented wave of workers from abroad – has pushed unemployment rates up from 4.8 per cent last year to 5.6 per cent in 2006. Official figures show nearly 1.7 million people are jobless. There has been an increase of 242,000 over the last year, the biggest annual rise for more than a decade.

The OECD predicts that unemployment will rise to 5.8 per cent next year, above the average for other industrial nations. It estimates that the number of people arriving in Britain is set to increase even further, and it describes the government's immigration projections as "conservative".

### Immigration up, wages down

The report adds that immigration also acts to keep wages down – nice for employers, bad for the working class: "Exceptionally strong labour force growth, driven by high immigration and rising participation, is outstripping employment growth, pushing the unemployment rate up. The resulting labour market slack should help to ensure that the anticipated fourth quarter spike in headline inflation does not push up inflationary pressures." The OECD also notes that the wave of new immigrants has put greater demands on limited housing stock.

Globalised capital, with its compulsory free movements of capital and labour, has produced ever greater wealth at one pole of society and greater poverty at the other. In 2002, Britain's richest 5 per cent owned 43 per cent of Britain's total wealth, up from 36 per cent in 1986, and they owned 62 per cent of disposable wealth (i.e. less the value of homes), up from 46 per cent in 1986.

Chief Executive Officers paid themselves an extra 30 per

d and what  
g. But the solution

# f Britain

**‘Exceptionally strong labour force growth, driven by high immigration and rising participation, is outstripping employment growth, pushing the unemployment rate up.’ (OECD report)**

cent more this year and the wealth of the very rich has risen by 18 per cent.

But at the other pole of society, where the rest of us live, globalised capital has produced greater relative poverty. Some 30 per cent of us have no wealth at all.

The tax burden for the average family has risen by £2000 since May 2005. The government has given poor families no rise in tax credits, which, as the Institute of Fiscal Studies predicts, will increase the number of children living in poverty. There are now eight million people with debts of more than £10,000, four million of whom owe more than £20,000.

British homes are 70 per cent dearer in relation to wages than they were in 2000; the average house costs six times the average income, seven times as much in London and the southeast.

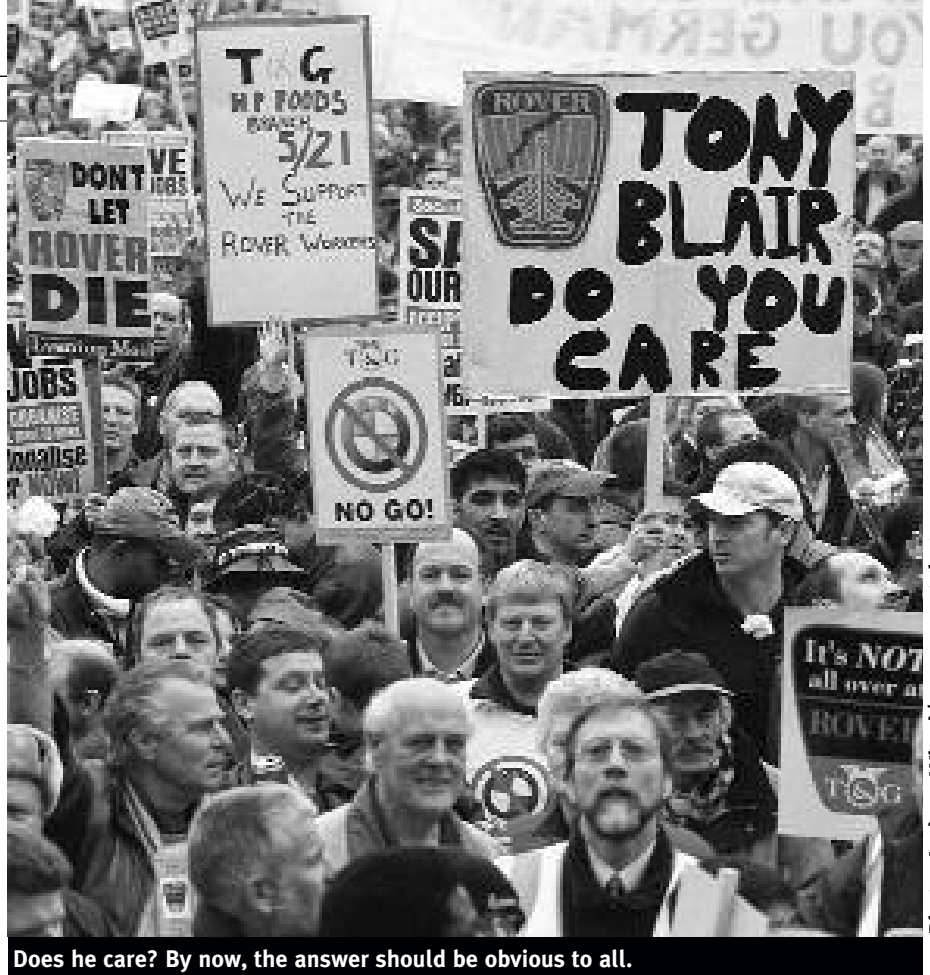


Photo: Andrew Wiard / www.reportphotos.com

Does he care? By now, the answer should be obvious to all.

Real wages are down, but our productivity is up. This has added trillions of pounds to the value of stockowners' equity, the vast sums gambled in the City of London. As a result, the richest 1 per cent of households in Britain, who own more than half of all shares, get more than half all capital income. Christmas bonuses for City firms will be \$17 billion this year. On Wall Street, the top five banks, including Goldman Sachs, will pay out \$36 billion, 30 per cent up on last year's record.

### Gordon's friends

Gordon Brown boasts that average personal wealth has risen by 60 per cent. That can happen when, for example, Brown's friend Gavyn Davies of Goldman Sachs raises his pocket money from £500,000 to £1,150,000, and 50 people have their wages cut from £10,000 to £9,000.

The ruling class's pretence that its profit is our good has worn out. Parliamentarism is broken, reformist politics have failed.

The parliamentary party system means evasion of responsibility. The working class surrenders authority by electing representatives, who do not speak for us in parliament, but speak for the ruling class to us. MPs then again justify themselves by saying, "It wasn't us, it was the Tories." "It wasn't us, it was the leadership, or New Labour, or whatever."

The more concentrated and extreme a form of power becomes, then the more vigorously it digs its own grave. Everything changing for the worse here stems from the un-British, anti-British class in power, except for the one thing that we cannot blame them for – that we continue to let them misrule us.

**NO TO THE  
EU CONSTITUTION**  
[www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk)

## Say it with stickers

Let Britain know what you think. No to the EU Constitution stickers are now available free of charge from WORKERS. Just send an A4 sae and two first class stamps to:

Stickers  
WORKERS  
78 Seymour Avenue  
London N17 9EB.

[Not to be used in contravention of any by-laws]

Everyone in Britain says science is important, yet everywhere it education system...

## A curriculum for decline: the state of British



An increasingly rare sight: hands-on work in a laboratory...

SCIENCE IS the bedrock of a modern economy. In itself, that is hardly controversial. Even Blair is on record as telling Britain's premier science institution, the Royal Society, "For Britain, science will be as important to our economic future as stability." His government says the right things. But it is doing the wrong things so consistently that it is hard to believe the mess it has created is an accident.

Pummelled by government initiatives, deprived of qualified teachers and overworked, no wonder school science departments are failing to deliver the scientifically literate – and enthusiastic – students that universities need.

In a sense, it is a good job that they

don't: most universities are ill prepared for an upsurge in science students, especially in two of the core subjects, physics and chemistry.

The result – and one produced by years of neglect and interference – is that already British companies feel forced to turn abroad for science graduates. How long before they up sticks completely and go elsewhere for their research and development?

### Investment abroad

On 22 January, the British-based pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca announced a major investment in research into infectious diseases...in Massachusetts,

which will benefit from the \$100 million dollar facility. And AstraZeneca is not the only company moving away across the Atlantic for its research.

An alternative approach is to poach scientists from abroad, just as has been happening – with disastrous results for the countries that trained them – with nurses and doctors. The deputy director of the CBI, John Cridland, told *THE GUARDIAN* in March last year: "We are beginning to see UK companies saying it makes economic sense to source science graduates internationally, particularly from China and India."

China, said the CBI, was producing 300,000 graduates every year in science,



# is under attack, and nowhere is the attack stronger than in the h science education

technology, engineering and mathematics – three times the number coming through British universities. And India had 450,000 engineering undergraduates in the current academic year alone.

## Qualifications

The position is, quite literally, desperate. In no region of England, for example, do even half of those teaching mathematics have a maths degree (the highest proportion is London, with 47 per cent, lowest the North East, with just 37 per cent). More than 10 per cent of maths teachers have no higher qualification than maths A-level, and not all of them went past O-level or GCSE. (Source: DfES Research Report RR708, 2006).

Just how desperate it is in maths is shown by this statistic: to have filled all the allocated initial teacher training places for maths would have required 40 per cent of Britain's entire output of maths graduates to have taken up a place. Of course, that didn't happen.

One-quarter of 11-18 schools have no physics specialists. In fact, the DfES admits that when it comes to the physics elements of double-award GCSE science, there are more teachers without even an A-level in physics than there are teachers with a degree in the subject.

At key stage 3 (11-14), according to the Roberts Review of 2002, "75 per cent of teachers teaching physics did not study for a physics-oriented degree". Worse, 40 per cent of them did not even have a physics A-level. At key stage 4 (14-16), 66 per cent of those teaching physics and just 51 per cent of those teaching chemistry had a related degree.

This is the result of 30 years of decline. A study for the Royal Society of Chemistry in 2004 showed that the number of chemistry teachers had actually halved since 1984.

## A-level teaching crisis

While the situation is better at A-level, even there it falls far short of what it should be. Some 10 per cent of A-level science lessons (13 per cent in physics) are



taken by teachers, to quote the DfES, "who either held no qualifications at post-16 level or above in the science or whose highest qualification in the science was itself A-level".

So the blind are leading the blind. No wonder science is not being taught as it should be. As far back as 2000 a study from King's College London reported that only 50 per cent of secondary science teachers had "a lot" of confidence (as opposed to "some" or "little or no") in teaching the Physical Process part of the curriculum at key stage 4. In primary, only 57 per cent of teachers felt confident about teaching science generally, with science part of the three core subjects of the National Curriculum. No one doubts that the situation has deteriorated since then.

Turnover is a massive problem. In the sciences generally, 40 per cent of all new teachers leave within five years. It's a situation that has led the Association for Science Education, with characteristic understatement, to warn that government targets for the recruitment, retraining and retention of science teachers are "unlikely to be met".

At university level, the University and

College Union has recently documented the disappearance of science courses in its publication *Degrees of Decline?* Between 1998 and 2007, the number of single honours chemistry courses has fallen from 62 to 43; of single honours physics courses from 51 to 44; of single honours mathematics courses from 73 to 67. Only in biology has there been an increase, from 64 to 70.

The number of single-honours courses is significant. As the Royal Society says, only these courses, taught over three or four years, provide the depth necessary for students to contribute fully as researchers. The multidisciplinary teams that are driving knowledge forward are overwhelmingly made up of single-honours graduates.

Even including joint physics courses, the number of UK universities offering degrees in physics has fallen since 1994 from 79 to 51, according to the Institute of Physics. Recent closures to hit the headlines include physics at Reading. Regionally, there is only one institution providing a single-honours physics course in the North East of England, and one as well in Northern Ireland.

## Struggling to fill places

With so few emerging from the schools with physics A-level, those physics courses remaining are struggling to fill their places. Astonishingly, four universities (East Anglia, London South Bank, Leicester and Surrey) announced in October that they would accept students for physics courses without physics or maths A-levels!

Meanwhile, figures from the Royal Society show that the number taking A-level chemistry fell from 45,000 in 1991 to fewer than 39,000 in 2005.

The consequence has been dramatic. Faced with falling numbers and rising costs, universities have reached for the axe. The Royal Society of Chemistry has documented the closure over the past 10 years of no fewer than 30 university chemistry departments, leaving only 40 remaining. What it calls a "recent rash of

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

department closures” has seen departments shut at King’s College London, Queen Mary College London, Swansea and Exeter. The society put the blame fairly and squarely on government funding policies.

Two years ago, Sussex said it would close its chemistry department, whose former staff include two of Britain’s Nobel laureates in chemistry. In the face of furious opposition, Sussex first postponed the decision, and then said it would merge the department with biochemistry – a partial but important victory. One of the laureates, Sir Harry Kroto, had said he would hand back his honorary degree from the university if the university went ahead with closure.

For once, Britain could take a lesson from the United States. “There is no... US university that would dream of damaging its chemistry department,” says Ronald Breslow, former president of the American Chemical Society. “It is as fundamental to the core of the universities as are the history and literature departments.”

Already, engineering and physics are in decline. Between 1994 and 2004, during a period of university expansion, the number of engineering graduates leaving university fell by 11 per cent, and of physics graduates by 10 per cent.

## Curriculum decline

Now, almost unbelievably, the government has stepped in to make matters even worse. A new assessment regime for 7–11s will drop science as a compulsory test. Given the pressure that schools are under to “perform”, what is not tested loses status – and curriculum time. And the government is introducing a new curriculum at GCSE, “Twenty-First Century Science”. The course was introduced nationally at the start of this academic year, in September, and is being taken by a third of secondary students.

True, something had to be done about the science curriculum, a monstrous set of dull lessons and mountains of facts introduced in 1989 with the idea of creating scientific literacy. With almost all

## New curriculum: what teachers are saying

**“Although I understand the reasons behind the thinking the whole thing is flawed in my opinion! As a chemistry teacher I want to teach chemistry. No problem with how it fits into the world, but it seems that all the fun has been sucked out. We are told to show a video clip of fractional distillation (no – I am going to demo it!); show a video clip of titanium extraction (I wish I could find one!); tell them this, tell them that, tell them the other! Hardly any practical work at all! [My students] don’t want**

**philosophical discussions; they want to DO something...”**

**“As someone who has just come into teaching after doing other things I think the new GCSE is dreadful. I became a science teacher because I love chemistry and wanted to teach it. I am waiting to find some real chemistry to teach. This time last year I was doing atomic structure and rates of reaction. Now I am doing citizenship not chemistry.”**

GCSE students spending 20 per cent of their time on it, the immediate result was a phenomenal boost in the numbers gaining a science GCSE, especially among girls.

The trouble was, it is so dull that there is hardly any time for the laboratory – which is where the fun is. So only a tiny fraction of the dragooned GCSE students carried on to A-level.

It’s the ultimate opiate: a dull curriculum, taught too often by teachers without expertise in the subject they are teaching. But he supposed solution is not going to help. The shortage of qualified teachers remains. And instead of getting students to do science themselves in the lab and make their own bangs and stinks – too expensive, too tied down by health and safety – they will have discussions on “topical issues”. It won’t work.

One look at the language explaining its rationale tells you all you need to know, littered as it is with the government’s meaningless buzz words: “Our view is that we need a curriculum model for science that offers flexibility and genuine choice to cope with the diversity of students’ interests and aspirations.” The course is designed “to develop the scientific literacy of future citizens”.

Out go traditional physics, chemistry and biology. In come discussions about topical issues – GM crops, or the triple vaccine MMR, for example.

The course has been savaged by some of Britain’s leading scientists. Professor Steve Jones, a noted geneticist and campaigner against creationism, said,

“Such topics are entertaining but are best deferred until the pubs open. Even over a pint, they make little sense without enough knowledge to support informed discussion.”

Sir Richard Sykes, head of Imperial College and former boss of the pharmaceutical company GSK, fumed: “A science curriculum based on encouraging pupils to debate science in the news is taking a back-to-front approach. Science should inform the news agenda, not the other way around.”

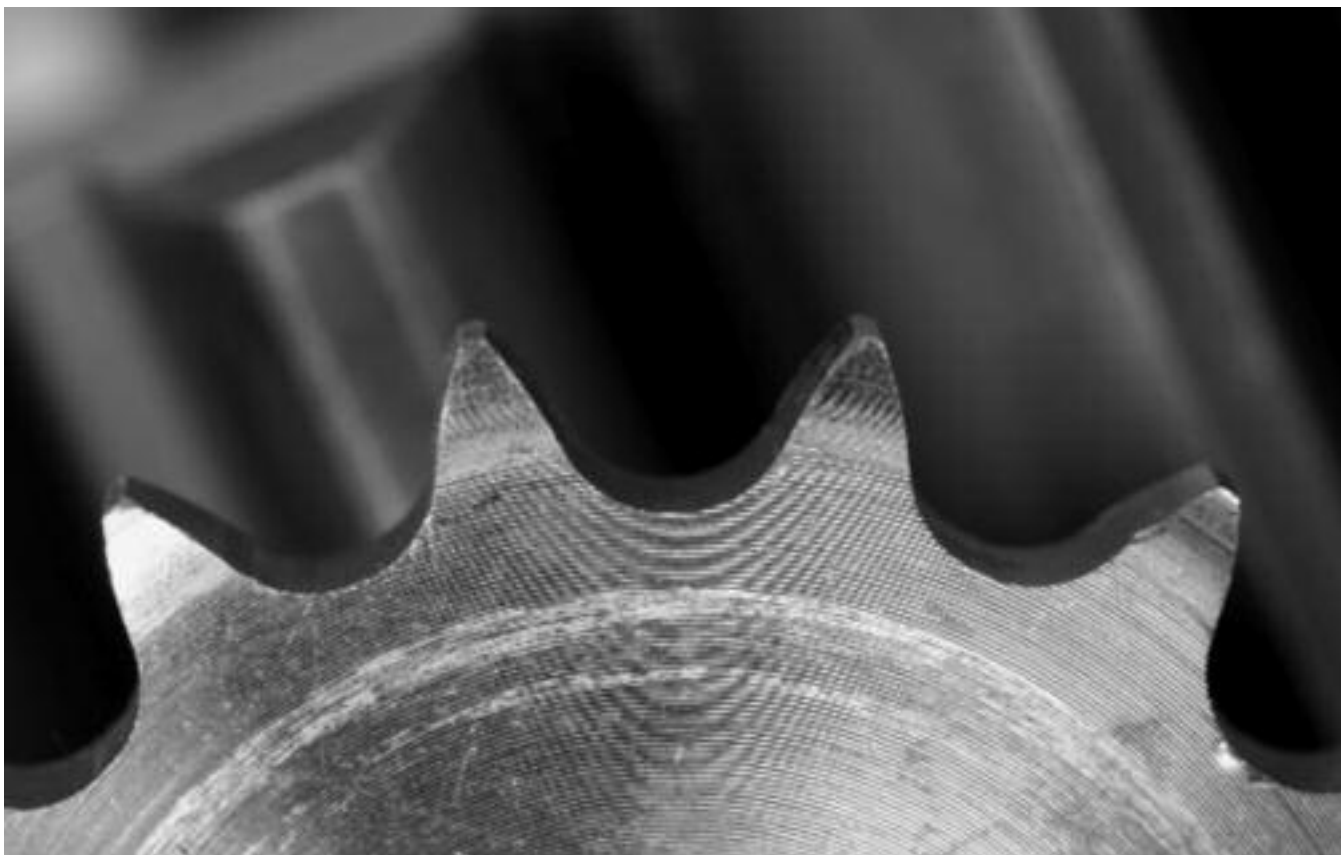
Sykes added, “...before the future citizen can contribute to the decision-making process, they need to have a good grounding in the fundamentals of science and technology, rather than the soundbite science that state school curriculums are increasingly moving towards.”

This course is not really aimed at offering anything to students. It is aimed at living with a situation where there are not enough scientifically trained teachers to teach science properly. The result will be an educational apartheid where the private and selective schools will shun this curriculum, leaving the rest with waffle instead of understanding.

Up to now the debate about the school science curriculum – and the supply of scientists – has been confined mainly to the scientific societies and to high-tech companies. It must spread out, into the teaching unions and professional associations, and wider, too, to the industrial unions, and out to the whole working class. The future of industry, and

**Our industrial landscape is about to be redefined yet again as Britain further loses control of strategic historic industries based here...**

## **Steel: slipping out of control**



**In Britain's decline from workshop of the world, what role will there be in the larger economy for production?**

THE WORLD steel industry has seen phenomenal changes during the past 6-12 months. Takeovers, mergers and restructurings both in steel production and financial bids are occurring on a scale never seen before.

Monopoly and domination of world markets were established facts before the 1914-1918 world war. Monopoly and linked company production – iron, steel, coal, railways, shipping, armaments – set the pattern across great companies, such as Krupps in Germany, Carnegie in the USA, Vickers-Armstrong in Britain.

The clash of monopolies in the First World War may have smashed a number of these companies but the drive to greater monopoly continued up to and beyond the Second World War.

In Britain, the steel industry was of

such critical strategic importance during the First World War, that failure in production, quality and delivery seriously impeded the prosecution of British war aims. So severe were these inadequacies that the then Prime Minister Lloyd George effectively took measures to nationalise the steel industry under wartime emergency measures.

### **Core strategic industries**

Similar measures were applied to the coal, rail and forestry industries. In Britain this further raised the importance of the debate about nationalisation of core strategic industries.

On the one hand, it met utopian social-democratic aspirations that nationalisation would take the means of production out of the hands of capital and set the building

blocks for socialism in place. On the other hand, capital, so mortified at the prospect of losing a war with its competitors, viewed the need for strategic national industries to be safeguarded from foreign competition and takeover.

To this end the government stored a strategic reserve of thousands of tons of scrap or non-productive steel so that it was always available for the armaments industry if the demand for steel arose at short notice. Ironically, Thatcher, the “Iron Lady”, abolished this concept of strategic reserves in the late 1980s, her concept being that the market would always supply.

Those who saw the nationalisation of the steel industry as the first blooming of

*Continued on page 12*

*Continued from page 11*

socialism perhaps did not recognise this more sinister governmental view. The Second World War saw a similar emergency measures programme introduced into steel and related strategic industries.

But the argument for full nationalisation was never settled. It was only in 1967, 50 years after the crisis in the First World War, that a partial nationalisation of 90% of the industry occurred. That nationalisation was in the teeth of the beginnings of the European Union in 1957, whose first measures had been to try to bring a supposed rationalisation to Europe's competing national coal and steel industries. In other words this meant Europe-wide closure with the assertion of private not state control.

### Privatisation

The British Steel Corporation survived until 1987 when Thatcher privatised the industry and endorsed the application of EU policy on steel production to the UK. British Steel went from employing 250,000 workers, with integrated planned industrial links for the coal and rail industries and an output of 55 million metric tonnes per year in 1987, to an output of 18.4 million metric tonnes, employing a workforce of 23,000 in 2006.

The period throughout the 1990s was marked by wholesale closure of industry and community across the UK. In 1999 the rump of British Steel was rechristened Corus and came under Anglo-Dutch ownership.

In the early 2000s Corus struggled to survive, with a further 10,000 jobs being axed from some of the most productive and modern steel plants in Britain and losses of over £2 billions: closure seemed imminent.

The industrial revolutions in China and India have seen a reversal of fortunes in the last five years for Corus and the world metal trades. Within the past year in steel across the world a frenzy of acquisition has occurred. The largest steel companies in

## **“What are the strategic implications of monopoly for a nation's self sufficiency, self-reliance and independence?”**

the world in 2006 were:

- Mittal-Arcelor, producing 108 million metric tonnes (mmt). Arcelor was snatched from under the noses of the Russian steel producer Severstat in mid 2006. Mittal-Arcelor has offices in Luxembourg but has roots in the Indian steel industry.

- Nippon Steel (Japan), 32 mmt.
- Posco (South Korea), 30.5 mmt.
- JFE (Japan), 29.9 mmt.
- Bao Steel (Chile), 22.7 mmt.
- US Steel, 19.5 mmt.
- Nucor (US), 18.4 mmt.
- Corus (Anglo-Dutch), 18.4 mmt.
- Riva (Italy), 17.5 mmt.

The order of steel-producing countries and usage differs slightly: China, Japan, US, Russia, South Korea, Germany, Ukraine, India, Brazil, Italy. Britain does not make the top ten.

The merger frenzy has seen the Russian company Severstat relocate and float on the UK stock market at £8 billion solely for the purpose of future acquisitions, its first bite for Arcelor being frustrated by Mittal. The Indian steel company Tata then bid for Corus.

Tata ranks as 56th in world production and was described as a 'mouse trying to eat an elephant' by a Labour MP. Tata's plan to pay for the takeover was based upon borrowing against the assets it hoped to acquire, a little bit like funding your mortgage on the assumption that house prices will always rise.

Enter Brazil's CSN steel company with a £5.9 billion bid – £5.15p a share for Corus. The offer was agreed and accepted by the Corus Board but with a higher offer of £5.50p per share now expected from Tata Steel by the end of January 2007, CSN

is expected to be out of the running.

The result will be that Tata Steel leaps from 56th to 5th in world production terms. In strategic terms it is an example of the realignment of mass producing low quality steel companies in Russia, India, Brazil, China linking up with high tech high quality producers in the UK and Europe,

The remaining centres of production in Britain – Port Talbot, Scunthorpe, Teesside, Rotherham – could all be at risk in the medium to long term if production transfers to Corus's sites in the Netherlands or Tata's in India. If Tata-Corus merge then the pressure on the other top ten producers to realign will be intense.

There are huge questions for production directly in Britain. There are 23,000 employed, and for the 166,000 pensioners in the pension fund there are further concerns. The fund has theoretically liabilities of over £14 billion, though within the last two years it has gone into a strong surplus due to the increased demand and price of steel.

### Strategic implications

If monopoly has realigned and reduced not the levels of production but the number of players, what are the strategic implications for a nation's self sufficiency, self-reliance and independence?

In Britain's decline from workshop of the world and crucible of the metals trade, what role will there be in the larger economy for production and wealth generation? Britain's steel industry provides the products for state of the art production in aerospace, electronics, vehicle production, diagnostic equipment, etc.

Is the Tata investment of £5–6 billion a price offered to further realign the industry by subsequent closure, market transfer and asset stripping? Will Tata Steel be on Mittal's takeover list? It seemingly was before Tata Steel bid for Corus. Perhaps the world's largest steel producer will eat the mouse, which devoured an elephant?

The industrial landscape of Britain is about to be redefined yet again as Britain further loses control of strategic historic industries based here.

## **CPBML/WORKERS PUBLIC MEETING**

### **London in the 21st century: booming or crumbling?**

**Thursday 8 March, 7.30pm**

**Conway Hall, London WCI (nearest tube, Holborn)**

**The catchphrase is “London: World Class City”.**

**Is this your experience of London – its transport system, housing, employment and services? There is no shortage of “development”, with cranes to be seen on the city skyline. But what is developing and for whom? What would you develop and what would you maintain? What do you think makes a great city?**

**Come and discuss this with us. All welcome.**

## **BADGE OFFER – Nationalise water. Reclaim our most vital resource!**

BRITISH WATER supplies are in the hands of foreign owned monopoly companies who are enjoying a cash bonanza while our infrastructure crumbles. If the ridiculously high profits made by these companies in the last few years had been channelled into developing a national water grid and other infrastructure projects we would no longer be facing a water shortage.

As it stands, if the winter of 06/07 has the same low rainfall in the South East as it did last year, then by next summer much of South East England will be using

standpipes.

Severn Water, for example, has seen an 18 per cent rise in profits as complaints against the company rose by 55 per cent and it was investigated for providing false data to OFWAT. And since it acquired Thames Water in 2000, RWE (its German parent company) has extracted around £1 billion in dividends to shareholders!

**FIGHT BACK** with a Nationalise Water! badge, available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make



Two books – one on slavery and the chocolate business, the other on paramilitaries and loyalist paramilitaries – tell the same tale of government de

## Slavery, conspiracy and cover-up: the ethic

**Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics and the Ethics of Business**, by Lowell J. Satre, paperback, 308 pages, ISBN 0-8214-16626-X, Ohio University Press, 2005, £16.50.

THIS SUPERB book studies the connection between slavery in West Africa and the British, and Quaker, firm of Cadbury, particularly in the first decade of the twentieth century.

From the fifteenth century, the slave trade was the foundation of the Portuguese empire. Even in the early 1900s, Angola was still a slave state, with half its people enslaved.

The British Empire was an ally of Portugal, so it was complicit in the slavery. Portugal's islands of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, 150 miles off Africa's west coast, had 40,000 slaves producing cocoa beans which Cadbury had been buying since 1886. From 1901 to 1908, Cadbury got half its beans from the islands.

A Foreign Office official noted, "The fact of the matter is that the system is

neither more nor less than slavery but that we do not dare to say much as we might thus offend the Portuguese with whom we desire to stand well."

In the 1900s, the British Empire was trying to recruit African labour from Portuguese Africa for its gold mines in South Africa. The Foreign Office warned against the "danger of learning inconvenient facts which might oblige us to make representations to the Portuguese Govt. which we don't want to do."

### Treaties ignored

So Britain, like Portugal, ignored the treaties obliging them to act to halt the slave trade. Prime Minister Lord Salisbury ordered, "Leave it alone."

It was not, of course, the only country in Africa where the British government ignored treaties. As Joseph Hanlon from the Open University pointed out in a piece the *GUARDIAN* newspaper on 25 January, slavery carried on in the British empire for several decades after the Abolition of

Slavery Act in 1833. In 1924 it was still being practised, with government knowledge, in Sierra Leone, northern Nigeria, Gambia, Aden, Burma and Hong Kong.

In 1901, William Cadbury first heard rumours of slave labour on Sao Tomé and Príncipe. All the evidence that he later received confirmed that there was a brutal slave trade in Angola, that the labourers on the islands were forced, that the death rate was huge (often 20% a year), and that none was free ever to leave. Yet Cadbury did not boycott the products of slave labour until 1909.

The company claimed that discreet diplomacy, and continued purchase of Sao Tome's cocoa, would improve the workers' position. Their position, however, did not improve: 6,000 slaves died every year, though profits certainly increased, as did the number of slaves and the amount of cocoa exported.

Humanitarian pressure groups tried to get the British government to act in the labourers' interests. It responded with endless promises to press the Portuguese state to reform, and repeated investigations and commissions.

This all proves the folly of relying on companies, pressure groups, treaties or governments to effect improvement. Angola and the islands suffered forced labour until they won independence from Portugal in 1975.

How we have progressed since then! Such outrages are long gone. Or are they? In 2001, the *FINANCIAL TIMES* reported, "Nestle and Cadbury were accused of turning a blind eye to child slavery in the cocoa industry."

A 2002 study estimated that 284,000 children worked in West Africa's cocoa farms. Another study concluded that there were 15,000 child slaves in the Ivory Coast alone. Cadbury responded, "We were completely unaware of the allegations concerning cocoa growing in the Côte d'Ivoire." Plus ça change.

The USA spends \$8.5 billion a year on chocolate products; Britain spends £4 billion, while the children who produce the chocolate toil in poverty and slavery.



Slavery in Africa as depicted by Edward Winsor Kemble, the artist chosen by Mark Twain to illustrate *Huckleberry Finn* and other novels. Kemble, an American, was born in 1861 and died in 1933. His drawings of African slaves were taken from real life.

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## s of empire

**A Very British Jihad: Collusion, Conspiracy & Cover-Up in Northern Ireland**, by Paul Larkin, paperback, 313 pages, ISBN 1-900960-25-7, Beyond the Pale Publications, 2006, £10.99.

PAUL LARKIN, an investigative journalist, made many films for SPOTLIGHT, BBC Northern Ireland's current affairs programme. The research for these films was the raw material for this outstanding book in which he details the British state's secret collaboration with loyalist paramilitaries.

He sums up, "The compelling evidence in this book, however, is that one of the most powerful states in the world, the United Kingdom, was the primary sponsor of a covert regime of murder and terror which lasted for three decades and was demonstrably directed against one section of the community only – Irish Catholics and nationalists and their 'fellow travellers'."

He contends that MI6 was involved in many covert assassinations in the 1970s. He shows how the British state connived at the attempted coup in Northern Ireland in May 1974, and how much it had in common with other 1970s coups, in Chile, Greece and Argentina.

Thatcher personally authorised Brian Nelson's 1985 arms-smuggling, sanctions-busting trip to South Africa. Nelson, a British Army agent working in the Ulster Defence Association, also developed the UDA/Ulster Freedom Fighters alliance with South Africa's death squads. The murders at Milltown Cemetery and other atrocities were carried out with arms from South Africa. MI6 also helped British and Irish mercenaries fighting against Africa's national liberation movements.

Larkin asks about Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, "How have the DUP gotten away with it for so long? What other party and its leadership would get away with founding and supporting paramilitary loyalist armies and continually aligning itself with loyalist gunmen and killers without suffering the kind of rigorous media questioning that Sinn Fein, quite rightly, has faced?"

# 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.

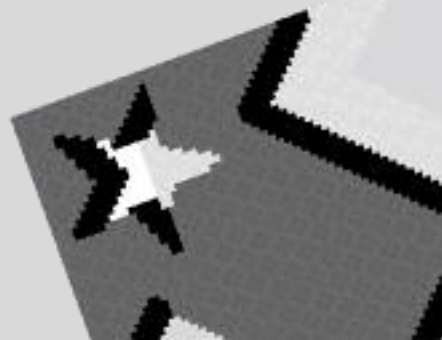
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# Back to Front – Making monsters

**‘The war has also worsened the prospects of peace and justice for the Palestinian people and strengthened the al Qaeda terrorists. Perhaps it was designed to...’**

IMPERIALISM creates monsters to destroy its enemies; the monsters then turn against their master. It is using Al-Qaeda to destabilise its economic rivals China and India. It is still protecting bin Laden and his sponsors the Pakistani and Saudi states.

And now the US state is planning to send another 21,500 troops to Iraq, in a desperate and doomed attempt to hold down the entire country. The Labour government is silent.

Bush is also ordering aggressive rules of engagement and a “tougher attitude” to Iran and Syria – US forces in late January attacked an Iranian consulate in Iraq, kidnapping five diplomats.

What Blair may think of all this matters not a bean to Bush, but Britain will take the consequences thanks to his supine cooperation. So far, as of 11 January, 3,009 US soldiers have been killed there, plus 250 other coalition soldiers, including 127 British.

US firms were awarded contracts worth \$50 billion to rebuild Iraq. Yet oil output, water, electricity, sanitation, health, education and security are all worse than before the war. US forces have also destroyed entire cities, for example Fallujah. As the US Defense Science Board boasted, “We do cities into rubble.” The US state is now imposing laws to allow US oil companies to exploit Iraq’s huge oil reserves.

The Bush administration claimed that toppling Saddam would democratise Iraq and stabilise the Middle East. Instead the invasion and occupation have been a disaster for Iraq and destabilised all the region’s countries. US General William

Odom, a former head of the National Security Agency, called the war “the greatest strategic disaster in American history”. Perhaps so, but not if your aim is indeed to destabilise the region, the better to control it.

The war has also worsened the prospects of peace and justice for the Palestinian people and strengthened the al Qaeda terrorists. Perhaps it was designed to. Imperialism has set Sunni against Shia across the Middle East, just as it earlier set Bosnian Muslims against Serbs in Yugoslavia and Protestant against Catholic in Ireland, and now sets Scottish against English in Britain.

The US state ordered the unprecedented killing of a head of state, to cover up its secrets and called it “independent Iraqi justice”. Americans were in charge throughout. US soldiers captured Saddam Hussein, the US occupiers changed Iraqi law to enable the trial to take place, American soldiers guarded him and handed him over to the lynch mob, and an American helicopter took the witnesses to the execution. Were the pictures of the lynching an accident? What better way to set Sunni against Shia? All very handy for the occupier.

Blair sent 8,000 British troops to Iraq to oust Saddam, and Brown authorised spending £5 billion so far on the war, so they too are directly complicit in the killing of Saddam Hussein.

We need our troops back home. Who else have we got to defend our borders against the terrorists, people-smugglers and drug-runners generated by the Labour government’s criminal wars against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq?

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