

WORKERS

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THE NEW BATTLE OF BRITAIN

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



Newspapers The fight to save journalism

06



Unions attacked Rulings from Luxembourg

12



Marxist thinking Rebuild Britain

15

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ Make it here

CAPITALISM'S ABSOLUTE decline is hitting Britain hardest, because Britain's capitalist class is the most in thrall to finance capital.

Banks lent recklessly. The system of regulation, set up by Brown, failed. He gave its key body, the Financial Services Authority, a constitution which says that it exists to promote (not regulate) financial services and the City.

Eighty per cent of the money that Brown has given to the banks has already gone abroad. Any money given to car manufacturers has only gone to pay off their debts, not into investing in new equipment or training. With great fanfare, Brown set up a £1 billion fund to help small businesses - how much has it paid out so far? £20 million.

Most of the world's tax havens are members of the Commonwealth, under British state influence if not control. Why not use the £255 billion in these tax havens to fund our rebuilding? But Brown prefers tax havens to industry. We need to make finance serve industry, not itself.

In March last year, the IMF estimated the world's total amount of toxic debt at \$1 trillion; in October, it revised this to \$3 trillion. Now a secret European Commission report estimates that the toxic debt held by just the banks in the EU totals £16.3 trillion.

These "impaired assets" may amount to 44 per cent of EU bank balance sheets, so government attempts to buy up or underwrite the assets could plunge the EU into even deeper crisis.

The 25 per cent fall in the pound has not led to a rise in the volume of exports or to a fall in imports. Britain's manufacturing production fell by more than 5 per cent in the last quarter of 2008, by 10.1 per cent over the whole year. We need to cut back on imports, to defend our manufacturing industries.

We can't rely on exports to save us when our markets abroad are also in steep decline. But exports are, after all, only a small share of our gross national product; they are not the driving force of the economy. So we have to expand domestic demand to sustain production: we need more people in work, at higher wages, spend more on buying British-made goods, invest here to build here.

As for unemployment, any firm sacking workers, or investing abroad, should be barred from paying out dividends.

All these problems cannot and will not be solved globally, at lush international conferences - that is to evade responsibility. Our class must solve these problems nationally, here at home, or not at all.

Make it in Britain, sell it in Britain, buy it in Britain.

Cover photo of Lindsey Oil Refinery picket © Justin Tallis/reportdigital.co.uk



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Contents – March 2009

News

Mass march by Irish workers, p3; Bang goes the poverty target, p4; Carnage in the auto industry, p5; News Analysis: The spread of bonuses, p6

03

Features

The fight for journalism, p6; Construction workers take up the challenge in the 21st-century Battle of Britain, p8; Rulings from Luxembourg that threaten our trade union organisation, p12; Series on Marxist thinking: Rebuild Britain, p15

06

Life and Soul

It's not a crime to watch football, is it?

14



Rebuilding Britain

IRELAND

ADULT ED

POVERTY

TRAINING

DEVOLUTION...

AUTO INDUSTRY

HIGHER ED

EUROBRIEFS

WHAT'S ON

NEWS ANALYSIS

Huge Dublin march

The missing two million

Bang goes the target

Apprenticeships fall

...can damage your health

Two hammer blows

Governance on the agenda

The latest from Brussels

Coming soon

The spread of bonuses

Mass march by Irish workers

SOME 150,000 Irish workers – in a country whose population is half the size of London – filled the streets of Dublin on Saturday 21 February. It was the start of a campaign by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in response to the economic crisis and was the largest show of anti-government feeling in Ireland for over 20 years.

Beginning as a protest at plans for a pension levy on the public sector, the rally drew together all elements in the country shocked at the effect of the economic crisis and despairing of their government's complacent response.

The march was led by the Dublin Fire Brigade band and other public sector workers including police and military trade unionists. Workers from other sectors turned out in force, such as those made redundant from Waterford Crystal and aviation contractor SR Technics.

Union leader Peter McLoone said Irish workers did not cause the economic crisis but were having to pay for it. ICTU has launched a 10-point plan called "There is a better, fairer way" setting out a plan for the country to tackle the crisis, including an end to the free market policies that placed Ireland in difficulty.

Far from being part of an "arc of prosperity" envisaged by Alex Salmond in 2006, Ireland is in danger of joining arc partner Iceland with a failed banking system. In the few days before the march took place, Ireland's credit rating was downgraded and reports emerged of a 10 billion euro capital outflow ahead of a report into the nationalised Allied Irish Bank.

Irish workers are beginning to recognise that this crisis is different. The traditional response of emigration will not help, and unemployment will rise.

The ICTU says that there can be no return to the former policies of little regulation and reliance on tax breaks for multinationals. Despite a good level of productivity, Irish wage levels are low (22nd out of the 30 richest countries). Further wage cuts are unlikely to bring more jobs.

General Secretary Paul Sweeney said: "And if/when we resolve the crisis there can be no return to business as usual for Corporate Ireland: for the banks, builders and Government policies that combined to bring our economy to its knees."

He went on: "This global mess was generated by privatised, deregulated and ultra-free markets. All countries, including Ireland, must now abandon this redundant economic model. However, ongoing commentary from many Irish economists demonstrates that most are still wedded to neo-classical economics, adhering faithfully to the theory of 'efficient markets'. But the world moves on. The market is not working. It was not even working when it appeared to be booming."

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

ADULT EDUCATION

The missing two million

FEWER ADULTS in England are benefiting from adult education classes. In 2003-04 more than 5.1 million adults were on courses funded by the Learning and Skills Council, but by 2006-07 this had fallen to just over 3.1 million. The figures showed a decline in adult classes across all regions of England.

As **WORKERS** went to press, campaigners were preparing for a lobby of Parliament on 25 February to protest about the cutbacks. The lobby is organised by CALL, the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

The government has shifted funding away from adult education using the specious argument that the taxpayer shouldn't be subsidising middle-class people learning holiday Spanish or flower-arranging. But according to surveys from the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) it is the poorest who are being hit really hard.

A spokesman for NIACE said the most disadvantaged adult learners were among the worst affected. Numbers of people taking qualifications at below GCSE level have halved in two years, he said.

MIGRATION

Net loss of British jobs

THE OFFICE of National Statistics revealed on 11 February that 220,000 British workers currently worked abroad in other EU member countries and that no fewer than 947,000 EU workers were working in Britain. This is a net loss of jobs here of 727,000.

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

French motor bail-out

FRANCE announced 6.5 billion euros in loans to three national car makers in a bid to save jobs. In return the companies agreed to keep factories open, maintain jobs and produce "green" cars. Other EU member states are trying to cope with the downturn using measures to help domestic workers and companies. But the European Commission is fighting to prevent this necessary turn towards protectionism in Europe.

Deficit deadlines

THE COMMISSION is challenging EU countries trying to deal with recession by increasing their budget deficit. Under the EU Stability and Growth Pact this cannot exceed 3 per cent. Six countries have breached that rule for 2008 – France, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Latvia and Malta. The Commission will soon set a deadline for reducing those deficits. Most, if not all, of the six have political difficulties making it hard for the national government to respond.

Some nerve

BARONESS Ashton, Britain's new European commissioner is no change from Lord Mandelson. She said, "We have got to be absolutely crystal clear on our views on industry, on trade, making sure that the strategy we have got in place works and holding our nerve that actually if ever there was a time we needed Europe it's probably now."

Keep away from the eurozone

BELGIAN economist Paul De Grauwe has said, "The UK will more easily manage to recover from the crisis than eurozone members such as Spain or Ireland, because it can devalue and is doing so." He said a eurozone break-up cannot be excluded: "It is possible that Spain would leave the eurozone."

Gaza: EU toes the US line

EU ENVOY Louis Michel said on 26 January that Hamas bore the "overwhelming responsibility" for the recent destruction in Gaza, and that there would be no dialogue with Hamas until it renounced violence and recognised Israel – exactly the US line. At a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands all opposed calls for an inquiry into alleged human rights violations.



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

LONDON, 16 FEBRUARY: More than 300 photographers exercise their right to take photographs outside Scotland Yard on the day section 76 of the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 became law. This updates section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which states that a person commits an offence if "he collects or makes a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism..." adding: "'record' includes a photographic or electronic record". The NUJ fears that the law will be used to stop news photographers doing legitimate work and could be used to prevent police officers being photographed at incidents. NUJ vice-president Peter Murray said: "There is a threat of photographers being criminalised just for doing their jobs."

Bang goes the poverty target

THE JOSEPH Rowntree Foundation estimates that 2.3 million children will still be in poverty in 2010, missing the government's 1.7 million target. An extra £4.2 billion a year will have to be spent on tax credits if the target is to be met. This, equivalent to an increase of £12.50 a week for each child, would push around 600,000 above the poverty line – defined as living in a family with less than 60 per cent of the average (median) income.

The report finds that there has been a sharp rise in the number of children living in poverty who have at least one parent in work. When research was last conducted five years ago, most children in poverty had parents who were unemployed. This study shows that most children living in poverty now have at least one parent in work, but they are earning so little that they cannot drag their family above the poverty line. Low-paid and casual labour is not enough to pull families out of deprivation.

The report suggests that the recession could push many further below the poverty line owing to increased unemployment. Child poverty could rise to 3.1 million by 2020, without new policies to help low-income families.

In the longer term, the report says, money needs to be spent not just on increasing benefits, but on ensuring sufficient affordable childcare is in place to allow parents to work, and on training so that parents acquire the right skills to secure stable work, with good long-term prospects.

TRAINING

Apprenticeship numbers fall

THE NUMBER of college-based apprentices finding work placements is dropping.

There is no shortage of applicants for the courses, but the scarcity of employers willing to take on apprentices means that about 25 per cent of potential trainees cannot begin their course.

The government target is 500,000 starting apprenticeships annually by 2020. Now the numbers are falling – by around

10 per cent since the same time last year.

Colleges are trying to partly address the deficit by taking on apprentices themselves as employers. College apprentices typically work in areas such as business support, IT, catering and gardening.

The deficit in apprentice employment placements means that there is a significant potential loss of funding to colleges.

Skills training through apprenticeships is vital to a viable economic future for Britain – far more important than bailing out banks.

DEVOLUTION...**...can seriously damage health**

ACCORDING to a report from the Nuffield Trust, devolution is weakening Britain's ability to influence the EU's growing hold over health policy. The negative influence of the EU on a supranational level is being met by diminished ability to assert national priorities as a result of the internal fragmentation caused by devolution.

Political conflict between ministers representing each of Britain's "nations" means, says the report's author, Paul Jervis, that devolution has "inexorably reduced Britain's ability to create a single united 'line'".

The author, a senior Research Fellow at The London School of Economics said, "There is a real risk that health policy will be made not by health policy-makers but by EU lawyers, economic ministers, or other groups that do not understand or sympathise with the specific problems in goals of health policy."

A further problem highlighted has been that many of those working in the Department of Health "lack the networks of traditional civil servants that underpin information sharing and handling interdepartmental relations". In plain English, they are not civil servants but people imported from the private sector who do not have Britain's overarching health needs at the heart of their work.

Carnage in the auto industry

THE MOTOR industry in Swindon has been dealt two hammer blows: after the abrupt sacking at BMW's Cowley plant of 850 agency workers, the town's BMW plant has enforced lay-offs, sending all staff home for seven days and another 150 jobs are expected to go permanently. The nearby Honda factory has been mothballed for four months, and 4,200 workers laid off till June, on fractional pay. The Japanese company had planned to close for two months, but has since doubled the closure period. Unite estimate that 10,000 workers in the town are directly or indirectly affected by the shut-down.

Elsewhere in the country, as *WORKERS* goes to press, an announcement was expected of the closure of another major motor plant, with 100,000 jobs at risk

Mandelson, who has left government twice in a hurry, was recalled for a third time, with a peerage, after several years in Brussels. Last year he promised a defence of manufacturing. The reality? Honda did indeed apply for help from Mandelson's department, but a bail-out, not for the Swindon plant or their bulk car production activities, but for Honda Racing, their Formula One arm.

EDUCATION**Building for the future?**

THE GOVERNMENT'S secondary school rebuilding programme, Building Schools for the Future (BSF), is in dire financial trouble. The aim is to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in England. Most existing projects depend on private investment (Private Finance Initiatives).

The BSF agency, Partnership for Schools (PFS), says it will deliver 300 buildings a year by 2011. Yet a National Audit Office report cast doubts on this claim in February this year. The cost of the programme has soared by around £10 billion to £55 billion, mostly because it has been expanded to include academies and religious schools. Just 42 new school buildings have opened so far.

PFS has already turned to the EU for help. At the end of 2008, it received £300 million from the European Investment Bank to try to bail out the scheme, on condition that the money will be spent on PFI schemes only. Now PFS has gone back

to the EU for more, with talks on more emergency funds "ongoing".

A year ago 30 banks were in talks with PFS to invest in the programme. Now there are just 12. Brown and Darling are pumping cash into the banks to bail them out – so our money is being handed to banks to persuade them to invest in a massive public works programme as a "private partner"! And any banks agreeing to invest will of course seek a decent return for shareholders – so being double funded by workers.

Tim Byles, the chief executive of PFS, has said that he's looking into a "range of measures" to rescue the programme. One of them appears to be a plan to gain access to local government pension funds, to enable contracts in process to be signed off and start building. Another measure will be to make investment "more attractive" to banks, including shortening contracts to enable quicker profits to be made.

Meanwhile, school heads and governing bodies report they are finding it hard to cope with the strain of managing a huge building project on top of running a school.

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

Thursday 5 March

Hard Times and Hard Travellin' – the story of Woody Guthrie

7.30 pm, Perth Museum & Art Gallery, George Street, Perth

A fundraising event for the Perthshire International Brigade Memorial Fund. Sung and spoken by Will Kaufman, reader in English and American Studies at the University of Central Lancashire. Tickets £5, passionariabooks@blueyonder.co.uk

Saturday 8 March

Sharia Law, Sexual Apartheid and Women's Rights

6 pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Organised by the One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain. Earlier, as part of International Women's Day, the campaign is organising a "symbolic demonstration" in Trafalgar Square, 3.30 pm to 4.30 pm. More info from www.onelawforall.org.uk.

HIGHER EDUCATION**Meeting on governance**

ON FRIDAY 6 March the University and College Union (UCU) is holding an open meeting for members from all over the country to discuss their growing concerns about university governance, democracy and the growing business influence on higher education. The meeting will take place at the University of East London Docklands campus, where there has been recent intense debate about the role of governors and especially of corporate influence.

Most of the pre-1992 universities in Britain are governed by ancient Charters and Statutes which were framed to allow academic staff to determine the nature of learning in an institution. Yet few academic staff (until now) were avid readers of these charters and statutes. What they have noticed is how many university bodies have incrementally changed their nature. Some institutions now have academic boards which no longer have academics as part of the membership!

Keynote speakers include Dr Alastair Hunter (Glasgow University, UCU President Elect) and Professor Mike Rustin (University of East London). Keep an eye out in the April edition of *WORKERS* for a report of the proceedings.

The spread of bonuses

NEWSPAPERS DAILY report the banking employers' bonus payments, now bankrolled by the taxpayer, and everywhere there is outrage, possibly tinged with envy in the case of some politicians at least.

The Royal Bank of Scotland, 68 per cent government owned, has lost £28 billion in bad loans. It got £20 billion from the taxpayer, so it is planning a £950 million bonuses payout. It paid its chairman £4.2 million in 2007, plus a bonus of £2.8 million. Yet it is trying to sack 2,300 workers.

Lloyds Banking Group got £17 billion from the government, and is 43 per cent government-owned. It is planning to pay its executives bonuses in the form of shares, not cash. Its chief executive Eric Daniels gets £1 million basic salary plus £1.79 million in bonuses. He said recently, "The recipients of bonuses that I am referring to are people like you and me. They have relatively modest salaries."

Conflicts of interest

HBOS, having lost £11 billion, got £11 billion from the taxpayer. Its chief executive was paid £1.9 million in 2007. Its former chairman got £821,000, plus a £600,000 golden goodbye. KPMG was HBOS's auditor, yet the Financial Services Authority commissioned KPMG to scrutinise claims about bad practices at HBOS, an obvious conflict of interest. Gordon Brown aided Lloyds' disastrous takeover of HBOS by agreeing to waive competition rules.

Barclays gave its investment unit partners £642 million over the last 18 months, and is planning to give its directors another £600 million in bonuses.

Brown has pledged to 'sweep away the bonus culture of the past' – but not just yet. The government's review into City bonuses will not be finished until the end of the year, so it cannot affect the bonuses paid for this year, or most likely those for next year!

In fact, giving the banks so much notice means that they will be able to write bonuses into contracts, making it illegal not to pay the bonuses. City lawyers are already claiming that withholding bankers' bonuses would be illegal, 'a violation of these people's human rights'. So the whole political game with bonuses is a charade.

It isn't just greed that we are up against, but shameless, habitual and mostly perfectly legal robbery. We can't take over the banks as they are, as some suggest, but need to build up the kind of banking services we require from scratch.

With the owners driving down costs, journalists are fighting for jobs, pay and quality...

The fight for journalism

NEWSPAPER OFFICES across Britain are in uproar as proprietors attempt to force through job cuts and pay freezes. Unlike some industries, publishing is not broke, and most of the employers trying to save on labour costs are making profits that other capitalists would give their right arms for.

But newspaper publishing is an industry used to making vast profits – returns of more than 20 per cent on turnover are not unusual – and the employers clearly want to ensure that dividends will stay healthy.

It's partly the knowledge that the cuts don't have to be made that is spurring members of the National Union of Journalists in local, regional and national newspapers to action in an unprecedented wave of resistance.

As WORKERS went to press, journalists at the YORKSHIRE POST and YORKSHIRE EVENING POST, owned by Johnston Press, were taking strike action, there were active ballots for industrial action at business publisher Reed Business Information, and votes for ballots at the FINANCIAL TIMES and the INDEPENDENT.

The striking YORKSHIRE POST journalists have set up a blog, and supporters have formed a Facebook group, Save Leeds' Local Newspapers, that has already notched up 1,000 members. High-profile local support has come from Yorkshire playwright Alan Ayckbourn. The company is trying to force through redundancies in the photographic section and elsewhere, and to impose a pay freeze.

"The picketing will continue over the weekend to demonstrate the chapel's determination to stop compulsory redundancies and protect the papers from being run into the ground," said NUJ Northern Regional Organiser Chris Morley.

Turning laws on their heads

In local newspapers, journalists at Newsquest York took action earlier in February, The chapel (office branch) there is facing job cuts, and has sought to turn the anti-union laws on their head by giving notice of industrial action on every weekday between now and 30 March. Jenny Lennox, NUJ Assistant Organiser, said: "By giving notice of discontinuous industrial action, starting afresh every day at noon, the chapel has the option of meeting whenever they feel the need to."

And the chapel at Yattenden-owned Staffordshire Newspapers has forced management to withdraw plans for compulsory redundancies. The NUJ chapel at Johnston Press-owned Derry Journal was also due to ballot over redundancies.

A running theme throughout all the disputes is the threat to journalistic standards and service to communities posed by proprietors' greed. "We have no faith whatsoever in Newsquest's commitment to quality journalism, nor its ability to deliver it," said the Newsquest York chapel. In publishing, as elsewhere, profitable companies are deepening the recession by seeking to drive down costs and drive up profits.

"Never waste a crisis," Rupert Murdoch's son James, who is running News Corporation, told newspaper executives recently. For them, as for countless other capitalists, the recession is an opportunity – to boost profits and dividends and depress costs.

Operating profits at Johnson Press are 29 per cent and at Trinity Mirror 19 per cent, according to an NUJ briefing paper. Trinity Mirror axed 1,200 jobs last year and closed 44 titles.

Newsquest's US parent company, Gannet, said in January that it would hold its dividend at 40 cents a share: "This is the same level it has paid since October 2007, which was a 29 per cent hike on what was already its highest ever dividend rate," points out the NUJ.

If action goes ahead at Reed Business Publishing, which employs hundreds of journalists, it will be the first for almost 20 years. The chapel was



Photo: Andrew Wiard/ www.reportphotos.com

A packed meeting during the NUJ Jobs Summit discusses how to respond to the employers' attacks.

“At the heart of this battle is a fight, not only for jobs, but for quality journalism...”

derecognised in 1992, but has gained membership and regained recognition and bargaining rights. The company is seeking compulsory redundancies, but is also trying to force through the merger of production desks on different specialist titles – so that instead of each magazine having a team of subeditors and designers who understand it, work will be pooled, with a consequent loss not only of jobs but of quality.

At the FINANCIAL TIMES, a meeting of more than 130 members earlier in February called for a ballot on industrial action over plans for three compulsory redundancies on top of cuts already made. Barry Fitzpatrick, NUJ Head of Publishing, said: “Quite simply, management has to recognise that the need for compulsory cutbacks has now been eliminated. There is no justification for forcing people out of the door.”

Management at the GUARDIAN has announced it intends to freeze wages, sparking the NUJ to declare that it must negotiate. At the INDEPENDENT, staff are balloting for action over threats of compulsory redundancies.

The response to the employers' offensive has exceeded expectations. A Jobs Summit on 24 January due to be held at the NUJ's head office in London had to be moved to a larger location to accommodate the 150 members who turned up on a Saturday to discuss how to proceed.

At the summit, NUJ President James Doherty said, “At the heart of this battle is a fight, not only for jobs, but for quality journalism and the integral part it plays in the health of our democracy and in our communities.”

Almost two decades of excessive profiteering, sales and mergers driven by the voracious demands of shareholders has led to thousands of journalists losing their jobs and to the closure of hundreds of titles, said Doherty. “However, today we are here to send a message that our industry is not dead.”

Nick Davies, author of FLAT EARTH NEWS, said, “The big lie you find all over the world from media corporations is that they can cut staffing and resources without damaging the quality news they produce.

They say the internet is the problem and the credit crunch has made it worse, but they have already ransacked the newsrooms for profit.”

Media companies, said NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear, “still make profits and have the cash to give executives big pay-offs and pensions. If NUJ members stick together, fight hard, and create a national debate on the importance of journalism in a democracy we can change things.”

It's no surprise that the summit included discussion of forms of media ownership. “The appetite for local, regional, national and international news has not died, if anything it has increased – but the business model which values an inflated bottom line, rather than quality journalism, is dead,” said Nick Davies. But a hackneyed call for “nationalisation under workers' control” was dismissed. Clearly, journalists intend to think more deeply about how their industry can survive and produce quality journalism rather than reproduce press releases.

There are – or should be – no illusions about the battle ahead. “Make no mistake,” said Doherty, “we are in a war – and we are not sure how long it will last – or the number of casualties we'll suffer along the way.” But the determination to fight and to win is growing.

At the end of January construction workers walked out of Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) in protest at the company's response to the free movement of labour so beloved of the government.

Construction workers take up the challenge



Photo © Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

Staythorpe power station workers tell Alstom to give them access to jobs.

ON 28 JANUARY engineering construction workers at Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) ignited the spark that is the 21st century Battle for Britain. French multinational Total, building new plant at its refinery at Immingham in North Lincolnshire, had appointed the US company Jacobs as main contractor. Jacobs in turn had removed the sub-contractor Shaws and appointed IREM – Italian/Sicilian – to take on the sub-contract.

The dispute at LOR that followed was settled, winning a commitment from IREM that half the jobs will be offered to local labour, and this job is due to finish in a few months' time. But the whole issue of the use of foreign labour continues, now open, now hidden.

At the heart of this struggle is the

attempt to destroy the last remaining national agreement in construction in Britain with foreign contractors using foreign labour to build new power stations and other plant in Britain that come under the terms of the NAECI, the "Blue Book".

Alstom, another French multinational, is the main contractor at Staythorpe power station near Newark in Nottinghamshire and also on the Isle of Grain in Kent and (reported in Workers in November 2008) at Langage near Plymouth. All these sites have sub-contractors refusing to employ UK labour.

Total said things such as IREM has the "specialist skills" – but they never said what those were because British workers have them and are currently out of work. It said IREM is paying the same rate –

maybe, but even that's in dispute and it's certainly not paying the other aspects of the Blue Book with regards to accommodation or the ability to go home once a month and have it paid for.

At Staythorpe, Alstom claims two-thirds of the workforce are from the UK. Maybe, but Alstom is being disingenuous: it is referring to the civils not the skilled engineering construction workers. The dispute has raised issues that have gone well beyond the immediate.

The LOR battle began by quoting back Brown's slogan of 'British Jobs for British Workers (BJ4BW)'. Brown, of course, used it in an attempt to curry favour during his populist "Britishness" phase when first assuming the role of PM.

But the construction workers' use of

Oil Refinery in Lincolnshire and signalled a seismic shift in employers and politicians, right and left...

e in the 21st-century Battle of Britain

BJ4BW captured the imagination of workers the length and breadth of Britain well beyond the industry itself, in a way not seen since the 84/85 miners' strike. It roused workers throughout Europe and indeed the world, and sparked sympathy walkouts across the industry in Britain. Why? Because it is right!

Enough is enough

These were not spontaneous (without thought) walkouts – the issue has been simmering for years. Workers in the industry have been becoming increasingly concerned and angry. Staythorpe became the focus last October, the Isle of Grain became engaged in December. At LOR in January enough became enough.

The ultra left, along with the media and government, immediately began wittering about its potential to be latched onto by the far right odious BNP, as if honest British workers cannot distinguish between a bigoted xenophobic anti-worker approach and the defence of ourselves and where we live. (One wonders how fascism during WW2 was ever defeated!).

British people are “allowed” to cheer and hoorah for the Olympic team or any other sporting event but when it comes to work, our own future or our ability to put food on our own tables it is somehow “racist” to say no! Where do we draw the line? This is a measure of the confusion that exists within our class.

The ultra left and global capital share the same demand even if they express opposite reasons for doing so – both demand no borders and unfettered migration. The logical extension is that the British working class should accept the EU diktat (for we have never been asked) that anyone in the EU (and beyond) can come and live/work here. Millions have the “right” to do so.

That so-called “socialists” accept this is at best misguided and at worst collaborating with the destruction of any semblance of existing class organisation. When capital demands the destruction of the nation state, then the demand for workers nationalism and sovereignty becomes revolutionary. Capitalists know

Letter from Lincolnshire

A WORKERS reader who was recently with the striking oil refinery workers in Lincolnshire has sent the following report.

Back in 1969-70 I worked on the Lindsey Oil Refinery site as a JCB driver. The icy winds howled in from the River Humber, just as they did on Wednesday 4th February last as I gave out WORKERS leaflets to the striking contractors. I was glad the CPBML was showing them support and opposing mass migration.

When we built the first phase of that refinery a good friend of mine was site convenor, a pipe fitter. The main contractor, Lummus (US company, like the present one, Jacobs) offered him all kinds of bribes to get him to sell out, to no avail. He was a good cartoonist, so they asked him to draw safety cartoons in a nice warm office, or would he like to take charge of a contract in South America maybe? The convenor stayed with the lads, fitting pipes in that Arctic blast.

The accommodation barge occupied by the imported workers is moored in Grimsby's old fish dock, now disused. It

was Hattersley and Callaghan, incidentally, who ruined the fishing industry by trying to bully Iceland. There's not much new about “New Labour”. Refusing Iceland's generous offer of 70,000 tons of fish a year, they sent in the navy. After a few weeks of this flag-wagging stupidity, Iceland threatened to withdraw from NATO and to expel the USAF from Keflavik. On US orders, Britain gave in. “Can we still have the 70,000 ton catch per year?” asked Callaghan. “You can catch nothing,” came the reply.

Grimsby is now a very depressed town. The engineers at Total-Fina's Lindsey refinery have returned to work after winning 100 new jobs. “We gave them something to think about,” said one fitter.

The leftover leaflets I pushed through doors in Scunthorpe, another North Lincolnshire town under pressure from abroad. Indian steel baron Ratan Tata demands wage cuts and de-manning. In 1967 the giant Scunthorpe steelworks was nationalised to bail out United Steel before being modernised and re-privatised. We should take it back.

this. It is our side that lacks that clarity.

Not so long ago it was commonly accepted that if workers, even if unemployed, accepted lower wages and took the jobs of those fighting to improve their lot, they were described as “scabs”, the lowest of the low. It was never a question of colour or nationality – simply class relations and whose side you were on. Now, because the employers use mass migration/importation of labour, we are cluttered with notions of “they are only trying to put food on the table”, “it's not their fault”, “what's wrong with someone trying to better themselves?”, and so on. Nothing at all, so long as it isn't at your or my or our/their own country's expense!

Make no mistake, this dispute has not “gone away” simply because LOR was

settled and it has dropped out of the news headlines. Far from it – struggle will ebb and flow, and that is natural. The LOR dispute has unleashed the class, in general, to areas that it has been concerned about for some time.

But the nature of the enemy is underestimated and has been ignored for too long. So it is no surprise that there are difficulties. As a result of the struggle so far, engineering construction workers, while experiencing a leap in understanding, have made demands that show a lack of clarity of the forces ranged against us. Social democracy retains its grip, but it is loosening.

Continued on page 11

Reg Birch:

engineer, trade unionist, communist

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Will Podmore

Workers take charge at Lindsey Oil Refinery

This is the text of a WORKERS leaflet distributed at Lindsey during the dispute.

It has started, and not before time. Workers across the country are on the move. Construction, oil and energy workers in Grangemouth, Milford Haven, Aberthaw, Warrington, Southampton, Teesside, Darlington and elsewhere are walking out of their workplaces in support of Lindsey Oil Refinery construction workers in Lincolnshire.

Reacting furiously against foreign employers refusing to employ British labour, with jobs being given to workers from Italy (part of a pattern that has been building up – Staythorpe, Isle of Grain and others), they have decided to take charge of the situation.

Placards saying “British jobs for British workers” and “New Labour means migrant labour” are 100% right. Those workers have been constantly told – by “left” and “right” alike – that migrant labour is good for Britain. Now, in an explosion of anger channelled through organisation, they are rebutting this lie.

The “free” movement of labour brings benefits only capitalism.

While capitalism appeared to be



labour here. Now that western economies are crashing, it is from those EU member countries that cheaper skilled workers will be imported to undercut British workers – if we allow it.

Let us be clear, “British workers” means all those, of whatever origin, living permanently in Britain and living by selling their labour power.

The first tranche of Italian workers have arrived and are living in barges moored at Grimsby docks. Some of them have been filmed shouting abuse at the striking Lindsey workers. They should know better – why aren’t they fighting for jobs in their own countries?

Brown’s famous phrase when he

booming, it stole workers from poorer economies who were needed in those countries – a reverse colonialism – to provide a pool of cheap, unorganised

became prime minister, now being quoted by the construction workers, actually meant “British jobs for European workers”. Government posturing about a new “tough” stance on immigration is utterly bogus. EU rules forbid restraints on competition – this means that European workers cannot be “discriminated against” for jobs here. We must leave the EU if there is to be a future for Britain. Until we do, their rules can be ignored.

There will be much agonising over the strikers’ slogans. But they are right. Workers’ nationalism is misunderstood as racist by those who either fail to understand capitalism’s tactics in the war on workers, or who connive in this war. And the unity across the whole country, Scotland, England, Wales, demonstrates at a stroke the wrongness of attempts to split us into separate countries as if workers’ interests are different.

Throughout the country, British workers have allowed themselves to be displaced by imported labour. The construction workers have begun to show what must be done. Now every worker must take up the fight.

Out of the EU! Let’s plan our own future!

Continued from page 9

This is evidenced by a general call for the Labour government to understand their plight, and if they only did, they would do something in the interests of Britain and the people who put them into government. That the EU and “free” movement of labour isn’t really the problem, it’s just some nasty greedy foreign employers taking advantage. Then there is the fear that they may be tarnished as racist, thus the demand is for British workers only to be given a “fair crack of the whip”. That we need control is becoming ever clearer – admitting it is the start of the solution.

The calls for the unions, Unite and GMB, to organise for “official” strike action ignore that fact that British and EU laws

“That we need control is becoming ever clearer...”

say it’s not legal without a “trade dispute” and that ACAS has confirmed the employers did not act “illegally”. (Trade unions were once illegal!)

“So what” say some – the NUM and Scargill did it. But the NUM was a single-industry union with 200,000 members. Unite and GMB are now general unions with around 2.5 million members covering some 25 sectors, and they aren’t all on board. Despite the rightness of the cause the unions will not endanger the whole

organisation at this point in time.

It is becoming a race against time to raise our understanding of where we are. The employers’ organisation, the ECIA, has upped the ante by raising the spectre of legal action. Reckless angry calls for all-out action are being countered with the understanding that this is going to be a long fight and if we are serious about winning, then the tactics we employ must be guerrilla in nature. There is also a growing understanding that this is a fight for a future for the industry itself within Britain, and win we must.

We are told that globalisation is just the way it is. That protectionism is wrong and positively dangerous (indeed it is - for capital). That we have to accept the

Continued on page 12

Even the TUC describes a series of judgements on workers' rights since the Thatcher anti-

Rulings from Luxembourg that

Continued from page 11

demise of the idea of the nation state. That whatever capital decides we must accept it, even if it means our own destruction. How bizarre is that?

When the enemy says these things, might it not be right to advance the concept of workers' nationalism in every country, which would actually deny the ability of global capital to operate? It has to be far simpler than trying to create a global union – with what as an end game? Being able to take on the employers on a more equal footing? Surely that simply means they are still in control?

Imagine a world where workers, in control, refused to go to war against each other and instead traded on an equal footing, recognising that how we produce goods/grow food must be done in a sustainable way and must be useful. Now that is a future worth fighting for.



The poster produced last year by www.bearfacts.co.uk and used in the Lindsey and Staythorpe struggles. The website is the place to go for discussion about contract labour.

AS INDUSTRIAL workers in the oil and other industries show signs of life and reveal that the emperor has got no clothes, even using the unmentionable M-word, migration, the malign effect of European Union membership and legislation is oh-so-slowly becoming apparent to even some of its closest adherents.

Lawyers have been among those most in favour of continuing EU membership and extending of EU practice in British law, such as the application of the social chapter (remember that?). The involvement of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the regulation of labour relations, not to mention the plethora of equalities legislation emanating from Brussels, Strasbourg and The Hague, have all been warmly welcomed.

Now even some of these lawyers are beginning to see the light which has been shining on class-conscious members of the trade union movement for many years. Four judgements of the European Court of Justice over the last twelve months have been described by many, now even (even!!) by the TUC, "as the greatest attack on workers rights since the Thatcher anti union laws of the 1980s".

So workers had better get to grips with the judgements, and their consequences. The four judgements concerned are known as Viking, Laval, Ruffert and Luxembourg. They are of course complex to understand and WORKERS will not attempt to translate legalese into language that can be readily understood.

However, the main breadth of the attack represented by these judgements must be grasped and action taken.

The first thing to say is, of course, that these are not laws. They are judgements of the ECJ, and so will be seen as case law, in other words, the same as passing legislation in the European parliament, unless altered.

This carries with it all the negative aspects of law making in Britain, where the work of legislators, allegedly elected in order to make law, can readily and easily be overturned by entirely unelected members of the judiciary who can completely re-draw the legal landscape in

a way that nobody ever voted for.

This has been happening in Britain for several centuries – judge-made law preceded parliamentary law by hundreds of years – and it was always claimed that one of the benefits of European Union legislative mechanisms was that the law-making process arrived from elected parliamentarians in the European Parliament (hardly a democratic body) rather than unelected judges in the Hague.

Now this can be seen to be untrue, and case law of a deeply reactionary nature (when is it ever progressive?) is now going to pose serious threats to workers throughout Europe.

At the heart of these judgements lies that central attack on workers and workers' rights represented by economic migration. To quote Hannah Reed, senior employment rights officer of the TUC, for the first time these ECJ rulings create a "hierarchy of rights" in which individual rights and rights of the employer are clearly separated and placed above collective rights of workers joined in trade unions.

Restricting the right to strike

She has pointed out that the combined effect of these judgements restricts the so-called right to strike in cases where transnational working is involved, and also severely limits the ability of member states to impose any kind of labour regulation which would benefit migrant workers. The judgements also indicate that industrial action "needs to be proportionate" and as a "last resort".

Any trade unionist will tell you that industrial action is always both of these things; it is the employer's action which prompted the industrial action, which can be disproportionate and often used in first resort.

Essentially, the judgements prevent member states paying rates of pay higher than the minimum wage levels in the country from which a worker has been posted. For example, if a posted worker comes from Poland to Britain where the minimum wage is higher than that in Poland, then in effect Britain could not

ents from the European Court of Justice as “the greatest attack on union laws”. So workers had better get to grips with them...

at threaten our trade union organisation



The European Court of Justice building in Luxembourg

Photo: Anders Gardebring

“These four judgements mark a neat circle from Taff Vale...”

impose minimum wage rates on Polish workers at the British level. In other words Polish workers would have to work at the Polish minimum wage in Britain.

Whether this will have the effect of turning around hundreds of thousands of Poles to go back and work in their economy is a moot point, but if that doesn't happen millions of British workers will find themselves in competition with Polish and other migrant workers not just employed at the British national minimum wage, but employed at the minimum wage (if there is one) in the countries from which they originate.

If this isn't bad enough, the judgements also specify, almost fascistically, that unions cannot take industrial action in order to improve

conditions of migrant workers in order to bring up wage rates to those in the host country. This is such serious legislation that it has shocked to a state of wakefulness even the TUC and employment rights lawyers whose ears generally do prick up at the mention of migrant workers.

Hannah Reed describes this “as the biggest threat to trade unions in a generation”. But what is the TUC's response? Again, to quote Reed, “of course it's a big ask to get twenty-seven member states to sign up to a social progress clause, but that's what we must do. We want a balance between business and the collective rights of workers.”

Dream on. Such wishful thinking has got us into this dangerous state in the first place. The only remedy that the EU deigns to allow to these draconian measures is that we place pressure on our member states – all twenty-seven – to sign up to this nebulous “social progress clause” to undo, eventually, the effects of the judgements of these unelected judges.

Taking a slightly broader view, Professor Keith Ewing, well known in the trade union world as an employment rights specialist, describes these judgements as “as big as Taff Vale”, but “not treated with the same degree of urgency by British unions”.

The Taff Vale judgement in 1905 meant that trade unions could be sued by employers for loss of profit following from strike action (which was and is of course the whole point of a strike). Overturning Taff Vale exercised the labour movement for decades and led to the formation of the parliamentary Labour Party.

These four judgements mark a neat circle from Taff Vale and place us back where we were. After a century of uncharacteristic progress within a nation state over which British workers exercised an increasing degree of control, we are now back where we were 100 years ago, facing not just one government but twenty-seven.

We will abide by these judgements at our peril.

They dream up draconian laws, then give them moralistic titles. Crime Reduction Act 2006. But the result is severe restrictions on

It's not a crime to watch football, is it?

OCCASIONALLY THE state reacts dramatically against the rights of the people, bringing in the police or army against strikers, perhaps, or enacting openly repressive laws. But usually the process is more incremental, a gradual whittling away of rights and customs won by working people over generations, as in Britain today. Local councils, supposedly the elected representatives of the people, have used anti-terror legislation to spy on their electorate, for example.

When such cases are brought into wider public view, it is claimed this was never the intention of the legislation. Nonetheless, the legislation remains unamended on the statute books ready to be used as the state sees fit.

The British state tends to work so that it can either deny or express regret about what it is doing. And always it is in the public interest, of course. Take a well-publicised social phenomenon like binge drinking and the terror it brings to the streets. The resulting moral panic enabled the government to pass the Violent Crime Reduction Act in 2006. A reasonable response to public concern? Setting aside the detail that people's stoked-up concern is rarely justified by personal experience, consider just how that law is being used.

Control

Section 27 of the Act allows police to move someone from a specified area for 48 hours. The stated aim is to enable the control of small numbers of people misbehaving under the influence of alcohol outside, say, a nightclub. But police are now using Section 27 against football supporters, some of them just standing outside a pub not having had a drink.

There is no need for an offence to have been committed or even an immediate likelihood of one. The police are not required to have any evidence, merely their own suspicion. Essentially, they can then order an individual to vacate the locality and go home. For night club revellers this is a taxi ride, for an away football supporter it could be hundreds of miles. There is no compensation for unused match tickets or the wasted cost



Fans at Old Trafford: beware the new-found powers of the police.

Photo: Workers

of travel.

What action can an individual take if subjected to a Section 27 order? Essentially nothing! Refusal to comply can lead to arrest, so although no crime has been committed the person becomes a de facto criminal. As always, the official explanation centres on the public good, the prevention of football-related violence.

How would people feel generally if they were prevented from entering their local shopping centre under threat of arrest on the grounds that they might, just might, become involved with shoplifting? If it becomes accepted that a demonised group, like football supporters/hooligans, can be treated this way then why not political demonstrators?

Workers gathering in support of others taking industrial action might well be deemed drunken sots liable to outbursts of violence and thereby subject to Section

27 orders before the picket could take place. Similarly, those well known inebriates, communists and anti-war protesters, could come under the baleful eye of the Rechabite constabulary and be sent on their way, or be arrested should they dare contest the ruling.

The contest between the power of the state and the rights of the people in Britain has a long history. Royal authority was challenged initially by Magna Carta and then given effective limits by the Forest Charter. Both documents embody elements of traditional local laws and customs. These were always important to ordinary people, being rights and freedoms referred to throughout the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. While the industrial revolution formed the circumstances for the rising working class movement, these traditional rights and freedoms formed the political roots.

such as the Violent
in our freedoms...

Organised working class politics were the expression of ideas going back beyond the thirteenth century given material form by the economic circumstances of emerging industrial capitalism.

This is a question of democracy. The freedom to attend football matches, or demonstrations, is no trivial matter. If the agencies of the state can on a whim prevent people going about their lawful business, and even arrest them should they fail to acquiesce, then there is no democracy no matter how often elections are held.

Democracy in Britain is not the gift of rulers nor a privilege granted to the working class somewhat grudgingly by their "masters" through nineteenth and twentieth century parliamentary reform acts. There is a popular confusion that associates suffrage with democracy. Of course voting can be a democratic instrument, but it is not a guarantee that democracy exists. Totalitarian systems often make use of plebiscites, as did the Nazis for instance who also used enabling laws, without being in any real sense democratic.

Democracy and history

How democracy is manifested in a particular country will reflect the customs, traditions and the whole history of political expectation and aspirations. The realisation of democracy is a dynamic process, or at least it should be if it is to be achieved. In Britain today that process is in dire need of reinvigoration.

Section 27 and legislation like it is dangerous. It is the result of the capitalist media working in cahoots with the state to create a moral panic and then legislate in such a way that the powers assumed are far more wide ranging than the original "problem" would suggest. The use of those powers can then be casually exercised in wider and wider contexts until they become commonplace and people have not realised another freedom has gone. It is important to recognise that binge drinking and football hooliganism are not the issue here; it is our liberty which is at stake.

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REBUILD BRITAIN

For decades, our Party has been saying, 'Rebuild Britain'. Under a capitalism in absolute decline, the capitalist class has been set on destroying industry as a way to destroy the British working class.

Britain needs a national plan for becoming self-reliant in our most important manufacturing needs. What do we need?

We must retain the skills and production bases that we still have, because modern manufacturing industries need lots of production experience and capital. We need to bypass the banks and invest and lend directly into manufacturing industry, transport and services. We must invest in science, R&D and in educating more people in the most advanced skills, particularly production engineering.

We need to make the goods that people need – cars, planes, trains and ships, earth-moving and building equipment, power-generation plant, pharmaceuticals, household appliances, machine tools, electronics, textiles, steel, and telecommunications systems.

We have to boost the nation's savings and channel more of them into planned industrial investment. So we need to get our hands on our own money. Pensions are deferred wages, and pension funds alone could rebuild British industry. We could also use the £255 billion that should have been paid in tax, which is hidden in tax havens. We need to bring back controls on the export of capital and ensure that it is invested here.

We could charge those borrowing for vital industrial investment at lower interest rates than for ordinary borrowers. We need to control the money markets, control imports through state trading agreements, and protect our home market, to give our reborn industries time to grow.

We need to take charge of energy, take control away from the companies that are bleeding householders dry, plan – without EU restrictions – for a future without blackouts and rebuild our coal, oil and gas systems. We need to launch a programme of public housing, buy up from developers and buy-to-let speculators at the bottom of the market, offer state mortgages and house the people.

We need to reclaim our waters for fishing and end the misuse of our farm land. We need to plan investment in agriculture to help us to grow what we need, with greater self-sufficiency in food, and to invest in local industries and in rural infrastructure - transport, Post Offices, local bank branches, schools, medical practices and libraries.

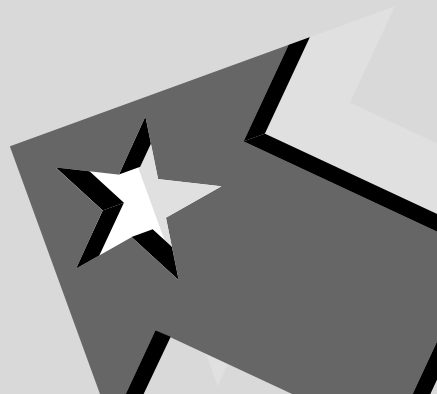
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Back to Front – Industry, not the euro

‘The recent visit by the Chinese Prime Minister was not a social call – it was more an examination of the British menu and whether Brown does home delivery...’

IN THE global capitalist crisis we are instructed that the main threat to recovery is protectionism and nationalism. Running scared, the capitalist class and their spokesmen are keen to emphasise the global, fearing that a national line from the working class will overwhelm them.

Some have seized the opportunity to again advocate joining the euro. But Britain’s current position would have been far worse had we joined it. We would have been unable to adjust our currency to reflect our actual trading position with the rest of the world. The political and economic consequences of euro emasculation are being felt in several states pegged to the Bundesbank bond yield. Their experience is being likened to a “prison of nations” with Greece, Ireland, Spain, Italy and the Baltic area all suffering.

The British working class, in keeping Britain out, have been absolutely clear, and it is this national resilience that has made our enemy so fearful of us. This does not suggest that we should be self congratulatory. Our opponents’ extreme policy of trying to destroy British workers during 30-plus years of de-industrialisation has meant that we are restricted in our ability to trade away our deficit because we are not producing enough.

So to liken our condition to that of Japan’s ongoing deflationary experience since the early 1990s is wrong. Japan has had a balance of trade surplus throughout this time together with a high personal savings ratio – all features of having a significant manufacturing base.

Britain’s problems are unique to us and it is encouraging that the reactionary spirit of ’79 and the stupid faith in the workings of the market have all but disappeared. It is also apparent that the government is making up policy on the hoof.

We hear that this is “no time for a

novice” – well, no kind of bank legislation can eliminate either the overproduction promoted by credit or the general inflation of prices that goes with it. Where the continuity of production rests solely on credit, Marx and Engels observed that “The entire artificial system of forced expansion of the reproduction process cannot, of course, be remedied by having some bank, like the Bank of England, give to all the swindlers the deficient capital by means of its paper and having it buy up all the depreciated commodities at their old nominal values” (CAPITAL Vol. III, 1894).

Brown and his chums are not just proposing that our taxes are used to prop up a corrupt banking system that has £4.5 trillion of foreign liabilities. They will also be negotiating with prospective foreign governments and individuals who are prepared to buy British government debt during the series of Gilt auctions planned for the coming period.

What secret terms will Brown grant in return for the loans? What if prospective purchasers of UK Gilts withdraw or wait until the screw is tightened? For example, the Post Office is about to be hawked around the market as a prospective bargaining chip to any foreign company whose own government is prepared to offer a loan by purchasing UK Gilts.

The recent visit by the Chinese Prime Minister was not a social call – it was more an examination of the British menu and whether Brown does home delivery.

Normally around mid March the Budget would be announced but this year it has been put back until 22 April (the latest ever date for a budget) which is another sign of desperation.

It is industry that we want in our country but capitalism has become an obstacle to getting it. Understanding that is the key to getting out of this mess.

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