

# WORKERS

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## WHICH WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS?



**Construction** Lessons from a picket line

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# WORKERS

## “ Something rotten in No. 10

THERE'S a nasty smell hanging about this government, the smell of dictatorship. One might almost say of fascism, but they lack the uniform and most importantly the strength to go that far, yet.

The evidence is all around.

You can see it in the academies programme, the pet project of “Lord” Adonis. Governing bodies of schools threatened with being turned into academies (where parents and the local community will have no say in how the schools are run) are told that if they kick up a fuss, they will be taken over right away.

The old Tory programme of forcing schools out of local control through grant-maintained status looks tame by comparison: it did give parents a vote in the process. Now, only one vote counts – normally that of a minister, sometimes that of a mayor (most councillors have no say in how their “cabinets” work).

You can see it in the outrage that greeted David Cameron's attack in the middle of October on Gordon Brown's handling of the economy. And goodness, isn't there a lot to criticise! But from the reaction of Labour MPs, you'd think it was high treason even to express a negative opinion about the government in the middle of a crisis.

For comparison, go to your library (should it still be there) and dig out a copy of Hansard, say around 1940, and look at the debates then

in Parliament then about the conduct of a real life-and-death struggle, World War Two. Not only did ministers actually account for debacles, MPs also condemned them, at one stage calling (successfully, as it turned out) for the resignation of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

You can see it, too, in the petulant way in which the government acknowledged reality in the face of a crushing Lords vote against extending internment – sorry, the time limit for investigating suspects without bringing them before a court – to 42 days, the longest, by far, in an industrialised country.

You can see it, increasingly, in all aspects of public life. The indignant huffing when journalists ask difficult questions. The cavalier way in which Brown has shovelled hundreds of billions of pounds of our money into the welcoming maws of clueless bankers with no discussion – even succeeding in making the US Congress look like the acme of democracy, which is no mean feat. The helter-skelter privatisation of chunks of the NHS. And most importantly in its draconian anti-union laws.

Workers need to take note. Petitions, leaflets, all the old ways of mobilising without taking industrial action, will work less and less. It's going to have to be back to basics, to struggle and organisation where the power lies: at work, where profit is produced.



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**SATS****TRADE DEFICIT****CABINET****ACADEMIES****LIBRARIES****TEACHERS****UNIVERSITIES****CONSTRUCTION****WHAT'S ON****EUROTRASH**

Government fails the test

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## Government fails the test

THE HATED SATs tests taken by 14-year-olds in England every year are to be scrapped – with immediate effect. So announced Ed Balls, the Schools Secretary, on 15 October.

There's been jubilation in classrooms and homes throughout the country. Margaret Morrissey, of parents group Parents Outloud, described the move as the "first sensible thing" Balls had done. Christine Blower of the NUT said, "Now I would like him to understand that the whole testing system needs fundamental change."

The NASUWT said the decision would provoke a "deep collective sigh of relief" in secondary schools, while the National College for School Leadership described it as a "victory for professionalism".

Balls commented that the decision to stop these tests with immediate effect was not a U-turn. Could this be the same minister who has repeatedly defended SATs as the cornerstone and public face of schools' accountability? One week these tests were on and schools were structuring a whole year's teaching and learning around them. The next week they were off.

Teachers have also long argued that the use of SATs results to produce school league tables did not help improve schools and was highly damaging. A report earlier this year – part of a two-year inquiry led by Cambridge University – found that English primary school children were subjected to more tests than in any other country.

So has the government finally listened and actually acted in the interests of working people? Or has it been forced into a U-turn by the failure of "market forces"?

In the past, SATs were organised by Edexcel, one of three main exam boards in England, but it lost the contract to ETS – a US-based company – last year. Disaster followed. The SATs results for 11- and 14-year-olds should have been sent to all schools by the start of July. But a series of blunders by the firm resulted in many schools still without pupils' scores by September. Try explaining that to a stressed 14-year-old!

Errors included delays in training markers and faults to an on-line results system. Some pupils were marked as "absent" despite sitting the tests in May. Markers received incomplete packs of test papers, the wrong papers or papers arriving after the deadline for their marking. Some 100,000 English results – 1 in 6 – were not included in national figures. Around 36,000 maths and science papers were also missing.

Things got so bad that ETS's five-year £156 million contract to run the tests was terminated. Two of Britain's three examination boards said they would not take over the contract – hence Ed Balls's announcement about the abolition of Key Stage 3 SATs. Those for Key Stages 1 and 2 – for 7- and 11-year-olds – remain.

**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)**

**TRADE DEFICIT****Worse and worse**

JULY'S GOODS trade deficit was a record £8.238 billion (worse than the figure that the Office for National Statistics published earlier) – the biggest monthly gap since records began in... 1697! August's deficit was little better, at £8.198 billion, but this figure will most probably also have to be revised upwards.

**IRAQ****Leave, say polls**

A JULY POLL conducted for the INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY showed that 74 per cent of Britons believe that "British troops should be withdrawn from Iraq as soon as possible."

Yet despite Prime Minister Gordon Brown's weasel words about changing Britain's "mission" in Iraq, the government aims to keep British troops in Iraq for a very long time to come. It also wants to boost the number of British troops in Afghanistan, up from the current 8,200 to more than 14,000.

**EUROPE****Why the Irish said No**

JACK O'CONNOR is the president of Ireland's largest union Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union – which represents over 200,000 Irish workers. He told his union's regional conference in Tralee at the start of October that people rejected the Lisbon Treaty because of an erosion of workplace rights and that new workers from EU accession states have "dragged down" wages.

## EUOTRASH

### The latest from Brussels

#### Crisis. What crisis?

LORD MANDELSON, the new UK Business Secretary, will get pay and pension worth £1 million from the EU. All former EU Commissioners can claim a "transition allowance" on leaving. Mandelson will be entitled to £78,000 – the difference between his EU £182,500 salary and his Cabinet pay of £104,000. It will be taxed at only 26 per cent under special "community rates" for EU officials.

#### Subsidy, anyone?

SCOTTISH farms and sporting estates have taken vast sums under the EU Single Farm Payment scheme. The 100 largest claimants received an average £1 million each over the past three years.

#### Phantom attendance

MORE THAN 60 MEPs sign in for the monthly European Parliament session in Strasbourg on Fridays, although it does not meet that day. They claim 200 euros each time, a total cost of 820,000 euros since 2004.

#### Ministry of Truth

THE EUROPEAN Parliament president, Hans-Gert Pöttering, has accused the Irish "No" campaign of being part of a US-backed conspiracy against the EU. And German Green MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit said: "There is now a direct link between the Irish referendum, the US military and the Pentagon. I call on the authorities to probe the matter." Now Liberal-Democrat MEP Andrew Duff says that the Irish government should scrap Ireland's 'fair referendum' rules, which let both sides have equal broadcasting time.

#### No, Denis

MP AND FORMER Europe Minister Denis MacShane has said that the claim that 80 per cent of all our laws come from Brussels is a "lie". He said, "It really is not good enough to come to the House and quote anonymous Germans, whoever they may be, in defence of the preposterous position that 80% of all our laws come from the European Union."

The truth is that there is nothing anonymous about it at all: the former German President Roman Herzog made the claim in the German paper WELT AM SONNTAG on 14 February 2005.



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Despite the difficulty of fighting academy plans, ways are being found to resist. Pictured: "tent city" occupation of Wembley Park, London sports ground site of a planned privately run academy school this summer.

# Academy hung out to dry

UNITY CITY ACADEMY in Middlesbrough is being abandoned by its commercial backer Amey, which is reported to be in discussions with government about the details of the walkout.

Unity has had a stormy history since it opened as one of the government's "flagship" academy schools in 2002, much touted as the answer to the previous school's low results and other problems. In its first two years Unity expelled large numbers of difficult pupils. Dumping the lowest achievers and those with special needs has often been the first action of academies in their attempts to artificially improve results.

In Unity's case this didn't work, and the new academy head resigned after two years. The following year the school was found to have overspent its budget by £1.5 million. That summer the school failed its Ofsted inspection.

By 2006, in spite of the expulsions, behaviour had deteriorated to the point that police were called to deal with assaults. Still, teachers managed to improve the school and get it out of Ofsted "special measures", only to move into dispute with management over excessive demands for lesson planning.

Now its private sponsor, Amey, a "major services consultancy", wants out. Times are hard and Unity is not improving the Amey brand name. Nobody seems clear about where this leaves the school. It seems likely to close, leaving other local schools to pick up the pieces of this disastrous programme.

## CABINET

### Shuffling the unelected

ANDREW ADONIS, junior schools minister, has been moved from his Education brief to Transport. Adonis is an example of the Labour habit of bringing cronies into government without the tiresome need to be elected, by simply giving them a peerage. Adonis, while knowing nothing about education, became a highly influential player in the drive to outsource and privatise state education

assets, most notably in the academies programme. He will be unlamented by teachers nationwide, who however should not assume this means the end of academies.

Now Peter Mandelson, Blair's old friend who had to resign his cabinet post twice in disgrace and went off to the EU to make a lot of money and preach the dogma of the "free" market, is back as a minister using the same peerage route. He will be Baron Mandelson of Foy and Hartlepool, and be completely unaccountable either to Parliament or to the people.

# Library staff act for service

LIBRARIANS, library assistants, and others who work in the country's network of public libraries are combining with those who use their services to stop closures, and job losses.

At the Public Library Authorities conference in Liverpool in October Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, announced a government review of public libraries to "modernise" them. Burnham, along with the new minister with responsibility for libraries, Barbara Follet, claimed that the review would look at, among other things, creating a "skilled and responsive workforce", government-speak for deskilling the workforce.

Funding will be reduced while libraries are exhorted to find "innovative partnership and funding models", code for replacing areas for stock and readers with franchises for giant corporate coffee chains, following the example of Conservative-controlled Hillingdon council. Public libraries will also be encouraged to accommodate adult learning.

This apparently innocuous idea results from the government's onslaught on adult education classes in further education. By 2010 students on adult education classes will have to pay fees set at a rate of 50 per cent of the actual cost of the course. As FE colleges close adult education classes wholesale, the public library will be expected to take up the slack.

Just as Burnham announced the government review, a group of MPs, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management, announced their own inquiry into the public library system and, in particular, its 'governance and leadership'. Its findings are unlikely to differ radically from the government's. There is unanimity among politicians: the access to knowledge and culture that libraries offer must go.

In public libraries, hundreds of professional librarian posts have been lost since 1997 and branches closed in a wave of restructurings, though some local battles have been fought and sometimes won to keep services. In May CILIP, the professional association for librarians, reported on ten authorities where the decline had been most acute: Cumbria, Dorset, Dudley, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hillingdon, Kent, Lambeth, Medway and Northumberland.

Branch closures, loss of jobs and handing-over of services to self-appointed voluntary groups led CILIP to warn that standards of service were being worsened. Labour and Conservative councils have vied with each other to see which can come up with the most bizarre and unsuitable ideas for "modernisation".

The institution of the public library, the basis of which was won, as with so many of our class's achievements, in the mid-nineteenth century, represents communal, shared access to knowledge. It is a vital part of British working-class culture.

## TEACHERS

### NUT ballot on pay strike

THE NATIONAL Union of Teachers has balloted members on taking discontinuous strike action over pay. The ballot closes on 3 November and follows a previous ballot leading to a well supported day of strike action on 24 April. This time members in sixth-form colleges are also being balloted.

At the time of writing the ballot has yet to close, but branch secretaries and school representatives know that they need to work hard to encourage members to vote. Many members have expressed a reluctance to contemplate strike action when workers are facing recession and unemployment.

Nationally, the union has produced campaign materials for use in schools. These graphically show how teachers' pay has fallen behind inflation over the past four years and will continue to do so under

the present pay award of 2.45 per cent. The materials also highlight the consequent increased problems with recruitment and retention.

## CONSTRUCTION

### Lessons from a faraway isle...

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS has reported that Chinese workers in a remote British dependency out in the Atlantic have literally shut the island down.

The workers are building a resort on the tiny (9 square kilometres) West Caicos island, formerly uninhabited but now the home of "the most exclusive Ritz Carlton community in the world", according to the island's web site.

Concerned at not being paid after the global financial crisis bankrupted the project, the workers held a dozen Israeli contractors, surrounding their living quarters, and shut the port.

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### NOVEMBER

Thursday 6 November

**Take Charge of Britain: Lessons from the Cuban Experience**

7.30 pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Organised by the CPB-ML and WORKERS magazine. The government says only billions of pounds raised from workers via taxation can save the financial world. Is that what we want? We must be more ambitious – and save Britain for the working class, instead of pumping obscene sums of money into a failed system. Come to the meeting. Join the resistance. All welcome. More information at <http://www.workers.org.uk>.

Tuesday 25 November

**Defend Council Housing National Conference, London.**

10.30 am to 4.30 pm, ULU, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

The conference will meet at a critical time for council housing and provide an opportunity to discuss key issues around the government's review. It will make the case and organise against privatisation or sales of council homes and land and agree how to take the campaign forward.

Individual tenants £5; funded tenants organisations, trade unions, councils and others £25 per delegate.

For information and a booking form, see <http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/resources/DCH2008ConfFlyer.pdf>

## UNIVERSITIES

### Strike vote at Nottingham Trent

NOTTINGHAM Trent University wants to end its recognition agreement with the University and College Union, but there is resistance: union members there voted overwhelmingly for industrial action to defend recognition, and were due to strike on Tuesday 21 October.

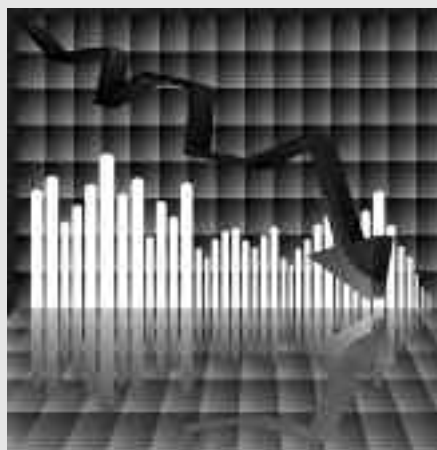
The union says that the employer wants radically inferior arrangements that would marginalise the campus unions and cut facility time for union reps by 80 per cent.

The existing recognition agreement requires nine months' notice of termination. On 4 July, the university wrote to the union and said it had decided to terminate the agreement on 4 October, just three months of notice. The university says it will only recognise the UCU if the union complies with its new proposals.

# PUBLIC MEETING

## TAKE CHARGE OF BRITAIN

### LESSONS FROM THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE



Thursday 6 November, 7.30pm

Conway Hall  
Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4RL  
(nearest tube Holborn)

The government says only billions of pounds raised from workers via taxation can save the financial world. Is that what we want? We must be more ambitious – save Britain for the working class, instead of pumping obscene sums of money into a failed system. Come to the meeting. Join the resistance. All welcome.



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

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

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

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

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

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

For three decades people have been encouraged to spend, and have spent, wages not yet earned, to become working class futures spenders. No wonder there's a crisis...

## Credit crisis: don't just blame the bankers



IT IS AN ill wind that blows no one any good: the BBC demonstrates the truth of this old aphorism. As economic twisters roll around the international money markets, so the BBC is supplied with a surfeit of ready meals for its various fast news outlets. Economists, financiers, politicians and commentators are summoned to portentous studios to be verbally examined by grave, morally

superior interviewers. Then there are those parodies of popular democracy, the phone-ins. There we hear a litany of crisis and despair, with a little panic from modest savers who have so little, and yet so very much to lose.

And how long will this go on? Up to 90 days, that being the maximum length, identified by Alistair Cooke of *Letter From America* fame, of media interest in any

crisis.

This does not mean the actual economic crisis will have been resolved by then, only that the media's appetite will have been sated and fresh carrion will be sought. What all this demonstrates is that in a self-proclaimed democracy, how little power and influence the people have

*Continued on page 8*



*Continued from page 7*

within the system. Banks teeter on the crumbling edge of insolvency, threatening to take the modest savings and wages deferred as pensions crashing into the abyss with them. This is not a matter of failed bonus schemes for “fat cats”, but of depriving the working class, whose labour has already been exploited for profit, of a significant part of their earnings. And what opportunity is there for objections to be heard? A Radio 5Live phone-in!

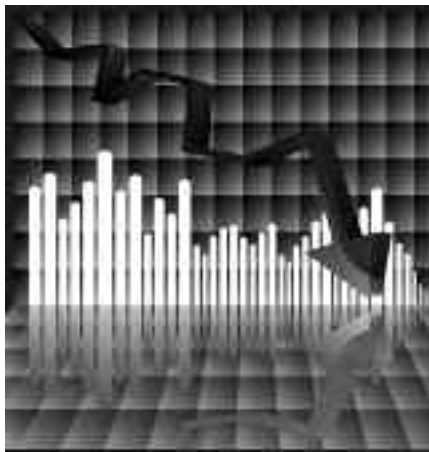
The media in general and the BBC in particular have identified bankers as the villains: it's their greed and incompetence that is responsible for the credit crunch and economic catastrophe. While it is not the job of *Workers* to defend bankers, the culpability is not all theirs. Since the Thatcher government assumed power in 1979, finance capitalism has been the vehicle of choice to drive this country's economy forwards, at the expense of actual value-producing manufacture. For three decades people have been encouraged to spend, and have spent, wages not yet earned, to become working class futures spenders, including those considering themselves “middle class”.

### **The fetters of debt**

Recently, personal debt stood at over a trillion pounds, effectively serving as an indenture: a man or woman with debts is far more conscious of those than of their class. The way to a better life was via the “plastic” rather than the very much harder involvement in a trade union to secure a better life through actively extracting from capitalism a greater proportion of the wealth they created. Blair's Labour Party succeeded because it embodied this passive attitude: just leave it all to them and they would leave it to the financiers to make everyone better off.

Blair's Chancellor, now Prime Minister, must act as the state always acts, to defend capitalism. A government that couldn't possibly give public service workers anything other than paltry below-

**“The way to a better life was via the ‘plastic’ rather than the very much harder involvement in a trade union...”**



inflation wages settlements can suddenly conjure up hundreds of billions of pounds to support the banks. This is, of course, portrayed through the media as being in the popular interest, protecting those savings and pensions working people have accrued.

### **No change**

Whatever the outcome the working class will not be consulted. True, there will be an election in the next couple of years or so, but a change of governmental personnel, even with a change of label from Labour to Conservative, will not substantially affect policy. Surely, no one believes that had Brown abdicated in the face of the crisis and been replaced by Cameron, any action taken by the state could have been different. After all George W. Bush concocted, or had concocted on his behalf, a similar response to that now being taken by the British government and being replicated all over Europe.

This contrasts markedly with how Cuba is presently dealing with the very

tangible devastation inflicted by the three recent hurricanes (see *Workers*, October 2008), the ongoing US blockade and the final knockings of the Special Period, countering the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

All three of these elements involve the Cuban working class directly in both suffering the immediate effects, and, crucially, in the collective response. Socialism is not a panacea for all economic, social and political ills, but is an active, continuous process with advances and setbacks.

### **Be collective**

The important factor is collective responsibility, an understanding that co-operative action is to the benefit of all, and therefore of the individual. But it is demanding and active, inimical to such passive measures as borrowing money many times actual income to buy a property that by some mystical means is expected to increase in value (price), rendering the purchaser free of economic and social obligations. Some just buy a lottery ticket and spend Saturday hoping beyond hope.

This is Britain's ideological fall-out from the last three decades. Despite thirty years of the decline in wealth production, the appearance has been to the contrary. Most people feel progressively better off as they sit in their own (heavily mortgaged) house that until recently seemed to be endlessly becoming ever more valuable. That house is well equipped with all the latest techno gewgaws while the car, or cars, on the drive sport the latest number plate. Unfortunately, most of this is actually the property of finance companies and too many families are but a few salary slips away from penury. They have to work long hours and deal with ever-increasing workloads for wages that never quite keep pace with inflation.

For too many, the minimum wage has become not a bulwark against low pay, but rather the standard from which pay rates are worked out. This leaves many workers in the invidious position of not being able to afford to work as the low



## Daylight robbery as Brown steals our money

THE BROWN government is stealing vast amounts of our money to save the banks. They have landed us with about £850 billion debt, £14,000 per person.

The US Treasury is taking \$700 billion and the EU governments another 1,300 billion euros. Altogether governments round the world have stolen about \$3 trillion, cutting spending and issuing more debt to help the financiers. These are virtual coups by finance capital and its representatives. They will cause even greater harm – an economic slump.

There is, though, an alternative – and a far better way of spending £850 billion.

**Bypass the banks.** Invest straight into manufacturing industry and services.

**Lend directly to manufacture.** Keep our industry going.

**Invest in science.** We need R&D for new industries, and to help us grow what we need.

**Take charge of energy.** Take control away of the companies that are bleeding householders dry. Plan – without EU restrictions – for a future without blackouts

**Lend to small businesses** – those that are viable but need cash to survive.

**Stop the repossessions.** It's no accident that Northern Rock, now nationalised, is repossessing houses at twice the rate of other banks.

**Launch a programme of public housing.** Buy up from developers and buy-to-let speculators at the bottom of

the market, and house the people. Offer state mortgages.

**Bring back controls on the export of capital.** Force it to be invested here.

Yet THE INDEPENDENT lectures us, "There is no possibility of using the lending power of these banks to provide a large economic stimulus to our economy and propel Britain out of this downturn ... Most of [the funds] will be swallowed up simply repairing the banks' balance sheets". These precious banks have never invested in manufacturing



industry: last year, their loans to industry were just 2.3 per cent of all lending.

Instead of seeking to rescue an economy, governments are buying up debts to save the financiers. But nationalising bad debts doesn't make them good debts. It is a matter not of toxic loans but of a toxic system – remember Brown's pledge that his "prudence" would mean "no more boom and bust"? Now he tells us that the last few years were an "age of

irresponsibility" – nothing to do with him then?

### Talking in trillions

But the \$3 trillion doesn't even start to cover the \$55 trillion market in credit default swaps, which is now failing. (\$55 trillion is more than twice the combined GDPs of the USA, the EU and Japan.) These contracts are supposed to insure banks against losses on their deals. Barclays and the Royal Bank of Scotland each hold \$2.4 trillion of these swaps, which are now selling at just 8 cents for every dollar, so the debts are uninsured.

The global pension, insurance and mutual funds hold \$46 trillion of our money, wealth produced by the 95 per cent who work. The CEOs, bankers and hedge-fund owners – the money managers – have got rich by stealing from this global river of cash. So our savings, housing and pensions are vanishing. Education, health and industry vanish too.

This Party has always said that industry, not finance, is the source of wealth. Now even the markets have lost faith in their own system.

We have always said that capitalism doesn't work and that socialism does work. The rulers lie to us that capitalism works, but most of us can now see that capitalism isn't working, that capitalism is in absolute decline and that this bail-out of the banks is a long step down on that decline.

pay on offer would be less of an income than benefits when factors such as paying for child care and travelling to work are taken into account.

A significant number of workers also depend on benefits – even if they work they often have to claim credits to make up their wages to liveable levels. None of this is conducive to developing class consciousness, as exemplified by a recent contributor to a radio phone-in who described himself as a "typical middle

class crane driver".

The working class will be the major victim of the present economic crisis, suffering unemployment and wage cuts, while saddled with their own debts and, increasingly, with those of the culpable financiers. Their failing banks are being handed ever-increasing wedges of public funds, taxes paid by workers.

No voting in elections or phoning Radio 5Live will change any of this. The only protection workers can rely on is the

mutual solidarity they can offer each other as a class united. No "model" can be imported. Cuba can serve as an inspiration for what a people are capable of, but in Britain it's the British working class that must actively work out its own salvation.

We start with the only mass organisations presently extant, our trade unions. By becoming involved we can turn them into instruments through which our interests can be pursued.

## When construction workers building a new power station in Plymouth face dilemmas facing the working class – from migration to the role of

# Construction: lessons from a picket line

FOLLOWING the sacking of 16 British workers at the new power station being constructed in Langan near Plymouth, a picket line was mounted on the morning of 7 August and respected by some 200 workers of various nationalities including Polish and Portuguese, demanding that the 16 be reinstated. By 09.00 the gates were locked and passes withdrawn from those outside the gates. The main contractor, Alstom (a French multinational), was demanding that the contractors on site whose workers were involved, obtain repudiation of the dispute from the unions (Unite – Amicus and T&G – and the GMB) and sack the workers.

Negotiations led to a settlement: the 16 received compensation for being sacked, and those on the picket line returned to work with no recriminations. Although they would lose a day's pay they would only lose the bonus for that day and not the whole month as is stipulated in the industry's SPA (Supplementary Project Agreement).

The dispute brings into sharp focus a number of important questions. What role does migrant labour play? How do we combat it? Where did those on strike want to take the dispute? Did the union "sell out" the sacked workers, as is claimed by some? And what are the weapons ranged against such action?

Alstom had engaged the agency

Atlanco to recruit labour for the job and, as shown by their advert in the press, were clearly seeking Polish labour. A requirement for the job was the ability to speak Polish – for a job in Britain! Why? Because they are cheaper? Only in part. The site is covered by the NAECI (Blue Book) with all rates for all trades clearly laid out, but as ever the employers, not just Atlanco, are prone to "make mistakes".

There are a number of reasons why Alstom has instructed Atlanco to bring on Polish workers. They think that foreign workers are more compliant, more willing to cut corners and less likely to organise because they are more vulnerable, and they are – at first. There is also a shortage of skills in a number of trades.

### French takeover

Alstom has a number of other major projects soon to start, and this, together with the recent French takeover of Britain's nuclear production, puts them in pole position for the projected nuclear build. Additionally, the combined gas and steam power station at Langan is both over budget and behind schedule. It is thought that Langan is seen as a testing ground. Could it be that in the bigger picture they wish to undertake future jobs both outside the Blue Book and with foreign labour?

In the weeks running up to the

dispute, Polish workers had been arriving on site in significant numbers. On the day the 16 were sacked, as they left, Polish workers took their place and gave the impression it was a clear attack on British workers.

Discontent had been growing at the difficulty British workers had at getting a job on site, and for the record, it isn't racist to demand your out-of-work mate is given a job before someone from outside of Britain. When workers turned up for work on the day and learnt of the sackings it didn't take much to turn the issue into one of migrant labour, and refuse to cross the line. Here there is lack of clarity, over the true position of our relative strengths, our demands generally, and on the day, specifically.

On our side, we were angry about the migrant labour and wanted to show the employer we weren't going to stand for it, demanding reinstatement. At the same time, the 16 had begun negotiations to extract a pay-off from Atlanco the night before, in the clear knowledge that to "play by the rules" and use the disputes procedure they would get nothing. Under the Blue Book, in your first four weeks on the job, you can be sacked with only two hours notice and have no recourse to anything but internal company procedures – utterly futile – you would never be allowed back on site! The men could have

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

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

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

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

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



# outh walked out this summer, they highlighted a raft of unions, and the government's draconian anti-union legislation...

accepted the offer but were determined to make their point.

At the employer's disposal are the weapons of the state including the law, both domestic and European. For a start 'unofficial' action, as this was, is unlawful. The employer's response in the first instance is to demand repudiation (to disown, cast adrift) by the union. If the union fails to repudiate, it risks fines and possible sequestration.

Once the union repudiates, workers either return to work immediately or are liable to lawful dismissal, with no employment rights whatsoever. The employer may selectively re-engage whom they wish, if any. Some say that the union should not repudiate but that it should take on the laws and render them inoperable. As a general aim - of course, but that is a battle that has to be won and not entered into lightly. It demands not only organisation but clarity of thought, and is not to be started if our forces are unprepared to the extent that we are. The same goes for ridiculous calls for a general strike.

## Were we ready?

So, on the day, were we ready to start the prairie fire? Some told of tales of coachloads of pickets coming from south Wales, that the Isle of Grain was going to come out, and then there would have been others. Could we shut the job down? For how long? We could have got into pitched battles with the police escorting in scab labour and shown the true nature of the state, as if we didn't know. Only one small problem - it wasn't the demand of the workers on the site or anything like it! We would have had yet another glorious defeat. Have we learnt so little? That level of clarity is not shown by the cry "It cost us a day's pay!". And since when do we hit the gates expecting to be paid? No "sell-out", just recognition of reality.

So the Poles, and others, are here, now. We have a choice: fight among ourselves or unite against the employer. Any talk of setting up some sort of apartheid union, as the BNP have tried, would still have exactly the same problems all unions have and is an idea



Construction site, Liverpool

benefiting only the employer.

Ultimately that battle has to be faced, and clearly it cannot be done "lawfully". It is against the law for a union to even hold a strike ballot over migrant labour - in both domestic and EU law. Besides, in general, unions (and all main parliamentary parties) are in favour of the EU with its "free movement of labour". The call for British jobs for British workers from these quarters is cynical. Despite recent anti union judgments in the European

Court, we continue to be taken up the alley of trying to reform the EU, to make it work for us, refusing to accept its true nature. Can we have border controls? No, not if we're in the EU. Can we protect what's left of manufacturing? No, not if we're in the EU. The list goes on. Nevertheless, the arguments must be fought in our unions to clarify yet further the need to get out. And at the same time, new ways of fighting will have to be developed.

John Cooke was the son of a working man from Leicester – and t  
new book tells his tale...

## Book review: The hidden history of one of t



THE HOUSES of Parliament are one of the busiest tourist attractions in the whole of Britain. They are considered remarkable for many reasons; in fact they are remarkable only really for one. That is the statue outside the building of Oliver Cromwell. He was the only person – not Guy Fawkes, as the popular joke runs – who entered Parliament with honest intentions. Where Fawkes would have destroyed Parliament to subject England to a Catholic dictatorship, Cromwell entered Parliament in 1653 ordering it to “take away this bauble”, meaning the crown of England.

Hero though Cromwell is, his lieutenants and comrades, just as heroic, are mostly unknown to us. A remarkable recent book, *The Tyrannicide Brief*, by the lawyer Geoffrey Robertson, aims to put the record straight in respect of one of the bravest yet least well known.

Following Charles I’s declaration of war on the people of England, two civil wars had to be fought, during which more people were killed in proportion to the population than in any other war in which Britain has been involved before or since, including the First World War. When

Parliament had finally been successful and Charles had been captured, Parliament had to take a critical decision. In order to prevent Charles launching a third civil war, he had to be put on trial. And in order to put him on trial, a lawyer had to be found who would draw up a case against the king and who would prosecute at a trial. No king had ever been put on trial publicly anywhere before and the trial was indeed remarkable. The man chosen to undertake this fearsome task is our unsung hero. He was John Cooke, the son of a working man from Leicestershire who became solicitor general of the English Commonwealth.

### High drama

The trial was the greatest spectacle in legal history bar none up to that point. The (still existing) great hall of Westminster was packed with Londoners and the trial itself was high drama. Cooke, who was standing next to the king, opened proceedings by addressing the court. At this point, Charles Stuart hit the lawyer with his cane. Not only did this not deter Cooke, but neither did a second strike, and a third which was so hard that



the silver tip of the cane flew off. Charles then commanded Cooke to stop his address and to pick up the tip of the cane. As Geoffrey Robertson says, “If Cooke had yielded, the entire enterprise would’ve faltered. But the barrister ignored the king and continued to address the court. Under Cooke’s wounding words, the king seemed to shrink into a small, cranky prisoner with dirty hair. In that character, slowly and painfully, under the astonished gaze of his people, the king stooped to pick up the silver tip from the floor at Cooke’s feet. There were gasps: Cooke paused for the significance of the moment to sink in.”

History had changed. A king who

the solicitor general who prosecuted Charles I for tyranny. A

## the unsung heroes of the English revolution



Left: Oliver Cromwell, hero of the English Revolution – but not the only one.

thought he was a god was unable to command.

The king's trial, contrary to the way it has been recorded in history, was fair to a fault. It lasted for weeks, the king had recourse to whatever lawyers he wished, and had unlimited time to prepare.

Following Cromwell's death in 1659 the disgusting Colonel Monck, one of the Commonwealth's leading soldiers, led a betrayal that brought Charles's son into power. This new Charles, Charles II, was explicitly brought into power because he said he wanted to "obtain peace without effusion of blood." He wanted London to know "how far we are from the desire of revenge".

As soon as Charles II became king he broke all his promises. The leading republican soldiers were hunted down and, illegally in John Cooke's case, kidnapped and imprisoned. Cooke and many others were held in chains for months, without access to the means to defend themselves and their so-called

**"They were allowed no legal defenders, not even pen or paper..."**

"trial". They were allowed no legal defenders, not even pen or paper. They became so ill and infected that the "trial" had to be held outdoors so the judges wouldn't become ill. They were berated and abused by their judges in the same way that Charles I had tried to berate Cooke. They defended themselves bravely, but were of course convicted of treason.

Charles I had been convicted of treason and had suffered the fate reserved for royalty and the nobility found guilty of such a crime, beheading. Cooke and the republicans were not noble enough simply to be beheaded, the most humane way of killing someone in the 17th century and the sentence meted out to Charles I. Instead they were sentenced to what history has called hanging, drawing and quartering. Robertson records what this death meant in the case of John Cooke.

### Butchered

"With a noose around his neck, Cooke looked up at clouds heavy with rain and stepped into thin air. The rope pulled tight about his neck and he briefly blacked out, but the hangman quickly cut the rope and his body crumpled onto the ground. The assistant took the tongs and pincers and one held a flaming torch. John Cooke was quickly stripped and bent over backwards, as his genitals were cut off with a sharp knife. He was held up, conscious, while they were dangled in front of his goggling eyes before the hangman threw them into a bucket.

"The captain of the guard, egged on by the crowd, ordered that the cowering Hugh Peters (next to be executed, and the only terrified republican) be untied and brought forward, forced to watch the disembowelling. 'Come, Mr Peters: How

do you like this work?' laughed the hangman. His assistants pulled on the halter that brought the judge (Cooke was a high court judge) forward: the hangman inserted the burning corkscrew into his anus and expertly twisted out the lining of the inner bowel: Cooke was then bent backwards again to watch as his entrails were put to the torch.

"The executioner would normally at this point end the excruciating suffering by cutting out the heart, but this executioner wanted Peters to observe Cooke in conscious agony for as long as possible. The stench became sickening as the yards of bowel were slowly burned – ladies clasped scented handkerchiefs to their noses as the wind carried the smell to the residential apartments overlooking the gallows. Eventually, Cooke expired: his heart was cut out and exhibited, still pumping, to the approving crowd, the executioner holding it high around the scaffold on his knife before casting it into the bucket."

Cromwell was of course dead. Had he lived, none of this would have happened. But in their hatred for him, his body was exhumed and thrown into a common pit. He was lucky; the following are the names of the men who suffered John Cooke's fate:

Thomas Harrison, John Carew, Hugh Peters, Thomas Scott, Adrian Scroope, George Clement, John Jones, Francis Hacker and the soldier keeping order at Charles' trial, Axtell.

These and others whose names have been hidden are heroes and should be revered as such. They were responsible for the greatest change in Britain's history (quite apart from anything else, John Cooke was the first person to propose a National Health Service) and we have benefited from what they did. It's time their names were as well known as Cromwell's, and we look forward to their statues joining Old Noll outside the houses of parliament.

**The Tyrannic Brief, by Geoffrey Robertson, Chatto & Windus. ISBN – 0-701-17602-4.**

# Our tenth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, *The Worker* month: Rebuild Britain!

## 1992: The response to Thatcher – Rebuild Britain



**ABSOLUTE** decline and deindustrialisation ravaged our working class in the 1970s and 1980s. Following the call of our Ninth Party Congress in 1991, *The Worker* featured applications of the Rebuild Britain line. We espoused it then, but continue to do so now, when the need is even more urgent as the decay of our country has deepened and widened. The editorial in *The Worker* issued on 6 March 1992 read:

“Capitalism through Thatcher waged relentless war on workers. Some were defeated, others crushed, many were intimidated, but a large minority held on. We say Rebuild Britain. That is what we must endeavour to do in the 1990s. Class organisation, socialist commitment and therefore Marxism are the tools.

Rebuilding Britain for the working class means collective thought and action. Workers developing ideologically, drawing up plans for the job. Not ‘designer socialism’ but designs for socialism.

When professional workers for professional reasons can draw up letters and petitions, signed by hundreds but agreed by thousands of colleagues, rejecting damaging legislation on science, education and health – having discussed them in unions like AUT, NATFHE, BMA, MSF and NUT – then they have started to plan and design what they do want. Rebuilding starts by rejecting destruction.

From 1937, when engineering workers

and shop stewards led by communists worked to rebuild trade union strength, so laying the basis for war-time and post-war advance, the organised working class struggled and moved forward over forty years. After two generations of this, mass unemployment seemed a feature of the Thirties beyond modern comprehension.

Thatcher changed all that. Where there had been comfortable assumptions that the worst of capitalism had been

call for lifting of anti-union laws that limit workers wanting to offer solidarity to fellow workers in struggle. We do not think unions should be destroyed or kept at arm’s length. Unions have long had policies that could rebuild this country, and should be encouraged.

All the capitalist parties are for membership of the EC and monetary union – foreign domination – but we say Rebuild Britain.”



The Worker, 6 March 1992: a challenge for the working class.

behind us, her class proved otherwise. In no time, pessimism, dull conformity and deference to the status quo held sway. In that atmosphere, destruction flattened parts of the industrial landscape.

But Britain could not be built in a decade and, for all the destruction of the 1980s, could not be destroyed in a decade. Robust remnants of a country that grew over centuries now provide potential for its necessary reconstruction.

...We are for rebuilding and strengthening of the trade unions that defend living standards of workers. We

**In the editorial of the issue of *The Worker* published on 9 September 1997, under the headline “Rebuild Britain for all its people”, the theme was expanded upon again:**

“Three years ago this Party was one of the few voices identifying our political and economic independence from the EU as one of the most important steps towards building a new Britain, operating in the interests of its people rather than international finance. Now the issue is identified as one of the top priorities in the election. Faced with hostility to the



# Looking at the past THE WORKER. This Britain

single currency from many workers both the Tories and Labour moved away from their preferred pro-EU position to one that was less in direct conflict with the electorate.

After the election the tendency of many MPs, both Labour and Tory, will be to re-embrace the EU. Our determination as workers to rebuild Britain can not allow such backsliding. The need for progress means that Britain's future lies outside the EU straightjacket, in creating an independent country that is beholden to no one – not to America, not to the multinationals, to the Bundesbank or the EU.

Our priorities are at home – rebuilding our economy, declaring war on unemployment until it is eradicated completely, and developing the education system to meet the needs of an independent modern Britain. Only then will we have a viable future. It is a future worth working for, not only because the alternative is so bleak, but because such a future is as attainable as it is necessary.

## WHAT BRITAIN REALLY NEEDS

- A national plan to end unemployment
- Imposition of import and export controls
- Investment of available funds into industry, including research
- Cut spending on the army, foreign office and withdraw from Ireland
- Redirect funds into education and training at all levels
- A health care system based more on prevention than cure, and on cooperation, not competition
- Withdraw from the European Union and focus on rebuilding Britain.”

These ideas from 1992 and 1997 are just as relevant, just as pressing, today. The fool's paradise of financial speculation and the supremacy of finance capital over industry have been starkly revealed over the past year. We need to rebuild the true foundations of our real economy, in which industry and manufacture must be to the fore.

# 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.

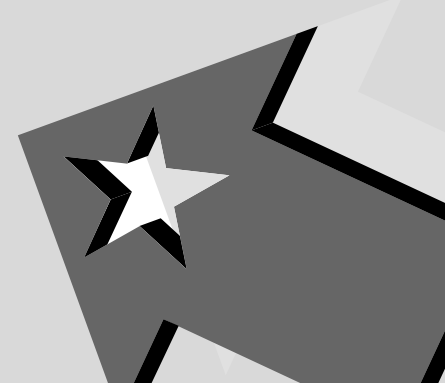
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# Back to Front – A fraud on workers

**‘It is hardly surprising that this alchemy from 1980 onwards has been promoted by treacherous politicians...’**

“VERY LITTLE is now built to order. Anyone wanting a new house picks one from among those built on speculation or still in the process of construction. The builder no longer works for his customers but for the market and builds from 100 to 200 houses.....thus embarking on an enterprise which exceeds his resources twenty to fifty times. The funds are procured through mortgaging. Then if a crisis comes along the entire enterprise generally collapses.”

Such was the testament of a builder before a bank committee in 1857 and was quoted by Marx and Engels in Volume II of *Capital*. They gave this as an example of where credit is deployed alongside greater speed in the production of housing, leading to a reduction in the turnover time of capital invested for house building purposes.

Things of course have accelerated since 1857. Through the development of machinery and advances in materials, the building time for new houses has shortened and with it a corresponding reduction in the time that circulating capital is tied up in the building process, before its exit with a profit.

It is no longer a builder or landowner taking on the risk of an ongoing mortgage but instead the servicing of mortgage debt has been dumped onto the back of a worker as notional house owner, rather than as a tenant renting. The mortgage itself is sourced from worldwide fixed capital markets that unlike circulating capital seek a steady long-term yield rather than a quick high return. Marx described this interest-bearing capital as “the fountainhead of all manner of insane forms, so that debts, for instance can appear to the banker as commodities”.

This insanity is all the clearer today.

It was the investment bank Goldman Sachs that in 1980 was the first of the contemporary bankers to step up this insanity by hitting on to the idea of packaging mortgages as a commodity and recycling them as a CDO (collateralised debt obligation).

The attraction of a CDO was much like that of Government gilts or bonds: although de facto debt, a CDO could be traded and used as collateral against the issuance of further new debt (the spiv term for this is pyramid selling). Provided workers continued to service the original mortgage loan and the asset value increased (i.e. house prices), banks could raise further lines of credit (sourced recently from places like China) without the need to produce domestic savings in the form of bank deposits normally needed to back such debt.

It is hardly surprising that this alchemy from 1980 onwards has been promoted by treacherous politicians speaking about a worker’s right to buy a house or the more recent phrase of creating “affordable housing” for Britain’s hard-working families.

The consequences of this 30-year falsehood of mis-selling are going to be dramatic, as Britain (unlike in 1857) has a small manufacturing base. As we know British manufacture has been destroyed, for counter-revolutionary reasons, by the very same politicians who have fronted the mortgage culture. A revolutionary solution to this beggars’ muddle will therefore require the British working class for the first time to take on its historical responsibilities. In this respect we are extremely fortunate to have the political economics of Marx and Engels as a starting point – the rest will be down to us as a collective working class to sort out.

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