

WORKERS

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CUBA: AFTER THE HURRICANES



Labour in decline The end of Brown?

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WORKERS

Don't mention the migration

Immigration has pushed population density in England to a higher level than any other major country in Europe. Figures released by the Office for National Statistics show there are 395 people per square kilometre in England. This is an increase of five per square kilometre in the past two years.

While unemployment is rising, 2.54 million new National Insurance numbers were issued to overseas nationals between 2002/3 and 2006/7. New immigrants numbered 565,000 in 2005, following 582,000 in 2004.

The ruling class promotes unlimited immigration, claiming, as usual, that it knows better than we do what is good for us. The ultra-left, as usual, supports the ruling class by spreading the slanderous lie that it's racism that's fuelling popular opposition to immigration.

THIS MAGAZINE has been talking about migration – into and out of Britain – for quite a few years, as the article on page 14 shows. We reject utterly the idea that discussion of migration is somehow “off limits”. In this we have little in common with the official structures of the trade union movement, which has stood by while immigration and unemployment have soared and which will not countenance a proper debate.

But that debate is taking place, nevertheless. A new national poll shows that

the vast majority of us, regardless of party affiliation, believe that immigration should be sharply reduced: 81 per cent of Labour voters, 83 per cent of Liberal Democrats and 89 per cent of Conservatives.

Perhaps more pertinently, a survey by Unite of 100,000 of its members in marginal seats, reported in *The Guardian*, showed that immigration headed the list of their concerns, but you won't find that reflected on the union's websites...or indeed mentioned as a concern.

The newspaper commented: “The high number citing immigration was regarded as an embarrassment in some parts of the union.” That it should be seen as such speaks volumes for the blinkered and isolated world which many trade unions officials – lay as well as full time – inhabit.

The European Commission, meanwhile, predicts that Britain's population will be 77 million by 2058. Ten million of the additional 16 million will be immigrants, they say.

You don't need to be a statistician to work out that adding that number to Britain's population will not make housing affordable, nor take cars off the road, nor make school places any easier to find. But it will increase the available labour force, and help employers drive down wages.

That, surely, is something the labour movement can have a debate about.



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EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Ofcom set to slash news

AS WORKERS went to press, workers in broadcasting were bracing themselves for a report on ITV from the regulator, Ofcom. It is widely expected that Ofcom will permit the monopoly broadcaster to reduce its regional news programmes from 17 bulletins to 8, a move that could result in the loss of 500 jobs and would leave areas and communities across the country without proper local news coverage. Union reps are set to hold meetings in response, and industrial action can't be ruled out.

ITV is a network of 15 companies, each licensed to broadcast in a region of the UK. It wants to cut its regional news budget by around £40 million in order to hike profits. "In a shareholder-driven broadcasting environment, costly programmes that don't deliver big bucks audiences to advertisers are not considered viable," National Union of Journalists General Secretary Jeremy Dear wrote in the union's journal, adding, "News and current affairs, regional and other public service programming should not just be another commodity to be bought and sold, but a valuable benefit to enable informed citizens and greater democratic participation in society."

Since the plans were announced, broadcasting workers have been waging publicity campaigns up and down the country, in the process also reviving previously moribund union branches. In the north, for example, where Border TV journalists have been fighting to stop their service from being axed, 16,000 members of the public have sent postcards into Ofcom urging it to ensure that the daily Lookaround programme is kept. Supporters have included the Eddie Stobart transport company, which lent campaigners its private jet to take them to a meeting on the Isle of Man.

- NUJ members employed by Trinity Mirror in the Midlands voted to strike against compulsory redundancies. Ballots were held after the company served redundancy notices on its Midlands journalists, including those at the Coventry Telegraph and Birmingham Post and Mail. The company has told its editorial staff that they have to reapply for their jobs.

Journalists in Coventry and Solihull voted 85.4 per cent in favour of strike action on a 79 per cent turnout; in Birmingham, 68.4 per cent in favour on a 71 per cent turnout; and at Midland Weekly Media - 87.5 per cent in favour on a 61.5 per cent turnout.

The journalists are outraged at the compulsory nature of the redundancies, and fearful of what the reduction in staff would mean for already hard pressed news rooms. In Coventry, where the editorial staff has halved over the past five years (before the latest proposals), there are not enough staff to answer the phones when local readers ring in with news.

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

EDUCATION**Academy suspends 40**

THE HEAD of Academy 360 in Pennywell, Sunderland, last month suspended 40 pupils in the first two weeks of term. This is a new academy, replacing a secondary school which was judged to be failing by the government.

The academy programme, designed to close state secondary schools and hand them and their assets over to "sponsors" (who in some cases do not even pay for the privilege), has become notorious for finding devious ways to select pupils in order to push up results.

Last year, the academies - making up 0.3 per cent of "state" schools - were responsible for 2 per cent of temporary and 3 per cent of all permanent exclusions.

Paul Prest, chief executive of Academy 360, said that a zero tolerance approach was crucial for pupils who break rules. And no doubt very handy for his school's attainment figures.

HOUSING**Mortgage lending slumps**

THE LEVEL of mortgage lending in the UK slumped even further in August, according to figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders.

The total value of new mortgages was a staggering 36 per cent down on August last year, and represented a drop of 12 per cent from the low levels seen in July. "In some areas, you could count the number of transactions in August on one hand," said one mortgage broker.

Worse is on the way. The number of mortgages approved but not yet lent is down 71 per cent over the figure a year ago.

EUOTRASH**The latest from Brussels****Off to Bulgaria?**

THE EUROPEAN Parliament has overwhelmingly adopted a proposal to allow automatic extradition to another EU country after someone is convicted by a foreign court in their absence. Several countries that do not currently recognise judgements in absentia would be forced to allow this practice, including Britain.

Yet the Brown government backs the proposal; it will be presented to the Council of Ministers within the next three months, the first step to becoming national law. The European Criminal Bar Association said the proposal was "a violation of the fundamental procedural rights of the accused".

Hot air from Brussels

THE BRITISH government has signed up to the European energy plan – for 20 per cent of all energy to come from renewable sources by 2020. That that implies about 40 per cent of electricity from renewables, mostly wind. This may not be feasible, and will certainly be costly.

Energy from wind turbines is derisory: the 1,600 megawatt coal plant planned for Kingsnorth would generate two-and-a-half times as much electricity as all the 2,300 wind turbines already built in Britain.

A report by Professor Ian Fells of Newcastle University warns that Britain could lose one third of electricity generating capacity by 2012 to 2015, as ageing coal and nuclear power stations are set to close. That would cause "dramatic shortfalls" in power supply.

Fells says that EU targets for energy efficiency are "demonstrably unattainable". Plans for up to 7,000 offshore wind turbines by 2020 would require continuous installation at 10 times the best current rate.

Government figures show a subsidy of £1 billion for renewables last year. Fells estimates the cost of achieving the EU plans at £20 to £30 billion by 2020. The National Housing Federation estimates it will be more, adding another 25 per cent to domestic electricity bills within 2 years and pushing almost a quarter of the population into fuel poverty by the end of 2009. Yet EU rules forced Brown to drop any idea of raising £500 million to fund fuel vouchers for vulnerable families.



Photo: Andrew Wiaid/www.reportphotos.com

Under pressure, but still not under enough pressure: Gordon Brown at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester in September.

Going, going...

IF YOU WANT to understand Gordon Brown read the Tom Bower biography. Bower identifies the cowardice, indecisiveness, absenteeism, lack of leadership, innumerable wrong decisions seen well before he became Prime Minister, now epitomised in his collapsed public standing and confidence.

The division between Blair and Brown, barring ego and self-importance, was never on policy. Destruction of Britain's manufacturing industry, privatisation, dependency on the markets, dependency on the USA, cringing adoration of wealth and City crooks, PFI, public services by tick box, targets that drive workers mad, the bloodcurdling smooching up to Thatcher, billions wasted on consultants, spin and war. Where could you get a cigarette paper between them?

Speech of a lifetime or a 15-second sound bite? Does it matter? Brown will be gone next week, the week after, at Christmas, in February – doesn't matter when, just that he is going. And after him comes another and another – New Labour, New Tory, New Tory Labour, New Labour Tory, New Lib Democrat Labour – meaningless labels as the same old hand of Capital still rests on the rudder.

Brown will enter history along with all those other failures of social democracy – Ramsay MacDonald through to Callaghan through to Kinnock. The social democrats instead of running capitalism efficiently, have actually created something worse than Thatcher, so why do they exist? Time to go, Brown, and all the rest of them.

LONDON BUSES**Strike over pay**

BUS DRIVERS and other staff working for London bus operators First Capital East and First Centrewest went on a 48 hour strike from Friday 12 September in a dispute over their pay.

Routes such as the 191 and 259 in Edmonton, north London, were completely off the streets for the period of the strike. The 2,500 members of the union Unite

have overwhelmingly rejected an offer of 3.5 per cent from the operators. The union is also fighting for comparable pay across all London bus operators by submitting a London-wide claim.

Drivers and other staff are paid widely varying rates of pay for identical work across the Transport for London regulated area. In some cases the difference amounts to as much as £6,000 per year. Unless the dispute is resolved more action is planned and strike ballots are taking place in most other London bus companies.

United in self-delusion

ONCE AGAIN the public sector unions at the 2008 TUC agreed a unifying motion to deal with public sector pay. All will come together under the auspices of the TUC Public Sector Committee to determine a strategy of coordinated solidarity and industrial action to fight for wages. That may remind you of the 2007 strategy or of 2006 or of 2005 or the 1926 strategy.

The implementation of this identical strategy during the past 12 months has seen unions unable to coordinate sections within their own constituent organisations, let alone across several independent organisations. The strategy is flawed for several reasons. It doesn't grasp the concept of negotiation, a process entered into by real workers with the employers – instead it focuses solely on a seemingly religious concept of struggle. It starts with the presumption that all workers are straining at the leash to be released and all you have to do is point them at a brick wall and they will automatically demolish it. This approach is not new and simply works on the assumption of workers following orders from armchair generals – which they don't.

It fails to understand the complexities and varieties in wage structures across public services, privatised public services, outsourced staff, etc. Instead it assumes that one size fits all, one answer fits all, ignoring the historic difference of origin, growth, development and use the public services have evolved with and into during the past 50 years.

What is happening around public sector pay, but also in nearly all policy areas of the trade unions, is that union branches have motions smuggled through them setting out model resolutions from any one of the 57 varieties of Trotskyist cults in the UK – from branch to region or equivalent and from region to national level.

The non-engagement by millions of workers in their unions allows the same model resolution to appear from a handful of the usual suspect branches, and because of this disengagement, the lowest common denominator motion becomes the policy of every major union. No wonder that year after year such drivel flops dramatically.

Average turnouts in votes for public sector National Executive Council elections are between 8 and 10 per cent. In other words few NEC members have a real mandate, as 90 per cent of the membership, by not voting, have really said no thanks. Elections for general secretaries are running on similar empty returns. Industrial action returns are as dire – it is too embarrassing to publish the figures! These are the real indicators of the health of the unions and the reason that workers are not prepared to be drawn into yet more "Day One of the Somme" approaches to industrial action.

The armchair generals seem to believe that by having a ballot the employers will quake – the threat of "ballot" having replaced the reality of "strike". This is enshrined in various unions' industrial action procedures and is a guarantee to ensure that unwinnable disputes appear every year. This is not leadership; this is class struggle of the worst inept suicidal fashion, a recipe for disaster, disillusion and defeat. There is nothing worse than stupid struggle packaged as strategic when it regularly crashes in flames.

Employers can do the maths: a 10 per cent return – e.g. RMT's South East trains ballot for industrial action on 22 to 23 September means 90 per cent of the trade union membership are not going to strike. If you extract a further dimension as to what the real trade union density is then the effective union presence in the workplace looks even punier as density in many workplaces has plummeted. A ballot is not a weapon or a strike but just acceptance and compliance with anti-union legislation, more often than not playing a pre-arranged choreographed game with the employer.

Local government workers, after their disastrous July two-day strikes in England and Wales, are now creeping off to have talks with ACAS – as much a signal for surrender as asking the TUC to run your dispute. Why? Because the real figures of actually delivered industrial action varied from 6 to 10 per cent of union members on strike. The Unite union will huff and puff about not going to ACAS not because they have any strategy or clout but because it gives them the opportunity to recruit as the "real militant trade union".

Developing a strategy for pay is not going to come from perfect motions no matter how model. It will not come from endorsement by the TUC or Pope. It will not come when our army is in disarray and does not have the will or belief in the cause being promoted.

Consciousness around wages has to be one developed by rebuilding union density, by raising the relevance and profile of the union in the workplace, drawing the myriad strings of division (outsourcing, differing contracts, transferred undertakings, commissioning, providers etc) back into a concept of genuine public service. A groundswell of awareness has to be established and re-established as opposed to a painting by numbers approach to economic struggle.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

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, 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>

AFGHANISTAN

Killing civilians

THE US/BRITISH occupation forces in Afghanistan killed 577 civilians between January and August this year (up from 477 in the same period last year), 384 by bombing. Far more civilians than have been killed by them than by the national resistance forces.

A USAF air strike on 22 August killed 90 civilians, including 60 children, by the UN's estimate. The US forces at first claimed that they had killed no civilians, and then later said that they had killed "only" seven civilians.

Civilian deaths caused by US/British air strikes tripled between 2006 and 2007. The occupying forces dropped 272 tonnes of bombs on the country in June and July, the same tonnage as in the whole of 2006.

The RAF's oldest squadron, No. 1 Fighter Squadron, carried out 1,450 operations in nine and a half months. Its Harrier planes are fitted with two cannons, each able to fire up to 1,850 rounds per minute, and with the Angle Rate Bombing System (ARBS). They can drop standard "dumb" ordnance, including general purpose high-explosive bombs, napalm bombs, and cluster bomb units, as well as "smart" weapons such as laser-guided Maverick missiles.

The USA also carried out illegal attacks on Pakistani territory in the first two weeks of September, killing at least 60 Pakistani civilians.

Anyone who calls upon the TUC for succour or leadership is a fraudster. And there were plenty of them at the TUC Congress in Brighton...

The TUC and the missing-card trick

THE TUC HAS come and gone. Perhaps best summed up by the BBC report of how Unite, Britain's biggest union created by merger and fictional membership claims, failed to deliver its block vote in support of the Prison Officers Association, which was fronting for the general strike strategy proposed by the "lefts". Unite had forgotten their voting card. Such revolutionary posture and rhetoric lost in the oldest social democratic trick of cowardice and sleight of hand.

Anyone who calls upon the TUC for succour or leadership is a fraudster. Either you are beaten in dispute or are looking to pass the blame to some other scapegoat. There has only been one General Strike in British labour history, in 1926, and it was a failure. The class has never gone down that road again.

There is a false polarisation of the "left" trade unions – Unite, PCS, CWU, with the GMB and Unison tailing along at this year's TUC. The yet-again attempt to masquerade as something which the trade unions in Britain are not by trying to bolt on some phoney leftist organisation

has only one result – the working class is noticeably absent.

Those calling for a general strike are an unholy alliance of lefty entryists. This motley crew, combined with the junketing and freebies, believe they have "taken over" the TUC and trade union structures. It's all a sad delusion, as the structures are already pretty empty, especially of ideas!

Symptoms of collapse

The inner core of dying social democracy is mutating. If social democracy's role is to run capitalism on behalf of capitalism with a pleasant face and no warts, and it fails, what reason for its continued existence? In the trade unions this is presenting a revolting spectacle of a "left" fascism. All working class principles are despised and belittled.

A political cleansing of all but fellow travellers is occurring – left not class is the badge; droves of cadre appointments into the structures of the unions by fellow entryists intended to artificially create a "left" unionism in Britain; that is about

exclusion of the class other than as sheep to be herded. What is resulting is the elevation of division based upon a left-driven apartheid of 21st century Puritanism defined by environment, gender and race.

What relevance the TUC? Seemingly little in the dying days of the Brown government, with malaise, indecision and waffle. The Tories and TUC reveal they have been exploring each other's positions in recent months. Have they both forgotten the history of the relationship during the last 150 years?

These are but the symptoms of the implosion and collapse of social democracy and the unwillingness of the class to take responsibility for its future. Not as a 'left' creature but as a class determining the future of itself as a working class, the nation state and Britain. The working class is neither left or right, neither sinner or saint but 28 million workers and their families and dependents who need to determine a path out of this morass of daily life in capitalist Britain.



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.

It's not a sudden crisis. It's a decline that's been going on for decades. Instead of producing wealth, Britain has been living on credit...

What's happened to the financial markets?



Photo: Andrew Wiard / www.reportphotos.com

Just a year ago: depositors queue up outside a branch of Northern Rock in Brighton to withdraw their savings. That was September 2007, and the full impact of the "credit crunch" is yet to be felt.

THE UNRAVELLING of financial markets that has been taking place now for the past twelve months should not be seen as a crisis but as a continuum of absolute decline, a trend first identified by our party in 1976. The current contradictory mess has one central feature, namely that Britain produces little new wealth and has been accessing international capital to create domestic credit.

This credit has then been used to finance a number of things ranging from asset-stripping mergers and acquisitions to financing inflated mortgages, often to cover pre-fabricated "new build" housing that has been invariably built (thrown up) in little over a week.

Sadly an integral part of the credit process has been a belief by large sections of the working class that it is somehow acceptable for Britain to sustain itself through fictitious capital rather than creating wealth through production – an outlook that has been described as a country pretending that it is a hedge fund.

There is now of course a huge question mark against the ongoing viability of many British financial companies. For example, just before the HBOS problem two of the top twenty mutual building societies had to be quietly merged with the Nationwide as a result of their terrible debt exposure. This event was little reported and has since been lost amongst the latest headlines ranging from AIG, Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers, HBOS et al.

Rumbled

The problem with all of these companies, apart from AIG, has been that they have been generating loans without in any way matching this with deposits. AIG, on the other hand, has been the American insurer that has been underpinning these loans in the event of default but was rumbled last week as not having sufficient funds to cover its insured exposure.

The days of banks lending to third parties and being covered by customers' deposits began to change during the 1980s

and has all but disappeared under Labour's economic miracle where saving has been covertly discouraged in favour of the buy now pay later mentality. To give some idea of what has to be faced, it has been estimated that British banks have to find at least £40 billion each year between 2008 and 2010 just to fund their international repayment obligations.

Those who have been shouting about the "short selling" of shares such as HBOS, thus bringing down a sound financial institution, miss the point spectacularly. Short sellers were simply saying that the position of HBOS was untenable and that as a result the share price would go through the floor. HBOS was exposed because it had a £198 billion funding gap – the difference between customer deposits and customer loans. It was not the short sellers in the market who created this gap but the bunch of lightweight clowns calling themselves

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directors who put the company in this position.

Another point of interest is that the Bank of Scotland is part of HBOS and concerns are currently being expressed over whether the Bank of Scotland will lose its right to print Scottish banknotes with the wording "Bank of Scotland promise to pay here to the bearer on demand". Well, with the Bank owing £198 billion elsewhere it does stretch the credibility of such a promise and puts any pretence of pseudo independence into perspective.

Certainly to address Britain's problems a national rather than a narrow Scottish

“Those who have been shouting about the short selling of shares miss the point spectacularly...”

regional perspective will have to be adopted. The Scottish nationalists cannot therefore hide this fact by saying that a bunch of London based 'shorters' prevented HBOS remaining an independent bank. Certainly the current Scottish financial sector's uncertainty is

the same as London's and is due to a dependence on wholesale funding.

We as a Party are about changing the philosophy of the British working class. All of the unravelling nonsense currently taking place has long been identified as a likelihood within our analysis of absolute decline, which we have painstakingly developed over the past thirty years. What is certain is that unless the class changes its outlook it will be further punished by finance capital only too keen to pass the buck for its own failings by getting British workers to accept a massive drop in living standards. The forthcoming fight for wages will be key.

Book review: The Gods That Failed

The Gods That Failed: how blind faith in markets has cost us our future, by Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson, paperback, 326 pages, ISBN 978-1-847-92030-0, Bodley Head, 2008, £12.99.

IN THIS brilliant book, Larry Elliott, the economics editor of the Guardian, and Dan Atkinson, the economics editor of the Mail on Sunday, explain why the economy is in such a mess.

Previously, strong unions, progressive taxation, managed trade and controls on immigration and capital produced higher living standards for the majority. As the authors note, "A fifth factor, immigration controls, also contributed to rising real incomes of blue-collar workers." Now the opposite policies are producing stagnant or falling incomes, massive debts, tepid growth, and soaring income inequality and economic insecurity. Workers are subjected to material losses and moral uplift. GB plc is not a decent industrial company but a dodgy hedge fund.

Elliott and Atkinson blame what they call the twelve gods of globalisation – communication, financialisation, privatisation, liberalisation, competition, and their partners speculation, recklessness, greed, arrogance, oligarchy and excess. They show how the Labour party, the European

Commission, the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and the International Court of Justice have all embraced these gods. As the authors note, bodies like the EU "far from being essential in order to exercise some sort of control over large companies ... look rather more like being essential to the simplification of large companies' dealings with political authorities."

The present crisis arose because US companies promoted enormous 'ninja' loans to those with No Income, No Job or Assets. So US household debt is now three times the economy's annual output, the highest proportion since 1929. Two million insolvent borrowers means insolvent lenders, builders and hedge funds.

Full-blown recession

Every previous crash in the US housing market has led to a full-blown recession and this one will too, largely because the US economy has relied not on increased production but on growing debt. Its productivity has grown less since 1973 than it did in 1947-73 and it created no more jobs between 2000 and 2005 than anywhere else.

Elliott and Atkinson show how the British Treasury, its Financial Services Authority, and the Bank of England all failed in the Northern Rock debacle which

signalled the start of the crisis in Britain. Their answer was to nationalise the losses and privatise the profits. The authors sum up finance capitalists' plight, "They have to borrow money from the public purse because their system does not work."

Instead, Elliott and Atkinson urge a New Populism focusing on a real-world agenda of jobs, living standards and security in retirement. Its aims should be to subordinate finance to industry, establish personal and social security (mainly by providing high-quality pensions), enhance democracy, curb the semi-detached super-rich, strengthen the professions, value social stability above market efficiency or shareholder value, and reaffirm the liberty of the person.

They urge protection for our industries, tighter controls on lending and credit, splitting retail from investment banking, smaller banks, proper vetting of all financial products, higher taxes on hedge funds and private equity partners, and deregulation for smaller businesses and the self-employed.

This is a bold set of proposals, whose implementation would go a long way towards saving industry and rebuilding Britain. Those who worship the twelve gods would, of course, fiercely resist, and it would take the strength of the organised working class to make this New Populism

WORKERS reports exclusively from Cuba on how the socialist island is coping with the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes...

Exclusive: Hurricanes – Cuba fights back



All Cuba pictures courtesy Dr Maria del Carmen Rodriguez, Cuban Health Workers Union

Pinar del Rio, in the hard-hit west of Cuba, 17 September: the union committee meets to see how to support workers whose houses have been damaged or destroyed.

THE RECENT HURRICANES that have caused so much loss of life and damage in the Caribbean and southern United States are considered by the Cuban Civil Defence Authority to be the worst for 60 years, partly because of their strength and partly because there were so many in close succession. Hardly surprising, then, that many people are asking the question ‘why does Cuba manage to keep the loss of life so low compared to other countries?’ The answer lies in both Cuba’s values and working class organisation.

Haiti has been hit by at least three hurricanes in close succession. Nearly one thousand have died and hundreds of

thousands, if not millions, are homeless with little or no access to food. The southern US was also hit by Hurricanes Fay, Gustav and Ike but at least they all took different courses and weakened overland, yet still more than 50 died in the US during Hurricane Ike. Cuba was hit by the heavy rains of Fay, then Western Cuba and the Isle of Youth were devastated by Gustav, and then Ike simply tore up everything in its way as it roared across the whole length of the island destroying all in its path that hadn’t been destroyed by Gustav in Western Cuba and the Isle of Youth. Miraculously, with 2 million people being evacuated, there were only seven

deaths – which, it must be pointed out, directly resulted from the victims not following Civil Defence instructions.

The losses from two back-to-back hurricanes that wiped out housing, crops, electrical lines, schools and hospitals from coast to coast will cost about \$5 billion according to Cuban government sources. More than 444,000 homes were damaged with 64,000 destroyed. In the western Pinar del Rio Province alone 137 electricity pylons were lost, as well as 530 transformers and 4,500 smaller electricity poles. In the Isle of Youth every single

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Clean up in the San Cristobal Hospital, Pinar del Rio, where 26 hospitals were badly damaged.

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electricity line is down, 80 per cent of poultry was affected, and 4,355 tons of food in warehouses and stores were lost. Fidel Castro, commenting on Hurricane Gustav said that the Isle of Youth, after the hurricane, looked as if had been subjected to a nuclear attack. That's the measure of how bad it was.

In Eastern Cuba, as a result of Hurricane Ike, 80,000 acres of bananas were lost and 25,000 acres of other products. 40,000 tons of sugar has to be reprocessed as it was soaked and 1.2 million acres of sugar cane are under flood

water. More than half a million chickens died and more than 2,500 schools are partly or totally destroyed.

New housing

The Deputy Director of Havana City Council, Osmany Castro Ruz, told WORKERS that there had been no new build of municipal housing for 15 years because of the Special Period, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intensification of the US blockade, when the Cuban economy went into freefall. Now, with economic recovery and an end of the Special Period, this has been the first year of building new municipal housing.

Hurricane Ike damaged or destroyed all of the new construction.

Speaking to WORKERS after a visit to Western Cuban Province of Pinar del Rio, Cuban Health Workers Union (SNTS) General Secretary Maria del Carmen Rodriguez said that 314 medical facilities had been badly damaged in that area, including 26 hospitals, 18 clinics and 191 doctors' consultation offices.

"After hurricanes and floods, there are always psychological and social problems. There is the risk of disease as well as trauma and stress. Our doctors, including epidemiologists are already working on the case. The union is mobilising its health



Devastated homes in Los Palacio, Pinar del Rio

workers to assist the recovery from Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, with workers from all parts of the country demonstrating solidarity between provinces,” she said.

Dr Rodriguez also said that the renowned Henrique Cabrero Hospital in Havana City had been almost destroyed, but that they were still providing care for the patients although some wards had to be moved completely.

WORKERS asked the SNTS General Secretary how the Cuban Medical Brigade in Haiti had fared during Hurricanes Fay, Gustav and Ike that had killed so many Haitians and destroyed most of the country, particularly around Gonaives.

“Workers from all parts of the country demonstrating solidarity between provinces...”

WORKERS exclusively reported from Gonaives on the Cuban Medical Brigade in Haiti in February 2004 describing them as heroes because of the lives they had saved in such a poor and dangerous country. She said “As you know, Gonaives is still flooded. The Cuban doctors moved

their patients from the wards to the roofs of the medical facilities. They then dived into the flood water and swam into the medical buildings to salvage whatever they could, especially food. They then continued to care for their patients on the roofs. There have been no Cuban casualties in Haiti.” True heroes still.

“Our priority has always been to save human lives,” she told WORKERS.

So how does Cuba save lives during these terrible calamities? Cuba’s values mean that they put the saving of human

Continued on page 12



Hurricane-hit infrastructure in Pinar del Rio: a wrecked power station (above) and (below) one of 134 flattened pylons.

Continued from page 11

life above all considerations – human life is sacred. This is at the heart of their planning. They have experienced hurricanes every year and know that they can't stop them, so they have to manage the effects of them. They refer to them as attacks, hurricane attacks, and deal with them as such.

The National Civil Defence Authority, which guarantees to save all lives if people follow their instructions, is not part of the military, but is headed by a General and maintains tight military style discipline on behalf of the people and has several thousand well trained uniformed staff.

They receive regular information on potential storms from the Institute of Meteorology, which tracks the hurricanes, even when they are first formed as depressions over the Cape Verde Islands as Fay, Gustav, Ike and later Josephine were. A possible route through the Caribbean and in particular, through Cuba, is plotted with the Civil Defence Authority identifying possible dangers such as weak structures, flood plains, and identifying vulnerable people, livestock and assets. The Civil Defence Authority then prepares a plan based on this information.

It then issues its plan as an instruction to the people, state institutions and mass organisations such as the Committees for

the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), Trade Unions and the Federation of Cuban Women. The local CDRs would have already identified at-risk people in their neighbourhood, e.g. the sick and disabled, those living in weak structures etc.

Strategy

The plan will contain an evacuation strategy and the Ministry of Transport will be told, or rather instructed, how many buses and trucks will be needed, where they should be stationed and who should be evacuated to where. The evacuation locations may be in different areas of the country that have been judged less likely to be affected by the coming storm, or

alternatively safe public buildings such as schools and other institutions. Locally, the CDRs will evacuate its at-risk people and move them to safer buildings or underground Hurricane Refuges. Hospitals will need to evacuate certain patients to safety and this would need to be done by the Ambulance Service. The mass organisations, who would have previously trained their members in hurricane procedures, would assist with the evacuation, and where necessary, make buildings and assets safe. In the countryside, livestock would also be evacuated to designated safe spots wherever possible.

Dealing with a hurricane

Dr Collazo, the Director of Havana City's Intensive and Emergency Medical Service, SIUM, told *WORKERS*, "For us, the most important and difficult times in dealing with a hurricane are before and after, not so much during. I will receive an order from the Civil Defence Authority instructing SIUM to move vulnerable patients from their wards to safety using our ambulances and to ensure that our accident and emergency facilities are safe. After the hurricane has passed, SIUM will collect the patients and take them to a place where their treatment can continue if their original medical facility has been damaged. During the hurricane, we may have to attend with ambulances to those few who have not followed the instructions to evacuate – putting our crews' lives at risk."

Ironically, Cuba has a shortage of both construction and agricultural workers, because in Cuba, every child has the right to free Higher Education. Consequently, few choose to become bricklayers or farmers. Cuba was already trying to rectify this problem and reduce its \$2 billion food import bill. Since the hurricanes, 5515 Cubans have volunteered to farm unused land and work brigades can be seen travelling to the affected areas to help with reconstruction.

Food, especially vegetables, is now in short supply and the country has had to use its strategic reserve of food, put aside

"Cuba will recover from this because, uniquely, the Cuban working class is in power..."

for war. Cuban Government officials expect serious shortages of food for six months and are taking steps to increase domestic food production to ensure that no one goes hungry. However, Cuba will recover from this because, uniquely, the Cuban working class is in power. This means they can harness the full strength of a working class with its solidarity and humanity to bear down on the effects of this calamity.

This is why it is so different to the United States where 600 died in Texas during Hurricane Rita a few years ago and more than 1,000 lost their lives during Hurricane Katrina. When Ike hit Galveston, and the authorities screamed "Get out of town or risk certain death", it seemed to

sum it all up. Cuba takes responsibility for the lives of its citizens in this situation, while the US lays the blame on its citizens.

Interestingly, the first aid to arrive in Havana was in four giant Antonov cargo planes from Russia. This was followed by aid from Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Vietnam, Brazil, China, Dominican Republic etc. While East Timor gave \$500,000 of unconditional aid funds, the USA offered \$100,000 for aid, minuscule given the scale of the damage, on condition that they send a team to assess it – as if the Cuban Civil Defence Authority was not doing that already. Cuba rejected the offer which was just a very cheap bid to gain access to the country, insisting that the US blockade of Cuba be lifted to allow them to buy steel sheeting for roofing and other essential material.

This was refused by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, showing utter contempt for the hurricane victims. But the combination of humanitarian values and working class organisation will eventually overcome the blockade just as it overcomes hurricanes.



Ambulance station, Pinar del Rio – with the roof blown off.

Our ninth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, 1 month: Opening the debate on migration...

2000: Nothing free about the free movement



The subject of migration— both immigration and emigration – is one that many on the so-called left refuse to deal with. Yet it is an issue that won't go away. In this groundbreaking article in November 2000, WORKERS took the issue head on. Who benefits? Not the workers here, and not the countries where the migrant labourers come from, either.

“Modern capitalism sees national boundaries as inconvenient irritants, restricting their right to do what they want. The ‘free’ movement of global labour is part of the capitalist dream embodied in the EU. The ideal is a single market in goods and people in which capitalists can make and sell their goods wherever they want unconstrained by national governments. They can then take their pick from a rootless, unorganised workforce which moves at their behest, lacking the power to determine pay and the conditions of their work and lives.

This is the reality of the Global Market we are asked to revere, fear and accept as inevitable as the world of the future: a world in which the balance of power between capital and labour, which swung in our favour in Russia in 1917, swings back to the capitalist class.

A number of factors have driven the worldwide rise in mass migration. Wars and economic hardship, together with the deprivation and dislocation brought about by capitalism in eastern Europe, combine with the relative ease of travel and speed of global communications. This in turn



enables movement from country to country to seem more desirable and become more possible. These movements have profound effects on the countries people move to and on those they leave behind.

In Britain, the movement of foreign labour into the country enables employers to keep wages low in professions such as teaching and nursing. The acute shortage of teachers of certain key subjects and in the more difficult schools is glossed over by the practice of employing teachers from abroad on supply (non-permanent) contracts, paid rates set by the agencies which employ them. Teaching in London, one of the most expensive of capital cities, is now officially classed as a shortage occupation for immigration purposes, meaning that schools applying for work permits for non-European teachers (European are not so keen to come here) no longer need to show that they have been unable to employ a British teacher.

In nursing, some posts are extremely difficult to fill at present salaries in inner London hospitals because nurses would either need to have expensive inner London accommodation for their families or to travel to their shifts at difficult times for public transport. These jobs are often filled by nurses from abroad, with women living in digs and sending money home to

their families.

Indian stonemasons allowed into Britain under the new Home Office relaxation of regulations to work on a Hindu temple in north London are being paid £3 a day...they are now demanding the British minimum wage, an increase of about 1000%!

The high rate of exploitation of these legal workers is multiplied many times with illegal immigrants. As we reported in WORKERS last year, they form an important part of the labour force of agricultural gangworkers who pack supermarket goods in the countryside of Scotland, East Anglia, Lincolnshire, Kent and Sussex. The TGWU Agricultural Workers trade group has exposed their plight: working long hours for tiny wages in often dangerous and unhygienic conditions. Their illegal status makes them unlikely to protest or join a union, and their low wages are used to intimidate other, legal, workers.

Lift all restrictions?

So, in Britain, is the answer to illegal immigration to lift all restrictions, to allow in anyone at all who wants to come and live here? Immigrant workers make it easier for employers to worsen pay and conditions for workers here, but what of the effects on the countries they leave?

The impact of emigration on the

Looking at the past
THE WORKER. This

nt of labour

possibilities for growth in poor, developing countries is potentially devastating. Developed capitalist countries are poaching the skilled workers from their former colonies.

According to UN figures, almost one-third of skilled African workers had emigrated by the late 1980s – 60,000 high- and middle-ranking managers leaving for Europe and north America in five years by 1990. During that time, Sudan lost 45% of its surveyors, 30% of its engineers, 20% of its university lecturers, and 17% of its doctors and dentists. 60% of Ghanaian doctors practise abroad.

The member states of the EU which are the intended destination for these people have mass unemployment, yet the UN Commission on Population has said they need to take 75 million immigrants by 2050 – to keep up their populations or to maintain high levels of unemployment? What's wrong with national long-term planning to ensure the supply of educated and skilled workers needed by a modern economy? All those who live and work (or want work) in Britain should be included in such a plan....

Capitalism won't pay

...But British workers who produce the wealth which pays for the system through taxation cannot support by their labour unlimited numbers of extra citizens who come here, wittingly or unwittingly, in the interest of the ruling class. Is capitalism offering to pay for the maintenance of people they have displaced from their own countries and lured to others? Of course not.

Eventually, nations have to grapple with their own problems, however difficult and painful. Here in Britain we have to deal with our capitalist class which wants to give up our sovereignty to Brussels. Every independent nation has a democratic right to determine what and who crosses its borders in either direction. If we allow capitalists to decide, you can be sure that workers will be the losers both here and in the developing countries.”

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.

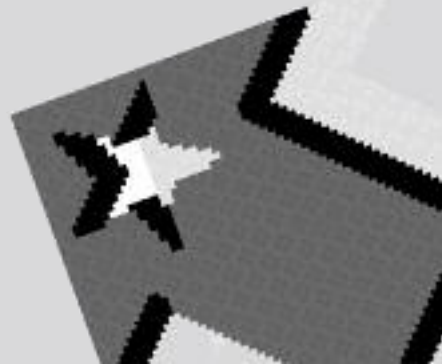
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Back to Front – Moving money about

‘You don’t create wealth by going into a casino or buying a lottery ticket...’

AFTER YEARS of being told that the City was an engine for “creating wealth”, the tens of thousands of workers in financial services – and not just in the high-profile collapses of recent weeks – must be wondering what’s gone wrong. Perhaps the reason is that they were never creating wealth in the first place.

For all the homage paid by Brown and Blair before him at the altar of finance capital, the idea that the City was actually creating wealth is one of the more ludicrous cons, like the word “securitised” an abuse of language.

Certainly a lot of money was accumulated there, drawn from far and wide. And equally certainly, a lot was spent – via huge bonuses and (now often worthless) stock options – driving up the cost of housing in and around London and bringing smiles to luxury car dealerships.

But wealth creation? That’s quite another matter. Speculation doesn’t create wealth. You don’t create wealth by going into a casino or buying a lottery ticket (though you make the owners of casinos and lotteries rich). You create wealth by creating things that are useful as well as tradeable – primarily through two activities scorned by Labour: industry and agriculture.

Packaging up a load of bad debts and selling them to someone else is not wealth creation – it’s just wealth redistribution, among the rich only. And when a government takes the risk of billions of pounds of debt, it’s another redistribution – this time a redistribution of risk from the rich back to the poor.

This Labour government has presided over a massive redistribution of wealth: from millions of hard-working people and pensioners to the rich. With its faith in

the free market and the City it has encouraged the idea that you create wealth by getting into debt. We all know – or should know – that’s a nonsense.

And let no one think that sub-prime mortgages were limited to the United States. What were British banks doing offering 125 per cent mortgages? They thought that property prices would carry on rising, so their investments would be safe even if the people taking out the loans were kicked out on the streets.

Under this viciously reactionary government – a government that has taken Britain to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, that has stamped on local democracy, that is privatising education and health on a scale Thatcher could only have dreamt of – greed and debt have become the household gods.

The result has been catastrophic. Per capita debt in Britain is now higher than in the United States.

Listen very carefully and you might hear the faint sounds of a handful of stable doors closing – such as the temporary ban on “short selling”. But otherwise nothing has changed. Labour is a party more wedded to finance capital than any in our history. It deserves to go the way of Lehman Brothers, and it will take more than £1 million from Harry Potter’s creator to rescue it.

So where does all this leave the workers? No better off, that’s for sure – not unless we take advantage of this weakened government, this discredited system, and go on the offensive: for jobs, for health, for industry, for education, for a future for Britain.

The Chinese communist Mao Tse-tung understood perfectly: “Everything reactionary is the same: if you don’t hit it,

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