

WORKERS

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DECADES OF NEGLECT PUT POWER SUPPLY IN PERIL



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WORKERS

“ No room at the school

THE NATIONAL Audit Office has warned that England and Wales will have a shortfall of 250,000 school places by September 2014, unless a major building programme is undertaken.

Yet even a massive programme of installing temporary classrooms won't solve the problem. Twenty per cent of primaries are already full to capacity. Some inner London councils have had to cope with a shortfall of 2,000+ school places by asking schools to take "bulge" classes this year. But bulges don't disappear – schools with a bulge this year will have it all the way through with that age group.

Other large cities have been told they must find extra places for the expected influx of new migrants in the next year or so. The government

refuses to acknowledge that tens or even hundreds of thousands of children new to the country pose any kind of problem. It won't act to stem the tide of inward migration, nor accept the need to fund places for the children arriving.

Adding to the turmoil is the government's insistence that any new schools must be offered first as either academies or "free" schools. This policy slows development and forces some children away from their natural catchment areas.

It's beginning to look a lot like education provision is now as focused on the interests of the employer as is government policy on immigration. Our children – born here or new arrivals – are going to bear the brunt of the government's approach. ■

The part-time collapse

EACH DAY comes a new and shocking statistic about the destruction being wrought by this government. But the news in March from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has devastating implications for Britain's skills and knowledge bases: the numbers taking up part-time undergraduate degrees have fallen by 40 per cent since 2010 – that is, 105,000 fewer students.

The fall in part-time numbers for

postgraduate studies was 27 per cent. Part-timers starting university courses in September last year were down about 30 per cent on the previous year. Clearly, people have been put off by the exorbitant tuition fees in England, which have risen to a high of £9,000.

The HEFCE report refers to higher education as being "one of the nation's most valuable assets". And the government's policies are destroying this great national asset. ■



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**PENSIONS****GREECE****DEBT****UNIVERSITIES****CROSSRAIL****SAFETY****SYRIA****OFSTED****CARPETS****EUROBRIEFS**

Saver numbers plummet

General strike

Unemployment blamed

Occupation at Sussex

No thanks, say investors

Cuts, and deaths

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Pension savers plummet

ACCORDING TO the Office for National Statistics only 46 per cent of staff saved for a workplace pension in 2012, the lowest figure on record. 32 per cent of private sector workers were in a pension scheme as opposed to 83 per cent in the public sector. Of those in a public sector scheme over 90 per cent were in a final salary scheme compared with 26 per cent in the private sector. When the Office first started collecting figures in 1997, 55 per cent of all workers were in a pension scheme.

The National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF) says the situation of only a third of the private sector workforce saving into a pension is unsustainable. "People simply will not be able to retire in comfort, and will lean more heavily on the state." It warns that the government's auto-enrolment programme will not halt the decline.

Meanwhile, after sham consultation on the use of local government workers' pension schemes, the government has now introduced proposals to access the estimated £150 billion of workers' money invested in their pension schemes for investment. Councils can now invest in local infrastructure projects between 15-30 per cent of the funds from the pension schemes. Effectively this will release up to £45 billion for investment. Such interesting descriptions are forthcoming from government ministers as "freeing up", "unlocking", "getting Britain building".

Workers have never opposed wise investment of their pension schemes. Indeed, the Local Government Pension Scheme funds the top ten per cent of British industry. What workers are more concerned about is the use of assets to fund private equity schemes, property development in the newly created Pensions Infrastructure Project - PIP to its friends. Remember the Private Finance Initiative, the Public Private Partnership and similarly fraudulent schemes which supposedly were to build schools, hospitals, roads etc?

The lifting of the investment cap is an attempt by the Coalition to get workers to rebuild Britain's infrastructure after they have gutted proper investment and state support for such projects. Osborne is claiming £22 billion will be invested in schemes he has cut.

Among the contributory factors to the pension schemes crisis of the past 15 years have been dodgy investments, employers' pensions holidays and employers' abuse of pension funds. Now we have yet another pension fund raid by the capitalist class carried out by its government and City spivs. ■

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email rebuilding@workers.org.uk

GREECE**General strike**

TENS OF thousands of Greek workers took part in the latest general strike against the government's "austerity" – poverty – measures and increased taxes, which have hit pensions and living standards and pushed unemployment to 26 per cent.

The strike had been called by unions representing 2 million of Greece's 4 million workers and had the stated aim of getting rid of the bailout deal. It shut schools and left hospitals with emergency cover as well as leading to the cancellation of flights and train services.

Emergency legislation has been used to prevent seamen and metro workers from striking. There were demonstrations outside the parliament building in Athens and in Crete and Thessaloniki.

Figures from the Greek Ministry of Health have revealed a 40 per cent rise in suicides in the first part of 2011 when the financial crisis first started to hit. ■

DEBT**Unemployment blamed**

DEBT CHARITY StepChange has found that a third of adults under 25 put their debt problems down to unemployment. There are now more than one million in that age group not in employment, education or training. Seventeen per cent of those aged 16 to 24 years have no job or are not in college.

The charity comments that its findings reflect "...the acutely vulnerable economic position that many young people now find themselves in and is likely to overshadow the lives of a significant proportion of young people for many years to come." ■

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Down – but up

THE EU budget is supposed to cut spending by 3.3 per cent. Cameron's negotiations ended with Britain paying even more to the EU, but he said afterwards "our contributions were always going to go up."

Hands off our food!

FOOD LAW has been under EU control ("competence") since 2002. As a result regular inspections and food testing ended. Instead, EU Regulation 178/2002 says that all food products should be accompanied by a piece of paper on which every "food operator" from farm to consumer vouched for its quality.

That did not work too well, but the EU ties our hands if Britain wants to act against food adulteration. We cannot introduce a temporary ban on foreign meat under trade rules, and even have to negotiate with Brussels before introducing random testing.

Help, cries Germany

THE BRITISH government admits it has no idea how many Bulgarians and Romanians will come here from next January. Several German cities are already begging for help from central government to deal with the effects of mass migration from those countries, including problems in schools, illegal working, increased benefit pay-outs, and an alarming rise in organised crime.

Not-so-super Mario

THE FIVE-STAR Movement emerged from the Italian elections with support around 25 per cent and as the largest single party in the lower house. Outgoing Prime Minister Mario Monti was the biggest loser. A Goldman Sachs old boy, he was appointed to the job by the EU. Fewer than 10 per cent of the votes went to his party. Almost 60 per cent of Italians voted for parties pledged to end EU-mandated austerity.

Anti-euro party

A NEW German anti-euro party, Alternative for Germany, argues that Germany should no longer guarantee the debts of other states and that the single currency should be abandoned, with all states free to leave the euro. It also pledges to offer a referendum on any proposed further transfers of sovereignty to the EU. ■



Photo: Andrew Wiard/andrew-wiard.info

Wednesday 13 March: 600 London teachers marched to the DfE to hand in a letter to Education Secretary Michael Gove, saying he must listen to the profession on teacher pay and our children's education. Many wore Gove masks (above) to make their point.

Occupation at Sussex

Sussex University is privatising 235 jobs in its Estates and Facilities departments, over 10 per cent of the university workforce. Under a total facilities management package, some of the 235 will be transferred to an external "partner". TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings [Protection of Employment] Regulations) will apply to those transferred but new recruits to the outsourced jobs will have worse pay, conditions and pension rights than directly employed university staff.

The university has previously privatised its crèche and nursery, in spite of vocal opposition from parents and campus trade unions. Its strategy, not unlike that of some local authorities, seems to be to outsource everything possible, leaving only a rump of managers to negotiate the contracts.

The proposals are deeply unpopular, naturally, with the staff affected, and with university staff and students more generally. A group of students occupied the university conference centre on 7 February, and have remained there ever since.

Despite its intentions the occupation is unlikely to achieve anything. The vice-chancellor and the clique around him are happy to sit it out, waiting for the occupiers to lose interest. The occupiers feel that they are taking action to help those less fortunate than themselves, whom they perceive to be too cowed to do anything. Perhaps because of this Lady Bountiful attitude, the occupiers have no support or relationship with the trade unions that organise the staff affected.

Sussex has a colourful tradition of student protest to which both the occupiers and the vice-chancellor constantly refer, but the times require harder-headed thinking. The well-meaning gesture is not harmless but dangerous, and weakens the ability of students and staff to organise for the long struggle required to save the university from the destructiveness of its present senior management. ■

CROSSRAIL

No thanks, say investors

THE GOVERNMENT'S much-vaunted plea to private capital to invest in public infrastructure works has failed yet again. The government is now going to fund entirely the £1 billion investment in London's Crossrail trains and maintenance infrastructure. This is the new London-wide railway system, as important as London's Underground, on target and running by 2018.

The failure of the government to persuade any private investors to find the money is a major embarrassment. It forced the arch-privateer and bankers' friend Boris Johnson to support rail trade unions in getting the government to fund this project.

The battle now is to ensure that the contract for this rolling stock is secured by Derby-based Bombardier and not Siemens in Germany or any other EU-based competitor.

Meanwhile, research from property company Jones Lang LaSalle released in March suggests that house prices along the Crossrail line are set to soar, particularly strongly around Tottenham Court Road, Farringdon and Canary Wharf, as well as big rises elsewhere.

This will be devastating news for any council tenants in the areas affected, and for those receiving housing benefit, as there will be a knock-on effect on rents. But the report has been received gleefully by the property vultures who stand to make a killing. Perhaps the estate agents and property vultures should pay for Crossrail! ■

HEALTH AND SAFETY**Cuts, and deaths**

DAVID CAMERON said last year that health and safety in the workplace was "an albatross around the neck of British business..." and he wants to "kill off the health and safety culture for good". Figures released in March by the Health and Safety Executive, whose statutory powers are being cut and its staff decimated, show that 175 workers died from injuries sustained at work in 2011-12 and that 50,000 workers die each year from work-related illnesses, including 6,000 from occupational cancers.

Launching its latest edition of HAZARDS

AT WORK, the TUC noted that the government has cut the HSE budget by 35 per cent, and local authority safety inspection teams are also working with substantially reduced funding, at a time when Britain's safety record appears to be getting worse.

"In 2010/11, the latest figures available, there was a 16 per cent increase in deaths across all workplaces, with some industries such as construction (22 per cent) seeing an even bigger rise," said the TUC.

It predicts the current upward trend in workplace fatalities will "not be reversed unless there is an increase in the enforcement of health and safety law in all workplaces". ■

Arms flood in to break Syria

SOME 3,000 tonnes of weapons from the former Yugoslavia have been sent in 75 planeloads from Zagreb airport to Islamist terrorists in Syria, largely via Jordan, since November.

Growing numbers of these weapons, including rocket launchers, recoil-less guns and M79 Osa anti-tank rockets, have been seen in rebel hands in online videos. The shipments were allegedly paid for by Saudi Arabia at the bidding of the USA, with neighbouring Turkey and Jordan assisting in the supply of the weapons.

One report added that weapons also came "from several other European countries including Britain". US and British allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar have supplied other weapons to Islamist terrorists in Syria via Jordan.

British, French and American military advisers are training rebels in Turkey and Jordan. Foreign Secretary Hague has promised another £13 million of British help for opponents of President Bashar al-Assad, on top of £9.4 million already committed. The Coalition government has amended the EU arms embargo to allow it to provide military equipment including armoured cars and body armour.

As the conflict continues, the opposition is becoming more religious and more extreme. The Coalition government has already let hundreds of British passport-holders, known for their extremist sympathies, travel to Syria to fight against Assad.

As Hague admitted, "Syria today has become the top destination for jihadists anywhere in the world." He has rejected President Assad's offer to negotiate.

Hague went on, "We cannot allow Syria to become another breeding ground for terrorists who pose a threat to our national security." But his policy of building up al-Qaeda as a mercenary force and rejecting peace is creating a breeding ground for terrorists, which he then wants to use to justify direct intervention. ■

OFSTED**Obedient to ministerial whim**

OFSTED, the education inspection agency, has always been about compliance with current government policy. Since its inception, definitions of excellence, areas of key focus and punitive arrangements have changed with ministerial whim.

Now, Ofsted has announced the appointment of 8 regional directors to more closely prescribe the application of government policy. Foremost amongst their tasks will be the identification of underperformance by local authorities – hence the innovation last autumn of putting

local councils into league tables, according to Ofsted judgements on their schools. On its own, that shouldn't be a problem but Ofsted is then expected to identify local authority services for rapid privatisation.

In a few cases – Bradford, Leeds, Islington, Southwark – we've been here before, with mixed results. This time, however, it is expected that privatisation will become far more rapidly and widely applied.

Given that some private providers declined to renew earlier contracts, as the returns weren't up to what they had anticipated, expect to see even bigger profits taken from public services instead of money being spent on our children. ■

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MAY DAY MEETINGS**

CPBML May Day Meetings: "Struggle for ideas: the battle for Britain"

Saturday 27 April, 12 noon. The Fox and Newt, 9 Burley Street, Leeds LS3 1LD

Wednesday 1 May, 6.00pm. Word Power Books, 43 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Wednesday 1 May, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

We, the British working class, have survived anything and everything thrown at us by early capitalism, capitalism in ascendancy or capitalism in absolute decline. We have survived by organising ourselves and by thinking out the strategies to defeat the brutal reality of capitalism. We now face the greatest struggle of ideas as we battle for our very survival as a class and nation.

Come to our 2013 May Day meetings and discuss the struggle of ideas that will win the battle for Britain. For more information, see advertisement on page 8, or visit www.workers.org.uk

Out of the European Union, no to the break-up of Britain, defend national sovereignty!

Rebuild workplace trade union organisation!

Fight for pay, skill and industry the key to independence!

Build the Party!

CARPETS**Axminster in administration**

TOP OF the market and high-quality carpet manufacturer Axminster Carpets has been placed into administration. Founded in 1755, Axminster has been the benchmark for carpet production and quality for nearly 260 years.

The move to administration foreshadows asset-stripping, ceasing of production and redundancy for nearly 400 staff. Factories in Axminster and Buckfast in Devon will be devastated.

But workers facing redundancy can take comfort from the financial media announcing at the same time as Axminster was being closed down that the world stock markets had hit record highs, surging to a five year-peak. ■

**We instinctively recognise the state as the tool for ruling class p
our problems...**

We're not going to reform the state – we ha

RADICAL CHANGES to the NHS from 1 April are a dramatic and visible sign of the way that the role of the state is changing. There are other, less obvious, changes in the way that the state and government work. At the moment most of our attention is on immediate effects and the increasing role of the private sector. There are other, wider concerns for our class too.

Handing over services to private companies is about more than making profits; it goes together with reducing what workers get from the state. Quantitative easing, inflation and wage freezes cut standards of living – that's easy to see. This is matched by the undermining of pensions, housing, education, health, local services, arts and all else that we've grown up to expect.

It's tempting to call for a fight against every cut in services, to reverse every new benefits rule, to tax the rich, or even to renationalise key industries. All of those are valid in the right time and place but do not, even together, comprise a programme for the working class to defend itself and to rebuild Britain.

Ambivalence

Historically our class has been ambivalent about the state. We instinctively recognise it as the tool for ruling class power. Yet at the same time we see it as providing the answer to our problems – hence the call for public sector control and against privatisation. Those calls alone miss the point. Capitalists make profits, or hope to do so wherever they can. Yet it is seen as a problem for them to do so in certain areas like healthcare. Food is just as essential, arguably more so, but few challenge the role of capitalism in food production – until something like the recent horsemeat scandal.

Do we hope that state provision of something takes that aspect of our lives out of the grip of capitalists? Or if we work for the state do we hope, against all evidence, that the employer will be kinder? Yet many of the successes of our class and positive features of Britain have become part of the state. That hasn't been wrong or something to criticise. The fears of life without proper healthcare or of ignorance and low self



TUC march, 20 October 2012: without a fight for wages and conditions, attempts to retain public sector provision will not succeed.

worth through poor education are rightly high on the list of workers' concerns. The failure would be not to recognise that those gains are temporary without a continued struggle to maintain them. In the end only we are interested in the future of our class.

The government of the day represents the ruling class and acts on its behalf, whatever the party in power. Parliamentary democracy is limited; it is never directly responsive to our needs. That's as true now as it was in 1945 or in the 19th century. But at times the working class has been able to influence or even dictate what the government does. Our dilemma is that although we despise politicians and the political process, we don't see any other way to secure our aims.

At the moment it is the ruling class and its government that appear to be breaking down the old ways of parliamentary

democracy. And, if they were to be believed, they are also "rolling back the state". The opposite is true. They are removing control and decisions as far from working class influence as they can manage. At the same time they are redefining what the state does and how it exercises class power.

Decisions affecting the economy or the working class are made not in the open or in parliament. They are made in EU meeting rooms or company boardrooms (often in tax havens). The ideas they take up are not from workers in Britain, or even local politicians; they are generated by think tanks and research institutes operating only in the interests of capital.

These policies are presented as what's good for Britain and as the only choice. The limited public debate that follows rarely acknowledges how this is happening, or

power. Yet at the same time we see it as providing the answer to

ave to take it for ourselves

effectively challenges the presumption that capital decides on the future of Britain. Sadly even trade unions and the TUC aspire to little more than hand wringing and commenting on the worst features of government policy.

The history of the working class and government has been a series of big steps mixed with periods of absorption and attempts at reform. Nor is the development of government the path to ever-increasing democracy, as those in Westminster would have us believe.

A universal franchise took nearly 100 years to emerge after Chartist agitation and the first reforms. The establishment of permanent and effective trade unions in the mid-19th century was followed by 50 years of wrestling with parliamentary representation ending only in the foundation of the Labour Party, though in this time many laws were passed to regulate employment and working conditions.

Workers' organisation grew in depth and breadth. The scope of the state was transformed in that period, laying the foundations of local government, education, health provision, and other social changes that benefited our class. We'd recognise many of them even now.

Coercive powers

The modern capitalist state meets common needs through providing state services and managing the economy – or it did. It also holds coercive powers (law and order, defence). During the 20th century there were periods when it seemed that the working class could gain control and make changes, for example in 1945. That followed 30 years of world war, depression and another world war (and a war in Ireland). There was an immense increase in central planning and control. Without that there would have been no victory to celebrate.

The 30 years after 1945 were a historical aberration. The working class could make more progress and gained the illusion it might consolidate post-war aspirations without having to fight for them. Then came the cold shower of Thatcher and the attempt to divert and disarm our class – from within as well as from outside.

“Without a fight for wages and conditions, attempts to retain public sector provision will not succeed...”

Struggle by workers for wages, conditions and a better life has not disappeared, though it is less frequent and our organisation is constantly under threat. But the reasons driving such struggles are as present as they ever were.

That process has continued from 1979 right up to today. Common provision of health and education is being broken up; the carpet baggers are moving in. Governments have abandoned any pretence that the state should secure industrial infrastructure like energy, transport or water. Even more destructive has been the policy of breaking up industry and the skills that underpin it.

The current failures of the capitalist state and its government are evident and insoluble. They cannot manage the economy. Brown the “brilliant” academic could not; Osborne the trust child can't

either. Both revere “the market” because the alternative is control and limitation on capitalists. The only answer excluded is to make more goods that people need and provide more services they want to use.

There is little to choose between parliamentary parties on the key issues for Britain – how to avoid an economic depression, getting out of the EU, regulating financial markets, creating jobs, stopping migration, maintaining health, education and other essential services. All potential governments fear organised workers, and fear the decisions we'd make on these questions. Likewise they fear any revival of a planned economy.

When the capitalists want to roll back whatever we've achieved in the past, we go into defence of the local, and look to parliament to put it right. We don't question the power that enables the ruling class to make those decisions. Nor do we, for the most part, claim the right to work not benefits, and assert that it is workers who create the wealth Britain needs.

Our class has the same dilemma over the state as ever. Without a fight for wages and conditions, attempts to retain public sector provision will not succeed. We must make the state come to us, not chase the illusion that we can reform it. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings began on 27 September, with further meetings on 15 November, 12 February and 11 June; all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, and start at 7.30 pm. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings are advertised in What's On (page 5). Further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2013, Wednesday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings Edinburgh and Leeds.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email info@workers.org.uk

CPBML/Workers MAY DAY MEETINGS



Saturday 27 April, 12 noon

Speakers and discussion

**The Fox and Newt (close to city centre),
9 Burley Street, Leeds LS3 1LD**

Wednesday 1 May, 6.00 pm

Speakers, music and discussion

**Word Power Books,
43 West Nicolson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB**

Wednesday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers and refreshments

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

STRUGGLE FOR IDEAS: THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN

We, the British working class, have survived anything and everything thrown at us by early capitalism, capitalism in ascendancy or capitalism in absolute decline. We have survived by organising ourselves and by thinking out the strategies to defeat the brutal reality of capitalism. We now face the greatest struggle of ideas as we battle for our very survival as a class and nation. We fight capitalist ideas and we fight the weakness in ourselves which says, "Live with capitalism."

Capitalist economics continue in their free fall of failure, poverty, unemployment, hopelessness and closure. Britain collapses under this government. Economic bankruptcy at home equates with imperialist war abroad. The European Union continues its 40-year colonisation to break up Britain and fragment our nation and class.

The challenges may be unprecedented but capitalist ideas are based on failure as they enter the second great economic depression in their history. Their short-term attempt to rule has created a government united only by hatred of the working class. We can destroy them by clarity of mind, rebuilt organisation, unity in the workplace and the assertion of our class resistance.

Come to our 2013 May Day meetings and discuss the struggle of ideas that will win the battle for Britain.

Out of the European Union

No to the breakup of Britain

Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

Fight for pay

Regenerate industry

Build the Party!

Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. All welcome

How is it that we need a public inquiry to remind us that patients come first – and that the organised working class in the NHS left it to relatives and carers to force one?

NHS workers: take responsibility

WITHIN HOURS of publication of the Francis report which described the “disaster” at Mid-Staffordshire Hospitals as the worst scandal in the history of the NHS, the Department of Health released figures from 5 other hospitals indicating that standards of care may be being compromised.

As WORKERS went to press the concerns about mother and baby deaths at Furness hospital were being reiterated. Now Professor Brian Jarman, former president of the British Medical Association, is working on a government review of 14 hospitals where mortality rates have been persistently higher than the national average.

Francis catalogued failure that would have resulted in criminal prosecution had it been discovered in a prison or a police station. Yet despite evidence of between 400 and 1,200 needless deaths, five investigations and a public inquiry costing £13 million, not a single person has been disciplined, sacked or struck off.

How is it that we need a public inquiry to remind us that patients come first – and that the organised working class in the NHS left it to relatives and carers to force one? Are NHS staff to abrogate responsibility for patients as well as pay and pensions? Is this where failure to take responsibility can lead to? If NHS staff do not resolve to put this right, personally and collectively, they lose public trust. And they open the service to its political enemies.

Custodians of quality

Changing the situation starts with the right mind-set. We are the custodians of quality. Not Monitor, the Care Quality Commission, NHS Litigation Authority or the National Commissioning Board in all its iterations. They have failed patients, their carers and their loved ones.

Next honest acknowledgement – this extract from the Francis Report should be compulsory reading – with compulsory discussion, too.

“There was a lack of care, compassion, humanity and leadership. The most basic standards weren’t observed, and fundamental rights to dignity were not



Mid-Staffordshire Hospitals: some parts of the Francis report should be compulsory reading – with compulsory discussion, too.

Photo: Philip Wolmuth/reportdigital.co.uk

respected. Elderly and vulnerable patients were left unwashed, unfed and without fluids. They were deprived of dignity and respect. Some patients had to relieve themselves in their beds when they were offered no help to get to the bathroom. Some were left in excrement stained sheets and beds.

“They had to endure filthy conditions in their wards. There were incidents of callous treatment by ward staff. Patients who could not eat or drink without help did not receive it. Medicines were prescribed but not given. The accident and emergency department as well as some wards had insufficient staff to deliver safe and effective care. Patients were discharged without proper regard for their welfare.

“At every level there was a failure to communicate known concerns adequately to others, and to take sufficient action to protect patients’ safety and wellbeing from the risks arising from those concerns. In short the trust that the public should be able to place in the NHS was betrayed.”

This extract could be read in team meetings or in union meetings. The

discussion question would be: could it happen here? And if the answer is “Yes”, the next question would be “what are we going to do about it?”

Professional bodies and the Royal Colleges have an absolute obligation to take action against the people registered with them that on a daily basis decline to uphold accepted professional standards. There is a personal as well as collective responsibility to root out poor practice wherever it manifests itself. A professional code of conduct is integral to being a professional, not an optional add-on.

The Chief Executive of the NHS cannot remain in his post just as Fred Goodwin could never have been left in charge of RBS. And the position of the General Secretary at the Royal College of Nursing is untenable if the allegation is substantiated that he advised a “whistle-blower” to keep her head down, rather than fight for change in an environment where ward staff were showing a callous and persistent indifference to the suffering of patients.

There is no external solution to the problems in the NHS. It can only come from those working in the service. ■

It's not rocket science, just simple mathematics: Britain is closing its eyes to a result is a dangerous reliance on Middle Eastern gas, and a looming

Energy paralysis: government action – and inaction

THE ISLAMIST attack on the gas production plant in Amenas in Algeria in January, rapidly followed by Cameron's sabre-rattling, warmongering visit to Algeria may seem unconnected. The reality is that Britain's energy supplies are more fragile and threatened than ever before, dependent on imports from places like Algeria while we sit on an island of coal.

Britain is the world's fifth largest importer of natural gas (53,630,000 cubic metres in 2011) after the USA, Germany, Japan and Italy. Ironical that Britain's gas reserves from the North Sea oil and gas fields, a once strategic national resource, have been largely wasted in short term use of gas for electricity production (and vast profit returns over the past 40 years). In 2011 Britain, for the first time since 1967, became a net importer of gas.

Britain's energy scene is a complex mix: dependency on imports, refusal of central government to commit to long-term investment in new nuclear and clean coal-fuelled power stations, the Chancellor's short-term "dash for gas" resulting in generating shortfalls, the investment strike by oil and gas companies operating in the North Sea, EU directives closing Britain's coal-fired generation under so-called "green" policy coupled with failing and failed renewables – wind, wave, solar energy. Add to that the potential for terrorist or other interruption of fuel supplies.

Security of supply

By 2020 Britain will depend on gas imports for an estimated 80 per cent of its power generation – with most of the gas coming from Qatar and Norway. Qatar gas is some 70 per cent dearer than Norwegian supplies, and Britain pays £4.25 billion a year to the absolute monarchy for these imports. Politically, as Qatar spins ever nearer to Islamic fundamentalism, this raises ever-growing concerns over security of supply. Hence the attraction of Algeria, not yet ruled by fundamentalists.

In addition to the gas provided by pipeline from Norway or supplies purchased via Europe from either Russian or other Middle East suppliers, Britain



The national grid can transport energy – but what if there's too little to go round?

Photo: Workers

imports vast quantities by tanker. Gas is frozen, liquefied and shipped here by tankers. Security of supply in this case is compromised by the vulnerability of shipping passing through the Straits of Hormuz. The Straits border, Oman, Yemen and Iran are a flashpoint for unwelcome US, British and other Western allies intruding against Iran, allegedly defending their imperial oil interests.

Terrorist action, piracy and or war could affect an estimated 25 per cent of all

liquefied natural gas exports and 17 per cent of oil exports, which would paralyse the British economy faster than the OPEC price increases in the 1970s. Ironically the armchair admirals of Downing Street propose to counter these threats by turning tankers, effectively floating bombs, into battleships, inviting assault and deadly consequences.

Having no national plan for energy, having no planned measures for building Britain's energy infrastructure other than

ing power stations faster than new ones are being built. The
 coming threat of power cuts...

naction – has put our power supply in peril

imports, the government – as with everything – has no Plan B. So Britain is placed in jeopardy. Alternative gas supplies are subject to defensive actions being taken by gas-producing states, which are now limiting exports so as to protect their own demand – the USA in particular.

If Cameron and Chancellor Osborne's resolution to Britain's energy crisis is gas imports then they are inviting war and the fight for re-division and possession of the world's natural resources. Teaming up with France, they toy with Algeria, which obviously is being targeted by Islamic terrorists. France has intervened in Mali and now Syria. Proposed British military aid, training, intervention in Africa and the Middle East will stoke the fires of war, as with the First World War.

Nuclear fiasco

The government's refusal to support a plan for Britain's energy infrastructure is highlighted in the fiasco surrounding construction of new nuclear provision – see WORKERS November and December 2012. The French state energy company EDF and the Hitachi consortium now look to have withdrawn from the proposals to rebuild at Hinckley. Why? Because agreement over the proposed internal rate of return, the add-on to the already extortionate billions they would have been paid by the taxpayer to fund yet again the failure of private capital to invest, has foundered on the 10 per cent mark-up.

The negotiations to rebuild at Hinckley have dragged on for 10 years; the latest impasse is effectively an investment strike by the construction companies to withhold their skill and construction expertise until the government coughs up. If this was a trade union strike there would be a flurry of legislation to outlaw such action plus a propaganda barrage denouncing outrageous behaviour. But no, the impasse remains and Osborne returns to more gas imports.

The investment strike pursued by the companies associated with nuclear construction has a clear precedent in the oil and gas companies operating in the

“If Britain had an energy plan, all Britain's coal requirements could be supplied from Britain's coal reserves....”

North Sea. Between 2011 and 2013, production from the North Sea sites dropped by 30 per cent, a direct response of the energy companies to new tax requirements. Osborne has now retreated with new tax incentives, tax holidays and perks to the companies.

Miraculously, the energy companies have now announced a £100 billion investment in gas and oil production. Osborne claims this is wonderful and will generate a tax windfall of £25 billion and sustain an estimated 440,000 jobs. The tax revenue will be significantly reduced on what was proposed previously and demonstrates who determines national energy policy: the energy companies.

The additional twist is of course that the Scottish Nationalists are now claiming the energy reserves and employment as being directly theirs and that the revenues should also be theirs. Some 55 per cent of the jobs are not Scottish-based, and the manufacturing supply lines are located throughout Britain. But for the energy companies the opportunity to play divide and rule over national governments, their favourite game, must be music to the ears.

With no national energy plan and squabbling petty local politicians, the energy companies' revenues will be propelled into the stratosphere. It's happening already – witness npower, owned by the German company RWE, which with a 9 per cent price rise has lifted profits from £77 million to £390 million at the stroke of a pen.

While paralysis over planning, imports and the prospect of war threaten to put the lights out, Britain's coal industry teeters on total collapse following the abandonment

of Daw Mill Pit in Warwickshire to an underground fire. With the loss of this production, UK Coal may not be able to supply contracts to existing power stations, worsening the dependence on imported coal. UK Coal is now reduced to two pits – Kellingley and Thoresby, plus six opencast mines, employing 1,850 miners.

The recent restructuring of UK Coal has separated coal production from the property portfolio worth £280 million. This separation has been the desired goal of the financiers and banks behind UK Coal since the privatisation of British Coal in the 1990s. The vast acreage of ex-British Coal and National Coal Board land was always seen as far more profitable, with quick and cheap returns rather than the capital-intensive requirements of coal mining.

If Britain had an energy plan, all Britain's coal requirements could be supplied from Britain's coal reserves. The wilful destruction of Britain's coal industry, started under Thatcher, connived at under Blair and Brown and exacerbated by the EU, has ensured Britain's 1,000 years of coal reserves are closed. Yet again we are dependent on imported energy sources.

Closed by the EU

European Union closure notices on coal-fired power stations under so-called anti-pollution notices will close 10 per cent of Britain's generation capacity this month. For the first time in half a century the threat to guaranteed energy supplies, “keeping the lights” on, is looming. Thanks to deliberate government decisions over the last 30 years, Britain is critically dependent on foreign energy sources, with all the inherent danger that brings.

Workers can find simple solutions to these complex questions: self-sufficiency in production – gas, coal, nuclear on an integrated planned basis. These include: no exports until the home markets are resourced; the development of strategic planning, investment, construction, training, and research and development into all effective clean-energy technologies; setting aside all EU directives and dumping the EU's technologically inefficient and landscape-blighting wind farm nonsense. ■

Capitalists like to refer to Africa as a hopeless case, unable to a how capitalist colonisation distorted its economies and sucked o

Africa: how a mighty continent bled dry by

AFTER THE slave trade had created what the missionary-explorer David Livingstone called “the open sore of the world” in central Africa, he called on Europe to open up Africa to commerce, Christianity and civilisation. Such pious intentions combined well with the requirements of capitalism in the mid-19th century and led to the “Scramble for Africa”. The continent must be civilised and Christianised in the name of commerce. This became the clarion call of the competing colonial countries, of whom Britain was the greatest protagonist, as they carved up Africa.

The Berlin Conference of 1884 was intended to “regulate” the scramble for African colonies, but in reality it only ushered in a period of heightened colonial activity. Britain grabbed the biggest slice of the colonial pie, followed by France, Portugal, Belgium and Germany, and then Italy. Most of Spain’s 400-year-old, tiny conquests in North Africa were taken by France but Spain did end up with Spanish Morocco.

Cut-throat

This cut-throat imperial contest was ultimately to lead to the First World War and the defeat of Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The spoils of war went to the victors and German African colonies were redistributed among Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal. Only Abyssinia, modern-day Ethiopia, remained beyond the reach of the European imperialists, until fascist Italy conquered it in the 1930s.

But what was behind this race to colonise Africa? Led by Britain, Europe in the 19th century experienced its industrial revolution. Industrial production requires labour, capital and natural resources. There was no shortage of labour, but there was a shortage of natural resources. Two hundred years of trade with Asia, the Americas and Africa had brought great profits to European traders, much of which was invested in the industrial revolution.

The trade with Africa had mainly been the Atlantic slave trade. Because Europe

was resource poor, European capitalists were dependent on raw materials from Asia, the Americas and Africa. For example, although Manchester had a thriving textile industry, all cotton, as the raw material, had to be imported. Consequently, competition for raw materials grew and there was a strong lobby of capitalists, not only in Britain, to encourage their governments to colonise Africa as a method of guaranteeing sources of raw materials.

At the same time, capitalism in Europe was producing more goods than could be consumed in domestic markets. The same lobby of capitalists pressurised governments to colonise Africa so as to protect their markets there from competition.

Many of these lobbyists on behalf of capitalism were people like Livingstone, who provided the “acceptable” face to a ruthless and murderous colonisation. Before colonisation, there were perhaps 10,000 different states or political entities in Africa.

By the end of the First World War, there were a handful of colonial powers governing Africans in territories with artificially created borders dividing most of the political entities. Borders were merely the consequence of rival colonial armies reaching their limits or making deals between themselves. The colonising powers used a combination of warfare, threat of force and treaties with African rulers to establish control over Africa.

At the end of the 19th century, Europe slumped into an economic depression and the colonies were told that they had to be self sufficient, raising taxes and funds from within the colony to pay for colonial administration, including the colonial army and police force. Consequently, the material and human resources in the colonies were ruthlessly exploited.

After 1900, European colonial governments began to introduce changes to colonial rule to increase revenues. These changes included taking land from Africans and giving it to European settlers. They also introduced taxes such as the hut tax and poll tax that forced the



Relic of the struggle for independence: burnt-out

Africans to work for the settlers in order to pay taxes in cash instead of cattle or crops, as was the previous practice.

The exploitation of African labour only fuelled resentment against the European employers. Resistance movements began to rise in colonies with a growing number of settlers where more and more land was being taken from the Africans.

Some tribal chiefs organised revolts against this exploitation. One such Chief was the Zulu Chief Bambatha, who organised an armed rebellion against the British after they had imposed a poll tax of £1 on his people and taken land from them. It took the British a full year to suppress the uprising, killing 3,000 Zulus and Chief Bambatha.

Similar revolts took place in Eastern

advance politically or socially. But a glance at its history shows
out its natural resources...

capitalism asserted its independence



tank in Angola

Photo: Workers

Africa, South West Africa and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Similar patterns of forced labour and taxation across Africa led to revolts that were ruthlessly crushed by overwhelmingly superior firepower.

Most colonies, except South Africa, developed single- or double-industry economies. For example, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) became a series of copper mines while Southern Rhodesia grew tobacco and had huge cattle ranches. Angola and Kenya grew coffee whilst Tanganyika grew cotton. All of it was to service the industrialisation of Europe.

Liberation movements

Political parties began to be formed in urban areas where some men had

received education at missionary schools, but these were no more than civil rights campaigners. Perhaps the biggest single factor in spawning the liberation movements that followed the Second World War was that Africans fought as soldiers in that war.

Africans played an important role in liberating Ethiopia from Italian rule and creating an independent Ethiopia. If it could happen in Ethiopia it could happen anywhere. In 1947 India won its independence from Britain, providing yet another example.

After the war, Britain occupied Libya but the UN set a deadline for its independence. In 1951, Britain handed power to a safe pair of hands in Libya – King Idris – but faced the Mau Mau

uprising in its Kenyan colony from 1952, and a campaign of strikes and civil disobedience by Kwame Nkrumah's followers in Gold Coast (Ghana).

By 1954, Algerians were using weapons left from the Second World War to launch their revolution against French colonialism and won independence in 1962. Inspired by these struggles, liberation movements grew across the African continent.

Colonising to the end

Was capitalism's colonisation of Africa coming to an end? It didn't go quietly. As soon as Algeria declared independence, France encouraged Morocco to invade. When Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960 under Patrice Lumumba, the US and Belgium tried to separate mineral-rich Katanga Province from the rest of the country. Lumumba was toppled in a coup and shot.

By the 1970s, Portugal was engaged in military conflicts in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau, where Soviet and Cuban assistance was given to liberation movements. Cubans fought alongside freedom fighters in Guinea Bissau, inflicting a major defeat upon Portuguese troops – precipitating a military coup that brought down the fascist Portuguese regime and leading eventually to independence for all of Portugal's African colonies.

Zimbabwean nationalists were fighting the illegal settler government while the ANC in South Africa and SWAPO in occupied Namibia were taking on the apartheid settler regime in South Africa. These two settler regimes, backed by the USA, continued with a bloody and ruthless war against newly independent Mozambique and Angola as well as their own people, with South Africa taking over the war against Mozambique after Zimbabwe won its independence.

Their wars were effectively ended in 1988 when the Apartheid regime was defeated by Cuban, SWAPO and Angolan forces at Cuito Cuanavale. So the fall of the apartheid regime marked the end of colonialism as we knew it in Africa. ■

This month, we look at a fascinating book about how wars are justified and how we attempt to do something for Gordon Brown's tattered reputation

Sacrifices that truly are in vain

JUSTIFYING WAR: PROPAGANDA, POLITICS AND THE MODERN AGE, edited by David Welch and Jo Fox, hardback, 397 pages, ISBN 978-0-230-24627-0, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, £70.

DAVID WELCH'S book is a fascinating collection of essays on the 20th century's wars, with the exception of two dreadful ones on the First World War by David Welch and Catriona Pennell. The rest are scholarly and objective.

Welch tells us that the Liberal Party "was intrinsically anti-war, as was the fledgling Labour Party." In the real world, both parties backed the uniquely vast slaughter of the First World War from first to last. Welch also claims wrongly that it is "fair to say that few, if any, scholars would deny Germany and Austria-Hungary's larger share of responsibility for the outbreak of war." Pennell ends by justifying that war as fought "in defence of justice, honour and democracy".

The other essays in the collection demonstrate that the British state and its house historians lie about its wars being all for honour, justice, the rule of law and the rights of small nations. They lie that its wars will end war, from the First World War to arming and backing Al-Qaeda forces in Syria today.

Other essays explore the British state's use of the cults of Wellington, General Gordon, Lord Kitchener and Churchill to mask or justify the horrors of colonial wars and massacres. European states lie that they always wage chivalric, Christian struggles for civilisation, democracy and freedom, against evil, against savages, barbarians and despots. Their churches preach Holy Wars and Crusades, using Biblical allusions (comically indexed here as "Biblical illusions").

The capitalist ruling class absolutises all its wars as cosmic struggles between good and evil. It uses up soldiers' lives and turns their deaths into "sacrifices that must not be in vain", to justify yet more deaths in vain.

Goering cynically claimed, "The people can always be brought to the bidding of

the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country."

So far, in too many wars, the mass of the British working class have proved Goering right. We have slavishly followed the ruling class's bugle calls to war.

"SAVING THE WORLD"? GORDON BROWN RECONSIDERED, by William Keegan, paperback, 109 pages, ISBN 978-1-907720-56-7, Searching Finance Ltd, 2012, £9.99.

In this book, journalist William Keegan tries to make the case for Gordon Brown. But even the facts he cites are enough to damn Brown.

Keegan notes how Brown took the Labour Party path from young "left" to hard right. Brown also always needed a leader. His first guru was the "left" Labour MP James Maxton, later it was Alan Greenspan, the Ayn Rand-loving chairman of the US Federal Reserve. Greenspan told us we could let finance regulate itself. So Chancellor Brown gave the City of London the infamous "light-touch" regulation.

On Brown's watch, manufacturing output was no higher in 2006 than in 2000. Real household incomes rose only 6 per cent from 2004 to 2007 and household debts soared. He inflicted PFI's on our public services, forcing our hospitals and schools to pay capitalists vast sums for decades. So Brown asset-stripped industry, the working class and our services.

Keegan tells the usual tale that Brown kept us out of the euro, but then explains that Ed Balls convinced Brown that joining the euro would end his power over the currency.

In his book *Beyond the Crash*, Brown claimed that he had no idea what the City did: he wrote that after Lehman's bust, "I was furious to discover that other major banks too were recklessly using their customers' own money to speculate." What did he think they were gambling



Photo: 360b/Shutterstock.com

Smug, smiling, and a disaster for Britain: Gordon

with? He also claimed not to have known that top bankers paid themselves huge sums at the expense of their banks' capital holdings.

'Moral norms'

He would have us believe that he "had not fully appreciated that moral norms were not constraining the behaviour of those competing across complex and interlocked global entities that covered both shadow and formal banking systems." Yet for years he had talked about the need for such "moral norms". This most well prepared and well informed Chancellor's claims of ignorance were just pathetic lies.

For 13 years at the top of government,

ustified, and a failed
...



Brown at a meeting in Berlin in 2009.

Brown was a hatchet man for capital. He promised to end boom and bust, but he boosted the bankers' boom and made the working class pay for the bust. Brown didn't save capitalism. He used the crisis that finance capitalists caused to give them our money and he did nothing to prevent the next financial crisis.

So the looting goes on. As Keegan points out, "Even in 2012, the banks have been behaving appallingly." They are still winning from their one-way bets, still profiting from the bailouts and quantitative easing that successive governments have given them.

Capitalism is still in absolute decline. And so is Brown's reputation, despite Keegan's effort. ■

D DEFICIT AND DEBT

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

Inextricably linked, though quite different, the terms deficit and debt are often used interchangeably by politicians. Britain spends around £670 billion a year on public and governmental services. But around 70 per cent of it goes on wages. The wage earners are paying income tax and consuming goods and services that attract VAT. Further, a significant proportion goes to capital spending to create jobs and infrastructural assets. Much of workers' overtime also ends up back at the Treasury, though it is difficult to find out exactly how much.

Cash-flow issues leave government accounts in deficit. Receipts come in retrospectively – some relating to major companies and financial institutions – and capital gains tax is not collected until the start of the final quarter of a particular financial year, whereas public services have to be paid for up front. So governments borrow on the financial markets through the issuing of government bonds to private investors. We pay interest on these "pay-day loans" – the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR).

Cut public expenditure and the deficit falls, but freezing wages and shedding jobs are not done in isolation. Similarly, increases in pension contributions and huge hikes in utility prices and basic commodity costs all serve to reduce disposable income and purchasing power. When demand in the economy diminishes, tax revenues fall along with economic activity and GDP.

Falling tax revenues mean more borrowing, with the national debt increasing as a direct result of government policy to cut the deficit. Keynes called this the 'austerity paradox'. When Cameron denied any association between deficit reduction and recession the Office for Budgetary Responsibility had to correct him. It's like denying Newton. Given time an apple falling from a tree hits the ground. Over the span of this Parliament, Osborne is predicted to borrow around £100 billion more than the previous government as a direct result of actions that he has taken to depress the material and social wage of working people in the public sector. It's "invest to impoverish" just as they have "invested" in a student loan system designed to ensure that our young people become accustomed to debt.

The PSBR runs at around £120 billion a year and given the will there may be other ways of raising the money. Bank of England Reserves comprise many times GDP (around £1.5 trillion per annum) and according to the OECD, transactions totalling \$500 trillion passed through the City of London in 2011. If we had control, the PSBR could be funded from "slippage", so small is it in comparison. But state power is in the hands of the enemy.

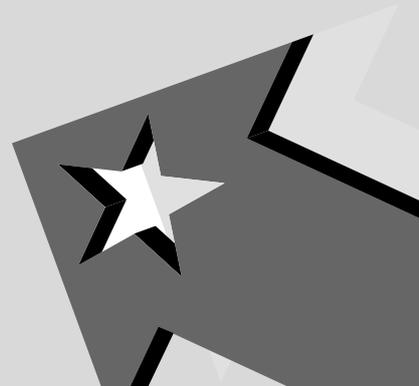
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Back to Front – Manufacturing matters

‘The fact that two-thirds of all Formula One cars are built in Britain cannot blind us to the killing fact that our deficit in manufactured goods runs at billions of pounds a year...’

IN THE topsy-turvy world of capitalist economics there have up to now been one or two unshakeable dogmas. One of these has been that devaluation leads to an increase in exports as our lower prices lead to higher orders abroad. In our post-Thatcher, post-Blair, post-Brown, post-industrial strategy Britain, that doesn't seem to be happening any more.

According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics in March, industrial production dipped 1.2 per cent between December and January. Yet the pound has been falling. In November the rates were \$1.60 to the pound and 1.25 euro to the pound. Now the rates are nearer \$1.50 and 1.15 euros.

Have our productive industries suddenly become unable to sell their goods? Or, as many suspect, is the real answer that our productive industries simply lack the capacity to produce more?

That should hardly be a surprise, given the failure to invest in manufacturing industry. A report from the Institute of Mechanical Engineers last year stated what should be obvious: "It is generally well understood that manufacturing is a capital-intensive process. This process requires long-term investment across the sector in its production assets to enable competitiveness, especially in high-labour-cost countries."

And what has actually happened? Cue the Institute again: "But manufacturing investment has however more than halved over the last 10–15 years, with evidence showing that UK manufacturing spends less per employee or per pound of Gross Value Added (GVA) than its competitors,

with the UK capital per worker being 40% to 60% lower than Germany or France."

The wilful destruction and weakening of our manufacturing base is the result of an economy dominated by its most unproductive sector – finance capital. So we will get all the disadvantages of a low currency in high prices, but none of the supposed advantages such as jobs in expanding industries. A lose-lose, as they say.

Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang commented in the GUARDIAN in March that "Britain has been finding it difficult to recover from the financial crisis not just because of its austerity policy but also because of its eroding ability to engage in high-productivity activities. This problem is most tellingly manifested in the country's inability to generate a trade surplus despite the huge devaluation of sterling since 2008."

The decline absolute of an economic system cannot be disguised forever. The fact that two-thirds of all Formula One cars are built in Britain cannot blind us to the killing fact that our deficit in manufactured goods runs at billions of pounds a year, and is growing.

Yes there is manufacture in Britain, and yes it is crucial to a British economic recovery and to our national independence, but it is weak, underinvested, unbalanced and uncontrolled (and too few of its workers are union members). Worse, those outside manufacturing still fail to realise that their survival is intimately bound up with that section of the economy, wherever they work. We produce, or we die. ■

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