

WORKERS

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APRIL 2014 £1

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WORKERS



Two trillion ways to rebuild Britain

THE GOVERNMENT'S pension proposals in the March 2014 budget came as no surprise. Easier access to cash for workers with personal pensions or money-purchase pension pots is simply an invitation to spend the money to prop up current consumption, mostly of imports. At the same time our production capacity continues to decline. Are we, as the government would like, a hand-to-mouth people without thought for the future?

Instead of consuming overpriced imports we could put production first to rebuild Britain. We have the world's second highest level of accumulated pension assets – £2 trillion, mostly held in collective final-salary pension schemes, not in the headline-grabbing personal pensions. We also have over a million workers toiling beyond age 65 and more than 900,000 young people between 18 and 23 unemployed, with many other workers of all ages part-time underemployed. That's not economically efficient, but it is politically repressive.

It's seemingly unconnected, but keep an eye on the appointment of Nemat Shafik as Deputy Governor of the Bank of England the day before the budget. As a Deputy Managing Director of the IMF fresh from the Greek campaign, her remit is to prepare markets for the unwinding of the £375 billion of quantitative easing currently sitting on the Bank of England balance sheet.

What this IMF stooge in the Bank of England

will attempt to do under the guise of "regulatory prudence" will be to lock our final-salary pension assets into non-performing government debt at those very same rates that Osborne says represent such poor value to personal-pension savers.

Many with personal pensions also have final salary pensions. So we are all potentially exposed to the same IMF trick: they will set up a mechanism to dump useless debt onto our pension funds at top prices that will then plummet, causing a pensions failure.

To oppose and prevent this we should be demanding a massive hike in the state pension payable at age 60 for both men and women. We should also recognise there is absolutely no need to pre-fund pensions with vast sums of accumulated capital. This would immediately free up our £2 trillion to rebuild and employ our youth.

This in turn would allow our pensions capital accumulated from our past labour to be used to rebuild for our future labour, instead of allowing it to be deployed for stock exchange speculation or to back non-performing government debt or to be squandered on imports from the euro prison camp.

Instead, with increased productive capacity, we could openly trade at best rates throughout the world while easily paying out high pensions to our elderly from the immediate proceeds of our labour. This is known as planning. ■



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Rebuilding Britain

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Ambulance dispute looms

AMBULANCE WORKERS' unions are dusting off their plans for a ballot on industrial action in England after negotiations over sick pay have reached an impasse. Thanks to devolution, never mind separatism, there is no longer any such thing as a British ambulance service, at least as far as the employers are concerned, and unfortunately unions too.

The problem has its origin in recently negotiated changes to NHS pay and conditions that neglected to take into account ambulance workers. These changes gave unscrupulous ambulance employers an opportunity to deduct up to 25 per cent (which they get for working unsocial hours) out of any ambulance workers' sick pay.

More significant than the technical (and complicated) detail was the fact that employers saw a weakness and sought to exploit it. They simply deducted pay from workers' pay packets without a negotiated settlement – indeed, without any negotiations at all. But workers are far stronger than they think they are. Especially when they're organised in unions.

The weakness that the employers perhaps spotted was that ambulance workers have allowed themselves to be divided between three unions, and indeed have an unavoidable reputation for hopping from one to another when they don't like what they see, especially when one of them demands taking some responsibility or involvement. Even Unison, with by far the largest membership in the area, has great unevenness across its 20,000+ members. Some having the best leadership in the British trade union movement, and some the worst. This too the employers were trying to exploit.

But Unison moved swiftly, and in the absence of a formal agreement, or even any proposed negotiations, agreed to ballot for industrial action at the end of 2013. The other unions, seeing no immediate poaching advantage, meekly followed suit. Within a day of the receiving the ballot notice the employers conceded negotiations, and Unison agreed to lift its strike ballot.

The negotiations have been difficult, and are not over yet, although pay deducted has indeed been reinstated. But a signal lesson has been learned: with clarity, determination and courage much can be achieved – all without the loss of any pay through industrial action, in effect without workers having to do much more than flex their little finger. Workers are not weak, as we are so often told. Our weakness is in the mind, and this dispute reveals that old truth.

More than once during the course of negotiations a deal looked possible, one which would have vindicated Unison's position. Now it turns out that the employers are in even more disarray than are the unions, who are currently unified under Unison's leadership, and no agreement has yet been sealed. ■

CITIZENSHIP

For sale to the rich

THE MIGRATION Advisory Committee revealed in March that under the government's "investor" scheme, established under Labour, 948 millionaires have been granted British citizenship since 2008, including 433 Russians, 419 Chinese and 96 from the US.

The price of citizenship is £1 million paid into government gilts. No people smuggling involved, no human trafficking, no fear of being a stateless passport-less migrant, no threat of deportation, just straightforward prostitution of the visa access system for the super-rich.

The MAC is proposing further revenue raising proposals, including raising the price to £2.5 million.

For all the serious concern and debate about sovereignty, immigration, emigration, what constitutes a nation, its history and its future, British capitalism tops all the responses. Forget about language or skills. Nationality is reduced to a class question: Do you have enough money to be part of the elite? ■

MIGRATION

EU inflow swells numbers

NEW FIGURES from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show a net flow of 212,000 long-term migrants into Britain in the year ending September 2013, up from 154,000 in the previous year. Net migration from EU countries increased by 60,000. Net migration from non-EU countries fell by 25,000. Some 24,000 citizens of Romania and Bulgaria arrived in the year to September 2013; 9,000 arrived in the previous year. ■

ONE BRITAIN

News on the referendum

White Paper costs soar

THE TAXPAYERS, the workers of Britain, will need deep pockets this year. The cost of producing, printing and distributing 100,000 free copies of the over-600 page wish-list that is the White Paper advocating independence for Scotland has risen to over £800,000. That's since its launch in November – it's now in its fourth reprint – and costs will rise as the campaign intensifies over the next six months. This does not include the hundreds of civil servants working and advising on this separatist project, again at taxpayers' expense.

Boost boast

THE SNP has been enthusing about what it calls a "Boost for Yes after Unison branch debate triumph" after Skills Development Scotland had a debate at its AGM. But it turns out that the members had not been consulted and the meeting did not even take a vote. The branch secretary admitted, "We've not canvassed on whether our members are yes or no, but I got the feeling tonight Yes was dominant."

Debts? What debts?

FINANCE SECRETARY John Swinney again said that an SNP administration would default on its £130 billion share of debt if Britain refused to share the pound. He warned of a "devastating impact" on public finances in Britain. Following this threat, an opinion poll suggested that 58 per cent of voters south of the border now want a say on Britain's future, and that 62 per cent oppose a Scottish breakaway.

Oil's not well

THE INSTITUTE for Fiscal Studies predicted in March that an independent Scotland would need to cut a further £2 billion public spending or raise taxes to meet the deficit left by falling oil receipts – even before Chancellor Osborne's budget warning of a further slump in oil receipts. Had Scotland already left Britain, it would have to have taken £4.4 billion out of schools and hospitals. In a united Britain, the money for schools and the NHS isn't gambled on world oil prices or the declining reserves of the North Sea. ■

Andrew Wriad/www.andrew-wriad.com



25 March: thousands lined the streets of east London for the funeral of Bob Crow.

Lawyers fight cuts with strike

WHEN IS a strike not a strike? When lawyers, barristers and those who interpret or advise on the law are involved. Thousands of lawyers walked out for the second time on court cases the length and breadth of England and Wales in March in protest against cuts to fees, deskilling of the legal profession and the undermining of the quality of the British legal system by government cuts to funding of legal aid.

No ballots were undertaken, no serving of notice of intent, no informing the employer of who was involved in the action, the when where or how which has cursed the British trade unions and the workplace for the last 30 years. No lawyers running off for writs to prevent the action, no fat fees to lawyers intervening in a strike or telling us in the trade unions what we can or cannot do. Just a walkout and polite rallies in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and a march through Westminster.

If this clear, strong action is good enough for lawyers and barristers, who obviously aren't rushing to seek damages against themselves, no sequestration of the leading chambers in England and Wales, then it's good enough for the rest of us. ■

CO-OP

The worst is yet to come

THE MYNERS Review of the Co-op gave an update in March – with dire warnings for the future of the Co-op movement. Headed by Co-op director and former Labour Minister Lord Myners, the review is looking into the governance of the Co-op Bank retail group and associated companies, the resignation of the Chief Executive and the desertion of senior management figures.

The Co-op is a major employer, with 90,000+ staff throughout its differing retail businesses. But it has had the guts ripped out of it by its attempt to be a normal City asset stripper by merging with the Britannia Building Society, ignoring the Britannia's toxic mortgage lending and the attempt, encouraged by the government and opposition, to devour Lloyds 643 branches.

The £1.5 billion black hole identified in the Co-op's 2012-13 finances looks to be overshadowed with a further estimated £2 billion loss this year. The resignation of

the chief executive after ten months followed on the exposure of his £6.6 million remuneration package. His predecessor received £1.3 million.

The Myners report is about scrapping the Co-op's historic, archaic, 19th-century governance and operational style. The proposed replacement is neither democratic, nor modernised, nor in the interests of the Co-op staff and its customers. It is about turning the Co-op into yet another PLC to be bought, sold, and disposed of as with any other capitalist venture.

And if the governance of the Co-op has been so archaic, if its outgoing boss's life was so degenerate, its managers' judgement and leadership so bad, then wait and see what follows.

The breakup of the Co-op business family will see the hiving off of separate business entities, job losses and asset wastage. That will benefit only the hedge fund interests, the private equity privateers and the Co-op's direct monopoly rivals on the high street, be they retail (Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury etc) – or the big four banks, HSBC, Lloyds, Barclays and RBS. ■

TRIBUNALS

Massive drop in cases

STATISTICS RELEASED for the period from October to December 2013 show a 79 per cent drop in employment cases lodged at Employment Tribunals. This follows a 75 per cent drop on the previous quarter.

According to figures released by the Ministry of Justice last month, the period from October to December 2013 registered 9,801 cases as opposed to the average 50,000 per quarter in 2012/13. The drop was caused by the introduction of an initial registration fee of £250, with a sliding scale of penalties and costs that make accessing employment law justice

prohibitive to thousands of workers.

The government's intention of denying workers recourse to an Employment Tribunal, which it justifies as reducing unnecessary or vexatious claims, is just another attack on employment rights. It is also a fallacy and delusion in many workers' minds that "having their day in court" or that being rescued by the law from the evils of the employer is better than being in a trade union and in a well organised workplace.

The fashion for running to tribunals was deliberately cultivated to undermine a collective workplace response. The damage to workplace organisation, taken with the erosion of the most feeble legalistic employment rights, has left workers even more defenceless. ■

Shopworkers say No

AT ITS mid-March annual conference for Scottish members, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw) confirmed its 2013 decision to support the No campaign against Scottish separatism and the break up of Britain. The delegates gathered in Dundee overwhelmingly supported the policy, with 82 per cent voting against breakaway.

Usdaw's Scottish Divisional Officer, Lawrence Watson, commented following the vote, "Our members in Scotland are rightly concerned about the future of their jobs in an independent Scotland. They are not prepared to take that gamble, particularly in the face of the warnings coming from leading retail employers. That is why Usdaw is making a positive and strong case for Scotland remaining part of the UK family." Referring to the consultation process leading to these conference decisions he pointed out, "We have listened to our members' views, investigated the pros and cons of independence and come to the conclusion that we are stronger and better together."

Usdaw is Britain's fourth largest and fastest-growing trade union, with over 433,000 members. Membership has increased by more than 17 per cent over the past five years and by nearly a third over the past decade.

Now Usdaw has joined in consultation with the other unions who have voted at their conferences to support No to separatism and to keep workers united in Britain. Community (this union includes workers in the steel industry), Aslef (workers in the rail industry), GMB and the National Union of Mineworkers have agreed a joint programme of action with Usdaw. A first move will be a public fringe meeting during the Scottish Trades Union Congress, which will convene in the Caird Hall, Dundee from 14 to 16 April.

Another union likely to support this unity position is the postal workers union CWU, which begins its annual conference in Bournemouth on 27 April. The decisiveness of these workers is in stark contrast to the mealy-mouthed "fence-sitting" of the large unions Unite and Unison and of the Scottish Trades Union Congress itself. ■

CURRENCY

12 sides of devaluation

THE GOVERNMENT is to introduce a new pound coin, fashioned like the old 12-sided Imperial threepenny bit, supposedly to stop counterfeiters. (The Bank of England previously proposed introducing plastic notes.) Historically round coins were introduced so that "trimmers", those

who trim coins to assist in counterfeiting, could be immediately spotted. Now the government is introducing a trimmed coined because it's already reduced the value of the £ pound in our pockets since 2010 by more than 20 per cent.

The £1 coin was to prepare the way for the introduction of the similar-looking euro. Political counterfeiters in Westminster and Brussels are going to have their work cut out. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

Thursday 1 May. Leeds, London and Edinburgh, various times (see p6 for details). CBPML May Day meetings.

Celebrate 100 years of historic working class struggle and plan for the future with the CPBML.

PAY

The long drop

SINCE JANUARY 2009, full-time workers' average weekly earnings (excluding bonuses) have fallen by 8 per cent, if the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used as the measure of inflation, and by 10.2 per cent when set against the Retail Price Index (RPI). Such a long and deep period of falling real average earnings is unique since 1945. The result: the real value of average weekly earnings is back to the level of 2002.

This holds across the whole class – men and women, public and private sectors, in all parts of Britain. The self-employed have seen an even bigger drop in their real average earnings – by 25 to 30 per cent in the three years to 2010/11. ■

EUROPEAN UNION

Thatcherite pledge

ED MILIBAND has committed any future Labour government to completing Thatcher's project of the Single European Market. In a speech in London he said, "We need to drive forward the completion of the single market in digital, energy and services. I am pleased to say the CBI has agreed to help develop proposals about how to complete the single market."

Miliband pledged, "We should also use Europe's strength to negotiate trade agreements with other parts of the world. As well as moving as fast as possible towards securing the Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US." Typically, this too echoes the position of the government.

He also said that the next Labour government will legislate for a new lock on any transfer of power to the EU (just like the Conservatives' policy). He admitted that "it is unlikely this lock will be used in the next Parliament." So, this is a promise that is not a promise. He offers a referendum and then takes it away. A referendum will not happen unless we make it happen. ■

CPBML/Workers MAY DAY MEETINGS



Thursday 1 May, 6.30 pm

Speakers, music and discussion

Word Power Bookshop,

43 West Nicolson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Thursday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers and refreshments

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

(nearest tube: Holborn)

Thursday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers and discussion

The Cosmopolitan Hotel (formerly Golden Lion),

Lower Briggate, Leeds LS1 4AE

1914 – 2014: 100 YEARS OF BRITISH WORKERS AGAINST CAPITALISM

The government wants to spawn four years commemoration of the futility, horrors and bloodshed of the First World War. This is a calculated threat to intimidate British workers and the workers of the world. We cannot ignore or be intimidated by this threat of war.

Throughout the last 100 years British workers have never been cowed. Unemployment, poverty, lock-outs, hunger, homelessness, wars, persecution and imprisonment, closures and decline, casualisation, discrimination, blacklists, governments of every hue: workers have seen them all come and go. We still remain undefeated despite everything

capitalism has thrown at us.

Workers are thinking beings; workers are magnificent at organisation; workers are the saviours and future of Britain; workers are the only creators of wealth in Britain. We celebrate the last 100 years as the failure of capitalism, we celebrate the last 100 years for the tenacity of workers to resist, struggle and rise ever again.

We invite you to celebrate 100 years of historic working class struggle and plan for the future with the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. All welcome

Ironically, the government has done unions a good turn through its directives on public sector pay...

We can win on wages



Workers

Workers on the march in London, October 2012.

BY IMPOSING a below inflation rise of 1 per cent for some health workers while denying anything to 60 per cent of non-clinical staff and 70 per cent of nursing and midwifery staff, health secretary Jeremy Hunt has sent a clear message out to NHS staff. And what has allowed the employers to present an offer that further depresses real pay is the linking of local government wages to the national minimum wage (in the union's case the so-called Living Wage).

At last public sector workers are coming to accept that since this government came to power in 2010 it has never wavered in its strategy of driving down public sector wages, establishing pay freezes as the norm, and contempt for workers who provide Britain's core essential services – health, education, and the local services essential to society. Hunt spelt it out further as he destroyed the Health Pay Review Board's 1 per cent offer by indicating pay freezes and wage cuts to continue way past 2016.

The unions have been hiding behind the Boards since the 1980s, with a strategy of asking an "independent" body to determine wages (independent of whom when the Treasury controls the purse strings?), instead of relying on members' strength. Their strategy has now been well and truly wrecked. Dismantling of national agreements is likely to be a Tory pledge if re-elected in 2015.

The employers are on their knees to the government, and strategically the unions are fundamentally wrong and stupid to rely on the begging bowl of the Living Wage, pleading for more like Oliver Twist.

The universities, meanwhile, continue to accrue vast reserves of cash, with stunning increases for senior managers but with a pig-headed refusal to shift from the 1 per cent in the 2013 pay round and a similar offer for 2014-15.

'This is the most dangerous period in the history of the organised working class in Britain.'

For workers, facing reality means stopping the heated diversionary debates about whether we should be in the Boards, whether we should pursue local or national bargaining, and whether defending national bargaining to the death engages with our members. There has been a time and place for all those debates. That time has gone.

We have a ruling class government intent on destroying our ability to organise

and to promote the interests of our class. And Labour is not saying much different.

This is not business as usual. This is the most dangerous period in the history of the organised working class in Britain. We need to renew the unions' ability to function, rediscover our skills for beating employers and re-engage with our members about how to fight, not because we want to but because we have no choice.

In response to the 1 per cent offer in health, the unions are now identifying and addressing the many forms of government divide-and-rule where differing groups of workers are played off against each other over what offer they get or what rates apply in competing NHS trusts.

But also we need to defend the *National Health Service*. That NHS is now being seen as Britain-wide, not divided up into the so-called four countries with England, Wales and Scotland being played off against one another and Northern Ireland tagged on as the oldest British colony.

Resurgent

The key will be to centralise the unions' role on pay, making it not only a Britain-wide fight but also a priority. This fight must be protracted and imaginative in its tactics, not just using industrial action but rebuilding a workplace consciousness, so that our army of labour can be resurgent, unified and competent in taking on the employers .

The government and the employers have thrown down the gauntlet. They think we are too weak to resist. They believe that siren voices in the labour movement will quiver at the knee and wail about not fighting in the run-up to a general election. They believe the traditional social democratic voices who argue that 1 per cent is better than zero will still be able to carry influence with our members.

We must cast away such illusions. We are not for engaging in a "one size fits all solution"; we can put the "general strike brigade" to one side. But we can engage in resurrecting workplace consciousness and anger. We can get organised. We can show unity. We can show the tactical discipline to pick our fights, on our terms, on a protracted basis. We can beat the government over wages and beat them we must. ■

Londoners could decide they want to live in a city run who inventiveness...

Crossrail: an asset only

BY 3 FEBRUARY 2014 three of the mighty tunnel-boring machines excavating the first of two Crossrail links had broken through at stations under central London. A press fanfare marked completion of the western section of the biggest civil engineering project in Europe, connecting London's outer suburbs and Heathrow airport to the West End and London's two financial centres, the City and Canary Wharf. At the same time, the flagship Bond Street ticket hall was completed five storeys under the ground – an irony since the Mayor seems intent on extinguishing ticket offices throughout the rest of the underground network.

No doubt when Crossrail 1 is up and running by 2019 (date deferred, so not exactly on time and on budget) it will be hailed as a magnificent feat of British engineering. It certainly is that. Whether by accident or design, it will be the length of a marathon, 26 miles. Up to 14,000 construction workers will have been involved in that marathon at any one time, plus 7,000 more ancillary staff, working round the clock.

With a typically British sense of history and achievement, they named the boring machines Ada (after Ada Lovelace, one of the earliest computer scientists), Phyllis (Pearsall, creator of the London A-Z), Mary and Sophia (wives of Isambard and Marc Brunel), Jessica and Ellie (Olympian and Paralympian athletes) and Victoria and Elizabeth (queens).

Over half way

Engineers have passed the halfway mark and during 2014 will progress from the basic civil engineering tasks to the fitting out of stations and tunnels in central London, while work continues on the rest of the line going east. In total, 9 new stations are envisaged and 29 existing ones improved.

Work on the western section has challenged the skills of engineers who have had to navigate a complex web of Tube lines in order to lay foundation piles and infrastructure up to 30 metres deep and 6 metres wide (for comparison, the Victoria Line is 3.81 metres wide), uncovering in the process a Black Death burial ground and



A now-familiar sight to Londoners: the Tottenham Court Road Crossrail works, with Centre Point in the background.

an old Crosse & Blackwell pickle factory. The excavated soil would fill Wembley Stadium three times. (It won't be wasted – some of it has gone to Wallasea Island to create a nature reserve.)

At Tottenham Court Road this involved tunnelling less than a metre above the Northern Line. The safety implications were obvious, but it is thanks to construction workers, not the construction consortium BAM Ferrovial Kier (BFK), that this phase has been completed relatively safely, with one fatal incident at Holborn on 7 March.

Kier is a ruthless transnational con-

glomerate with tentacles in Romania, South-East Asia, Saudi Arabia, and the Caribbean. Members of the union Unite were threatened and blacklisted for pointing out inadequacies of safety equipment on boring machines and scaffolding thrown on top of 11,000-volt cabling. BFK even bullied its own unionised British subcontractor, Electrical Installations Services into sacking staff who wished to join the union and replacing them with agency workers, before terminating its contract (which sent the company into liquidation).

The government was quick to reassure

lly for its people, with all their skills, talents and

if Londoners reclaim it



t in the background.

a sceptical public that the £14.8 billion project, ostensibly funded through a so-called public-private partnership (PPP), is “value for money”. But two reports suggest otherwise – that the enterprise is neither privately funded nor a partnership to any substantial extent. In reality, the third P stands for the People of London, who have no alternative but to foot the bill.

The National Audit Office (NAO) reports that the private sector contribution, which is needed to finance Greater London Authority (GLA) borrowing repayments over between 24 and 31 years through a levy on

business rates, will be far less than the £4.1 billion promised by mayor Boris Johnson. It now transpires that over 80 per cent of businesses were exempt from the business rate supplement all along. Put another way, fewer than 20 per cent of commercial properties in London met the criteria of a rateable value of over £55,000 per annum. Johnson must have known this when he made fewer than one in five liable.

This evaluation by the NAO takes into account the mayoral Community Investment Levy, a hoped-for £300 million revenue from local business developers passed on to Transport for London by local authorities. The justification for this is that all 33 boroughs stand to benefit from developments generated by Crossrail, especially in the West End, the Isle of Dogs and Thames Gateway areas. Not all agree.

Heathrow has defaulted on its pledge of £230 million. And the Civil Aviation Authority has decided that there is no net benefit from Crossrail to the airport and has reduced its contribution to £70 million. In addition, the reluctance of private capital to invest means that Londoners now have to meet the extra £1 billion cost of new Crossrail rolling stock (albeit competitively priced) from Bombardier.

Reading further into the NAO report, it is evident that the Department of Transport never expected the private contribution to materialise and had set aside £5.2 billion of public money precisely to cover this eventuality. In other words, the PPP was a government-endorsed con-trick.

It does not stop there. The NAO goes on to criticise the business case for a levy on the City, saying “the rationale for agreeing the amount the City of London Corporation would contribute is not clear”. It looks as though this is another fish that will get off the hook.

The Arup Report

A second report, by civil engineering firm Ove Arup for TfL, which runs London Transport, looked at the impact of Crossrail 1 relative to London’s population – rising by 2,000 every eight days. By 2030 the population of the Greater London area is set to rise to 10 million.

Arup finds the new network already has

‘The reluctance of private capital to invest means that Londoners now have to meet the extra £1 billion cost of new rolling stock.’

inadequate capacity. It says that in the area around three central stations in particular – Tottenham Court Road, Bond Street and Farringdon – growth has already outstripped the original 2004 estimates.

By 2026, Arup now says, 65 million more people than first thought will be using these three Crossrail stations alone (including for tube travel) each year – a total of half a million a day more than used them in 2013. And once Crossrail opens there will be more pressure on the likes of Marble Arch, Holborn and Oxford Circus. Yet still the mayor wants to get rid of ticket staff!

Who are all these people and where are they going? The clue is in the route. Crossrail 1 is intended as a magnet for international business, with quick and easy access to relaxation and nightlife. Others will be London commuters. Many will be visitors, for work, business or leisure.

International quarters

The GLA London Plan designates the West End and Knightsbridge as almost exclusively international quarters. London estate agents working out of Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong report an Asian boom in 2013, especially Chinese investors, both private billionaires and state holdings, buying up £1.2 billion of property.

They bought up Richard Rogers’ iconic Lloyd’s building in the City. This year

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Bromley council agreed the ZhongRong Group should develop the old Crystal Palace site. The Bank of China moved to be next to the Bank of England in 2009. The Chinese Embassy is to move to Battersea to shadow the new US Embassy being built there by 2017. Large parts of Wandsworth, including blocks of new flats, are now owned by the Chinese state. A Malaysian developer has taken over the Battersea Power Station site. Boris Johnson declared himself "thrilled".

A third of London jobs are in international and financial business, with Canary Wharf the focus for growth. The GLA has forecast 750,000 more jobs by 2031 bringing the total to 5.45 million, but growth in financial services is so rapid that the City Corporation has since upped its own figure and brought its target date forward by ten years. Available office space is at an all-time low (a mere 7 per cent) with record high rents. Londoners continue to be priced out to the margins of their city.

Not all finance

Away from Crossrail, we see that it is not all about finance and retail. A large proportion of jobs in the centre are found around Parliament, the courts, and Whitehall departments, while valuable media, telecommunications and technology cluster around the fringe. There has been a 75 per cent increase in British film-making, much of it in London, helped by tax breaks for the industry.

London is Europe's digital technology capital (48,000 jobs in the area around Shoreditch and Clerkenwell alone), with the largest concentration of computing and software firms in Europe. US firms Google and Facebook are expanding into London.

Biotechnology and other companies based on life sciences form a rapidly emerging industry – some 1,000 companies – requiring more laboratory space and stimulating more research investment, such as the Crick Institute being built near St Pancras International Station.

Clustered nearby are hospitals and centres of learning providing research facil-



Edgware Road Crossrail site, July 2013. Unite demonstration against blacklisting.

'Everything is paid for by the working class one way or another.'

ties which are the envy of Europe.

The tourist industry also employs thousands of Londoners, admittedly for the most part in low-paid hotel and catering jobs attracting migrants, but also in high-end professional, educational and managerial jobs requiring degree-level qualifications. Heathrow – the gateway for many – accounts directly for some 84,000 workers.

Add to these the workers in education, health, culture and retail, and we see that railway asset that should benefit Londoners by cutting travel time to work and relieving congestion on other parts of the transport system now looks uncomfortably over-subscribed even before it has opened. It will also be expensive.

Without a nationwide strategy for rail and air linking Crossrail to the rest of the country, a picture emerges of Britain's

capital city increasingly disconnected from the country as a whole. While links to France and Belgium via the Tunnel seem to fulfil the EU dream of a north-east Europe region, Britain as a nation in itself is airbrushed out. The GLA now measures area in continental hectares. Southeast England is cast in the role of European finance capitalist's dormitory. In Johnson's book, capitalist competition is the name of the game.

So what conclusions can Londoners draw from the Crossrail story so far? First, engineering is not dead, even if finance capital has skewed the economy. But industry and innovation is something trade unions in particular must step up the fight for.

Second, as with Crossrail, everything is paid for by the working class one way or another, by the power of labour, wages, prices, taxes...

Once we grasp that, we can take ownership of our city. We can decide who comes in, and how many. We could decide we want to live in a city run wholly for its people, with all their skills, talents and inventiveness. We could drive out the rich parasites. We could restore London's status as the headquarters of a nation run in the interests of its working people. ■

Qatar's foreign workers are modern-day slaves. It is funding reaction around the world. And it is buying up chunks of Britain. Worried? You should be...

Qatar: the new threat of super-feudalism

WHEN WE first saw the Al Jazeera TV News Channel, during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it was hailed as refreshing, good, independent journalism, mainly because it reported on the war from what appeared to be an independent perspective rather than the biased news from the invaders' media. Soon, we could all get Al Jazeera on our TV. We knew it was based in Qatar, but most of us knew nothing of the country.

What has become clearer to us since, is that Al Jazeera is the mouthpiece of the Qatari ruling family, the Al Thanis, who are buying vast properties across London, have bought one of Europe's biggest football clubs in Paris Saint-Germain and who appear to have bought FIFA or at least the votes necessary to host the 2022 Football World Cup. So what is Qatar and who are the Al Thani family?

To look at the history of Qatar, it is necessary to look at the history of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. In 1744 a pact was concluded between a powerful clan from the province of Najd led by Muhammad bin Saud and the followers of the influential preacher Muhammed bin Abd Al-Wahhab. The Wahhabis believed in spreading their religion by force of arms, which is exactly what happened. Ottoman colonial forces from Egypt defeated the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in the 19th century. But they returned to power and controlled even more of central Arabia by the end of the century.

On the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula there were a number of other clans that were threatened by the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. Britain was able to take advantage of this situation by offering

Workers



The London Shard, owned by Qatar's Al Thani family.

"protection" to these clans against Saudi-Wahhabi attacks in exchange for friendly relations with the clan chiefs. In truth, the British East India Company controlled the highly profitable maritime trade routes between Bombay (Mumbai) and Basra and needed to safeguard these routes.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the Company complained of disruptive "pirate attacks" on its ships, but in reality these were an invention by the Company which used them as an excuse to launch naval and amphibious attacks on various ports in the lower Persian Gulf.

Conquest by treaty

Britain then began offering peace treaties or "truces" to several clan sheikdoms in the area, creating what became known as the Trucial States. The ruling families became recognised by Britain as heads of these

states, which ceded foreign policy to Britain and promised no further pirate attacks in exchange for imperial protection. After several renewals, the treaties were made permanent in 1853 under the Perpetual Maritime Truce.

Bahrain went even further and agreed a British permanent regional military base. Qatar at that time was part of Bahrain, albeit with a different dominant family – the Al Thanis. The Al Khalifa clan attacked Doha, the home of the Al Thani clan, from the sea and in doing so breached the peace treaty with Britain. Consequently, Britain intervened and separated off Qatar, and consequently the Al Thanis,

This history, with its emphasis on clans, tribes, or families intermingled with British colonialism, is useful to know because it

'Qatar has never been a nation state.'

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

shows that Qatar has never been a nation state. It was always a colonial convenience built around one family dynasty.

By the 20th century, the ruling dynasties of all the Trucial States were direct creations of British colonialism. One of the most important aspects of British control over the region was political support provided to specific families.

The rulers even had to sign documents guaranteeing future "heirs" to ensure ongoing British control. They were also required to sign up to clauses forbidding rulers from entering into agreements with non-British parties. This was all about keeping British colonial rivals, namely France and Germany, out of the Persian Gulf. By the 1920s, Britain was paying rent to the Trucial States for landing rights for aircraft en route to and from India, for port and maintenance facilities and for drilling rights for oil. Each ruling family had to sign up to agree that they would receive no royalties from oil without the consent of Britain. Qatar was no exception. So it becomes obvious why Britain wanted to maintain a single-family dynasty in power in each Trucial State.

The decision by the Labour government of Harold Wilson to withdraw from its remaining colonies "East of Suez" led to the British government's announcement in 1971 that it also intended to withdraw from Qatar. Britain still intended to keep control through the ruling Al Thani family. A constitution was drawn up creating an Advisory Council to manage Qatar, with every member selected by the Emir and under the control of the Al Thani family.

Loyalty pledge

A clause in the constitution required every Qatari citizen to "Pledge their loyalty and absolute obedience to the Ruler in the fear of God". A cult of personality was developed and portraits of the Emir, as the ruling Al Thani was now called, with his son on his right and his unelected Prime Minister on his left, appeared everywhere.

The net result of this history is what some have called a "rentier" state. Marx



Paul Cowan/shutterstock.com

Doha, capital of Qatar: headquarters of reaction.

first discussed the concept of rentier capitalism in the 1860s, in the context of a decadent class which benefits from profit-income derived from renting out property and does not actually produce anything itself. That is precisely what Qatar and other Gulf sheikdoms did before independence and what they now do on an industrial scale.

Qatar has the second biggest reserves of natural gas in the world. But this resource is not extracted by the use of Qatari labour and capital. It is extracted by using foreign labour and foreign capital. Some of the profit-income and royalties that Qatar takes from the foreign companies is distributed among Al Thani family members. Some is passed on to other "citizens" - that is, Qatari members of other families - in the form of benefits. For example, low cost housing developments, land and interest free loans to develop it, marriage benefits of around \$20,000 and no income tax.

Those "citizens" who do deign to work are in high-paid public service jobs. None of these benefits, except exemption from paying income tax, is available to those foreign workers, who outnumber the population of 250,000 "citizens" by a ratio of 8:1. In fact you will not find Qatari staff on Qatar Airlines, at Doha Airport, or on any other

'Last year, 185 Nepalese building workers died at World Cup venues.'

major infrastructure in Qatar.

The real class nature of Qatar would at best be described as feudalism and at worst slavery. The dubious awarding of the 2022 Football World Cup has lifted the lid on the conditions of the more than two million migrant workers in Qatar, many of whom are working on constructing the stadia for the events.

All unskilled and domestic workers are hired under the *Kafala* system by which every worker must have a sponsor. This is usually their employer. The workers' passports are confiscated and they are committed to a contract. They are not allowed to leave the country without the sponsor's permission. They are not permitted to leave their contractual work.

Pay, which is very low anyway, is usually withheld and often not paid at all. Conditions at work, particularly health and safety in the construction industry, are



amongst the worst in the world. Last year, for example, 185 Nepalese construction workers died working on World Cup venues in Qatar and 382 have died over the last two years. These are just the figures for Nepalese, who comprise one sixth of the migrant workforce. The other migrant workers come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. The real death toll will be much higher.

A representative from the International Trade Union Confederation who visited Qatar described the situation as follows: "Foreign workers in Qatar are modern-day slaves to their local employers. The local Qatari owns you." FIFA has recently said that there is nothing they can do to change the situation, suggesting that Qatari money talks.

World cup

Qatar is spending an estimated £137 billion on building the stadia and other facilities for the World Cup. This is just a drop in the ocean of Qatar's wealth, or the Al Thani family's riches. They own the Shard in London, Harrods, the Olympic Village, swathes of Canary Wharf, No 1 Hyde Park – the world's most expensive block of flats, a sizable chunk of Sainsbury's, 20 per cent of British Airports Authority and 20 per cent of the London Stock

Exchange. During the banking crisis of 2008, it was to Qatar that Barclays Bank looked to receive a bail-out loan to avoid being taken over by the government. Barclays raised £4.5 billion from Qatar in what was called a loan swap.

The British government is believed to have offered guarantees to Qatar to invest in infrastructure projects such as the Northern Line Tube extension to Battersea, the Mersey Gateway toll bridge and the partial conversion of Drax coal fired power station to biofuel. Qatar has asked for "first refusal" over some of Britain's biggest infrastructure projects when they are on the drawing board. By 2011, 95 per cent of Britain's imported Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) was from Qatar. Hardly surprising then that Qatar is the biggest exporter of LNG in the world.

Qatar has the highest per capita income in the world, and that calculation is based on a population that includes both Qatari "citizens" and its migrant workers. So if the migrants were taken out of the calculation, Qatari "citizens", and particularly the Al Thani family, would be wealthy beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

Qatar also hosts the Al Udeid US military base housing some 10,000 personnel. From here, bombing missions over Afghanistan and Iraq have been launched, and no doubt there are plans for the

bombing of Iran to hand. The Qatar Air Force took part in the bombing of Libya – except that the pilots were not Qatari but foreign mercenaries. 70 per cent of Qatari Armed Forces are foreign mercenaries, led by Sandhurst-trained Qatari officers.

Qatar also funded and armed the Islamist opposition in Libya. Today Qatar is funding more mercenaries, this time in Syria. Qatar funds and arms the Islamic Front, a ragbag of Islamic jihadis fighting the Syrian government. It actually pays the wages of these jihadis. Syria, a country that had no need for migrants or mercenaries and had a proper labour code compared to the *Kafala* system, is being dragged back to feudalism by trillionaire robber barons, or to be more specific robber sheiks.

With Qatar preparing to buy up more of our infrastructure, workers should be very concerned. This foreign investment by Qatar is part of its survival plan for when the gas eventually runs out, as the Qatari economic model is unsustainable. It cannot continue to distribute largesse to the clan members or continue to pay its foreign workforce unless it has another source of income. That source is to be us. We should reject any foreign takeover of our infrastructure, whether it be the NHS or the Northern Line extension. Britain belongs to us. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings continues with two further dates on 4 June and 14 October. Both will be 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, see page 5.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2014, Thursday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings in Edinburgh and Leeds (see page 6).

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 e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

When landowners found that using the poor rate to supplement below-subsistence wages too expensive, they found another

1834: The way to the workhouse

AT THE END of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 there was a massive increase in unemployment. With the introduction of the Corn Laws that set high tariffs on imported corn and led to huge price rises, the numbers claiming "outdoor poor relief" (see *Workers* March 2014) soared. This caused growing criticism from landed ratepayers who contributed the poor rate. So our rulers changed course.

Wanting to curtail "outdoor relief" (payments to workers outside the workhouse), the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act centred on intensifying the system of workhouses, aiming for fewer claimants. There had been workhouses before 1834 but they were not the sole method of "poor relief". Poor Law Commissioners, who ran the new scheme, divided the country up into groups of parishes (known as poor law unions), and required them to set up workhouses providing only the most basic level of comfort. Workhouses were intended to be forbidding in order to deter both would-be inmates and outside workers. Ratepayers in each poor law union elected a Board of Guardians to manage their workhouse.

New workhouses were usually erected towards the edge of the union's main town. Early union workhouses were deliberately plain as a deterrent, though as time passed more decoration appeared. They varied greatly in size, from tiny ones of 30 up to



Mealtime in the workhouse

one in Liverpool that housed over 3,000.

Buildings were specifically designed to separate the different categories of inmate (known as "classes") – male and female, infirm and able-bodied, boys and girls under 16, children under seven. Buildings, doors and staircases were arranged to prevent contact between these classes.

Apart from concessions made for some contact between mothers and children, the different categories lived in separate sections and had separate exercise yards divided by high walls. The one communal area was the dining-hall. But segregation still operated with different seating areas and sometimes there was a central screen dividing men and women.

You were not "sent" to the workhouse. Theoretically entry was voluntary – you were only impelled by the prospect of starvation, homelessness and general misery. Before the social provisions introduced much later, many elderly, chronic sick, unmarried mothers-to-be, abandoned wives or orphaned children had no other option. However, it was viewed as a last resort because of the social stigma attached and the general fear of never getting out. Particularly for the elderly, it was a place you never came out of, only con-

cluded by burial in an unmarked pauper's grave, often without mourners. Workhouses were not prisons; inmates could leave at any time after giving a brief period of notice. As with entry, however, families had to leave together.

Harsh

It was a harsh regime. On arrival people's clothes were taken away and a workhouse uniform issued. Daily life was strict with early rising from 6am and early bedtimes at 8pm. Sleeping was in dormitories with beds packed together. In London's Whitechapel workhouse in 1838, 104 girls were sleeping four or more to a bed in a room 88 feet long, 16 and a half feet wide and 7 feet high. Life was governed by rules with penalties for those who broke them.

In return for board and lodging, adult workhouse inmates were required to do unpaid work in the workhouse and its grounds six days a week. Women were employed either in workhouse domestic chores such as cleaning, preparing food, laundry work, making and maintaining uniforms, or nursing and supervising young children. Able-bodied men were employed in manual labour, often strenuous but with little practical value such as stone-breaking,

Poor laws

UNABLE TO generate universal affluence, capitalism consigns many to poverty. "Poor laws" under capitalism are never designed to remove poverty, considered the inevitable lot for some, but rather to manage the extremes of pauperism while intimidating the entire working class. The question for capitalism is always how best to institutionalise poverty alongside profit. Capitalists want poverty to act as an overall threat over labour, thereby guaranteeing the continued flow of riches and wealth to themselves. ■

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'Food was intended to make life outside seem an attractive option.'

corn grinding, oakum picking or bone-crushing. Rural workhouses cultivated surrounding land. For older or less physically able inmates a common task was the chopping and bundling of wood for sale. Some poor law unions sent destitute children to British colonies such as Canada or Australia. Food was very basic and intended to make life outside seem an attractive option: bread was a staple, porridge or gruel for breakfast, meals were often cheese or broth.

There was resistance to the new poor law in northern manufacturing districts of East Lancashire and West Yorkshire and parts of Wales, where workhouses were often viewed as ineffective, either standing empty in good times or overwhelmed by claimants in periods of downturn. Employers preferred to give short-term handouts (dole) allowing families to stay in their houses until conditions improved. Towns such as Bradford and Huddersfield saw opposition with attacks on poor law officials and running battles with army troops.

According to an 1861 parliamentary report, 14,000 of the total adult workhouse population of 67,800 had been there for more than five years. By 1901, 5 per cent of the nation's over-65s were living in a workhouse. In rural areas, workhouse populations generally rose in winter and fell in the summer.

In later decades various campaigns including one by the Workhouse Visiting Society brought some improvements. Workhouse responsibilities were transferred to local councils and then abolished in 1929 and 1930. Memories of workhouse indignities were so loathed they were passed on to succeeding generations. ■

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist has recently held its 16th Congress, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see www.workers.org.uk.

1: Out of the European Union, enemy to our survival

The European Union represents the dictatorship of finance capital, foreign domination. The British working class must declare our intention to leave the EU.

2: No to the breakup of Britain, defend our national sovereignty

Devolution, and now the threat of separation, are both products of only one thing: de-industrialisation. Any referendum on the break-up of Britain must be held throughout Britain.

3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

Unions exist as working members in real workplaces or they become something else entirely – something wholly negative. Take responsibility for your own unions.

4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

The fight for pay is central to our survival as a class, and must be central to the agenda of our trade unions.

5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

The regeneration of industry in Britain is essential to the future of our nation. Our grand-parents, and theirs, knew this. We must now reassert it at the centre of class thinking.

6: Build the Party

The task of the Party is singular: to change the ideology of the British working class in order that they make revolution here.

Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
- Get a list of our publications by sending an A5 sae to the address below, or by email.
- Subscribe to Workers, our monthly magazine, by going to www.workers.org.uk or by sending £15 for a year's issues (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

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Ukraine: the US, the EU and fascism

'This coup has met with not a word of criticism from the US and the EU...'

ON 16 MARCH, an overwhelming majority (96 per cent) in Crimea voted to realign themselves with Russia, an outcome quickly confirmed by Russia itself. Sixty years ago Crimea was handed to Ukraine by then-premier Nikita Krushchev in an act which apparently took 15 minutes. The Crimean people were and are deeply unhappy with this autocratic decision, now reversed.

Howls of outrage from the US and EU accusing Russia of annexing Crimea cannot hide their imperialist intentions in the region. The US, using the EU, seeks to extend its power over ex-Soviet territories to open up their economies as a source of US profits. It has met a significant obstacle. How could Russia stand by with such chaos on her border? Crimea, its Black Sea ports central to Russian trade and military capability, is of huge strategic importance to Russia.

For years, tensions simmered as the EU, acting as usual on behalf of the US, sought to lure Ukraine within its orbit and deliver a blow to the old enemy, Russia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Ukraine, despite being the third-largest grain producer in the world and with a well developed manufacturing sector, has edged closer to bankruptcy. Around 60 per cent of GDP was lost between 1991 and 1999. The "recovery" after 1999 was largely brokered by Western banks, with onerous interest rates.

Corruption and fraud on a staggering scale remained. The laughably called "Orange Revolution" of 2006 heralded further stagnation, with political power switching from one group of oligarchs to another. Late last year Russia was set to bail out Ukraine's debts. Now that job will fall to the peoples of the US and the EU.

Things came to a head late last year when elected president Viktor Yanukovych pulled out of an association agreement with the EU

and signalled his intention to ally with Russia instead. Protests erupted in Kiev and western parts of Ukraine, where many were dazzled by the prospect of joining the EU, ignoring the nightmare reality for Greeks, Portuguese and millions of others.

Spurred on by the EU, and abetted by terrorist elements, an upsurge of rioting broke out this February. A truce brokered by the US, Russia, the EU and Kiev protesters was immediately broken. The muscle was provided by the far right with snipers and Molotov cocktails, culminating in the occupation of government buildings.

This coup has met with not a word of criticism from the US and the EU. The rump of pro-EU members of parliament who remained cemented it by installing their own government. The EU and US poured petrol on the fire by immediately recognising it. In fact, as has since been revealed, they actively supported the coup, with the US providing a list of "suitable" new ministers. So much for elections!

In so doing, these "democrats" are relying on some of the filthiest fascists in the world. The neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine (since rebranded Svoboda – freedom!), whose heroes are World War Two collaborators, now has five ministerial posts. Members of Svoboda and the Right Sector control the armed forces, the police, economic affairs and national security, among other areas. On 18 March Svoboda MPs led violent raids on TV editorial offices for spreading "anti-Ukrainian propaganda". International criticism of the raids has not been echoed by normally vocal Foreign Secretary William Hague.

Ukraine is not a member of the EU nor of Nato, so there is not even that cover provided for western interference. The people of the region must decide for themselves. Ukraine is not our business. ■

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- Highlights from this and other issues of WORKERS can be found on our website, www.workers.org.uk, as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.

Publications

CHANGE BRITAIN, EMBRACE YOUR PARTY
This pamphlet brings together the statement from the Party's 2009 Congress with those from two former Congresses in 2003 and 2006. Also included is a statement on the European Union: "The fascist dream of a united Europe resurrected." (£2.75 including P&P).

To order...

Copies of all pamphlets and a fuller list of material can be obtained from CPBML PUBLICATIONS, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. Prices include postage. Please make all cheques payable to "WORKERS".