

WORKERS

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BOOK REVIEW



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IG FARBEN:
HELL'S CARTEL

STAYTHORPE: STRUGGLE RETURNS



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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“Wishful thinking

Britain is still producing wealth, at least enough for the Labour government to make us pay billions to the bankers and the EU, and billions for Labour's illegal foreign wars.

There is growing, massive unemployment, yet the government is blocking young people from gaining skills. The government wants us to be mercenaries, not workers.

To ask whether Labour should move left to win the election, or ditch Brown to win the election, is to indulge in idealist wishful thinking. Labour is part of the enemy. To warn sagely against Tory attacks to come is to cover up Labour's current attack, to connive at the destruction.

Who is funding and encouraging the current wave of mergers, whose known,

inevitable effects are yet more job losses?

Who has already published budgetary plans for four years of spending cuts?

Who is attacking – now – our NHS?

Who wants – now – to cut a billion pounds from further and higher education, destroying at least 20,000 jobs?

Who went to illegal war in Iraq? Who is sending soldiers to die in Afghanistan?

We must all act in defence of our jobs, our industries and our services. We must never sell any jobs – they are not ours to sell; we must oppose every voluntary redundancy as vigorously as we oppose every compulsory redundancy. The jobs belong to the next generation. We must all now defend our jobs, take responsibility, take control.

The rights of capital

WHEN WE are balloted in a General Election, there is absolutely no control over who is on the electoral list. You receive a form from the local electoral commission or local authority that asks you who is resident and eligible to vote at your address. You fill in and return the form, but if you inflate the number of residents, nobody checks.

But of course this is capitalist democracy.

At BA it was workers' democracy (see p3) which led to an overwhelming vote for a strike at the end of last year, which is why Mrs Justice Cox QC outlawed it.

In 2005, Cox was awarded a lifetime achievement award for her commitment to the protection of equality and human rights by the Liberty and Justice organisations. That's capitalist rights for you.

Cover photograph of the Staythorpe protest by Jess Hurd/www.reportdigital.co.uk



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BA crews to ballot again

AFTER THE court declared unlawful BA cabin staff's 92 per cent majority vote for strike action on an 80 per cent turnout, they are now to ballot again. The cabin crew have called for a ten-day strike. Meanwhile BA is threatening to blackmail ground staff into scabbing by becoming temporary cabin crew, and to lease aircraft and crew from other airlines. No doubt the company will also go back to court to challenge the next ballot. It's already threatening to stop cheap flights for striking staff.

Anti-union laws brought in by Thatcher and kept in place by Labour have been used many times to nullify legitimate ballots, each time case law making the laws more and more restrictive. An accurate postal ballot depends on a union knowing precisely who of its members will be involved in any particular dispute, their current address, their employer and much more. The union must notify the employer whom they are balloting, and the employer is more likely to have up-to-date information than the union.

In the public sector the number of employers involved in any dispute can be in the thousands, and constantly changing, so the room for error is huge. One employer takes the union to court and the whole thing can crumble. Up to now there had always been a little "wriggle room" around "reasonableness", or courts would take into account whether the balloting discrepancies would have materially affected the result or whether the union had taken all steps reasonable to ballot an accurate list. The nature of the strike was never legally judged by a court.

The BA judgement changed all that. The cabin crew's vote was an unprecedented result that would be the envy of most unions. But Mrs Justice Laura Cox ruled that a tiny proportion of Unite members who were in the process of agreeing redundancy were balloted, and despite the fact that the number would have made no difference to the outcome, she declared the ballot unlawful. But she did not end there. She went on to criticise the impact of the strike if held over Christmas. So now judges will not have to take account of whether any inaccuracies in the ballot register would have significantly affected the outcome, but will be able to take account of the impact of the strike.

Maybe workers will have to take a leaf out of the cabin crew's book. Remember some years ago during a similar dispute, the cabin crew simply all phoned in sick at the same time. Or maybe workers will have to follow the example of the construction workers at the Lindsey oil refinery and simply walk out. In any case we must become outlaws – there are no longer any rules of the game. Striking is effectively illegal.

SCHOOLS

Huge majorities against SATs

PRIMARY HEADS in the National Association of Head Teachers and primary teachers in the NUT have overwhelmingly rejected SATs as a way of measuring pupil progress in a joint activity to test opinion, and are currently deciding the next steps in their joint campaign.

In the NUT, overall turnout in the indicative ballot was just under 25 per cent, high for a mere test of opinion: 95 per cent said the current system of SATs at the end of key Stages 1 and 2 should be abolished, while 76 per cent said they would be prepared to boycott the tests should that prove necessary. Among leadership-group members who would be at the forefront of any boycott, the turnout was even higher at 35 per cent.

The NUT and NAHT have called upon the government to engage in constructive talks about ending the tests that are highly damaging to children's education and put in place alternative assessment that will be of value to pupils, teachers and parents.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Dirty offices

MORE THAN one in four workers described their office as "dirty", according to a research survey by support service group, Resource.

The research results showed two out of five firms had cut back on cleaning and maintaining offices because of the economic recession. One in 10 of those questioned described their office lavatories as "filthy" and over a third said that their working environment was unsafe.

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

The emissions racket

The EU is proposing a 10-year economic framework, Growth Strategy 2020. Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso called for penalties for member states that fail to reach agreed economic targets, ending national economic sovereignty. The Commission believes the previous growth strategy failed because it was non-binding. New powers under the Lisbon Treaty will correct that.

The carbon racket

The EU's Emissions Trading Scheme granted surplus carbon permits worth 28.6 million euros to oil and gas companies operating in Britain in 2008. These surpluses are essentially free assets that firms like ExxonMobil, Total, Corus and Hanson can sell on to boost short-term profits. The two largest carbon trading exchanges made more than 57 million euros between them in 2009. The EU has lost at least 5 billion euros to carbon-trading VAT fraud in the last 18 months.

The pay racket

MEPs are to receive an extra £32,000 a year, phased in over two years, now that the Lisbon Treaty is in force. A European Parliament official said, "With more power comes more work." The increase will take the total annual allowance for 2010 to almost £220,000, excluding a tax-free 'general expenditure allowance' worth over £44,000, for which no receipts are needed.

The competition racket

A group of banks, including Royal Bank of Scotland, has hired City law firm Clifford Chance to explore a legal challenge to the government's 50 per cent windfall tax on bonuses, using EU competition law as the basis for the challenge.

Challenge to diktat on power

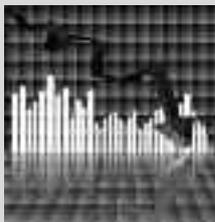
E.ON Chief Executive Paul Golby has urged the Government to defy the EU and keep open some coal and oil-fired power plants due to close. Under the EU's Large Combustion Plant Directive, a number of Britain's plants would be forced to close by 2015. Golby argues some should remain operational and ready to come online during periods of



London, 23 January: Following a series of high-profile detentions under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act, PHNAT (I'm A Photographer, Not A Terrorist) called for – and got – a mass turnout of photographers, professional and amateur, to stop the abuse of the terror laws.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Iceland: can't pay, won't pay



ICELAND'S PRESIDENT Olafur R. Grimsson has refused to sign the bill, negotiated under duress, enforcing the payment of £3.5 billion to the British and Dutch governments to refund them for the collapse of Iceland's deposit insurance fund – 50 per cent of Iceland's shrunken GDP. Iceland's government is now to put the bill to a referendum on 6 March.

This is equivalent to a demand for £700 billion from Britain. Iceland's taxpayers have no moral or legal obligation to pay.

Would we agree to refund depositors in foreign branches of bankrupt UK banks? Taxpayers cannot be expected to write open-ended insurance on banks' foreign activities.

In every civilised country there is a limit to the pursuit of debts. That is why we have introduced limited liability and abolished debtors' prisons. Combining cross-border banking with generous guarantees to creditors is unsustainable. Brown's demands are not reasonable. Threatening Iceland with destruction, as Lord Myners has done, is disgraceful, self-righteous bullying.

A poll from MMR found that 58 per cent would vote against the bill, while 42 per cent would vote for it. Can't pay, won't pay – right. But for Iceland's people, voting against the bill will not be enough: they will have to take power to defend themselves against the EU.

Iceland's Foreign Minister Össur Stropheöinsson warned the British and Dutch governments not to interfere, saying, "Despite the President's decision, which I deeply regret, it has to be remembered that he exercised his constitutional right."

President Grimsson said, "You have to trust the democratic process. You see in France, in the Netherlands, in Ireland, in many European Union countries, referendums are a normal part of the democratic process. I know in Britain you don't really have the experience of trusting the people with a referendum but all over Europe there are countries that trust the people with a referendum ... I thought the new Europe we were talking about was not only about market reforms but also about democracy and the will of the people."

The banks turned Iceland into a hedge fund, with huge short-term foreign currency liabilities used to finance risky long-term assets. Iceland's privatised financial sector's debts grew from twice to ten times its gross domestic product, in five years, so the economy was doomed. Between 2007 and 2010 the fall in real consumption was close to a quarter.

ENVIRONMENT**Cuba slams "farce"**

CUBAN Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez has called the Copenhagen Summit on climate change a farce, undemocratic, exclusive and arbitrary. He said President Obama's approach was arrogant, cynical and devious, "principally aimed at confusing international public opinion and participants in the Summit, making them believe that it had reached the final document through general agreement".

He pointed out that Obama had called 16 heads of state to a separate, private meeting, where they adopted their own document. They refused to commit to cutting their CO2 emissions by 40 per cent until 2020, to transfer technologies to poor states, or to aid programmes designed to cut emissions. As Hugo Chavez remarked, "It's not democratic, it's not inclusive. Well, ladies and gentlemen, isn't that the reality of the world?"

Sudan – as president of the Group of 77 – with China, Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba

and other nations from the South blocked Denmark's efforts to impose a deal that suited the rich.

Obama tried to blame China, slavishly echoed by Climate Secretary Ed Miliband, who accused China and the others of trying to hijack the conference and "hold the world to ransom" to stop a deal being reached. Miliband wrote, "We cannot again allow negotiations on real points of substance to be hijacked in this way. We will need to have major reform of the UN body overseeing the negotiations and of the way the negotiations are conducted."

Gordon Brown called for a "global policeman" to monitor countries' compliance with emissions reduction targets, with the EU taking the lead: "I will work with President Sarkozy for a European organisation that will monitor the transparency that is being achieved ... in every country around the world."

Far from uniting the world against exploitation, pollution, deforestation and debt, the conference seems to have ended in recriminations that may well accelerate the drive to a wider war.

Kraft to swallow Cadbury

THE UNITE union is leading protests against the takeover of Cadbury by US giant Kraft. Top of the list of concerns is jobs: Cadbury employs more than 45,000 people worldwide, 6,200 of them in Britain, according to the union. Already, workers at Cadbury's Marlbrook factory, near Leominster, have brought their fight to protect their jobs and their company's independence into the heart of their community, getting signatures on a union petition outside a local supermarket.

"If Kraft or any other bidder swoops for Cadbury, the consequences could be devastating not just for the workers, their families and the communities, but for Cadbury itself. We want to keep Cadbury in the UK, producing products we all love - not swallowed up as a trophy for some far-off boardroom," said Unite official Jennie Formby.

Kraft, meanwhile, has sacked 10,000 workers across the world in the past 10 years following takeovers. The fear is that with Kraft raising its bid by £2 billion in borrowed money – on top of several billion more in loans to put together the original bid – the workforce will be slashed to service the debt.

The union points out that the leading credit agency Standard & Poor's has downgraded Kraft's corporate credit rating from "A" in 2007 to its current status of "BBB", two levels above junk bond status, reflecting its concerns that Kraft is not managing its portfolio well. That will make interest payments higher, and put even more pressure on staffing.

COLLEGES**Manifesto launched**

THE UNIVERSITY and college union UCU launched its education manifesto on Tuesday 26 January at a lobby event in Parliament to set out its key issues in all areas of post-16 education.

The union's vision of education is founded on a belief in the intrinsic value and power of education as a force for good. It sets out the context in which the

manifesto has been prepared – against a backdrop of cuts across public services, with education bearing the brunt of them.

The document, which will be a key plank of the union's campaigning work, explains the problems facing further education, higher education, prison education and adult learning. See Education for the future: UCU's manifesto for post-school education [358kb], available at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/k/c/Manifesto.pdf>

• See feature article, p12

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****FEBRUARY**

Wednesday 3 February, time to be confirmed

"Fair access to employment"

March and rally, London

Organised by engineering construction workers and supported by GMB, the aim is to demonstrate outside the London offices of Alstom, which is paying Italian workers less than the agreed rate at the Staythorpe site. For more information, see www.bearfacts.co.uk.

Tuesday 23 February, 7.30pm

"Britain's Finances – Treachery in the City"

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

This public meeting, organised by the CPBML and WORKERS magazine, will look at the role the City plays in Britain's economy. Why are we pouring billions into banks that are ruining the country? All welcome.

ECUADOR**Coup conspiracy**

ON 3 JANUARY, Ecuador's President Rafael Correa revealed that his government had uncovered a conspiracy to launch a coup. He said it had "intelligence reports that support with data and figures that conspirators have been receiving help not just from the US government, but from US right-wing organisations." The plotters had sent e-mails round army barracks, the President said.

The USA is active in Latin America: waging secret operations by Special Forces, supporting death squads and selling huge quantities of arms, all under cover of fighting a war on drugs. In Colombia, American Special Forces and other personnel are fighting the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The USA has sent military aid worth \$6 billion. The British government has sent undisclosed amounts of military aid, and the SAS trains the High Mountain Battalions, which have a record of atrocities.

Last October, Colombia's government agreed to let the USA use seven new military bases, some on the borders of Venezuela and Ecuador. The USA is also training Colombian forces for more attacks inside Ecuador and Venezuela.

Greece: running out of money

GREECE IS a glaring example of what capitalist banks and the European Union (a truly dreadful combination) can do to an erstwhile independently minded nation.

The EU wants assurances that Greece will not default on its 402 billion euro debt to foreign creditors. Most importantly, it wants Greek workers to foot the bill with wage freezes or deep salary cuts. It is arrogantly declaring that Greece must accept an IMF-style austerity package, without any devaluation, which is an absolutely ruinous prescription, a dose of further poison. Draconian pay cuts would only deepen Greece's economic depression with tax revenues collapsing even further.

Greece's public debt is already 113 per cent of the country's GDP and predicted to rise further in the next two years. Its Treasury will have to raise 56 billion euros from the bond markets this year, the peak danger period being May and June. While Greek workers are to suffer, who is destined to earn fortunes from this bond market trading?

Even in terms of past capitalist orthodoxy, Greece desperately needs to restore its currency by devaluing and then passing a law switching internal euro debt into drachmas. This would at least allow the country the possibility of breaking out of its depression-loop. However, membership of the EU and EMU prevent this – surely a spur to an increase in anti-EU attitudes.

Even though the PASOK party was only elected last autumn, the Greek government has already jettisoned its pre-election promises and agreed harsh measures to reduce the deficit, revealing the limitations of social-democratic politics in current conditions. Yet these actions still do not satisfy the EU, which wants them to go even further with multi-year freezes on public wages and VAT rises.

Greek workers

It is difficult to tell how far the contradiction between the interests of Greece and the EU will go. Probably the answer lies in the response of the Greek working class. Potentially at least, Greece holds the whip hand over Brussels – as a Greek exit from the EMU would be dangerous, raising the contagion of departure spreading to other nations on the periphery and puncturing the image of ever-expanding EU integration. Possibly the government will posture and then settle for yet more crippling loans, only postponing the day of reckoning.

The EU is continuing its brinkmanship. Jurgen Stark, the EU's chief economist and German member on the European Central Bank's inner council, has recently said that Greece's problems are entirely "homemade" and do not meet the terms required to trigger the rescue mechanism under EU treaty law (which is limited to countries that face severe difficulties "beyond their own control"). Another German minister has said, "Germany will not take on the burden of Greek debts."

The fear behind permanent subsidies is that other countries in a similar position, like Spain, Portugal or Ireland, might quickly join the queue. It may be that EU institutions will still conjure up a 'rescue' such as buying Greek bonds or certain EU states may club together to keep Greece afloat with loans or subsidies for a while. But these measures would solve nothing, as Greece's debts would probably still increase. However, the stakes are high because if Greece is left to fail, it will provoke a euro crisis.

There is a serious fault line running through the EU. Interest rates that suited Germany were too low for Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, causing all to be engulfed in a destructive property and credit-fuelled boom. EMU divergence between certain northerly countries (led by Germany) and the southerly countries has widened to the point where questions are being asked as to whether these fissures will extend further, and more eruptions of national interests break out, imperilling the basis of EU integration.

The TUC has its own Aid for
involvement in South America

Haiti puts the spoils

THE BRITISH working class are a generous lot when it comes to those who find themselves victims of terrible natural calamities or dreadful wars. Witness the outrage when the BBC alone decided not to screen the Disasters Emergency Committee's (DEC) appeal for the people of Gaza. Witness as well, the magnificent response to the DEC appeal for the people of Haiti – with the Welsh and other fire fighters rescuing buried victims. But what of the TUC's Aid for Haiti appeal? How does this fit in with the working class's traditional generosity?

Well, the TUC will hand all the money collected to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), formerly the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The post-war history of this organisation needs closer scrutiny.

The ICFTU broke away from the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1948 as a Cold War gesture led by the British TUC and the American AFL/CIO. There then followed a period when the ICFTU encouraged affiliates to ban communists and "fellow travellers" from holding office, even as shop stewards or on Trades Councils. In Britain, this policy held sway for more than twenty years.

Living with capitalism

The ICFTU tried to encourage the "opposition" in the socialist bloc and to undermine the WFTU whenever it could. It took as its own the West's foreign policies and was happy to live with capitalism. It was in effect the creation of capitalism frightened by the growth of workers' support for the USSR and socialism after WWII.

After the collapse of the USSR, the ICFTU turned its attention to Cuba, the island that was now struggling with an increased US blockade and the collapse of its former trading partners. Despite the fact that Cuban unions within the CTC which was affiliated to the WFTU had over 90 per cent membership density on a voluntary basis and manual subs collection, the ICFTU found a stooge or two who claimed they were trying to start a new union in the energy sector and were being persecuted and not recognised by the Cuban state owned energy industry. It reported Cuba to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) seeking suspension of Cuba from its bodies and sanctions against Cuba.

The ILO was riddled with spooks at the time. It took a UNISON delegation to Cuba to investigate these claims and find them groundless, reporting that the ICFTU stooges represented no one and

for Haiti appeal. But where will the money go? The history of its
America does not bode well for the future...

Spotlight on the politics of aid



Photo: Workers

Cuban doctors in Gonaives, Haiti: some UNISON regions are donating disaster relief money directly to the Cuban medical brigades.

the CTC unions had genuine popular support. Despite this the ICFTU continued for years to undermine Cuba. It took a campaign amongst British unions to reverse TUC policy which was originally identical to that of the ICFTU.

After 1948, most Latin American unions stayed with the WFTU and the ICFTU always wanted to gain union power here. There was also the right-wing Catholic trade union centre called the World Confederation of Unions, with whom the ICFTU would eventually merge to create the ITUC.

Turning on Chavez

But not content with trying to subvert the Cuban revolution, the ITUC turned on Venezuela after the election of Chavez. The US-backed coup that temporarily put Chavez out of power involved the leader of the Venezuelan ITUC trade union centre. He had previously organised strikes by managers in the oil industry to bring down the government that was taking on the

oligarchs that were in bed with the ITUC trade union centre in the country.

After the coup, he was arrested and workers began to form new unions and a new union centre. The ITUC saw its opportunity and reported Venezuela to the ILO for harassing a trade union leader and creating state unions. Once again it took former UNISON leader Rodney Bickerstaffe to phone, from Caracas, the TUC delegation at the ILO in Geneva that was hearing the case to explain the truth and that the new unions were genuinely representative of Venezuelan workers. But the ITUC does not change its ICFTU spots.

It now wants affiliated union centres to collect money for Haiti, a country that has never been forgiven for its slave uprising that ended French colonial rule, and which is in partnership agreements with Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia and ALBA.

The ITUC says some of the money will go to its affiliates in the Dominican Republic and some to its Haitian affiliate

and some for "long term development". What are ITUC's long-term ambitions for Haiti? With plans for the mass transportation of Haitian children to Florida and calls in the US for Haiti to become the next state of the USA, it's really all left to the imagination.

Two regions of UNISON have already come up with a very interesting idea. Instead of sending money to the TUC and consequently the ITUC, the Northern and London Regions are to send very large donations to the Cuban Medical Brigade in Haiti. If your union would be interested in doing the same, here are the details:

If you make a transfer, agree to pay bank charges at both ends. Donations in pounds sterling. If there are lots of small amounts, send cheques to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign with Haiti Earthquake written on back.

Title or reference: Terremoto en Haiti
Bank: BICSA
SWIFT code: BIDCCUHH
Account No: 01321010770900

A year ago the fight for work erupted when skilled engineering workers at power stations across Britain demanding jobs for British workers.

Engineering construction: underpayment at

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS are, once again, at the forefront of challenging our thinking and taking the fight to the opposition, both in and outside our own class. Opposition comes in many guises and in today's climate its most debilitating manifestation is the idea that there is no alternative to accepting whatever capitalism throws at us.

The engineering construction workers' website, Bearfacts (www.bearfacts.co.uk), developed independently of "official" union control, has become the focal point for the struggle against the deliberate refusal to employ British construction workers and, notably, British shop stewards.

Through the website and its various offshoots, a demonstration and rally has been organised in London for 3 February (see What's On, p5), to demand the right to work on British sites. It is also in protest at the continued attempts by foreign contractors to undercut the rates of pay on NAECI (National Agreement Engineering Construction Industry – Blue Book) sites, despite Mandelson's

assurances at the height of the first LOR (Lindsey Oil Refinery) dispute.

At a time when there are major construction projects being planned, the government's commissioning of a report entitled "Would the needs of large projects be sensibly met through immigration?" has, not unsurprisingly, provoked outrage among construction engineers. These workers are fighting, not only for the right to work now, but also to demand a future in the industry for generations to come.

Calling on workers

The work of Bearfacts is not only to be applauded but more importantly, supported. It is calling on all workers to get off their knees and demand work in their own country and for those in work to support that demand. The call, as yet, is not for mass stoppages but for financial support and delegations from working sites to enable those out of work to make the point. The politics are simple – there is work here and we want it!

The origins of this current phase of

struggle, marking the anniversary of the first LOR dispute last year, lie in two areas. On the one hand there is the failure of the employers to honour the latest version of the Blue Book and secondly the denial of work to British workers, notably to effective shop stewards.

Last month, following questions at the Staythorpe power station construction site, Italian contractor Somi and its subcontractor CMN were subject to rigorous investigation by the auditors, and found wanting. Staythorpe is where, in 2008, weekly demonstrations against the main contractor Alstom and two other foreign contractors took place and was recently the scene of another stoppage.

Fears that flying the auditors to Italy, with the ECIA (Engineering Construction Industry Association – employers' "union"), while refusing to allow any union official to accompany them, might end up being a "pasta n vino junket" proved unfounded. The report confirmed that Somi/CMN had been paying some of their workers over £1000 below agreed



CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London

Tuesday 23 February, 7.30 pm

Britain's finances – Treachery in the City

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall,
25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Nearest tube Holborn.

Do we want British workers to continue to be the cannon fodder for finance capitalism? This is the system that has robbed us of our pensions, our savings, our jobs, our pay and conditions, our sovereignty and in many cases our homes.

Everybody welcome.

construction workers walked off sites at oil refineries and
s. Now they're back...

Staythorpe sparks renewed calls for action

rates. Clearly, scepticism is a wise position to take in the construction industry.

But instead of accepting the employers' usual "ok gov – you found us out, it's a fair cop, we'll pay it back" behaviour, workers are demanding more and are intending to demonstrate in London. The march is scheduled to visit the offices of Alstom, the ECIA and Mandelson. Remember Mandelson's words a year ago about IREM at LOR? "The Italians," he said, "have specialist skills." These claims have proved to be utter nonsense, as illustrated by the employment of British workers, with the requisite skills, to put right the cock-ups made by IREM.

At the time of writing the GMB has backed the demonstration and is laying on coaches and publicly calling on workers to attend. But Unite continues to drag its feet and is refusing to support the demonstration. Why?

Sadly, this is typical of the Unite leadership's slavish allegiance to the Labour Party. It's the line of (how many decades old now?) don't rock the boat before an election; we're better off under Labour; it would be so much worse under the Tories.

Forget Iraq; Afghanistan; the promised referendum on the EU constitution/Lisbon treaty; the pretended support for public ownership yet continuing privatisation; the banking bail-out – in short the support for finance capital and its freedom to rule etc etc – but but but ... the Tories would be so much worse. Let's be honest – one pile of rubbish may be smaller than two, but it's still rubbish, and it doesn't smell any better.

We must take care to avoid the obvious inter-union squabbling, each vying with the other to appear the more progressive/militant in order to attract members – not new ones but from each other. What is necessary is that workers join forces to press our agenda of demanding work in our own country. This message must be, and is being, taken out to all workers, both in and out of work in every industry.



Engineering construction workers demonstrating in London last year against the denial of jobs to skilled and unemployed British workers.

Taking full advantage of the liberalisation of Europe's international Armed with massive opportunities to exploit workers across Europe

The German takeover of Europe's – and Britain's

THE GERMAN national railway company Deutsche Bahn (DB) is currently positioning itself to take full advantage of the European Union's decree that international passenger services would be "liberalised" from the beginning of this year. It has already begun to move into Britain.

This liberalisation of international passenger services will bring about huge changes. The publicly owned national rail companies across Europe have long co-operated with each other in running international trains. It was only in 2007 that many of the companies joined together in an organisation called "Railteam", to facilitate through- and inter-available tickets, as well as better connections.

This is likely to wither rapidly as international trains from one operator run in competition with another. At present, on most international journeys you can buy a ticket and use it on any operator's trains on that route. In the brave new world now coming into being, you almost certainly won't – it would be like trying to use an Easyjet air ticket on Ryanair!

This is the latest phase of the implementation of the EU's policy to open up the railways of Europe to privatisation and competition that began in the days when the EU was still the EEC, with a directive enacted in 1991. It was this directive that was enthusiastically seized upon by the Tory government as the blueprint to break up and privatise British Rail in the 1990s.

The EU has already liberalised European rail freight back in 2003. As a result, DB in particular has aggressively either taken over or set up operations in 11 other countries. For example, it has taken over the entire Netherlands Railways freight operation, NS Cargo. It is clearly thinking big, and has recently begun to operate through freight services from China to Europe via Russia in competition with deep sea shipping.

DB last year took over Britain's largest freight operator EWS which is being rebranded to reflect the new ownership, trains now appearing in the same DB colours as those to be found in Germany. Its freight trains travel regularly between Britain and continental Europe through

"This is the latest phase of the implementation of the EU's policy to open up the railways of Europe to privatisation and competition..."

the Channel Tunnel.

The burgeoning DB empire has resulted in the rail unions across Europe establishing a coordinating body to deal more effectively with the problems that have arisen. Already, DB is clearly seeking to undermine the pay, terms and conditions of "mobile" train staff such as train drivers by using the cheapest labour to work cross-border services. Its policies and actions in its new found territories are very familiar to observers of the private rail companies in Britain. Its cheap operation in France is undercutting French national operator SNCF, resulting in cuts and job losses.



New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

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

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

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

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

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

national passenger services, Deutsche Bahn is moving into Britain. In Europe, it's looking for profits, at the expense of workers...

Britain's – rail services



Out with the old: the former English, Welsh and Scottish Railway is being rebranded as DB Schenker.

DB has also bought Chiltern Trains, which runs passenger train services from London to Birmingham, along with a small 'open access' operator which runs a few trains between London and Wrexham. It also owns 50 per cent of the company that operates the London Overground services on behalf of Transport for London, the owners of London Underground. This expanding network of passenger services, which at present serves Euston, Watford, Richmond, Clapham Junction and Stratford, will shortly extend its reach via a re-opened East London line to Croydon. DB has a nice little earner here, paid for by Londoners.

DB's latest conquest is the Tyne & Wear metro, currently publicly owned, which the RMT and other trade unions have fought a hard campaign to retain in the public sector. It will operate the metro for between seven and nine years, and will receive more than £300 million from the government in capital funding, plus a long term operating subsidy. Doubtless the people of Newcastle, Gateshead and the surrounding area will be paying through the nose to fund DB's future profits.

Many industry observers believe that the next target for DB will be the East

Coast main line franchise, recently removed from National Express, but up for grabs in the next two years. DB has recently sought to buy the British arm of international passenger operator Eurostar, which is currently an operation shared with the French and Belgian national rail companies. Whilst they were unsuccessful, DB has made it plain that they want to operate services to London via the Channel Tunnel.

State-owned, but not for long

DB itself is still nominally a company owned by the German state, but those in charge are planning for the company's imminent post-privatisation future. The EU's liberalisation of the railways is providing the company with massive opportunities to exploit workers across Europe, in much the same way that Britain's bus companies were able to exploit the opportunities provided by rail privatisation here over a decade ago. The difference now is that DB dwarfs the likes of Britain's Stagecoach, First Group and National Express. Will one of these minnows be gobbled up next?

DB's freight traffic has slumped by a quarter as a result of the current economic crisis, and it has announced 3,900 job losses across Europe, including

a 25 per cent cut in staff in the Netherlands, with as many as 7,000 possible by next year. Its British arm EWS has already seen large scale job losses during 2009. It seems that it is a lack of investment cash and increasing competition from SNCF, itself expanding into other countries by exploiting EU liberalisation, that is holding it back. The losers in this rush to privatisation and competition are the workers.

Many railway workers, and even more rail users, are oblivious to the growing German presence in Britain's railways, and even more don't appreciate the role played by the EU in bringing this about. RMT to its credit has clearly identified the threat to the railways and rail workers posed by the EU, and has been at the forefront of the trade union movement in opposing it.

Rail unions must break the conspiracy of silence and make sure that their members are told the truth about what the EU stands for, both for the railways and for workers in general. What is needed is real internationalism, with unions working together across Europe in the interests of the workers. Joining together to oppose the expansionist DB, which is by far the biggest rail company in Europe, will be an important first step.

Programmes frozen, budgets cut, young people excluded. Now responsibility for vocational training is to be handed to local government, with little evidence that it is prepared...

Vocational education under attack

IN 2006 the Leitch review reported on the future of Britain's vocational education. The review found that Britain's skills lagged behind those of competitor nations as the result of employers' neglect of education and training over a decade (though Leitch glossed over this important fact). Illogically, Leitch then suggested that the way out of this situation was for further education to become more "employer-led", as if the very people responsible for the lack of co-ordination and planning in further education could be trusted to turn the situation round.

As a result, new apprenticeships and diplomas were to be created. Train 2 Gain was set up, under which colleges could bid for contracts with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to offer on-site training to employers. Adult learning, which had been an important part of college work with the communities they served, was cut back drastically. The government's proposal in a paper called a Learning Revolution was that adult education should move out of colleges and that people should organise their own courses in rooms in public libraries and museums.

The LSC, which dispensed government funding to colleges, has proved a disaster. Its offices had to be fitted with a revolving door to cope with the frequent

turnover of senior staff. A building programme was launched, and colleges invited to develop plans for the much-needed improvements to the antiquated premises in which much of further education is delivered.

Programme frozen

Yet, with 144 colleges and plans approved, and contractors on site, the LSC announced that the programme was drastically over-budget and froze all of it. Colleges were left with holes in the ground or half-erected buildings, and contractors were ordered off-site. In the event, after a scrutiny process in which colleges had to justify their plans, already approved, a merged 13 projects were allowed to proceed, many in a reduced form.

Recent reorganisations in government have not helped. Government responsibility for further education is now distributed between four departments, those of Business Innovation and Skills, Communities and Local Government, Children Schools and Families, and Work and Pensions.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service warns of "significant financial instability" in colleges. In a scenario familiar to universities, colleges are told to increase fees, and logically, will want to attract as many lucrative overseas

"One cannot throw a stone in any FE college without hitting a consultant...."

students as they can. Many already do and the recent visas scandal, in which it appeared that some providers were recruiting students to courses with promises of two years' right of residence in Britain at the end of their studies, shows the danger of distortions to college curricula and recruitment that could result.

Do more with less

Defying the laws of arithmetic and logic, colleges are told to do more with less. Though colleges are told to recruit more students, funding is cut. In a paper called the Skills and Investment Strategy, the government department BIS announced in November, after a leak, £340 million in cuts to the learning and skills sector.

The rate paid to colleges for apprenticeships will be cut by 3 per cent, while for those over 25 years old, the cut would be 10 per cent, the rate for students on Train 2 Gain programmes will be cut by 6 per cent, and for adult learners by 3 per cent. These cuts, or

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

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

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

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

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





Photo: Andrew Wiard/ www.reportphotos.com

College lecturers fighting for their service in 2005.

“efficiencies” as they are termed, are to be implemented through pay freezes, redundancies and reductions in learners.

While colleges may still be able to recruit, it is probable that they will not retain students throughout the length of the academic year. There are already high wastage rates in FE. If colleges are required to bring in more students than they can actually teach and support, the numbers leaving before completing their course will rise yet further, with concomitant waste of the students’ time and energy at a crucial phase in their life.

The LSC’s life is moving peacefully to its close, and government is transferring funding and commissioning for education for 16- to 19-year-olds to local authorities. A Young People’s Learning Agency and a Skills Funding Agency will take the LSC’s place nationally.

There is little evidence that local authorities are prepared or able to take on this role. In any case, especially in the big cities where the largest further education colleges are sited, and because of the narrowing of the curriculum as a result of the employer-led approach.

Try finding a pipe-fitting course in

London. There’s one college offering it in the whole capital – students may well study far from their home local authority, and no one has yet said how colleges will be paid for students from other authorities who enrol for their courses.

There is talk of sub-regional partnerships. These will probably be managed as well as the LSC was. The model the government has taken here is easily recognisable as the discredited one from the NHS where, Workers readers will remember, money was supposed to “follow the patient”. A poll by the Learning and Skills Network found that only 15 per cent of the public trusted their local council to run 14-19 education.

New age bar

The “participation age”, the age until which young people attend school or college, is to be raised, initially to 17 in 2013 and then to 18 in 2015. There is no capacity in the further education system to absorb these extra students, to say nothing of how staff and other students might cope with the already difficult behaviour problems, the so-called guns ,gangs and knives issues, which will be

exacerbated by including large numbers of students who have no wish to be there, and are only in college to meet a legal obligation.

Private providers lurk in the shadows. One cannot throw a stone in any FE college without hitting a consultant. With local authority commissioning, what is to stop a local authority deciding to buy its education from a private college? Colleges have already been forced to compete with one another.

The new arrangements will make it obligatory for college principals to spend their time, not on providing the best possible education for students, but in trying to put their neighbours out of business. The trends toward college mergers, with accompanying job losses and cuts in the curriculum, will gather strength.

It could be very different. The system of technical colleges Britain established in the 19th and 20th centuries was a model copied around the world. If we value skill, the essence of our existence as a working class, then we could construct a twenty-first century system for its transfer to new generations of the class.

Hitler needed a chemicals company to provide the raw material Farben, the largest chemicals cartel in the world...

The cartel from hell: IG Farben and Hitler's

Hell's Cartel: IG Farben and the making of Hitler's war machine, by Diarmuid Jeffreys, paperback, 406 pages, ISBN 978-0-7475-9655-4, Bloomsbury, 2008, £8.99.

THIS BOOK by Diarmuid Jeffreys brilliantly chronicles the story of the rise and fall of the chemical conglomerate, IG Farben. It tracks the cartel's evolution over history: from its origins in the nineteenth century in the nascent German chemical industry to its global dominance of the world chemical industry. By the 1920s, IG Farben had become the fourth largest industrial concern in the world after America's General Motors, US Steel and Standard Oil, and the largest in Europe. So strategically important was it to Germany that Weimar Republic Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, declared, "Without coal and IG Farben, I can have no foreign policy."

The book provides comprehensive evidence of its fatal alliance with the Nazis and its direct complicity and close collaboration with Nazi aims and war crimes. Without IG Farben's participation, Hitler and his party followers would never have been able to seize and consolidate their power in Germany, and the Third Reich would never have dared to plunge into war.

Jeffreys traces the development of IG Farben back to its beginnings in the nineteenth century, when German textile manufacturers impelled by the economic impetus that came from German political unification exploited the new aniline chemistry (invented by an English chemistry student in 1856) and soared into the lead, establishing close to the river Rhine many more synthetic dye works than elsewhere in Europe. Companies such as BASF (which was to play a leading part in the IG Farben project), Bayer and Hoechst were set up, employing their own scientists and chemists, conducting their own academic research and soon leading in the world field.

These businesses quickly realised that "dyestuffs were only the beginning, that out of the same set of basic chemical compounds could come other, more remarkable discoveries". Soon



Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler (foreground, left) visiting IG Farben's synthetic rubber (Buna) plant at Auschwitz, being shown round by IG Farben executive Carl Krauch (centre) and Auschwitz commandant Rudolph Höss. Krauch, sentenced to 6 years by a US war crimes tribunal, was released for "good behaviour" two years later.

investigations into the medical potential of coal tar derivatives led them into pharmaceuticals, which developed into a hugely profitable area, particularly for Bayer. Other commercial applications of basic coal tar science ranged from paints and printing inks to photographic materials and cleaning products.

By the time of the First World War, the programmes to produce synthetic nitrate (for gunpowder) and also poison gas weapons brought the German chemical industry into a mutually dependent relationship with the state, which increased still further with military contracts for products such as dye for service uniforms, medicines and paints, replacing the exports that had been interrupted by the war. Also, in August 1916, responding to growing international competitive pressures, a sort of half-merger of Germany's chemical industries took place; the shape of IG Farben was beginning to emerge.

Following the First World War, the half-merged German chemical companies, facing a weaker international position and needing to update technology, to invent new products and find new capital,

decided to merge fully. In December 1925, IG Farben was born.

In 1933, IG Farben donated 400,000 Reichsmarks to the Nazi Party, the largest donation from a firm. In the March 1933 election Hitler emerged with a slim majority, before crushing all internal party opposition. A few weeks later the cartel increased its financial contributions and by the end of the year had given 4.5 million Reichsmarks. IG Farben now settled into a stance of collaboration with the Nazi regime. Though some of its leading directors remained non-Nazi, from this moment on many of its leading managers became Nazi party members and the company and state interests merged.

Underwriting the costs

In particular, Hitler and the Nazis promised to underwrite the costs of IG Farben's quest to produce a synthetic fuel usable by the military and thereby reduce or end Germany's reliance on foreign energy supplies. Soon after, the cartel further planned to devise synthetic rubber, also essential for the rearmament plans. "From now on IG Farben's fate and fortunes would be inextricably tied to those of the

for his war. Enter IG

s Nazis

Third Reich.”

The company greatly profited from the Four Year Plan in which it was given a dominant role in the run-up to war: selling more products, employing more people, making more money than ever before. And in 1938 with the takeover of Czechoslovakia, IG Farben bought one of its rival Czech companies, Aussiger Verein, on very favourable terms, as war plunder.

The German war effort after 1939 is almost unthinkable without IG Farben. The Wehrmacht's vehicles rode on its synthetic tyres, were powered by its synthetic fuels and fired shells with its explosives. A summary of IG Farben products in the German military machine takes almost a page to describe in the book.

Slave labour and the SS

Also, IG Farben developed a cheek-by-jowl relationship with the SS, consuming countless slave labourers in its plants, most infamously at their plant near Auschwitz, and colluded in the process of the Holocaust. Three chapters towards the end of book catalogue IG Farben's participation in the concentration camps, including direct experiments on prisoners. The German military blitzkrieg into Poland was swiftly followed by the company, who acquired the most important chemical plants there.

After the war, in 1951 the cartel was broken up and Bayer, Hoechst and BASF were reborn along with 6 smaller firms, which quickly resumed dominance. In August 1947 23 IG Farben defendants were put on trial, but no one received a long sentence and most were freed early, quickly acquiring jobs in industry again. By now, American interests were firmly anti-Soviet; collaborators with Nazism were needed to rebuild Germany on pro-American lines.

This book, full of copious research and evidence, is very informative. It illustrates that fascism assumes power through the established system and confirms that it is the open, naked dictatorship of the most extreme sections of monopoly and finance capital called into play to prevent the progress of working people.

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

ABSOLUTE DECLINE

Marx analysed 19th-century capitalism as being in decline, never to recover. Many claim this shows Marx was wrong, because capitalism always manages to recover from its frequent crises – so it can go on forever. Yet a longer and deeper overview of history shows Marx was right.

Capitalist forces grew up under feudalism and eventually defeated it, establishing itself as the prevailing economic system. In doing so, it created a new class, of workers who had to work in return for wages. Marx said capitalism created its own gravediggers. So from the time of its greatest triumph, capitalism never again expanded in overall form, and its decline began. Class relationships made this inevitable, and all apparent “recoveries” proved temporary.

In Britain, the working class forced the issue, seeing its own potential power, organising in trade unions to fight the capitalists. Thus it became the dominant force in society – the class which represented the future.

When workers in Russia in 1917 showed they could overthrow the capitalist class altogether and seize and maintain power for themselves, the balance of class forces in the world changed forever. Capitalism's decline became absolute. From that point, its main aim was to destroy its future assassins – all internal and foreign policies concentrated on bloody war on workers.

This doesn't seem obvious today. The Soviet Union eventually collapsed (having saved the world from fascism in world war two) together with socialism in China and other countries, and capitalism might seem to have won the class war. Yet the nature of class relationships is the same, and so capitalism remains in absolute decline. It is incapable of offering any kind of growth or progress for the vast majority. It can only destroy.

Now we see an increasingly fast cycle of ever deeper capitalist crises. Capitalism's major aim is to kill the power of the working class, and decline is deliberately promoted to achieve this end, for example the closure of coal mines in Britain to finish off the miners. By its own actions, it destroys the means of production – industry and agriculture, the banks and the financial system.

Capitalism has no answers to its problems. In absolute decline, it is now exposed in its weakness, but it won't fall unless the working class strikes it down. We could do it, but we have to want to – this is the challenge.

Interested in these ideas?

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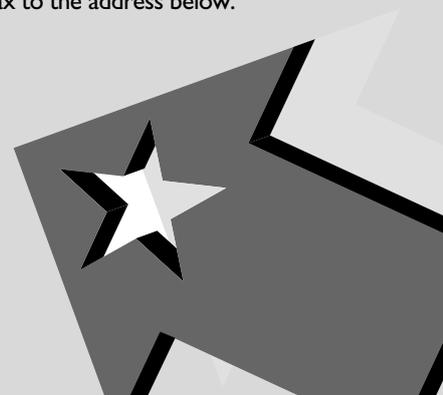
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Back to Front – Beware US gifts

‘The US may see an opportunity in the tragedy that has struck Haiti.’

In February 2004, WORKERS exclusively told the story of the Cuban Medical Brigade in Haiti, “Cuba’s Haitian heroes”, and the story of Haiti itself. Today, we are expecting more than 200,000 Haitian dead following the severe earthquake that struck that land with the force of 400,000 tons of TNT.

What does this human tragedy tell us? Well, miraculously, as the residents of Port-au-Prince know, part of the Cuban compound in the city survived the earthquake as did the Cuban doctors. They immediately started saving lives in a makeshift hospital based on their “Anexo”, or annexe, of the University Hospital of Port-au-Prince.

So nothing changes there, then, because when President Aristide was overthrown by a US backed coup in 2004 (nothing changes there either), all civil infrastructure collapsed and the Cubans, along with the Red Cross, provided the only medical care in the country.

There are connections between Cuba and Haiti. Both had historic revolutions, both were severely punished for those revolutions with blockades and military interventions. But there the similarity ends.

Cuba eventually took the socialist path while Haiti was ruled by a series of leaders who were either killed in office if they tried to do good things, or ran off to the USA with the contents of the national treasury.

The hand of the US, as well as the defeated colonial power France, could always be seen interfering in Haiti. The

most recent example was the ousting of elected President Aristide by a coup orchestrated by the US and France who then sent in their troops and installed a Haitian émigré who lived in Miami.

France has never forgiven the 400,000 African slaves who defeated Napoleon’s best general and established a black republic, the second republic in the hemisphere after the USA. It demanded and forced through massive reparations that were only paid off in 1949!

Despite the overthrow of Aristide, Haitians eventually elected Rene Preval, an ally of Aristide, as their President. Preval took Haiti into partnerships with ALBA, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia as well as Brazil. Programmes to eradicate illiteracy, disease, and to educate the people, provide low-cost energy, develop agriculture, roads and infrastructure, were the result. The Haitian doctors you see interviewed on TV were trained in Cuba.

But, having been implicated in the coup in Venezuela, Honduras and the attempted coup in Ecuador, the US may see an opportunity in the tragedy that has struck Haiti.

The pouring of troops into Haiti and the subsequent chaos is an insult to Haitians. They are a proud people who have acted with great dignity during the devastation and chaos inflicted upon them. Our solidarity with the workers of Haiti must ensure that they are able to rebuild their country as a sovereign people and nation.

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