

WORKERS

www.workers.org.uk

JANUARY 2009 £1

NEVER MIND THE NONSENSE -

1997:
No more
boom and bust.

2007:
I want to lead a
government humble
enough
to know its place.

2008:
We have saved
the world.

1997:
My reforms are
essential to ensure
the confidence of
investors large and
small.

LET'S MAKE OUR OWN FUTURE



Meat hygiene Up against the inspectors

06



Cuba How to cope with economic disaster

11



Book reviews Three books for the new year

14

WORKERS

“ There’s a thought

HAVE WE British workers any idea what is just around the corner? Do we, the sole remnants of the national entity, understand what we have allowed to develop?

It was clear by the end of the 1970s that Britain had become an industrial wasteland. It was equally clear that we could not survive on finance capital and services alone.

We have also abandoned much of our agriculture and fishing. One wonders what our collective thought has been.

History teaches us that we have been in industrial decline since 1870, when we produced a third of the world’s industrial goods. This decline is not some natural phenomenon out of our control. It is a product of perpetual lack of investment by “British” capitalists. Greed, pure and simple.

There is no wonderful symmetry of nature in being the first to decline because we were the first to develop. There is no justification for being the first to commit suicide because we were the first to organise to resist capitalism. Both processes are in our hands. In other words, both are influenced by our thought processes.

We are suffering the consequences of

allowing a strategy of reliance on the madness of gambling with other people’s money. We are going to see a massive and rapid economic decline, worse than that of any other once industrial nation, because “our” capitalists have always been the most greedy.

The only alternative to dealing with this is a future of itinerant pauperism.

Assuming that enough of us are willing to continue, and not surrender to degradation, what can be done? The first, and most important, step is to recognise that our rejection of conscious theory, and our embracing of the false hope of social democracy, was an error.

We have been too cynical, too sceptical. We have shied away from ideas. We should have listened to Marx when he worked here and not surrendered our political thought to others by inventing the Labour Party.

When we have reclaimed the theory based on us, and developed for our use, Marxism, and we have each taken responsibility for its collective development, we can not only survive but we can build Britain anew.

Now, there’s a thought.

”



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Victory at Nottingham Trent

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE Union (UCU) members at Nottingham Trent University were able to celebrate an end-of-term victory in December for their branch and for trade unionism. As WORKERS readers will know, back in the summer Nottingham Trent University formally announced they were derecognising the UCU, in a direct attack on independent trade unionism on the campus. The university had been attempting to rewrite the recognition agreement, proposing a set of radically inferior arrangements that would see the campus unions marginalised in favour of a "consultation and information forum" that would include non-union representation, while facility time for reps would be cut by a staggering 80 per cent.

UCU members at Nottingham responded with a fight that was locally strong but also involved communication across the whole national union and to other trade unions. This included a successful one-day strike on 21 October that drew cross-country support. But the management were still reluctant to negotiate with the union.

Following the strike, the national executive of the UCU agreed to implement greylisting, the most serious sanction available to the union, on 1 December. This action would have included asking lecturers not to apply for jobs at Nottingham Trent University, not to act as external examiners, etc. As the local branch and the national union had done an excellent job of keeping Nottingham Trent's name in the headlines and in emails directly to union members, this proposed action was well understood nationally and even internationally. It is a type of action that needs good understanding and discipline to be successful.

After a series of negotiations lasting late into the night the UCU General Secretary, Sally Hunt, was able to email all union members on December 4 (within 3 days of the start of the greylisting action) to report that management had withdrawn the threat of derecognition. In addition the negotiators had agreed trade union facility time at Nottingham Trent in line with good practice in the higher education sector. Also the union had faced down an attempt to give what the university termed "employee reps" a role in our collective bargaining process. And the UCU had significantly improved on the management's proposals for changes to the consultative and negotiating forums.

Consequently, the calls for the greylisting of the university were suspended with immediate effect. The local committee points out that there is a lot of detail still to be finalised and the union is expecting further challenges. Since the dispute started 60 new members have joined the UCU branch at Nottingham Trent.

TRANSPORT

New carriages promised

THE CHANCELLOR'S pre-budget report promised to bring forward delivery of 200 new railway carriages earlier than was planned and stated that this will contribute towards British jobs in the present crisis.

The carriages are destined for use in the Thames Valley, around Bristol and on longer distance inter-urban services in Northern England.

But if the government is sincere about wanting to keep British manufacturers in business and retain skilled engineers in this country, they will need to take immediate steps to enable those carriages (plus the 1,100 others that have been promised) to be built in Britain.

This means an unequivocal financial commitment from the Treasury. The banking collapse has shown that nothing less than a rebirth of manufacturing and apprenticeships, with a return to national government support, will meet the needs of the next generation.

IRAQ

Withdrawal date set

THE STATUTES of Forces Agreement, signed by Iraq and the USA, and backed by the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi parliament, says that all US forces are to leave Iraq's cities, towns and villages "on a date no later than 30 June 2009". And, "all US forces are to withdraw from all Iraqi territory, water and airspace no later than 31 December 2011".

There are no conditions for the withdrawal, and there will be no US bases. It is an unconditional defeat for the illegal invaders.

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

Renewable bills

A REPORT from the House of Lords Economic Committee says that Britain's electricity costs would rise by £6.8 billion a year to meet EU targets for renewable energy.

Lord Vallance, the Committee's Chairman, said, "...the dash to meet the EU's 2020 targets may draw attention and investment away from cheaper and more reliable low carbon electricity generation - such as nuclear and, potentially, fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage."

The report concludes that Britain is most likely to adopt wind power as its main source of renewable electricity. Wind is not reliable, leaving Britain to depend on intermittent supply to a much greater extent than elsewhere. Conventional generation capacity to back up wind turbines and the need to replace almost a quarter of Britain's older capacity by 2020 represents a massive investment programme. The Committee doubts it is achievable in that time.

Metal workers protest

OVER 10,000 metal workers protested in Brussels on 2 December against the controversial EU climate package under negotiation. The European Metalworkers' Federation criticised the EU's plan to force European heavy industry to pay for emissions permits from 2013. They believe the proposal endangers production and jobs because European producers face competition from producers who are not subject to emissions restrictions.

And a few billion more

BRITAIN'S contributions to the EU are set to treble after failure to agree cuts in farm subsidies. Britain's net contribution in 2008/9 is estimated at £2 billion, set to rise to £6 billion in 2010/11.

People who matter

EUROPEAN Commission President José Manuel Barroso claimed that some British politicians told him that Britain would have been better off if it had adopted the euro. He said, "I don't mean to say that it will be tomorrow and I know that the majority in Britain are still opposed, but there is a period of consideration under way and the people who matter in Britain are currently thinking about it." People who matter?



November: RMT union members demonstrate in Paris against rail privatisation saying "No to EU Rail Privatisation", and "No to the Lisbon Treaty, Yes to Workers' Rights".

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

EU tries to buy elections

NO LESS than £27.5 million is to be spent by the European Union in 2009 promoting itself and the EU elections in the United Kingdom. The EU Vice-President, Günter Verheugen, justifies this expenditure on the basis that "the legitimacy of your parliament, and that of the Union as a whole, is at stake".

In other words the hostility of the British electorate to the EU needs to be attacked. They intend funding numerous non-government organisations – EU front bodies – to spread their poison.

Elections for the EU Parliament have dropped by 20 per cent in Britain comparing the first elections in 1979 and the 2004 elections. The British electorate is expected to not turn out in record numbers in 2009 based upon EU research. If they cannot force us to vote for them or the bribes don't work, then they can do what they are threatening to the people of Ireland, force another election until they get the answer they want to hear. Or more likely an even larger resounding NO!

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Pay farce continues

THE FARCE around the 2008 pay round in local government continues as the terms of reference for referring the dispute to ACAS, previously agreed between the trade union and employer sides, have now been overturned.

The employers are renegeing on the agreement on the grounds of the economic crisis and losses they have suffered by speculating in Icelandic banks. The proposed new terms of reference include a

reference to "affordability" and changing economic circumstances since April 2008. Even ACAS is scratching its head as to whether arbitration can be entered into if the terms of reference are so biased towards one party.

So the unions have accepted payment on account, placed all their hopes in the ACAS ship of state, just to see it holed before negotiations have even commenced. The 2008 pay campaign is looking very threadbare. Plans to lodge the 2009 claim and to follow up with a rapid ballot for industrial action, must have the employers shaking in their boots – with laughter.

SECULARISM

Anti-Sharia campaign launched

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS Day, 10 December 2008, saw the launch, ironically at the House of Lords, of the "One Law for All Campaign against Sharia law" in Britain.

The campaign, supported by the Council of Ex-Muslims, women's organisations, secular organisations, equality organisations, numerous MPs, Lords and others, calls upon the government to ban the practising of Sharia law courts and religious tribunals.

The campaign demonstrates that Sharia law and religious tribunals are discriminatory against women and children, and undermine British law and civil rights. It also shows that the functioning of these tribunals creates even greater segregation of minorities within Britain as they promote an insular apartheid mentality.

According to campaign organiser Maryam Namazie, "Even in civil matters, Sharia law is discriminatory, unfair and unjust, particularly against women and children. Moreover, its voluntary nature is a sham; many women will be pressured into going to these courts and abiding by their decisions."

The English Civil War, fought over 350 years ago, stopped religious courts and religious bigotry. We cannot allow them to be smuggled back into Britain by pandering to religious obscurantists, medievalists and charlatans.

Below: the campaign website, www.onelawforall.org.



Newham teachers strike

ON 10 DECEMBER 2008, 48 members of the National Union of Teachers at The Royal Docks Community School in the London borough of Newham took strike action in opposition to the threat of redundancies that might arise from the privatisation proposal to turn the school into an academy run by a private sponsor.

The school was closed, affecting 1200 pupils, and the striking teachers distributed thousands of leaflets into the houses of the local community surrounding the school. The local newspaper gave good coverage to the dispute and the beginnings of resistance are starting to emerge among parents and teachers in other schools.

Creating an academy would transfer many millions of pounds of publicly funded Royal Docks assets and running costs to unaccountable private sponsors. In addition, an academy takes the school outside local authority control.

In an effort to "increase" exam results, there is evidence that academies use permanent exclusions to reduce the number of special needs children whilst poaching high achievers from elsewhere. Moreover, there is no legal compulsion on an academy to admit pupils with special educational needs. As the Royal Docks currently has a high proportion of special educational needs children, there is a fear for their continued presence in the future if the school's status were to be changed. Local children will not have an automatic right to attend their local school, despite authority claims to the contrary. The community fought long and hard to get a new community school in this part of the borough which would benefit all in the area. Now this asset is poised to be taken away and handed over to a private sponsor.

Although The Royal Docks School did not reach the recently introduced national challenge target, exam results at the school are improving with 43 per cent of pupils gaining 5 A* to C grades being its best-ever total, whilst value-added indicators reveal slow constant improvement as well. Moreover, the HMI inspection in mid-November stated that the school was making satisfactory progress with many good features. The school and its NUT members wish to continue to make progress, bringing greater achievement, but in a state school working within the family of local authority schools.

Newham Anti-Academies Alliance has been created and is now campaigning throughout the borough, as the creation of an academy will undermine admissions procedures across all the secondary schools. Together with Newham NUT it is asking parents to send letters of protest to the mayor, councillors and Newham local authority, calling for a proper consultation process with both sides of the argument being presented to ensure a democratic decision, before a ballot of parents is undertaken. It is too important a decision to be left to one man, the mayor, to decide.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

February

Thursday 12 February

Beyond Brown – What Next?

7.30 pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

Organised by the CPB-ML and WORKERS magazine. Capitalism has no idea about how to get out of the crisis that it has so carefully nurtured and which threatens to take us all down with it. Only the ideas of Marxism can offer an analysis and indicate a way forward. Want to discuss ways forward for the British working class? Come to the meeting. Join the future.

All welcome. More information at <http://www.workers.org.uk>.

HEALTH

Measles cases at 14-year high

MEASLES CASES in England and Wales have topped 1,000 in a year for the first time since 1995. Figures released by the Health Protection Agency show that in the first 10 months of 2008 there were 1,049 cases, more than in the whole of 2007. The Agency said measles was spreading more easily because of the low uptake of the combined MMR jab over the past decade.

Public health experts say the growing number of children who are unprotected – about three million or one in four – means there is a real risk of an epidemic. This could lead to between 30,000 and 100,000 cases of measles in England alone.

Dr Mary Ramsay, an immunisation expert at the Health Protection Agency, said, "Over the last few years we have seen an unprecedented increase in measles cases and we are still receiving reports of cases across the country. The 1,049 figure is the highest number of measles cases recorded in England and Wales since the current method of monitoring the disease was introduced in 1995. This rise is due to relatively low MMR vaccine uptake over the past decade and there are now a large number of children who are not fully vaccinated with MMR.

"This means that measles is spreading easily among unvaccinated children. There is now a real risk of a large measles epidemic. These children are susceptible to not only measles but to mumps and rubella as well."

Higher education and the pound

BRITAIN'S RELIANCE on overseas students as a means of funding higher education is a policy that Workers has criticised over the years. Now the financial services firm Grant Thornton, in a recent analysis for The Times Higher Education journal, has recently spelt out the lunacy of this policy.

Based on 2006-7 data, Grant Thornton identified 11 institutions that depend on overseas students for more than 25 per cent of their teaching income and more than 15 per cent of their total income. It points out that any institution that relies on overseas student income is particularly vulnerable to exchange rate fluctuations.

Seven institutions would immediately fall into the red if their overseas income fell by as little as 10 per cent. The seven are: Aston, City, Exeter, East London and Middlesex Universities, the Royal Academy of Music and the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Formula for attack

The focus on overseas students (and teaching them at the expense of British students) underlies the government's attack on adult education using the formula "ELQ". The idea of this formula was announced by education minister John Denham in autumn 2007.

Under the formula, anyone who signs up for a course providing a qualification which is equal to or less than the highest qualification he or she has previously obtained will have to pay what the government defines to be the full "economic" cost of the course.

At a stroke it will eliminate most education of people past the age of 30. The far-sighted Victorians who founded adult education, such as the great George Birkbeck in London University, recognised that while society needs "vertical" education within the walls of universities, in which people gain higher and higher knowledge within a single ever-narrowing field of study (necessary for the development of professions), there must also be a lateral or "horizontal" spread of education outside the walls ("extra muros") of the university.

This generates an intelligent public with whom the experts can talk. It also allows someone who has got into the wrong vertical channel to move sideways into the right one. And it enables the cross-fertilisation of ideas that occurs when disciplines talk to each other.

In the past it was also a device to help someone who had completely missed out on secondary education at school to fill the gap as an adult – after 70 years of compulsory secondary education this should be a vanishingly small group, yet this is the only group for which adult education is to be funded under the ELQ formula.

Unison sees proposals to widen "self-regulation" that its members are determined to oppose

Proposals to ease meat

WE HAVE HEARD much in recent months about the parlous state of what are passed off as pay campaigns in the public services, particularly in local government. One pay campaign hasn't yet received much coverage but is an interesting and so far successful one. The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) is a group of health inspectors whose job is to inspect the hygiene of the meat that we buy through butchers and other outlets throughout Britain. These highly skilled inspectors have in effect not had a decent pay rise to keep up with inflation over recent years, and are now subject to what they consider to be dangerous interference in the levels of regulation their service provides.

In effect, the Food Standards Agency is trying to change European Union regulations to widen the use of self-regulation in meat hygiene, as in so many other areas. They want the industry to be able to employ its own staff instead of independent government inspectors, who are usually Unison members.

This has already happened in the poultry industry but the union believes that it would fundamentally compromise meat and safety, and result in far worse pay, conditions of service and working conditions for meat inspectors. The current proposals made by the Service as part of pay negotiations are, in Unison's view, "laying the groundwork for this move to self-regulation".

In 2004 Unison ran a successful campaign when the Food Standards Agency last pushed for meat safety regulations to be relaxed; so successful a campaign that it went unnoticed. The union is now launching a new campaign in the run-up to 2010, when the EU will again review the relevant regulations. Meetings are being held of union members in York, Manchester, Leeds, Cambridge, Perth and throughout Wales, and industrial action is now on the cards.

In addition to the moves towards deregulation, crude attempts to save money by cutting payments to operational staff are also envisaged in the current "offer" to MHS inspectors. Unison says that under the current system, service failures are unheard of. The union believes that the current system gives the MHS all the flexibility it needs to provide a professional service, and therefore the proposals are not only

Join the debate on the way out of the crisis

PUBLIC MEETING

Beyond Brown – What Next?

Thursday 12 February, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube Holborn.

A public meeting organised by WORKERS and the CPBML. Capitalism has no idea about how to get out of the crisis that it has so carefully nurtured and which threatens to take us all down with it.

Only the ideas of Marxism can offer an analysis and indicate a way forward.

Want to discuss ways forward for the British working class? Come to the meeting. All welcome. Join the future.

“self-regulation” of meat hygiene as an attack on standards – and to resist...

hygiene regulations don't pass inspectors

unnecessary but clearly malign in intent.

The Meat Hygiene Service in line with many other Government departments is in effect seeking to impose an unagreed pay settlement. The Unison Meat Hygiene Inspectors recently undertook a consultative ballot as part of their opposition to these proposals and the result, in stark distinction to earlier reported pay ballots, was a high 75 per cent turnout and an 83 per cent vote in favour of taking strike action.

Although this was a consultative rather than a legally binding ballot, the strength of feeling is underlined by the fact that a massive 94 per cent of workers voted in favour of “taking action short of strike action”. Apart from anything else, this gives some understanding of how much better workers' feelings can be represented when the ballot is entirely under their control, and untrammelled by legal restrictions that are hedged about by the employers' lawyers.

And how about this for an example of the length to which capitalism will go in Britain to attack workers: in at least one documented case in Merthyr in Wales, Hungarian “meat inspectors” have turned up unannounced, supernumerary, attempting to engage in the work of the meat inspectors. This is reportedly so that if Unison members do vote yes and if they do take strike action, there will be



Talking turkey: union Meat Hygiene Inspectors have been listened to.

people, foreign trained migrant strike breakers, on hand to continue to run a scab service. That is how seriously our enemies take their pay campaign – we should take ours no less seriously.

Following the consultative ballot, and as reported in the last issue of WORKERS, negotiations re-opened, which have resulted in an agreement. A 2.99 per cent pay increase, backdated to August 2007, has been accepted by members and will

be in pay packets in time to pay Christmas bills. While any pay settlement is only ever a truce, a truce on our terms is always preferable, and 2.99 per cent against a background of possibly plummeting inflation begins to look pretty good (as does the three-year NHS pay deal, but that's another story!).

Clearly there weren't enough EU meat “inspectors” to cope with the scale of meat eaten at British Christmas dinners!

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”.



In a land swamped by doubt and diffidence, we declare there is harassment, encirclement, and destruction of all we hold dear. I future for our country and our class.

2009: There is a future, and it begins here.



Workers can change the world, but we must fight for our liberation.

IN A LAND swamped by doubt and diffidence, we declare there is “a way through” the gloom. There is “a way out” of relentless harassment, encirclement, and destruction of all we hold dear.

Doubt and disillusion come when people cannot detect hope or chance of progress within the system. And they are absolutely right. And in a sense, temporary self-doubt and despair are a necessary stage in the process of learning. But to stop at this juncture, imprisoned by disillusionment, is to close our eyes to the whole picture. Progress will have to come from us, the working class, acting together. We are the only force seeking advance; all other institutions set out to diminish or destroy us.

Knowing it's going to have to come from us, we need to be sure about, to reflect on, the best way forward. In other words, we must plan. In particular, we must make certain that our strategy and tactics are sound.

To be able to plan we have to know

where we have come from, where we are now and where we ought to be. We can't plan in the abstract, in a detached way. Neither can we be dreamers: we must be realists.

Certainly, our working class is nowhere near as strong as it once was. The post-World War II high in terms of organisation and influence, which lasted for several decades, has been dissipated and replaced by a new low caused by a succession of external, aggressive ruling class tactics such as deindustrialisation, mass unemployment, privatisation, mass immigration, and so on.

A word of caution: the highs were never as glamorous nor as profound as sometimes imagined. Our 40th anniversary celebratory articles in *Workers* throughout 2008 re-published the warnings our Party gave in 1968 of the weaknesses apparent even then in our labour movement during a dispute in engineering. As early as 1976, our chairman, Reg Birch, was alerting

everyone to the dangerous consequences of a perceptible withdrawal by workers from trade union activity. Without doubt, it was not just external attacks but also internal weaknesses, particularly of outlook, that have led to the ceding of our strength.

But, for all our travails, we are still a class and the only force for progress.

Action and ideas

Action changes ideas, quite quickly. Well conducted class struggle has a huge stimulating effect on the realm of ideas. This was brought home forcibly in last year's NUT strike action over pay, unsuccessful though it may have been in the end. It has been the custom in recent years to talk of the younger generation as “Thatcher's children”, but the sudden, eager participation of young teachers in schools which was also evident on the march and rally in central London showed the young to be very readily involved, indeed willing participants in this outburst of trade union action.

Political understanding does not proceed in a simple, upward, linear fashion. Working class history records progress being more in waves: with ups and downs in organisation and thinking. Thinking and action go hand in hand and sharpen each other, as is evident whenever collective action occurs.

Our working class is not going to survive if we continue to think in the same stale, passive way; we need to think according to the ways of nature, dialectically. Dialectics regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence. And that is how workers ought to view capitalist Britain in absolute decline.

British workers need to examine, understand and exploit to their advantage all the prevailing contradictions here and in the world in order to transform all the class potential into a qualitatively new approach.

Not only was dialectics the cornerstone of Marx, but also in the

“a way through” the gloom. There is “a way out” of relentless t is not to wait for capitalism’s next disaster, but to plan for a

maelstrom and madness of the First World War carnage, Lenin studied it and then reintroduced all his learning and knowledge to the Bolshevik Party. It is largely because of this painstaking work that in Russia the workers and communists transformed the imperialist war into a civil war for the establishment of workers’ power – the only country where such an earth-shattering event happened. The mental outlook was right. Elsewhere the people continued to be slaughtered as cannon fodder.

The economic is the political

British workers have long accepted a sorry separation between their economic and political interests. To re-establish the influence of our class and our unions, workers will have to square up to a weakness in their operation that has existed for over a century.

We can no longer afford to cede our politics to a social democratic Labour Party that was always prepared to work with the capitalist system and has always betrayed our class. Our class organisations need to advance our economic and political aspirations jointly; there is no separation. Workers can handle both simultaneously because the political usually emanates from the economic anyway. We need a politically conscious working class, capable of actively reshaping society, not a Labour Party.

In its old age, capitalism has an ever-



“We can no longer afford to cede our politics to a social democratic Labour Party...”

increasing tendency to dictatorial methods of rule and a diminishing tolerance of any semblance of democracy. Latter-day capitalism is inimical to democracy, often down to the last detail.

One London Borough’s town hall was a wonderful late Victorian rabbit warren of a building that was full of different sized meeting rooms, which unions or community groups or local people could hire for their gatherings according to their need and specification. When the Council built new buildings on the other side of the borough in the late 1980s, surprise, surprise, no provision was made for people to meet. That attitude is replicated throughout the land: fear, mistrust, hatred of the people.

One feature of this anti-democratic tendency is the vast apparatus of CCTV cameras and general surveillance of the populace, installed to intimidate. How can it be countered? Surely, the only answer is in numbers, in the scale of class activity.

Remember first, moments during the English Civil War in the 17th century and particularly the army’s Putney debates in 1647 (the army then was essentially the people in arms); and second, during World War II where the whole direction of post-war society was hammered out in national debate by conscripted soldiers and civilians. In the coming years, the class has to take tentative, then full-blown steps, to becoming a permanent, self-acting collective dictating the direction of the country.

A feature of capitalism is its never-ending ability to revolutionise the means of production in search of profit combined with its minimal, antiquated mechanisms for political expression. The class cannot avoid the practical question: how do power and change best accrue?

Somehow society has ossified into an unquestioning acceptance of universal suffrage in a representative bourgeois parliament, as if this is the best and only way to progress political matters and as if this method and institution is somehow the quintessence of human political decision-making, never to be superseded. But really, has the idea of how to run a society come to a halt with the establishment of parliamentary representative assemblies? These were first invented by feudal nobles to restrain the overweening powers of medieval kings. We shouldn’t be browbeaten into thinking ours is a holy cow.

Bourgeois parliaments involve the people handing over responsibility for politics to others once every four or five years. Surely a proper political arrangement ought to be based on the active involvement of the people and demand their permanent participation in the denouement of decisions and lines.

In the early years of our party, we studied at great length the political and organisational structure of the nineteenth century Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Those skilled workers had constructed a body in which the power of the collective working in their trade would be protected and allowed its expression: the supreme body was an elected lay national committee who met to take decisions about the direction of their union and instructed their national executive officers. Not only did our Party study this working class practice, so too did Lenin when deciding how best to organise the Bolshevik Party.

War and liberation

Workers must foresee where world capitalism is heading. At a time of economic depression, it appears to be dividing into competing blocs and powers – USA, EU, Russia, Japan, India, China – fighting over markets, commodities and resources. Workers need to look deeply into the concept of war again, not just accept prevailing views. In the past often

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discussion has been limited to whether it is “a just war, or an unjust war”.

But oughtn't we to propose an altogether different approach: it is capitalism that fights wars and enlists workers to sacrifice their interests and often themselves in the greater good of the rulers. Workers do not want war, workers need only to engage in fights for liberation, for emancipation. There is a world of difference.

Recent massive levels of immigration into Britain on a scale hitherto unknown are deliberate attempts on the part of the ruling class to weaken, disrupt and nullify our class. They want to drive down wages and worsen conditions and let the employers be able to crack the whip over us. All immigrants must decide whether they for advance and progress as part of a British working class. If they are, then they must become part of our class culture and struggle for what everyone desires: work, pay, better conditions, employment, health, education, etc. If they are not, then like those blacklegs and scabs in our past they will have to be opposed and confronted so as not to undermine our budding power. Scabs can be of British descent or of a new background, but they remain the same thing. Together we are strong, divided we are weak.

To workers, capitalism is like a foreign body, an occupying force, distorting our land and the productive process. It attempts to make us aliens in our own realm, to denude us of our natural strength. In turn, we should aim to make our outlook the one that predominates throughout all the sectors of life; capitalists should feel they are the outsiders. Workers should create their own agenda, their own future, which will some day move centre stage.

In particular we must struggle to retain society's culture as secular and scientific. As a result of a long sequence of events in British history, popes, clerics, church courts have long ago been put firmly in their place, so that religion was pushed to the margins of society, a materialistic outlook was commonplace and people

“Workers must foresee where world capitalism is heading...”

were free to form their views and live their lives free from their control. But now a worrying equation that says religion equals good has re-formed. Our traditions need to be maintained if we are to establish a unity across our class. There should be no more toleration of religious schools, which will only become ghettos, increasing bigotry and mutual distrust.

The way forward

When deciding on our future direction, the first step to be taken is: stop looking for an escape route – there is none. We don't have to make the same mistakes again; in particular, we do not need to be enslaved to a Labour Party or a son of Labour Party because social democracy and the political sects have always seen workers as passive, an electorate, a force to be harnessed, whose lot would be improved by “politicians” doling out reforms on their behalf.

To change the direction of industries, services and sectors across the whole of our society, our class needs to be strong in the workplaces of Britain. The strength of unions lies in there, not in the minds of a few general secretaries or national executives. A culture has to be revived.

And in the years ahead a guiding rule to any class struggle must be: it's a protracted campaign; it needs to have a guerrilla perspective – fight where we are strong and they are weak, use flexible tactics, and aim to build our strength, organisational and political. Always, always, we must preserve our class force.

With long working hours, inflation rocketing, prices and interest rates and utility bills soaring, workers need to reinvolve themselves in their defensive organisations. But the tactics and strategy have to be sound – there must be no grand gestures or posturing and action has to be well prepared and supported.

A plan for a future cannot emerge from a few minds, a cabal. To succeed, it has to involve a greater mass, evolve out of a never-ending exchange inside our class. This battle of ideas will throw up a programme to ensure our survival. Workers must start to plan how to tackle the practical problems we face within each sector of society and incorporate these ideas in struggle.

Consider water. Let's demand a national grid for water: an integrated system of tunnels, pipelines, aqueducts, reservoirs, whatever is needed, to move water – a staple of life – across the whole of Britain. We can shift water from the wetter areas to the dry ones. Crucially, water needs to be re-nationalised because it is not safe in the hands of profit-making, foreign water companies. Take energy and power. We need an integrated approach combining nuclear, coal, gas, oil and renewable forms of energy. Otherwise, there is literally the danger of the lights going out. Each sector of industry and the economy should be rethought.

Our Party has achieved much in 40 years. The outfits that mushroomed in 1968 have disappeared, most of them quite quickly. Only we have stayed the course. We have contributed and learned a lot. In our early years, valuable tenets of our Party's outlook were established: workers think for themselves; they are not misled; they are the only force for progress; we will not have a party of full time professionals; the two class line.

We do not seek power for our Party. We seek power for the working class. We share weal and woe with the people and do not seek advantage.

We are a new type of party, and must see that our traditions are handed down to the coming generations.

Workers are active, self-reliant, able to think, speak and act for themselves, and thus capable of changing the world. We have belief in the working class, in its ability even when it has voluntarily not exercised such powers for a while. The skill, the sheer professionalism, the creative potential in workers must now be tapped to design a programme for survival.

If you want to see how impotent capitalism is to deal with difficult times, compare it with Cuba in its 'Special Period'...

How Cuba dealt with economic disaster



Small country, powerful ideology: Marxism enabled Cuba to survive a 40 per cent drop in production.

WITHOUT A working class alternative to capitalism, there is the probability that we will get dragged down with capitalism and face disaster. Such alternatives do not magically appear. They must be fought for by workers and they will come about only by a working class taking responsibility for its own future. It may sound a hard thing to do but there are examples of workers taking responsibility for their own future that we can learn from.

So how have other workers dealt with economic crises and calamity? Let's look at the Cuban experience, which, because of our links with Cuban trade unions, we are in a position to examine.

The history of Cuba during the Special Period is of the highest level of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in a country that is impervious to the Credit Crunch and the recession, just as the Soviet Union was impervious to the effects of the Great Depression during the 1930s. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European bloc around 1990, Cuba's

economy went into free fall and its economy shrank by a massive 40 per cent. (And our government is worrying about 0.5 per cent!). It was no longer able to import oil and oil products, machinery and spare parts, foodstuffs from wheat and rice to frozen chicken and cooking oil, medicines and anaesthetics, chemicals for production of tyres, soap and detergents, timber and wood pulp for making paper, shoes and clothing, vehicles and power station equipment, water treatment chemicals and disinfectants, white goods and TVs, and cement and construction materials.

His master's voice

All this disappeared overnight as the new Russian President Yeltsin banned all trade with Cuba at the request of his new masters in the White House in Washington. Yeltsin, of course, went on to give away the assets of the Russian working class to the new breed of gangsters running the country. Cubans could see what was happening in Russia and could see what would happen to their country if they did not take charge of the situation they faced.

Cuba also lost the market for its main produce – sugar – and the US tightened up its blockade of the island with the

Torricelli Act and the Helms Burton laws in an attempt to starve Cubans into submission and bring down its socialist system. These laws were intended not just to ban US companies from trading with Cuba, but to make it illegal for foreign companies to trade with Cuba, and to encourage illegal and dangerous emigration from Cuba. Cuba and the US signed a migration treaty permitting 20,000 Cubans to migrate to the US annually. The US never honoured this agreement, issuing only 1,000 visas a year but promising any Cuban who made it to the US illegally automatic US citizenship.

The US, that had already used low-level biological warfare against Cuba, spreading animal and plant diseases and human blindness, now sponsored terrorism against Cuba. Some 3,500 were killed during mercenary attacks, the bombing of an aircraft and bombs in Cuba, all initiating from the US. Five brave Cubans who volunteered to infiltrate the mercenary organisations to put a stop to this activity and who tried to pass on information to the US authorities about possible terrorist attacks against Cuba from US soil were jailed for long sentences

This article is based on extracts from a speech at a meeting organised by the Communist Party of Britain ML at Conway Hall, London, in November 2008.

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

for their trouble. The US and its counterrevolutionary allies in the US boasted of Cuba's imminent collapse.

In this situation, special Congresses of the Cuban Communist Party and mass organisations of the people such as the trade unions (CTC), the Union of Communist Youth, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and the Cuban Federation of Cuban Women were convened, and the Cuban working class confronted the situation that they faced.

Rationing was introduced, and foreign investment was sought to develop tourism as the only short term way they could obtain hard currency to buy the goods they needed to survive. The government declared that there now existed a Special Period outside of war.

By 1993, Cubans were hungry as food imports disappeared and there were daily electricity blackouts. There was little transport or fuel and unemployment was rising. However, after the Congresses, the working class through their organisations took control of the situation.

The CDRs, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, are local neighbourhood committees that defend the values of the revolution. During the Special Period they also took care of their local communities and made sure that no one fell through the safety net, while the trade unions looked after their class in a number of ways despite the fact there was very little for their members to spend their wages on.

Union farms

Trade union farms were opened to grow food. The health workers' union looked after the health of the people and the infrastructure of the health system. The transport union looked after the transport system to keep it ticking over. The education and science union maintained educational standards despite lack of equipment, and supported pioneering developments in biotechnology and genetics. Innovation was the word as workers found ways to get around the

“In 2000, Cuba embarked on its Battle of Ideas, a nationwide campaign to reassert and develop working class socialist values...”

problems arising from the blockade. The Institute of Innovators and Rationalisers was set up to identify solutions to the myriad of problems.

Cuba also had to address its security concerns. Faced with the constant threat of invasion by the USA, Cuba had relied on its relationship with the Soviet Union to deter such an attack. Now this would have to change. Cuba would have to rely on its own ability to defend itself. Cuba learned from the Vietnamese experience, the lessons of developing a strategy of a “war of all the people”. This meant that the whole population would have a role in the defence of the country.

Union armouries

Trade unions had their own armouries. Previously, their watchword had been that the enemy would never step foot on the island. Now it adapted to defeating an invading army. Guerrilla struggle would be the theme for their defence. And of course they had experience from the revolution and the armed guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra and other campaigns. They also had the experience of their soldiers fighting alongside Angolan troops and Namibian freedom fighters against South African invaders and US -backed troops that ended in victory for Angola, independence in Namibia and the collapse of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Then there were the Cuban volunteers who earlier fought alongside freedom fighters in Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands in a liberation war that brought about the collapse of the Portuguese empire and Portuguese fascism, and independence for Guinea

Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. With these achievements there was good reason to believe in their own defence.

So the Special Period put Cuba on a wartime footing, not unlike our own Special Period during the Second World War. Despite severe hardship, there was a strong sense of class collectiveness and faith in the working class leadership. Tourism was developed as a source of foreign currency that the country lacked although all Cubans knew that this was not the long-term future of their country. Tourism brought with it a new range of problems such as the dual currency, which meant that those with access to hard currency were better off than those who had no access, and this had to be managed. By 2006, Cuba was able to introduce its own hard currency.

Despite the hardships, Cubans maintained their values throughout this period, training more doctors and teachers per capita than any other country, and offering scholarships to low-income students from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. As Cuban doctors and teachers practised in numerous poor countries, so Cuba's standing in the world increased. African countries remembered Cuba's role in their liberation struggles and the end of the South African Apartheid regime.

UN resolutions

Cuba would put an annual resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations condemning the illegal US blockade of Cuba and calling for it to be lifted. More and more countries supported the Cuban resolution each year until this October 2008 when the vote was 185 countries supporting Cuba with only Israel and tiny Palau supporting the US. The US continues to ignore the UN resolution but its moral authority declines with each annual vote. Incidentally, one of the architects of the US blockade is the new Vice President elect of the USA, Joe Biden.

But the US responded to this in another UN body. Each year it would press one of its subordinate countries – maybe the Czech Republic or El Salvador or



Old car in Havana: nothing is wasted.

Uruguay – to raise complaints about human rights in Cuba to the UN Commission for Human Rights. Each year the US would win this until eventually one country – Uruguay – refused to be a US pawn and other countries complained that the US was using the Human Rights Commission as a political tool. The US was voted off the Human Rights Commission and was replaced by Sudan – a humiliation for the US. Today the Human Rights Commission has been upgraded so that it cannot be used as a US political tool, and a Cuban is the current chairman.

Then in 2000, Cuba embarked on its Battle of Ideas, a nationwide campaign to reassert and develop working class socialist values. This Battle of Ideas was carried into schools, among youth organisations, trade unions etc.

The Battle of Ideas gave birth to a new occupation called a “social worker”. New training schools for social workers were opened, and this new worker was not only to work in support of families and children as we would understand the job. The social workers, mainly young and from poor families, were to visit every family and individual, learn all of the specific problems facing different groups –

families, single mothers, unemployed, children, pensioners – and find solutions for them. 28,000 had graduated by 2005.

They then moved on to tackle the corruption that developed during the Special Period, just like it developed during our Special Period during WWII with spivs and the black market. First they tackled the petrol stations where fuel had been siphoned off and sold, denying revenue to the state. 10,000 of them took over the pumps at every filling station in the country and accompanied delivery drivers, monitoring the refineries. In two months, the state’s income from petrol stations doubled.

We have heard these youngsters described as “Doctors of the Soul”. They are a part of the process of guiding the society towards the strengthening of socialism as the economy recovers. They are the next generation of revolutionaries and are the revolution’s shock troops.

Today, the Special Period is officially over and the economy has turned the corner, GDP is expanding at between 4 and 9 per cent a year, and the Battle of Ideas continues as socialist, honest, humanitarian values are asserted. This was only achieved by the Cuban working

class because it holds state power and because of its work through its organisations taking control of the situation, by taking responsibility for the consequences of the blockade and taking responsibility for the future and future generations.

In fact it can be argued that Cuba is the most responsible country in the world with 40,000 Cuban doctors in 72 countries saving millions of lives, educationalists abolishing illiteracy around the world, and by minimising its reliance on fossil fuels with a dramatic energy saving programme born out of necessity. Because of the respect it has gained, Cuba can have good relations with countries that you would have thought impossible. For example, Marxist Leninist Cuba can have excellent relations with Islamic Iran.

Fighting hurricane

During the recent three devastating hurricanes Fay, Gustav and Ike that hit Cuba in September causing \$8billion worth of damage, it was the working class through its organisation that saved lives and worked selflessly and collectively to repair the damage and care for those who lost homes and property, under the slogan “every human life is sacred”. (For the full story of the hurricanes read October’s edition of WORKERS.)

The Cuban Civil Defence Authority takes responsibility for the population in events such as hurricanes. They actually guarantee to save all lives if people and organisations do as instructed. The same three hurricanes hit neighbouring Haiti and over one thousand were killed and many are still without food. In Cuba seven people died. When we expressed our condolences during our recent visit, we were respectfully told that the seven had ignored instructions from the Civil Defence Authorities. In the event of hurricanes, everyone is mobilised through trade unions and other mass organisations.

Such achievements as Cuba’s can only be realised by the disciplined and determined action of organised workers. There is no other way they could have done it.

The ills of finance capital could fill entire libraries – here are the different aspects of its failure...

Three books to start off the new year

A city of workers

DOREEN MASSEY, Professor of Geography at the Open University, has written a brilliant study of London, showing it to be a city of workers and still of manufacturing industry, claimed by a minority for finance capital.

London's economy is still closely tied into Britain's economy. 28.5 per cent of all London's exports go to the rest of Britain while 12.3 per cent go abroad; 39.9 per cent of financial services go to the rest of Britain, 31.5 per cent abroad; and 32.9 per cent of business services go to the rest of Britain, just 12.1 per cent abroad.

Yet the City of London is a key base of class power, and "a new imperial order has taken hold".

The Labour government embraced the Thatcher counter-revolution and spread it to the regions, trying to incorporate the whole of Britain into Thatcherism, by urging the regions to embrace finance, destroy industry and compete to attract capital and labour. So the Treasury blames regional inequality on regions' "market failures", not on the failure of the market model.

Finance capital demands the free movement of capital and labour. In 2004, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry welcomed rising immigration into London from the new EU members. Massey notes immigration's "depressive effect on wages at the lower end".

She also points out that commitment to immigration conflicts with commitment to equality between nations, writing, "Unrestricted immigration can result in increased inequality between countries." Immigrant workers, for instance nurses from Ghana, are subsidising London, 'a perverse subsidy, flowing from poor to rich'.

London-as-global-city is hospitable both to immigration and to finance capital. But London as Britain's capital city needs neither immigration nor finance capital; it needs to be first and foremost a city for Britain.

World City, by Doreen Massey, paperback, 262 pages, ISBN 978-0-7456-4060-0, Polity Press, 2007, £14.99.



London: a city of workers and still a city of manufacturing.

The creed that failed

ERIK REINERT, Professor at Tallinn University of Technology in Estonia, has written a most remarkable book. He has shown that the free trade creed – the free movement of capital, deregulation and privatisation – doesn't work.

The American economist Paul Samuelson won a Nobel Prize for "proving" that under free trade prices paid to capital and labour tend to be the same across the world. But in the real world, free trade has led, not to the levelling up of world wages and the end of poverty, but to growing inequality and poverty. Half the world lives on less than \$2 a day. In many countries real wages peaked 30 years ago.

Reinert proves that the mode of production determines social forms, and that the technology and mass production of industry are the key to economic growth, not capital, property rights and the rule of law. Industry also has good economic, social and political effects.

But how can countries build industry? They need to protect and subsidise their infant industries. Countries need to have an industrial policy that provides work for their educated people. Otherwise developed countries will take them away.

For example, 82 per cent of Jamaica's doctors practise abroad and 70 per cent of

university-educated Guyanans work abroad. Their remittances fund consumption and dependence, not investment and industry,

It is better to have an inefficient industry than no industry at all. Reinert points out that the Soviet countries were better off before the 1990s counter-revolutions that deindustrialised and then depopulated them.

The old empires all banned manufacturing industry in their colonies. Now the World Bank and the IMF ban industrial policy. They lie to third world countries – open up to imports of goods and capital, be competitive, make your labour markets flexible and you'll grow. The European Central Bank tells EU members the same story.

Welfare colonialism, with \$2.3 trillion in aid since 1950, has failed. The Millennium Development Goals will fail too. Aid is a means of control, not of growth, keeping the third world dependent. Palliative economics, which is supposed to ease poverty's symptoms while ignoring its causes, does neither. Reinert writes, in 2007, "a major financial crisis is increasingly likely."

How Rich Countries Got Rich...And Why Poor Countries Stay Poor, by Erik S. Reinert, hardback, 365 pages, ISBN 978-1-84529-326-0, Constable, 2007, £25.

Free books that look at

Pass the parcel

ALEX BRUMMER, the DAILY MAIL's City Editor, has explored the origins of the banking crisis, showing how finance capitalists played pass-the-parcel with bundles of bad debts – a form of mutually assured destruction.

Financial firms scrambled to sell mortgages, advising those least able to pay to take them out at the highest interest rates. The banks then fraudulently sold on debts that they knew to be rotten or overvalued.

Northern Rock's "Together" mortgage allowed customers to borrow 125 per cent of their home's value plus up to six times their annual income. The Rock borrowed three-quarters of its money from other banks.

In July 2007, the Financial Services Authority approved the Rock's paying a special dividend of £59 million to shareholders, just when the company was imploding. The FSA, the Bank of England and the government all failed in their duties of supervision.

On 17 February the government nationalised the Rock, privatising the gains and nationalising its losses. Goldman Sachs lawyers and PR people got £41 million in fees. The Rock's new CEO will get £950,000 a year, while 2,000 workers get the sack.

The Office of National Statistics – an increasing embarrassment for this government – estimates that the Rock debacle has cost taxpayers £100 billion. Another £30 billion of the Rock's loans fall due in 2009, so there will be many more repossessions – and already, under government control, the Rock is repossessing homes twice as fast as other banks.

Globalisation means that a banking crisis cannot be contained in any one market. But the more a country relies on finance, the worse it suffers.

The Crunch: the scandal of Northern Rock and the escalating credit crisis, by Alex Brummer, paperback, 244 pages, ISBN 978-1-8479-4008-7, Random House Business Books, 2008, £11.99.

CLASS AND CAPITALISM

First in a new series on aspects of Marxist thinking

The only way to understand history and the current situation in Britain and the world is to understand class. Marx realised that all history is the story of the struggle between classes.

Class is a scientific, economic idea. Your class is defined by your role in the economic life of society. In Britain, there are only really two classes – a capitalist class, made up of those who own the means of making wealth and exploit the work of others, and the working class, who have to sell their ability to create value, for wages, in order to survive. Workers are paid for their ability to create value, not for the value they actually create – the difference between these two creates profits for the capitalist.

Under capitalism, the capitalist class controls the means of production – in Britain today this means the banks and finance houses, the land and property, and what is left of industry, agriculture and business. This control leads to political power – they decide how the country is run, and they make sure the state is run in their interests. This could hardly be clearer in the current crisis, where a Labour government pours our money into the banks.

Although the capitalist class holds the political power, it is tiny in comparison with the working class, the vast majority. Being working class has nothing to do with your educational level, where you live, whether you work with your hands or your brain (actually, everyone does both in some way) or even your income level. All who work for a living are rarely more than a wage packet or two away from disaster. The myth of a "middle class" is blown when you lose your job and can no longer pay the mortgage or rent.

While the capitalist class holds power this will never change. So all workers have the same basic interest – to take power away from the opposing class and run society in their own interest, for the vast majority, by putting an end to capitalist exploitation of workers and the domination of profit and greed.

The capitalist class will never give up their power willingly – why would they, when this will mean their destruction? So the working class must seize power for itself – a revolutionary change. Doing it won't be difficult – it's the change in thinking which is hard.

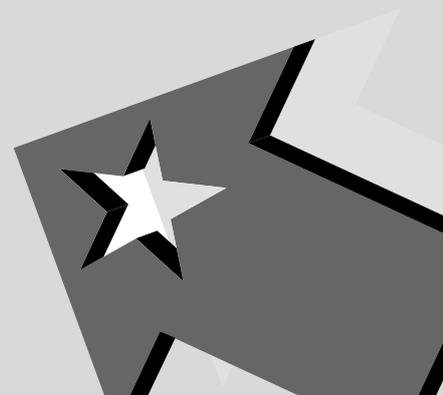
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Back to Front – In love with the City

‘What we could do is invest our way out of the slump – invest in making things...’

AS AN object lesson in sheer cluelessness, the government’s interest rate cuts and VAT cut takes some beating. The new year has dawned, and all they have managed to do is spark a run on the pound while mortgaging the country for a generation at least.

We cannot spend or borrow our way out of a slump, any more than we could in other times spend or borrow our way to riches. It only means consuming more imports and incurring more debts.

Take a look at Japan. The country’s long slide into deflation began in 1990 with a collapse in the property market, which spilled over into banking failures. Fiscal and monetary stimuli failed. Japan’s ruling class defended their financial sector, producing a slump that has not yet ended.

What we could do is invest our way out of the slump – invest in making things. That would mean the government acting like a bank (or like banks should have been doing), offering direct loans to businesses. Instead, some call on the government to beat deflation by printing money – a measure that would only deepen deflation.

The last three decades saw the most reckless speculation ever, and the greatest global real estate bubble. By 2005, global financial assets – stocks, bonds, loans, mortgages – were worth four times global GDP. Financial derivatives (a form of claim on these financial assets) have a notional value of ten times global GDP – about \$500 trillion. The crash covers every kind of financial asset: there are no firebreaks.

But, hey, that’s capitalism.

Thatcherism’s free-market mania for asset stripping, abusive lending, and

hedge fund secrecy has ended in ruin.

Gordon Brown when he was Chancellor was the City’s darling. They loved him. He loved them. And like a true love match, the relationship is still going strong even though times are tough. Having a spot of trouble? Here’s a few hundred billion...no, no problem – British workers will pay for it through their taxes, for decades.

But it’s not just cluelessness that is leading the US and British governments to turn a debacle into a decades-long disaster. There’s a structural problem: the political dominance of their financial sectors. And people thought that what’s good for the City was good for the country!

In fact, as we ought to know by now, the opposite is true. What’s good for the City is bad for Britain. The bigger the dominance of finance capital, the greater the destruction of our manufacturing industry, and the bigger the debacle – which is why Britain is even worse placed in the crisis than the US.

We are especially badly exposed: since 1997, personal debt has risen by 165 per cent to over £1.5 trillion and we have a debt-to-income ratio for the personal sector of 173 per cent. Companies’ borrowing costs have soared, threatening yet more company failures. With the crisis globalised, there’s not much in the way of export markets to turn to. The market will not provide.

By now it should be plain enough that sticking with capitalism is the road to ruin and more war. As 2009 dawns, we have to plan for a future, as the article inside (page 9) sets out. Because if the working class does not plan for a future, it won’t have one at all.

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