

WORKERS

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UNIVERSITIES: RESISTANCE GROWS



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WORKERS

“ The price of capitalism

THERE'S ONE thing they all agree on: in the current phase of economic capitalist crisis hitting Europe, countries must pay the banks what they demand, however much suffering this imposes on their peoples and however destructive it will be for their economies. So national politicians, the EU, the US, the newspapers, the broadcasters – all agree that Greece, the current debt-laden economy under the spotlight, must do “whatever it takes”.

Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, warns the German parliament that “the euro is in danger. If we don't deal with this danger then the consequences for us in Europe will be incalculable.” US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner rushes over the water for urgent talks with George Osborne and European Central Bank chief Jean-Claude Trichet.

But the people don't necessarily agree. The Greek people are making this clear on their streets, but elsewhere too the anti-euro and anti-banker mood is on the rise.

Why should we pay the banks, the currency speculators, the dealers in government bonds, when they recognise no responsibility whatever to anyone or anything except lining their bottomless pockets? The speculators are particularly odious and dangerous. Not content with attacking currencies, they are threatening to bring down nation states by their activities.

They didn't care that they almost brought the world's capitalist economies to their knees, now resulting in brutal attacks on the working class, and now they are at it again – of course, it's in their nature. When finance capital is allowed to hold sway, they will continue to behave like this until they are made to stop.

The “market” is not an inevitable natural force at all. It can be reined in when people assert their will and refuse to tolerate this banditry. Make no mistake, their onslaught will not stop at Greece unless we plan an alternative future.

To default on debt is not an easy option, but the alternative for Greece and any other debt-stricken country is appalling. Refusal to play to the bankers' rules would enable a nation like Greece to begin to tackle its problems – not least of them a bloated, corrupt, non-tax-paying ultra-rich elite. Argentina defaulted in 2002 (see article, p14) and survived.

The eurozone is weak, and Merkel has mentioned the unmentionable – the possibility of throwing out member countries that threaten the euro's long term survival (against EU rules, but who cares?). These countries should leave the euro, re-establish their national currencies and their power to manage their own economies, and discuss how to support each other as independent, sovereign nations.



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Death by the markets

THE FINANCIAL markets, which the EU embraces, are wrecking the euro and the EU. The experiment of a monetary union for Europe has failed. The EU is disintegrating before our eyes. On 10 May, EU finance ministers agreed a \$1 trillion package of loan guarantees, designed to stop the debt crisis spreading. If a receiving country fails to pay back the loan, all 27 EU member states would have to cover the default. We would be liable for about £8 billion.

But, as the FINANCIAL TIMES pointed out, "for the package to serve its purpose, sustained eurozone growth must return. Yet the fiscal adjustment required to meet its conditions may shut off the very growth it is designed to inspire."

The EU is exposing us to the ever-growing debt burdens of governments over which we have no democratic control. This is unsustainable – both from a democratic and an economic point of view. It costs more to keep the eurozone going than it would to let one or more countries leave the euro and devalue.

The FINANCIAL TIMES noted, "Now governments are struggling to cope with the aftermath. But, in insisting that there will be no defaults they are protecting the financial sector from its stupidity. The people of indebted countries are expected to pay, instead. Is this going to prove an acceptable bargain, in the absence of a return to growth in stricken countries? Hardly."

Economist Paul de Grauwe observed, "the source of the government debt crisis is the past profligacy of large segments of the private sector, and in particular the financial sector." As the FINANCIAL TIMES' Martin Wolf wrote, "The financial markets financed the orgy and now, in a panic, are refusing to finance the resulting clean-up."

The German government is also proposing a plan for eurozone members to examine each others' budgets before they go to national parliaments. They could reject the budgets by majority vote, with the country whose budget is being examined unable to vote. Germany is openly seeking to run Europe.

INSECURITY

Holiday left untaken

TOO MANY workers are doing unpaid work for their employers: some 38 per cent of professional workers failed to take their full holiday entitlement last year, according to the Institute of Payroll Professionals.

Insecurities about jobs and lack of financial confidence have made workers wary of taking time off, says the Institute, though it says 81 per cent are planning on taking all their annual leave this year.

MOTHERHOOD

Cuba's the best

SAVE THE Children, an internationally acclaimed children's advocate organisation, annually ranks the best and worst places to be a mother. Among the 81 "Less Developed Countries" analysed, Cuba is ranked number one, meaning it is the best place to be a mother. (Among the 43 "More Developed Countries" analysed, the United States is ranked number 28.)

Full details are available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/state-of-the-worlds-mothers-report/SOWM-2010-Index-Rankings.pdf>

TRADE GAP

Unexpected leap

MARCH'S TRADE gap was £7.5 billion, up from February's £6.3 billion, as imports rose by 5.2 per cent, five times faster than exports. The City had forecast a £6.4 billion gap. The total trade gap for the first quarter was £21.8 billion.



Are you interested in the ideas in WORKERS? Do you have news from your industry, trade or profession? We hold regular public meetings and informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Greek turmoil

GREECE'S social-democratic government announced 24 billion euros of cuts to get the EU/IMF 110 billion euro loan, including a three-year wage freeze for public sector workers, a pension freeze and a rise in the retirement age. There were May Day protests across the country, public sector workers conducted a 48-hour strike, and there have been two nationwide general strikes.

No euro, thank you

A YOUNG poll found that 65 per cent of British voters oppose joining the euro or giving the EU more powers over justice, banks, migration, climate change and defence. Since the EU created the euro in 1999, income per head in the eurozone rose more slowly than in the previous decade and growth in productivity halved.

Still, parliamentary parties think they know what is good for us. Former MEP Clegg admitted that we would have been worse off if we had joined the euro. Yet the 2010 Liberal Democrat election manifesto said, "We believe that it is in Britain's long-term interest to be part of the euro". At the same time the euro was falling under the strain of the Greek crisis.

Something wrong with the project

PROBLEMS IN the eurozone are not just about economics. EU politicians see difficulties for the euro as a threat to the whole "European project". One reason that Greece is under fire is that it rejected the British/US/EU scheme for Cyprus.

Please, Brussels

FINANCE MINISTERS are being asked to gain EU approval for Budgets before presenting them to their own legislature. European banks hold \$1.4 trillion of toxic assets compared to \$1 trillion in US banks. That might be a better place to start looking for the cause of the crisis.

And while the euro sinks...

...CLEARLY ALL sense of irony is sinking with it. The Belgian EU presidency, which begins in July, will be opened by 40,000 people dancing at the same time in 12 Belgian cities. Nero just played his fiddle.



Photo: Workers

Sacked Jarvis workers demonstrating opposite King's Cross Station, London.

Jarvis workers demonstrate

HUNDREDS OF sacked Jarvis workers demonstrated outside Network Rail headquarters at Kings Cross, London on 28 April to demand their jobs back. Members of RMT, TSSA Unite and GMB angrily accused Network Rail of deliberately triggering the collapse of Jarvis. The workers know that their work still needs to be done and that their jobs are still there, and that Network Rail has begun to award the Jarvis contracts to other firms. They believe that this is a cynical ploy to drive down costs by cutting rates of pay, and attacking hard won conditions.

The campaign to win back their jobs has seen Jarvis workers marching through Doncaster, York and Leeds. The unions believe that the TUPE Regulations should apply in this situation, and union pressure on the new contractors is paying off. Already, Scotland-based Babcock Rail has agreed to take Jarvis workers on to do their old jobs.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow commented that the Jarvis sackings were part of a £5 billion Network Rail cuts programme which is ripping apart both the rail industry and the livelihoods of the people the public rely on to deliver safe rail travel.

CIVIL SERVICE

Court battles

A RARE victory for a union in the courts may not turn to be the success it looked at first. On 10 May the Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS) won its case objecting to imposition of changes to civil service redundancy payments.

PCS had conducted strikes against the new terms, even though five unions had agreed to them. The ruling was that the government did not have the right to force new terms without the agreement of all. But the detail of the judgment may take away the gains PCS hoped for and bring it into conflict with the other unions.

The court reversed the changes and said that PCS and the Cabinet Office had

to go back to see if they could agree what changes had to be made. This has unwound limited protection the other unions thought had been agreed. And it has paved the way for the new government to end the redundancy scheme completely. All unions will probably have to negotiate a new scheme – hardly an ideal time to do so.

Earlier this year the previous government forced through the new redundancy terms. Long negotiations ended with five unions agreeing under duress to changes, not being allowed to consult members under threat of the withdrawal of some concessions. They believed that they could go no further: PCS disagreed.

All unions will have to assess their position now that pay and conditions for the public sector are under review.

BANKING**'Crap' from Goldman Sachs**

DOCUMENTS DISCLOSED as part of the US Senate hearings into Goldman Sachs have revealed that the finance house's dealers called one of their products "crap", and called one \$11 billion

collateralised debt obligation they helped to sell, known as Timberwolf, "one shitty deal" and the whole idea "intellectual masturbation". It praised its traders for "making lemonade" out of a "whole lot of lemons".

These are the bankers who told us that their \$55 trillion credit derivatives would take the risk out of their system.



Boycott to ruin league tables

A JOINT BOYCOTT of Key Stage 2 SATs by the National Association of Head Teachers and the National Union of Teachers was organised in May. Although the boycott was patchy, it looks like it could have sunk the whole SATs scheme: the national league tables built on the basis of the SATs are now meaningless as they depend on near-100 per cent compliance.

The fact that the joint boycott went ahead in a considerable proportion of schools (in some areas a majority) in the face of large-scale Labour government intimidation and scurrilous threats by ministers was impressive. Ex-Education Secretary Ed Balls even called on school governors to dismiss boycotting heads, or conduct the tests themselves (which would have been illegal). Commitment, determination and courage were displayed in equal measure. The boycott was separate from, though running parallel to, the education unions' general educational campaign against SATs, which has attracted strong public support from parents, governors, academics and authors.

The Key Stage 2 tests are taken by year 6 pupils at the end of primary school, and have become the principal tool behind the state's league table mania. Key Stage 2 SATs are the crucial baseline for "judging" primary and secondary schools. So the mass boycott seriously undermines the efficacy of league tables and Ofsted's ability to exploit them to damn schools in their draconian inspections.

Learning from the successful 1993 SATs boycott and mindful of the recent spate of state interventions in trade union disputes, the terms of the joint ballot that led to the action were related strictly to a trade dispute, specifically on one group's conditions – the "leadership group" of senior managers responsible for conducting the tests. However, everyone in education was aware of its significance for the profession's ability to reassert control over the curriculum and assessment procedures, as well as its impact on undermining the league tables.

The two unions represent the vast majority of primary school leaders and classroom teachers and their cooperation on this issue is quite unprecedented, which bodes well for the future. The effect of the industrial action taken did not mean strike action, rather schools were open, children were taught and the 2010 tests ignored. In its own right the boycott though patchy has huge significance, particularly as it went ahead despite the distraction of the general election. It was another exemplary case of workers pressing their own vital agenda to improve their lot and that of their pupils.

CATERING managers at Nottingham City Hospital and the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham have switched to cooking with local ingredients, saving the NHS millions of pounds and in the process saving local jobs in farming and food distribution. The hospitals cover a wide area and 7,000 meals a day are served to patients and staff.

The kitchen, until recently run by private contractors, has now reverted to an in house contract. Trust catering manager John Hughes has switched all the menus to use local food, and now 90 per cent of the food comes from the East Midlands. Cooking with local ingredients has brought about a daily plate saving of £2.50 per patient and an annual saving of £6 million on the food budget. Hughes says that if replicated across the NHS it could save £400 million.

When the in-house team proposed the scheme even they thought it might work out more expensive or that they would have difficulty sourcing sufficient food. They (and many other doubters) have been proved wrong. And as unemployment is associated with ill health, Nottingham hospitals will also be saving the NHS money in other ways.



Five miles up the road in the village of Nuthall, Michael Hatton's pig farm was nearly going bust before it got a contract from the hospital. It is now making a profit for the first time in years.

A number of other hospitals are adopting a similar approach, though not on the same scale. In April 2009 the Department of Health produced "Sustainable food: a guide for hospitals" (available on its website), whose main principle was that hospitals should, "Use local, in-season ingredients where possible, to minimise energy used in food production, transport and storage."

Then Nottingham was just an example of good practice. Now it is proof that buying British is possible, cheaper and saves jobs.

Just when you would expect the people running British universities of the country, voices are emerging calling British students “losers”

Universities in uproar as cuts hit courses, v

A WEEK before the University and College Union (UCU) met for their Annual Congress at Manchester (29 May to 1 June) Andrew Oswald, the Pro-Dean for Research at Warwick Business School, wrote about his vision for Higher Education in the INDEPENDENT newspaper:

“UK parents would be advised to understand that in the future the particularly hard-up UK universities will rationally favour overseas students rather than their own loss-making offspring. If we stick with the current system, UK parents and students will be the losers. Our nation will have to live increasingly by its brainpower. Higher tuition fees are needed.”

Superficially there is one sentence which UCU members might agree with: the reference to “live increasingly by its brainpower”. But behind it is a vision for Britain which sees us as a country that no longer makes things and not a country that engages hand and brain in production. That notion condemns us to a balance of payments deficit and long-term instability.

The real question is what we need as a country from higher education – to educate

the population or to make a profit?

It has been evident for some time that overseas students’ fees have contributed to keeping a range of courses afloat in British universities. Everyone knows that in the long term this is an unsustainable strategy as other countries develop their own education systems. But to describe our own population as “loss-making offspring” puts it bluntly, as if the brainpower of the young and their potential counts for nothing. It is an entirely short-term vision linked to the balance sheet of individual institutions. The concept of a nation investing in its future simply does not figure.

Oswald, like the vice chancellors of many institutions, has only one answer to the current situation – increase fees. In other words, limit education to those who can afford it and exclude others regardless of their talent and potential.

Although Oswald’s article does not directly mention it, there is a growing trend which will exclude not only students but whole areas of thinking and human brain potential. Increasingly, institutions are



Photo: Workers

Protesting against the proposed closure of the Ph

closing some subject areas such as philosophy and focusing their provision in areas that attract higher-band funding. In previous articles by Oswald he has been keen to predict the development of the American system of academic pay, which sees a professor of computing earn about twice as much as a professor of music.

Save higher education

Who is going to defend higher education? On a strategic level, the UCU has been active. At the Browne Review into university funding, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said that Tory plans to bring corporation tax down to the lowest in the G20 countries were not only a missed opportunity to bring in much-needed funds for higher education, but also proof that their talk of the country being “in it together” was hollow.

Putting the UCU’s case for business to pay more tax (see Box, left) and therefore fulfill part of the Dearing report’s recommendations that business, the state and student share the bill for university funding, she said, “Starving education of

Fees: the search for alternatives

“IN PLACE of Fees: Time for a Business Education Tax?” is a recent pamphlet produced by the Make Education Count campaign, published jointly by the UCU and Compass. In it, Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary, states that, “Making it (higher education) achievable and affordable for all who would benefit is a policy challenge any civilised society must meet.”

To listen to politicians and a number of the Russell Group (“elite”) university spokespeople (see quote from Andrew Oswald in the main article) the only options for future funding on the table are to make students pay more. This would either be through hugely increased fees, confining university to the few who could afford it, or through a graduate tax, which assumes all graduates will increase their earning power by obtaining

a degree.

This assumption is weak – some graduates may earn large salaries in the City or the law, but many earn much less in the public and other sectors, if indeed they manage to find work at all. A graduate tax would saddle many young people with high taxes when they are just starting out in their earning lives.

The pamphlet rejects both these options, calling instead for a tax on large businesses which depend on the supply of quality graduates but which at present contribute virtually nothing to producing them. It points out that corporation tax is relatively low in Britain, and even at present levels around £8 billion a year goes uncollected.

The pamphlet is a useful contribution to widening the debate on future funding.

ies to be standing up for higher education for the young people
s making” and urging a greater focus on foreign students...

while administrators call for fee increases



funds and making families pay more to access a university education, while authorising billions in tax giveaways to big business will be a disaster for the UK. We need a highly-skilled workforce that can compete in the high-knowledge global economy.”

Such thinking contrasts with that of Oswald and other senior university figures merely fighting to keep afloat a series of individual businesses, that happen to be called universities. It is at least a start.

Just a few weeks ago the UCU predicted that 3,083 jobs in further education could be at risk. Now, after its new survey of all the English regions, the prediction has increased to 4,300 – and this relates to just 63 colleges, around a fifth of the total.

The UCU warned that government funding cuts to higher education could lead to universities facing “financial meltdown” after it was revealed that the University of Cumbria came close to not paying its staff wages in March. The university, which is nearly £30 million in debt, is looking to make 200 staff

redundant and has announced plans to close its Ambleside campus.

The higher education sector is facing cuts of over £900 million in the next three years, and 30 institutions could be forced to close. The UCU estimates that more than 14,000 university jobs could be at risk and warned that students will face larger class sizes and substantial cuts to courses.

The union pointed out that while Germany, France and the USA had all put more funds into higher education as part of their recovery programmes, government cuts here put at risk Britain’s chances of recovery. Meanwhile, its members have been fighting.

Workers respond

UCU members at Bradford College delivered a solid strike on 12 May as part of their dispute over plans to make 18 teaching staff redundant, axe courses in counselling, metallurgy and music technology, and cut provision in basic literacy. Pickets were out at all the main college buildings across Bradford including Westbrook, The Old Building, MacMillan and Bolton Royd, supported by students and other staff. At Bolton Royd students joined the picket line in the evening.

UCU members at four of the largest colleges in the West Midlands – City College Wolverhampton, South Birmingham College, Birmingham Metropolitan College and City College Birmingham – have voted overwhelmingly to ballot for strike action unless the threat of compulsory redundancies is lifted.

If Sussex University management persists in refusing to rule out compulsory redundancies, UCU members there will call for industrial action and protests aimed at causing maximum disruption to the examination process.

The UCU said it fully supported the members of National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) involved in the SATs boycott. UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said, “We wholeheartedly support the action being taken by NAHT and NUT members. As victims of league table culture ourselves, we fully understand

their frustrations and anger at league tables and the obsession of stripping everything down to statistics...SATs do little other than disrupt children’s education and create misleading league tables.”

Industrial action at Glasgow University looks increasingly likely after UCU members packed an emergency meeting on 19 May and overwhelmingly backed calls for a strike ballot if the university did not immediately withdraw the threat of compulsory redundancies. The university has targeted over 80 job losses in the Archaeology, Biomedical & Life Sciences and Education departments. Glasgow UCU President Dave Anderson said, “The support for industrial action against targeted redundancies was overwhelming with a huge turnout. The university must now immediately withdraw the threat of redundancies or we have no choice but to move to ballot on industrial action.”

The UCU is campaigning to save a degree programme in Deaf Studies at the University of Bristol. It says the university is ignoring the wider deaf community, which has strongly criticised the plans.

The union is asking all members to support the campaign to save the Philosophy Department at Middlesex University. The department has an international reputation and in the last Research Assessment Exercise, 65 per cent of its research activity was judged “world leading” or “internationally excellent”. It also brings funding into the university through major grants and teaches more than 100 students at the university.

The university has said it wants to move away from programmes like philosophy because they attract less funding per head than vocational subjects. The implications are serious for humanities everywhere. If a department which produces world-class research and teaching can be closed because it is not vocational, then arguably no humanities department anywhere is safe.

In every struggle lecturers and students need a vision that sees education in its broadest sense as integral to the future of the country.

With the anti-trade union laws as the backdrop, capitalism has a method of attack to devastating effect: unemployment, intensified jobs and the importing of labour...

Mobility of labour: why the conspiracy of s

NOTHING STANDS STILL. We either progress or regress. And what we have had for the last 13 years is the continuation of the [Thatcher] counter-revolution. It is the attempt to destroy any semblance of collective thought and organisation, to prevent the possibility of us moving forward to taking power.

Earlier this year, it was exposed in the LONDON EVENING STANDARD that the Labour Party had made a conscious decision in 2000 to begin the process of opening the doors to the largest mass migration this country had ever known, with some three million people having settled here. They boasted that they have created two million new jobs, but the Office of National Statistics tells us that 9 out of 10 of these have gone to foreigners coming in to Britain. And Labour told us that they lose no sleep over the population of Britain going to 70 million and beyond!

We are told that everybody has the right to better themselves and we must therefore support the freedom of movement of labour. So, for example, we

have the disgraceful spectacle of teachers, doctors and nurses being poached from countries that struggle to afford their training while we have people with the very same skills out of work or in jobs they weren't trained for. And worse still is being planned.

While in his role of EU Trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson initiated the negotiations for the introduction of a little-known clause to be included in future trade agreements between the EU and countries outside of the EU. Known as Mode 4 (see page 11), the intention is to open up further the EU's labour markets to cheap labour.

Global capital

The sole purpose of this is to entrench the power of global capital so that transnational corporations can move labour around the globe from, say, India, paying only the minimum wage (and India is even arguing that the minimum wage is too much). And because of the Lisbon treaty, all things EU apply here.

The desired effect of mass migration

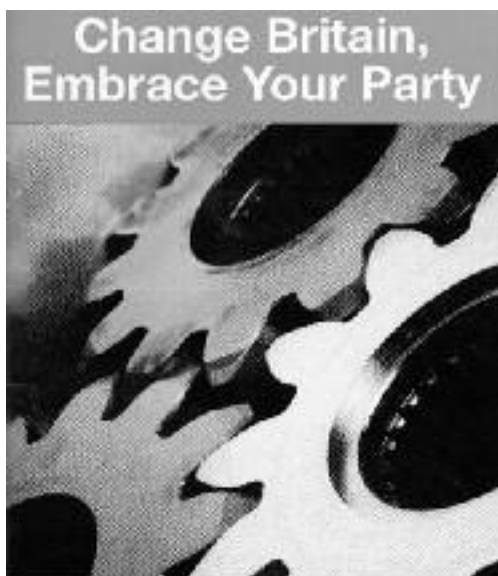
is the destabilising and undermining of working-class organisation and communities, and the extraction of ever-greater profit through use of cheap unorganised labour. Until very recently mere mention of the issue was shouted down as racist.

Well, the engineering construction workers of Britain changed all that and firmly placed the issue on the agenda when workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery walked out at the beginning of last year.

With employers bringing in over 400 Italian and Portuguese workers, denying those already on site the right to work, these construction workers struck, demanding British Jobs for British Workers, BJ4BW.

In defiance of the anti-trade union laws, they were swiftly followed by workers from over 20 other sites up and down Britain, capturing the imagination of workers not only across this country but the world. Because of the support neither the government nor the EU dared challenge the "illegality" of the action fearful of fanning the flames.

Ever since, BJ4BW as a slogan has



New pamphlet: Change Britain, Embrace Your Party

This pamphlet brings together the statement from the Party's 2009 Congress with those from two former Congresses in 2003 and 2006. Also included is a statement on the European Union: "The fascist dream of a united Europe resurrected".

The pamphlet represents a decade of thought and analysis of the situation in Britain, and considers how to move forward as a British working class.

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silence?

been vilified by the main parties and ultra left alike as racist. Interesting though is how there is common ground between international capital and the ultra left – sharing as they do the position of calling for unfettered movement of labour and no border controls.

But we have come a long way since those strikes and all opinion polls register that this is one of the major concerns that people have in Britain, and to demand the right to work in our own country is recognised as correct and not racist.

Unite poll

A poll of members conducted by the Unite union said the same, but you won't find the union mentioning it, and the main parties conspired to try to avoid it at the election. Yet workers forced it onto the agenda. The same was true with regards to the EU – a conspiracy of silence gave way at the 2005 election to a promise to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. As we know, they have all reneged.

When the question of immigration is put, however, all these parties make righteous noises about border controls and regulating those coming in from outside the EU. Their attempts to sidestep the issue of the EU become more futile as workers become ever more aware that the main source of migrant labour is from the EU, particularly the countries that have recently joined.

The current financial turmoil in the eurozone raises the prospect of ever greater movement, and membership of the EU means we have to accept them. But if we say we don't want to, that we want to put a stop to further influx, what mechanisms have we got to stop it - to assert our democratic right in our own land?

It has been fashionable to talk of globalisation as if it were a thing beyond the control of mankind. Some unions and others think that we need one big global union to combat the power of multinational capital. They would have us spend more than a few lifetimes in the



5 May 2009: Lobby by construction workers from around the UK on a one-day strike against denial of British jobs to British building workers.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

vain struggle to do what? To stand toe to toe with our exploiters on a more equal footing?

All that boils down to is that we are still exploited by capitalism. And can you really expect someone in, say, an Indian call centre, who is offered work at more than ten times their national average wage, to reject that work – even if they were in a global union – because it has been taken away from their brothers and sisters in, say, Britain?

When international capital demands the death of the nation state, the answer is not to call for measures that enable

that. The way to challenge the power of multinational companies is not by trying to build a global union but to assert control of our own borders through workers' nationalism. You can't have inter-nationalism without first having nationalism, and for workers of all countries to do likewise. Then when we say to global capital, "You can't operate here except by our rules", what power would they actually have?

• This article is part of a speech given at the CPBML May Day celebration in Conway Hall, London, on 1 May.

Recent court decisions, backed up by silence from the parliamentary parties, has all but made the right to strike an illegal act...

Unite against the anti-strike laws!

THE MOST fundamental freedom any worker has is the right to withdraw their labour. Without that right you are a slave. The right to strike in Britain now is a hairsbreadth away from being a criminal act due to recent court decisions.

Leave aside the decision to reverse the injunction sought by BA to stop the Unite strike action planned for May and June – that's just a blip, and even that was a majority ruling. The interpretations of ballot legislation now make it almost impossible to conduct a legal ballot.

The BA action was initially banned because 11 spoilt papers out of more than 7,000 were not notified to every single member. Also in May, planned NUJ strike action at regional newspaper chain Johnston Press was stopped because the union had not informed each one of Johnston Press's subsidiaries individually.

Every ballot called is now crawled over by bands of lawyers. Case law is being made almost on a daily basis to generate technical loopholes to undermine the ballot or create impossible conditions which the unions are guaranteed to fail.

Anti-trade union legislation in Britain dates back to the Combination Acts of the 18th century and has continued under both Labour and Tory administrations in legislation over the last 50 years. Anti-union legislation has never been reformed or scrapped by Parliament, it has only

been strengthened. The Donovan Commission, "In Place of Strife", the Industrial Relations Act, the Trade Union and Labour (Consolidated) Act, the earlier Master and Servant legislation, were all about the ruling class using Parliament to rubber stamp anti-worker, anti-union legislation.

There are over 13 million workers in Britain who are in TUC-affiliated trade unions, non-TUC affiliated trade unions, staff associations or company staff associations. Be they TUC or not they are all threatened by anti-union legislation which effectively outlaws the collective interests or actions of millions of workers.

Outlaws

Parliament, the courts and ever more draconian case law have turned us all into outlaws. Now is the time to step outside of the law. We have to develop a new mindset which sees industrial action in myriad and imaginative ways, effectively going underground to rebuild the trade union movement.

For decades there has been no political will in the Labour Party to reform or scrap anti-union legislation. In fact so-called improvements by Labour consolidated and worsened the legislation. Within many trade unions there is now an institutionalised attitude which cravenly bows towards the law. If

we are to assert our independence as a working class, if we are to halt this creeping fascism of incorporation and complicity as espoused by Parliament, then we have to look to ourselves and our history to survive.

Trade union leaders are understandably wary of having union assets seized for "illegal" action, but members themselves can force the issue, as the engineering construction workers did at Lindsey Oil Refinery. The trade unions, as one, must take up the cause of trade union freedom. Not as a "leftie" grouping of the few but as the united voice of all. For all the talk of the trade unions having an "organising culture", this is the issue to organise on.

Collectively the trade unions and their memberships must reach out to all workers' organisations, forums and bodies, to create the greatest alliance possible for resistance.

Being mesmerised by "legal" industrial action is killing the trade unions. Nothing should be legal or illegal in how we approach industrial action, only what are sound strategies and tactics, and winning. The survival of independent and effective trade unionism is at the crossroads, and time is running out. The membership must seize their organisations and let nothing stand in their way.

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

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

British workers demand the right to reject the ridiculous "Constitutional Treaty" signed at Lisbon.

In backtracking on his referendum promise Gordon Brown tried to wipe out 1,000 years of independence and sovereignty using his tame party in Parliament. Now, the coalition government does the same.

Yet the will of the British people has been clearly expressed. Now it is time for a poll of a different kind, a referendum. The TUC has already reneged on a conference 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".



The ConDem coalition has promised a referendum on significant changes to the way the EU operates. It can start with one on the proposal for a trade deal with India...

Free trade deal set to hit British workers



May 2009: Corus steel workers fight for their jobs. Now an EU deal could potentially see Indian workers brought in to reopen their plant.

IF THE new government is promising referendums on significant EU treaty changes, the EU/India Free Trade Agreement currently being fast-tracked in Brussels must be the starting point. With Britain's historic ties to India and significant Indian investment here, this international trade agreement is set to have a stronger effect on workers in Britain than in other EU member states.

The deal, which is in the interests of transnational capital and against those of the people of both India and the EU, especially Britain, is meeting resistance on a range of issues in India (see Box 1). Yet people here have been kept in the

dark about the agreement and how it will affect them, particularly in terms of "Mode 4" (see Box 2), the little-known aspect of the deal which will allow transnational companies to move workers from India to the EU.

The Mode 4 aspect poses a big threat to Britain. If allowed, it will permit the huge Indian multinationals that are driving India's negotiating stance to move a temporary service labour force around the globe, and thus to capitalise on wage differentials.

Indian companies like Infosys and Tata are now among the world's biggest. Infosys operates within the IT sector, but

Tata's reach – it's the largest company in India – goes way beyond IT. For instance, the mothballed Corus steel plant in Redcar is owned by Tata, which took it over and closed it. Once signed up, the so-called "intracorporate transferee" provision of Mode 4 will allow Indian transnational companies to bring temporary skilled labour into Britain. So if the agreement goes through, the Redcar plant could reopen with a workforce largely imported from India.

The text of the agreement is set to remain secret until negotiations are

Continued on page 10

Box 1: Global impact on health and agriculture

OBJECTIONS INSIDE India to the proposed agreement focus on the curtailing of Indian generic medicine production, as the agreement would strengthen the intellectual property rights (patents, for example) of transnational pharmaceutical companies beyond those contained in World Trade Organization rules.

The effect will not be limited to India: the country supplies much of the developing world with generic drugs for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis – which are far cheaper than the branded drugs produced by the transnational industry.

“The impact of this proposed agreement is truly global, as treatment will become considerably more expensive, and countries and funders may have to ration the numbers of people they can put on treatment,” said

Ariane Bauernfeind, an HIV/AIDS programme manager for projects in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

Farmers in India, too, are resisting the pressure for India to accept subsidised dairy production from the EU, which is happening even while India is considering a Food Security Bill. The EU is demanding severe tariff reductions from India, while leaving subsidies within Europe untouched.

Major targets

The Indian banking and insurance industries are a major target for transnational financial services corporations, even though it is the domestic nature of the Indian banking system that has protected the country from the most severe effects of global recession and which also provides the

rural and small customer banking in which transnational banking has no interest.

A further hugely contested area is public procurement: the Indian government is being pressured to open government spending to transnational corporations, rather than keep it ring-fenced for domestic contracting. UK public procurement is, of course, very open already.

The EU is pressing for similar bilateral and regional free trade agreements all round the world, and meeting opposition. Dairy farmers across Colombia, for example, announced a new round of protests in May demanding that the government halt the signing of their country’s Free Trade Agreement with the EU amid fears that the deal could put 400,000 farmers out of business.

Continued from page 11

completed. But the European Commission’s Directorate General for Trade, which is in charge of implementing the EU’s “common trade policy”, has admitted that India will not sign up without the inclusion of Mode 4 – indicating the significance of the potential profit for Indian companies in bringing labour into Britain, and, implicitly, with a direct relationship to the negative effect on British workers.

The European Commission acknowledges that Mode 4 is a sensitive issue for member states, but seeks to encourage it by urging business to pressure member states to accept it. The result is that unknown to us a few bureaucrats from Britain’s Business Department attend Brussels meetings and commit the futures of British workers to these arrangements. All this is going on despite Tory talk of an immigration cap.

As yet the mass media has failed to

shine any spotlight on the issue of Mode 4, on this particular Agreement, or on how the trade agenda generally affects people here.

Green blinkers

Recently elected Green MP Caroline Lucas, a long-term MEP, has had the privilege of not only representing British people in the European Parliament but also on the European Parliament’s International Trade Committee (INTA). In this unique position she has had full information on Mode 4, included in all the trade deals the EU is negotiating, yet has failed to inform the people that she has been paid to represent – despite suggestions that she should. The UK constituency she has just won, Brighton, has a relatively strong No-Borders group arguing that there should be no restrictions on movement of people between countries.

The Green New Deal manifesto included a cruel promise to young people

of a million new green jobs without dealing with the fact that under existing regulations – as revealed by official figures during the election campaign – foreign-born workers have been employed in 95 per cent of the net number of new jobs created since 1997. The Free Trade Agreement on which Lucas is so silent can only accelerate that trend.

At the EU level, members of the European Parliament are active in calling for the inclusion of child labour and environmental standards in the agreement, against India’s rejection of the inclusion of such issues as “trade”. But there is as yet nothing from MEPs in regard to the effects of Mode 4 on the people that they are there to “represent”.

The need for public information and debate on the EU/India Free Trade Agreement is urgent: the EU wants the deal concluded ahead of an EU/India summit in October this year. Those who represent transnational capital know that India has not been hit as hard as the

industrialised countries by the economic crisis, and want the Indian market forced open via the mechanism of an EU agreement. And here, cheap “onshore” outsourcing in Britain with Indian labour will tempt managers in both the public and private sector to cut costs by displacing British workers.

Although under the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament is now supposed to have the last say on trade deals, the European Commission is pushing to implement the EU/South Korean Free Trade Agreement “provisionally”, before ratification. This is an ominous sign that business interests come first.

The EU/India Free Trade Agreement must be discussed in Britain, with full information, and with the connections drawn to related structures through which the key capitalist strategy of undermining workers with foreign labour is being enacted. In India the Right to Information Act is being invoked by activists. Here, considering how high the stakes are, we need to demand a referendum on it.

Box 2: Mode 4 – the secret agenda

The aspect of the “trade-in-services” agenda, known innocuously as “Mode 4”, is being included in all of the trade agreements being negotiated by the European Commission. The approach was initiated by Peter Mandelson when he was EU Trade Commissioner.

Trade-in-services includes financial services and telecommunications, which underpin all other services, goods and agricultural trade. When public services are privatised, they are usually liberalised at the same time – and become prime investment opportunities to overseas corporations. Trade agreements, effectively irreversible, provide “investor security” for investments into countries’ key and basic services.

Cross-border trade-in-services has been divided into four “modes” in the international trade agenda. Mode 1 is services bought from abroad, for instance

via the Internet. It is Mode 2 when buyers move across borders, for instance students going overseas to buy study programmes. When corporations set up in another country, this is Mode 3. Mode 4 is the temporary movement of skilled service workers to another country.

The information is being effectively kept from the workers in EU member states such as Britain that will be directly and negatively affected. The texts of these agreements, including the Mode 4 element, is confidential until after negotiations are concluded, so they are kept secret from those who will be affected.

Labour liberalisation is a further dimension of trade-in-services beyond what we expect “trade” to encompass. But it is essential to recognise how encompassing this agenda is, and its effects.



CPBM-L 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 , 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 has re-issued 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.

When Argentina ran into a debt crisis like Greece, its first response was to ask for money from the IMF and others, promising “austerity” packages in a different direction...

How Argentina escaped the clutches of the

NOT SO long ago Argentina had a debt mountain like ours, and found a viable alternative to the punishing regime imposed by international financiers that has been proven to work. What could we learn from this about managing the finances of our own country?

Argentina ran up debts during the 1990s because of its US-style economic model and the Malvinas (Falklands) war. It also suffered from large scale money laundering and tax evasion. Its creditors, including the IMF, were demanding their money back or else demanding the same draconian anti-worker measures they and the EU are demanding today.

When the country could not repay the loans, the IMF just extended them, making the problem worse. And as in Greece, corruption was rampant, with much of the money being siphoned off into offshore bank accounts. With a fixed exchange rate (against the dollar) imports kept flooding in, wrecking local production.

Then in 2002, Argentina defaulted on its debt repayments. By this time there were runs on the banks, unemployment was at 25 per cent, scores of thousands of homeless and jobless people scavenged the streets for cardboard to eke out a living, money stopped circulating and the economy virtually ground to a halt.

The IMF, the USA and the EU were all demanding that austerity measures be put into effect so that the creditors could have their money back and they made all sorts of threats against Argentina.

Give in without a fight?

So what was the country to do? Should it give in to the demands of the IMF, US and EU as the Greek government has done, and as the British government is offering to do even without putting up a fight?

No. Argentina basically stuck two fingers up and told the IMF, US and EU and other creditors that “Argentina will repay its debts in a time and manner that is determined by Argentina” and “will not accept any conditions imposed



June 2002: demonstration outside a Buenos Aires bank.

by outside bodies”.

At the annual meeting of the IMF/World Bank in October 2004, leaders of the IMF, EU and G7 warned Argentina that it had to come to an immediate debt restructuring agreement with the speculative “vulture funds”, increase its primary budget surplus to pay more debt, and impose “structural reforms” to prove to the world that it deserved loans and investment. Or else.

Or else what? The Argentine government ignored these threats and called the bluff of international capitalism. The government under President Nestor Kirchner decided that Argentina would rebuild its economy itself without outside help.

The government, in alliance with the trade unions, put the economy on a path to recovery. Wages were increased and large sectors of the economy were subsidised by the state. Where employers had fled the country, taking their money with them, factories were taken over by workers.

In its “isolation”, the economy boomed thanks to government spending stimulating the economy. Its economy

has grown by 50 per cent since 2003 and the government plans to emerge from default by resolving the last of its bad debts.

Argentina’s “isolation” was not complete, however. Neighbouring friendly countries knew they had to stand by Argentina and find an alternative to the IMF and to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), a sort of American EU run for the sole benefit of US capitalism.

Venezuela bought \$2 billion worth of Argentine government bonds and floated the idea of ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative to the FTAA and a ‘Bank of the South’ that would not put client nations and their people in hock to capitalism.

In 2004, Venezuela and Cuba signed the originating agreement and today there exists the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America with a growing membership. In 2008, the ALBA Bank that will become an alternative to the IMF was established.

Argentina’s current President Cristina Fernandez says that the country’s experience shows that “austerity”

...nse was to borrow
...s of cuts. Then it took

IMF

measures are exactly the wrong measures in a debt crisis, which is why, she says, the EU "rescue" plan for Greece is "condemned to failure".

So the lessons of Argentina are that a country can stand up to the IMF, the EU and the US, can assert its sovereignty and can sort out its own economy without outside interference or conditions. Argentina went on to severely criticise the IMF at the UN General Assembly in September 2004 with President Kirchner warning that the IMF was not a "lender for development" but was a "creditor demanding privileges".

But the other lesson for us is that there are alternatives to existing capitalist structures such as the EU and the IMF. The growth of ALBA and the ALBA Bank confirm this.

And what about Britain? Does this experience not lend itself to our own situation? The new government says it will implement Labour's proposed cuts, but a bit earlier.

High stakes

As Germany warns that the euro and the EU are at risk unless workers pay for the economic mess that is today's capitalism, the stakes appear very high. The model across the EU is that the debt created by pouring our money into the banks to save capitalism should be paid by the public sector with years of cuts in pay and services, privatisation and tax rises.

With Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems all singing from the same hymn sheet about the absolute necessity to make massive cuts in the public sector, and the EU and the International Monetary Fund enforcing similar cuts on Greece, you could be forgiven for thinking that "there is no alternative" (to quote Thatcher) to this policy. Could we not rebuild Britain ourselves? Of course we could.

But it would mean that we would have to take responsibility for our own future and take control. That is the alternative to Labour/Tory/Lib-Dem cuts.

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

ORIGINS OF OUR CLASS

What were our origins as a working class? The British working class was the first in the world to emerge out of the land, the first to become an overwhelming majority. Feudal obligations and relationships on the land had already broken down and been rejected by the peasants of Britain by the end of the Black Death in the fifteenth century (far earlier than elsewhere in the world) to be replaced by wage labour and capitalist relationships.

As they were first, they had no other experience to rely on or copy, so they had to work things out for themselves, devising their own philosophy of defence against the ravages of early capitalism to prevent the capitalist parasite devouring the working class host.

Workers' organisations, trade unions, began locally, in parish, village, mine, and town, enjoying strong commitment and loyalty. They were not imposed from outside but forged by the people themselves and grew organically. Not created by external political organisations or religious groups, they were usually based on a common trade or a skill, which brought the strength and identity of a common culture. Because capitalism feared trade unions, it tried to destroy them, notably with the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, and the unions were often born in conspiracy, against the law.

British workers in the 18th and 19th centuries proved they could be self-reliant, able to think, speak and act for themselves, capable of changing their conditions and improving their dignity. Instead of being merely passive or submissive they combined against the exploitation and oppression of employers and their governments.

When they had to grow nationally to better combat the opposing class, there was an absolute suspicion of those who did not work at the trade, best illustrated by the leading craft union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), whose rules insisted that workers would control and run the union. Later, when Lenin came to fashion the democratic centralism of the Bolshevik party, he studied the ASE's structure.

Eventually the most retrograde thing that the trade unions did was to form the Labour Party in 1900, which represented a turning away from their origins, a denial that working people would be the deciding force.

Today with capitalism in absolute decline, with misery and exploitation again threatening to devour us, our class needs to revive itself by rebuilding our unions around skill and trade, in workplace and in regions; exercising control over structures through the vigilance of those at work. We will learn, incidentally, that we not only have the ability to defend to better effect but also have the capacity to fashion our own society and power, free of capitalists or politicians: the dictatorship of the proletariat. The host will eject the parasite.

Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
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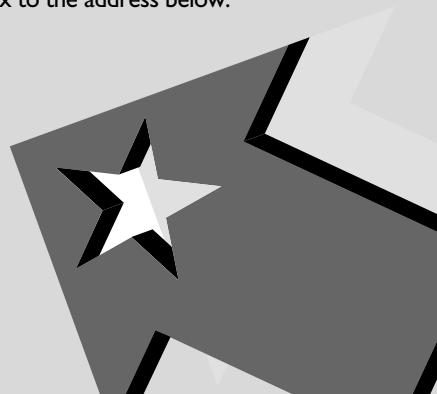
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Back to Front – They all lost

**‘This time
“None of the
Above”
represented 35
per cent, more
than any
party...’**

LIKE BROWN, Cameron and Clegg intend to continue giving the banks all they want. In June 2006, Cameron hailed “the victory of capitalism, privatisation and liberalisation”. In September 2007 he said, “the world economy is more stable than for a generation.”

The ‘Left’ begged us to vote bankers’ party Labour – rather than bankers’ party LibDem or bankers’ party Tory; that is, to back the bankers against the working class. (In the ConDem manifesto, the word industry appears just once – after the word banking.) The corporate state is absorbing the parliamentary parties into a state where there is effectively no choice at all.

With no choice within the system, there is no democracy. All the state’s parties are for capital’s maximum freedom, which means – cut public spending, destroy industry, bail out the bankers and the EU, ally with the USA for wars across the world, embrace elections to a rotten parliament. The three lowest turnouts since 1945 have been the last three, and this time “None of the Above” represented 35 per cent, more than any party.

Tories, Labour, LibDems, SNP, Plaid, Respect, BNP, all lost the election; all are disappointed. But they will make sure that we lose more, as investment, industry and services are cut to bail out the bankers. We have our orders: EU Commissioner for Monetary Affairs Olli Rehn says, “The first thing a new government has got to do is to agree a convincing and detailed programme of debt consolidation. It is by far the foremost challenge for a new government. I trust that whatever the colour of the government it will take

this measure.”

So whoever won, we would still have seen the same kind of savage attack. Labour will never bring socialism.

The City of London and the EU won the election. They still rule us - and who ever voted for them? The ConDem government will continue the City’s rule, and ruin, of our economy, while we permit it.

The government wants to prevent parliament from ever ousting it. The rule that 55 per cent of MPs would be needed to vote down the government would give the Conservatives a blocking minority, so they could rule when a majority of MPs oppose them. So Nick Griffin lost, all 12 BNP councillors in Barking lost – good. Now let’s focus on the real fascist threat, the denial of democracy coming from Parliament.

This is the prospect, unless workers act to change Britain for the better. Is our class going to stand for it?

We say:

Support Britain’s independence; get out of the EU and NATO.

Support the pound and oppose joining the euro.

Support industry and invest in it, especially in our energy industries to ensure energy supply.

Support our public services and oppose anti-social, pro-capital public-private partnership schemes.

Support strong trade unions and oppose Thatcher’s and Brown’s anti-union laws.

Support a united Britain and oppose its EU-driven break-up by devolution and regionalisation.

Support controls on the movement of capital, goods, services and labour.

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