

WORKERS

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MARCH 2014



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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS



Making space for water...

BRITAIN IS an island particularly exposed and vulnerable to north Atlantic weather systems. No one who has seen the pictures on our TVs of the havoc wreaked by this winter's storms, with whole areas of the country under water (often mixed with raw sewage), washed away railway lines and roofs blown off railway stations, can doubt that we have a national problem. The question is, what are we going to do about it?

Mankind has always had to adapt to climate changes. Ten thousand years ago with ice sheets covering much of the globe our ancestors lived, fished and hunted. At least when the ice sheets melted they didn't have to deal with capitalist governments and the European Union.

The critical situation we are now facing demands a national, planned, collective response not unlike that of wartime. And yet during the Second World War Britain could and did implement what it needed to do to save the country. Now it's not so simple.

Some of the flooding over much of southern England may have been unavoidable. But by no means all of it. The flooding of the Somerset Levels was the result of deliberate government policy (and that includes Labour government policy), at the behest of the European Union. Environmentalist Richard North has uncovered the trail from the EU's Floods Directive of 23 October

2007 to the British implementation of the directive as the Flood Risk Regulations of 2009. Instead of protecting areas like the Somerset Levels, the policy was to "make space for water" – i.e., encourage flooding.

So Labour's Baroness Young was heard saying she would like to "attach a limpet mine" to every pumping station on the Levels. Dredging equipment was sold off. Make space for water, not land.

Once the immediate problems have been dealt with, we will have to get to grips with our membership of the European Union. Its chaotic, uncontrolled migration policy is forecast to boost Britain's population to 80 million within a generation, leading to enormous pressure to build houses on floodplains. Its agricultural subsidies encourage farmers to rip out trees from uplands, speeding runoff from upland areas into the rivers.

Note, too, that David Cameron's proposal to hand control of flood defences to local authorities would require approval from Brussels.

Don't let us, our homes, our livelihoods and our country get washed away. This is a matter of prime national importance, and everything must be done to protect the country.

The sometimes competing claims of housing, farmland and wildlife need to be decided here, not in Brussels.



Cover photo Andrew Wlard/www.andrew-wlard.com



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Derby wins Crossrail bid

A SIGNIFICANT victory in the fight for manufacturing jobs has been secured at the Bombardier rail works at Derby. The Canadian-owned firm has defeated Japanese (Hitachi) and Spanish (CAF) bidders to win a £1 billion contract for 65 new Crossrail trains. This now raises the expectation of up to 1,000 directly related British jobs in the area, with many more on the supply side, as well as engineering apprenticeships.

National and local union campaigns and, most importantly, the determined fight put up by the people of Derby to save their 175-year railway heritage after the Department of Transport shamefully allowed the Thameslink contract to go to Siemens of Germany in 2011, has shown what workers can achieve when there is a clear unifying objective. This news follows the decision of Transport for London to buy the new trains directly using public money, rejecting the alternative of putting themselves in hock to expensive train leasing companies owned by banks.

After the Siemens debacle Bombardier managed to retain around 1,500 jobs at Derby, but as many jobs were lost too. The subsequent contracts with Southern Rail and Transport for London were a fraction of what was needed. There should never have been a competition putting British jobs at risk to satisfy the quest for the lowest wages.

The government has never satisfactorily explained why it was so willing to boost German rather than British manufacturing. This would have meant admitting how servile it is to EU procurement rules and German shareholders. As well as jobs, £140 million was lost to Britain because the Siemens bid was made and accepted in euros, and its value sank as the euro declined relative to the pound.

An engineering and technology hub ever since the first passenger train ran from Derby to Birmingham in 1839, Derby still has the largest cluster of rail-related businesses and expertise in the world. Bombardier still provides rolling stock for London Underground. Yet the Derby workers will need to do more than simply celebrate their history if they are to survive. With the Crossrail contract Bombardier may have won a stay of execution, but it is still only one plant, and a foreign-owned firm at that, under attack from its competitors and from governments, both Canadian and British, which put financial capital above manufacturing.

As recently as 3 January 2014 the firm lost its £350 million contract with London Underground to provide new signalling. For two years it has employed 100 engineers in London doing surveys and setting up a control centre, but it has failed to come up with a signalling system compatible with the existing one.

For a secure future, the Crossrail contract needs to be viewed by trade unions as a fresh start. If they are serious about members' jobs they need to call for the rebuilding of British locomotive engineering in the hands of British firms. ■

GANGMASTERS

Agency cuts back

THE GANGMASTERS Licensing Authority is to stop automatic checks on new applicants in favour of a "discretionary" approach to "reduce the burden on business". It covers 700,000 workers in food-related industries alone but has only 31 staff at its HQ and 37 inspectors – and its budget has been cut by 20 per cent.

It will not concentrate on areas deemed to have "no serious risk of exploitation", and instead focus on supposedly high crime areas involving drugs, money laundering, people trafficking, etc. It will no longer regulate forestry, land agents and cleaning – all of which would not be subject to licence or inspections.

The authority was set up following the deaths of the Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004. Since 2006 it has regulated employment agencies, labour providers and gangmasters providing workers for the fresh food and horticulture industry. ■

RECOVERY?

Still smaller

GOVERNMENT AND media chorus about a recovery. Yet the economy is still about 2 per cent smaller than it was at the end of 2007. More than six years, and Britain still has not recovered to where it was before the crash. And this is no surprise, given that our levels of investment are far below the world average of 23 per cent. Britain's investment in 2010, 2011 and 2012 was just 15 per cent of GDP – lower proportionally than Afghanistan's. ■

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

ONE BRITAIN

News on the referendum

Having to join the euro

IF A breakaway Scotland were allowed to join the EU – and that is currently looking increasingly improbable – it would have to join the euro, whatever the SNP says. Salmond used to advocate joining the euro. That's now a vote loser. So he wants to leave the fiscal, banking and political union with Britain, but still keep the pound – which would entail, yes, a new fiscal, banking and political union. No British government will agree to that, so Scotland might have to have its own special currency. How much might that be worth?

Spending cut or tax hike

IF THE SNP won the referendum Scotland would lose fiscal transfers from Britain and it would have to find more than €1 billion a year after joining the euro and losing Britain's EU budget rebate. The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates a breakaway Scotland would need between £3 billion and £10 billion of spending cuts or tax increases to make its finances sustainable, equivalent to an 8 per cent cut in public services or an 8 per cent hike in the income tax rate.

Dwindling oil revenues

AN ISOLATED Scotland would depend on falling reserves of North Sea oil and gas. Production slumped between 2000 and 2011 – oil by 65 per cent and gas by 60 per cent. Total British oil and gas revenues are forecast at £4.5 billion in 2017-18, against £11.3 billion in 2011-12.

Keep cutting wages

SALMOND wants Scotland to keep all the EU's anti-trade union laws, directives, regulations and judicial decisions. The SNP's Fiscal Commission Working Group, said, "Wage and price flexibility can help facilitate changes in relative production costs and competitiveness." Simply, it wants low wages.

Passports at the ready

IF IT LEFT Britain and joined the EU Scotland would have to become part of the Schengen area – establishing border and immigration controls with the rest of Britain while relaxing them with other Schengen jurisdictions. That would cost between £74 and £102 million a year. ■



The headquarters of the European Commission, Brussels. Corruption? Not us...

EU raps corruption (of others)

THE LONG-DELAYED report on corruption in the EU from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Home Affairs has at last been published. It details what it calls the "breath-taking" scale of corruption and how "the political commitment to really root out corruption seems to be missing" across all 28 countries in the EU. An estimated €120 billion (around £100 billion), almost the equivalent of the European Commission's entire budget, is lost by corrupt practices.

Corruption has been identified in every nation within the EU. But the report has dropped its planned intention to report on corruption in the institutions of the EU itself. Meanwhile, the report has been criticised by some for understating the levels of corruption, while other countries are scathing about what they regard as intervention in their internal affairs.

The EU police agency, Europol, estimates that there are at least 3,000 organised crime networks behind the corruption. Though Britain comes out well in the report on corruption – fewer than 1 per cent of those surveyed expect to pay a bribe – 64 per cent believe corruption is widespread in the country, with 16 per cent believing corruption affects their daily lives.

The report highlights the "high ethical standards of public service" in Britain – but doesn't mention that these standards are continually undermined by privatisation and outsourcing, both key economic strategies of the EU. So the causes of corruption are not tackled – and they are built into the EU's political and economic structure. ■

HMRC

Valentine's Day strike

SENIOR MEMBERS of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) struck on Valentine's Day over new terms and conditions imposed on them. New performance management rules demand fixed quotas: 10 per cent of all staff must be rated as underperforming regardless of performance. Anyone recruited or newly promoted will work longer hours and have less leave.

The 2,500 tax officials, members of the FDA (formerly known as the First Division Association), voted to strike because of the imposition of quotas, an unfair, unwieldy system, and HMRC's refusal to go with the union to ACAS. According to the union's general secretary, Dave Penman, union members fear those marked as underperforming could later lose their jobs.

HMRC introduced these changes in April 2013 as part of the Civil Service Reform plan promoted by Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude as the future for central government services. HMRC staff see the quotas as arbitrary; they have found the new approach to performance management dogmatic, bureaucratic and time consuming. There is no longer an independent appeal process for staff marked down or who feel they have been treated unfairly.

Unsurprisingly people in HMRC are demotivated. They contrast the idea that one in ten of them are underperforming with the continually improving performance of the organisation reported to Parliament. Gareth Hills, president of FDA's HMRC section, said, "Last year HMRC's compliance interventions delivered an extra £20.7 billion into the coffers of the Exchequer. That's enough to fund the cost of primary healthcare for the whole of the UK." ■

SCHOOLS

Teacher victory

GOVERNMENT THREATS to deregulate schoolteachers' working hours and conditions of service have been hastily withdrawn, after the School Teachers Review Body (STRB) rejected Education Secretary Michael Gove's proposals.

Gove had asked the STRB to scrap: the limit of 1,265 "directed" working hours a year; the limit of 195 working days a year; protected non-contact time for planning, preparation and assessment; protected lunch breaks; and strict regulations about when teachers can be asked to cover additional classes.

This is the first time a Secretary of State has been overruled by the STRB. This victory is a direct result of last year's campaign of industrial action by teachers, when they showed their anger, solidarity

and persistence in refusing to accept Gove's edicts. Then, the widespread involvement by young teachers in particular, during the period when the STRB was meeting and gathering evidence, gave the body pause for thought.

Teachers are still in dispute on the issues of pay, pensions and workload. Strikes planned for November 2013 and February this year were called off when Gove agreed to meet the unions for talks. A meeting with DfE officials has now been arranged for 25 February, but the agenda is wide ranging and not specifically about the topics in dispute.

The National Union of Teachers has called a national one-day strike on 26 March, saying it can be called off if there is genuine progress towards resolution of teachers' concerns. Much will depend on the strengthening of union organisation in the schools between now and then. ■

TUC calls wages campaign

THE TUC has called for a Fair Pay fortnight from Monday 24 March to Sunday 6 April to highlight the worsening of living standards, the continuing decline in the value of wages and a drop in incomes that is comparable with the early days of the Industrial Revolution at the start of the 19th century.

It is also calling its fourth national demonstration against the Coalition's so-called economics of austerity, which translates as economics of poverty for workers. The march on Saturday 18 October 2014 will start in central London and go to Hyde Park. The demonstration in March 2011 had over 500,000 people.

Workers has regularly covered the fight for wages. One of the central points of the government's attack on wages is its attempt to ensure workers are not unionised, not organised and so incapable of either defending wages and wage agreements or of fighting to lift wages. The government has the clear aim of driving the standard of life down for workers by ensuring that the national minimum wage or its variants of the "living wage" become not a safety net but effectively the ceiling for wages for many.

The attempt to drive the standard of living down means that disorganised, demoralised or non-unionised workers learn to live on less and less pay. Wage rates fall to whatever level workers allow. As wages fall, the share creamed off by the employer rises.

Unions are effectively campaigning to run on the spot by re-unionising workers, organising non-unionised workers, re-galvanising those in a trade union to fight for wages. They see the "Fair Pay" fortnight as a way to raise consciousness, shame the employers and politicians – and more importantly recruit workers into their ranks. ■

PAY SURVEY

Staying low?

A WORLDWIDE survey of 22,000 employers by Hay Group consultants indicates that British employers expect wage rises in Britain to remain the lowest in Europe with an expected 0.5 per cent reduction on wage rise forecasts in 2013.

In other words British workers' wages are either remaining static or being cut

further, while profits, dividends and boardroom bonuses rocket.

British employers expect wage increases will remain the lowest in Europe despite the Eurozone's ongoing financial crisis; and that they will remain lower than in the USA and similar industrial competitor nations.

Whether British employers are correct in these predictions depends on how effectively British workers use the unions to fight for wage rises. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MARCH

Tuesday 4 March, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. "Class in the 21st century"

CPBML public meeting. Some people say class is dead. Or that there are too many to count. Really? The CPBML says there are only two classes in Britain – workers and capitalists – and that an understanding of class is central to any analysis of modern Britain. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

MAY

Thursday 1 May. Leeds, London and Glasgow, various times (see p11 for details). CBPML May Day meetings.

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

HEALTH

Widening equalities

IN 2007 the analysis of health inequalities in London by Professor Darzi indicated a 10-year life expectancy gap between West and East London. This led to a health equalities strategy for London, a strategy that was promptly dumped by Boris Johnson on taking office as Mayor of London.

A report from NHS England (London) now shows that the gap in life expectancy between West and East London has now deteriorated an average 17 years. Worse, a report by Professor Sir Michael Marmot of the Institute of Health Equity at University College London puts the figure at 25 years.

Where do these figures come from? They come from analyses of housing, employment, education and diet. What they don't speak of is the influx of massive wealth into West London, especially of rich foreign residents in recent years.

They do not acknowledge the political and social engineering which is driving working class families and residents from West to East. They do not recognise that the question of life expectancy, when the social and economic factors are analysed, is a question of class.

Health inequality is a question of class, and life expectancy is a question of class. Capitalism shortens workers' lives. ■

February's tube strike was the opening skirmish in a struggle the face of a full frontal attack on the rail unions...

A victory for London, a

THE WEEKEND after London Underground staff staged their 48-hour strike, three people in a pub in an affluent part of Sussex were overheard chatting over a few drinks. They seemed unlikely supporters of the rail unions. But while these commuters to London had been severely inconvenienced by the strike, they were unconvinced by the arguments put forward by London Mayor Boris Johnson to justify the proposals that led to the strike.

That feeling was echoed throughout London and its commuter belt: the public has seen through Johnson, preferring the commonsense union view that closing ticket offices and cutting staff would damage service to passengers.

This strike was the opening skirmish in a struggle to defend London Underground transport services in the face of a full frontal attack on the rail unions. It ended in a resounding victory for the workers. Strike action paralysed London for two days. London Underground was forced to agree to withdraw its formal notice of redundancies and conduct a review of station staffing jointly with the unions. A second strike was therefore called off.

The strike was a show of strength for both RMT and TSSA. While the two unions have decided against merger, there has been a spirit of unity among the many pickets around the system.

Voting with their feet

Transport for London (TfL, London Underground's parent body and the transport authority for London), and London Underground tried to play down the effect the strike would have on tube services. But they massively overestimated the number of staff who would turn up to work, and hence the lines and stations they could open and how many trains could run. Despite a less-than-decisive turnout in the strike ballots nearly all union members voted with their feet and walked out.

The strike also affected National Rail services and passengers. One group got off a (non-Underground) train at a station managed by London Underground to find the station was closed, and the gates locked! There were also dangerous levels of overcrowding at many busy stations, London



Workers

6 February: RMT and TSSA pickets united at Leytonstone tube station.

Underground taking a very cavalier approach to public (and staff) safety.

London Underground and TfL tried every tactic to undermine the strike. They tried to recruit so-called "ambassadors" (a new euphemism for scabs) from among TfL staff to replace striking station staff. Not surprisingly, these workers were not at all enthusiastic about breaking a strike by colleagues – many of whom are in the same unions, and facing the same Johnson-inspired staff cuts.

TfL put on huge numbers of extra buses, many from outside London, with reports of vehicles over 60 years old being pressed into service on some routes! The bus enthusiasts may have loved it, but massive traffic jams ensured that they were no substitute for lost train services.

Unions are now urging passenger watchdog London Travel Watch to put pressure on ministers to bring tube ticket offices into line with those on National Rail stations across the country, where strict rules apply about ticket office opening. Stations and lines are often shared between the tube and National Rail with some rail stations managed by the Underground and ticket offices staffed by Underground staff, so a common approach would be logical.

So what lies behind the dispute?

London has adopted the Oyster smartcard for passengers to use the tube, as well as buses and National Rail services. Seven million Oyster cards are in regular use, with millions more bought by visitors to London. An Oyster fare for any given journey is much cheaper than conventional paper tickets, a deliberate move to pressurise passengers to use Oyster.

Johnson would have us believe that the success of Oyster means ticket offices are no longer needed. Prime Minister Cameron was clearly taken in by Johnson's hype, telling Parliament "the fact is that only 3% of transactions now involve ticket offices, so it makes sense to have fewer people in those offices." The trouble is, Johnson was not just seeking fewer staff in ticket offices – he wanted no ticket offices at all.

Even the statistics quoted by Cameron were not correct. TfL's own research shows that around 3 per cent of journeys begin with a purchase at a ticket office. Clearly many transactions pay for more than one journey, including sales of weekly, monthly or even annual season tickets, and Oyster cards which almost invariably pay for more than one trip.

TfL has now been forced to admit that one in five ticket purchases took place at a ticket office. And, as many tube staff are

gle to defend London Underground transport services in

victory for unions

quick to mention, much of the time of ticket office staff is spent sorting out errors and problems with the millions of Oyster cards. It is well known that TfL is overcharging Oyster users on a massive scale running into millions of pounds, much of which is down to problems with the Oyster computer systems.

And the dispute is significant for those working in National Rail ticket offices. The extension of Oyster to all National Rail stations in London (and some beyond, soon including Gatwick Airport) has meant a big reduction in conventional ticket sales. In a clear attempt to undermine their viability, many of these ticket offices are not equipped to sell or top up Oyster cards, or to deal with any problems.

Long-planned

This isn't the first dispute over tube ticket offices – it's the third time they've had to fight. "They've been planning this since 2005," said one picket at Leytonstone, east London. "I think if Ken Livingstone had been mayor [the full closure programme] would have been done," said another. To which a third added, "More efficiently."

But Mayor Johnson has a much wider agenda. He has set out to wage war on tube workers and their well organised unions, RMT and TSSA. Not only does he

'Johnson has set out to wage war on tube workers and their well organised unions.'

want to cut staff numbers, but he also wants to slash wages for those left with a job, and there are growing fears that Johnson intends to attack the staffs' pension scheme and their free travel facilities. He wants driverless trains, though there are huge technical difficulties to overcome before that can happen. In order to achieve his plans, he needs to defeat the unions.

Fortunately, the regulations put in place following the loss of life in the Kings Cross fire disaster in 1987 will protect staff numbers at stations that are actually below ground (many London Underground stations are not actually underground), but if Johnson has his way many surface stations will become what the unions refer to as a "mugger's paradise". With the government attacking health and safety standards and laws, how long will Underground workers

No tickets?

REGULAR passengers on London Underground will be used to seeing signs telling them that their ticket office is closed owing to "staff shortage". What we have not been told is that TfL has been running down offices for some years. Part-time closures are the norm. Clerks have been moved between stations to staff offices for odd hours. Signage has been changed from Tickets and Assistance to Assistance only.

Pickets at Leytonstone Station (see left) told *Workers* that TfL has taken to closing offices even when the "shortage" is in fact due to properly planned annual leave, and qualified staff are available for duty. They also said overall staff numbers had been deliberately run down, with staffing levels around 500 to 600 short across the system.

And they pointed out that ticket office staff are also the people who maintain the ticket machines. ■

be able to rely on these laws?

It is no coincidence that Johnson announced the intention to start running 24 hours a day at weekends, along with the plan to remove nearly 1,000 jobs and axe 260 ticket offices. The unions believe that more staff cuts would follow. Yet only recently, London Underground was talking of employing around 300 extra staff!

The employer's publicity has continued to talk about "modernising" the tube but failed to explain how this "modern" 24-hour tube service could be run with so many fewer staff!

There is no doubt that the war against cuts and closures in London Underground has yet to be won, and many expect the workers to be picketing again in the near future. But Mayor Johnson and London Underground are on the back foot. They now know that they have a formidable adversary in the unions, and will have to overcome massive public support for maintaining public services. ■

CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London

Tuesday 4 March, 7.30 pm

"Class in the 21st century"

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

Some people say class is dead. Or that there are too many to count. Really? The CPBML says there are only two classes in Britain – workers and capitalists – and that an understanding of class is central to any analysis of modern Britain. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

Too often dismissed as irrelevant or denigrated as harmful British manufacturing...

Why Britain needs its c

BRITAIN'S CHEMICAL industry, grouped with pharmaceuticals, represents an eighth of all manufacturing and is the fourth-largest after food, engineering and transport. Sales for the sector, amounted to £55 billion in 2011, generating £20 billion in added value for gross domestic product. It was the largest export earner last year after motor vehicles and parts, according to government data.

A strong chemical industry can underpin efforts to rebuild Britain as a manufacturing nation because chemicals and materials are an essential component on which manufacturing is built.

The products and services of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry can be found in every area of our lives such as vital medicines, food and clothing, housing and transport. The products are the raw materials for most other areas of manufacturing, including paper, textiles, aerospace and electronics.

Adding value

Chemicals and pharmaceuticals are often compared with aerospace. The industry has an average "value-added" per employed worker of £92,000 which is nearly 25 per cent more than aerospace. Yet average pay is £42,000 per worker, only about 10 per cent more than aerospace. This is presented as a great advantage by employers – and it is, for them, since it really means that workers in chemicals and pharmaceuticals produce more surplus value.

For an industry which is clearly so important you might think that investment would be a priority – but all is not well in chemicals and pharmaceuticals. In recent years the industry has lost around 10 per cent of its workforce, as well as whole sites, and job losses are continuing.

Many of these job losses have come about as a result of "mergers and acquisitions" but many more are at risk because of Britain's high energy costs. These high energy costs have been driven by EU and government policies ratcheting up energy prices.

Unite, a significant union in the chemical and pharmaceutical industry, says: "The UK's energy market arrangements,



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An industrial landscape: East Yorkshire is one of the main centres of chemicals production in B

particularly for intensive users of energy, are undermining the sustainability of the UK's chemical industry ... large-scale users of gas are paying more than their European competitors. We are concerned that the current energy prices will displace manufacturing in the UK ... The key issue for Unite and its members in the chemical industry is the relative competitiveness of energy prices compared both to European and global markets."

A study by the British Geological Survey found fields in northern England's Bowland Basin may have enough shale gas to meet demand for almost 50 years.

The term "fracking" is often used; this is shorthand for hydraulic fracturing, the technique used to release oil and gas from shale rock using high pressure water.

While reserves in the North Sea decline and imports rise, the British government is nominally encouraging shale drilling by fracking – through lower taxes – but drilling has barely started. Planning regulation has been allowed to delay the start of drilling.

The government's recent announcement that it will allow councils that back fracking to keep more money in tax revenue as part of an "all-out" drive to promote drilling is a feeble attempt which

, in fact the chemical industry is an essential part of

Chemical industry



'In recent years the industry has lost around 10 per cent of its workforce.'

among those pushing the government to clear obstacles for drilling shale rock.

One example of the damage caused by "mergers and acquisitions" (known as M&A in business circles) is the dismemberment of British-based ICI, once a byword for British industry. The acquisition of part of the company by Akzo Nobel has turned part of a British owned company into a Dutch-owned company. Ineos also acquired half of ICI as well as BP's former refining business, among others.

Originally based in Britain, Ineos moved headquarters to Switzerland in 2010 (as Ineos Group AG) to avoid taxes in Britain – having been given tens of millions of pounds in tax relief on its £6 billion debt for its acquisitions. Only a small part of ICI remains. Ineos was at the centre of a closure threat earlier in the year (and is still under threat of major job losses).

In the middle of 2013, British-based pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) became embroiled in corruption allegations in China which are still not fully resolved. The company is a classic tale of M&A: in 1989 Beecham Pharmaceutical and SmithKline merged to form Smithkline Beecham. In 1995 Glaxo and Wellcome merged. Finally in 2000, Glaxo-Wellcome and SmithKline-Beecham merged to form GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). In a little over 10 years, four companies became one, with accompanying job losses.

2013 saw a raft of job losses. In some cases energy costs were linked both to closures and to decisions on future investment. An early blow came in March, when AstraZeneca announced the closure of its

would be more convincing if they hadn't cut council revenue in the first place.

The anti-industry environmentalists insist the only way forward is efficiency and "renewables", which could only result in further decline of the chemical industry in Britain as well as other areas of manufacturing.

The chemical industry is losing sales to lower-cost competitors, previously far east countries such as China but now including the US, where new supplies from shale gas drilling have reduced prices for natural gas. The price of gas, also used to make electricity and steam, now averages about

two-thirds less in the US than in Britain, the steepest discount in five years.

Foreign-owned

Chemical and pharmaceutical employers are represented in Britain by the CIA (Chemical Industries Association) and to some extent by the ABPI (Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry). The CIA seems inordinately proud of the fact that 70 per cent of its members are "overseas headquartered" (foreign-owned) but this picture has arisen over many years through mergers, acquisitions, closures and large job losses. But the CIA is also

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Alderley Park R&D centre in Cheshire just five months after receiving a £5 million grant to develop the site. The closure means the loss of 550 jobs with another 1,600 jobs to be moved to Cambridge. It also announced 150 jobs to go elsewhere in Britain. AstraZeneca has a history of job cuts: just over a year before, the company had announced 7,300 jobs to go (world-wide), in addition to 20,000 jobs over the previous five years.

In April, petrochemicals manufacturer SABIC UK (Saudi Basic Industries Corporation) announced a “restructuring plan”. These always involve job losses, in this case 110 jobs at its Teesside operation which represents more than one in seven of the 700-strong workforce.

‘Workers are highly skilled and productive but are not always valued as such.’

SABIC came to Teesside in 2006 after acquiring former petrochemicals business Huntsman for £350 million. The company’s base in Wilton produces chemicals which are used in plastic drinks bottles, CDs, car interiors and tyres. The production complex also features aromatic chemicals which are the building blocks for medicines, food packaging, sports equipment and computers.

SABIC has also announced that it is actively seeking a partner to form a chemicals venture in the US to benefit from low-cost shale gas supply.

In October, BASF announced the closure of its chemical site in Paisley, just west of Glasgow, with the loss of 141 jobs. This site had been producing pigments to colour paints, paper and plastics for almost 60 years. It had been run by Swiss

Key production areas

CHEMICAL production is distributed throughout Britain but at the heart of the industry are four principal regions:

- The North West has a highly diverse industry which directly employs 50,000 workers and up to three times that number indirectly employed.
- The North East is significant for the sector, encompassing pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, speciality chemicals, polymers and rubber, petrochemicals and general commodity chemicals. The sector directly employs around 35,000 with another 200,000 indirectly

employed. Teesside is the main production area within this region.

- Yorkshire and Humber has expertise in petrochemical refining, personal care products, pigments and colours, agrochemicals, fine chemicals, paint and coatings, surface treatments, speciality chemicals and general inorganic and organic commodities.
- Scotland, where the chemical industry contributes almost 10 per cent of the British output, employs almost 14,000 workers directly and 70,000 indirectly. ■

firm Ciba before being acquired by BASF in 2008. In 2010 the company made 232 workers redundant “to safeguard its future”.

Also in October, Tata Chemicals Europe announced the closure of its soda ash factory at Winnington in Cheshire with the loss of 220 jobs, some at the nearby Lostock site (which will continue to produce soda ash). The Winnington site had produced the chemical since 1874. Tata Group is an Indian company which acquired the soda ash production from Brunner Mond in 2006.

In November, Polimeri Europa UK Ltd announced the closure of its factory in Hythe, Hampshire, with the loss of 120 jobs (and up to 300 jobs including contractors). The site, which had operated for more than 50 years, manufactured synthetic rubbers, mainly used to make tyres and moulded foams.

Also in November, pharmaceutical multinational Novartis announced the closure of its site for respiratory research at Horsham in Sussex with the loss of 371 jobs as well as up to 170 jobs at third party suppliers and contractors. The decision was part of a “restructure of operations” as a result of a global review of research operations and “realignment of its other global R&D sites”. Manufacturing at the site was stopped two years ago with job

numbers reduced from 950 to 450 people.

In December, Dow Chemicals announced the closure of its Grangemouth-based site manufacturing its impact modifiers, a specialist product used in the packaging and construction industries.

Investing in the US

The US-owned company said the proposal to shut the facility had arisen out of a “comprehensive review” of the Dow Plastics Additives business. They are planning to invest heavily in the US as a result of low energy costs, mainly as a result of the development of shale gas.

Despite these job losses, workers in the British chemical and pharmaceutical industry are highly skilled and productive but are not always valued as such. Ineos owner Jim Ratcliffe (who also moved to Switzerland) took the opportunity in an article for the *Daily Telegraph* in November 2013 to praise unions in German Ineos sites and non-unionised US Ineos sites.

While talking about the decline in manufacturing industry in Britain, he also managed to denigrate and (at least partly) blame British workers and their unions. Despite his claim that employers should not be seen as the enemy, he is still determined to push through major job losses at the Grangemouth site. ■

CPBML/Workers

MAY DAY MEETINGS



Thursday 1 May, 6.30 pm

Speakers, music and discussion

Word Power Bookshop,

43 West Nicolson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Thursday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers and refreshments

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

(nearest tube: Holborn)

Thursday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers and discussion

The Cosmopolitan Hotel (formerly Golden Lion),

Lower Briggate, Leeds LS1 4AE

1914 – 2014: 100 YEARS OF BRITISH WORKERS AGAINST CAPITALISM

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

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

capitalism has thrown at us.

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

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

Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. All welcome

Among the expressions of togetherness and shared experience day – our currency. And the pound's stability is under threat

The SNP's stab in the back

THE POUND is one of the main features that help knit us together as an economy and as a society. Trust in a currency cannot be conjured out of nothing, which is why it does not exist in the eurozone – one of the reasons why that zone is the prison of its member nations.

But this truth is an anathema to the Scottish National Party. To expose their current stand one need only go back to around January 2009. Just before the euro crisis took hold Alex Salmond appeared on Spanish TV. He predicted that abandoning the pound will prove to be a vote winner in his battle to break up Britain.

In a round of interviews with the Catalan media during a visit to Barcelona, Salmond said to “expand the economy within a monetary context within a European euro context will prove to be a very strong one for the people of Scotland.” Needless to say the recorded series of interviews have never been broadcast here in Britain. Why not? They should be. During the same Spanish visit Salmond's senior adviser said the SNP “had always recognised the benefits of euro membership”.

A new story

Clearly – and with the full blessing of the euro fanatics in the Westminster Parliament – the early plan was for Salmond to use the euro currency as an expression of Scottish “independence”, as a means to break up Britain. But with the euro now seen as a hideous political construct, the SNP narrative has had to be changed.

This explains why the SNP, their covert Westminster supporters and their little helpers who chair independent commissions (e.g. Sir Kenneth Calman) have been tying themselves in knots over what currency basis they should use in an attempt to break us up.

The latest idea from this bunch using Salmond as a mouthpiece is that in the event of a Yes vote, the Scottish government has said keeping the pound and retaining the services of the Bank of England under a formal currency union agreement is the best option for Scotland and the rest of Britain.

The key words in this statement are “currency union agreement” and “the



shutterstock.com/Adam Gilchrist

Scottish government has said”. Any form of currency union is something that the British people have totally rejected with the euro. We were right to do so, as subsequently proven by the euro experience over sovereign debt, financial fragmentation and large divergences in economic performance.

But this experience has presented a problem for Salmond. With the euro now a no-go political area since around 2010, he has been without a currency narrative to use as a lever for break-up. So for 2014 he is wearing a new mask – by demanding that the pound enter a euro-style currency union with Scotland.

Are all British workers able to vote on whether we want a sterling currency union together with the inherent weakening that this will bring about? Well, no – because only a relatively small part of the British population (8.3 per cent) will be able to vote in Salmond's referendum. During the build-up to the vote in September he hopes to fill the minds of those voting with for example, feudal imagery of “knights of old”, based on 14th-century tribalism, designed to poison a modern-day British industrial and

‘The British working class took on the Scottish bank debt’

commercial working population.

The SNP demand for a euro-style currency union for the pound is already unsettling capital markets. At the beginning of this year institutional lenders to the Westminster government clearly stated that in the event of break-up a surcharge would apply to future debt to cover the risk of a currency union. So the ultimate cost of servicing Britain's debt would rise when compared to the current integrated basis.

The highly sensitive gilt (government bond) yield calculations that drive the wholesale debt market also ultimately determine retail interest rates – mortgages, for example. So the direct consequence of monetary fragmentation would be that

ience between British workers is something we use every
at from the SNP and its supporters...

back for the pound



every British worker would face higher debt interest rates all round.

For example: during the year 2013/14 Britain had to issue £153 billion of new debt (gilts) to which an annual interest rate is applied. In the future new national debt issuance and our personal debt of loans and mortgages would be more costly because of the increased hazard of currency union. According to Salmond this surcharge should be introduced without 55 million of the British population having any say in the matter.

Of course to allay currency fears the SNP now says it will honour Scotland's share of past and future central government debt (gilts) at rates applying before and after break-up.

But the fact is that at the first opportunity Salmond will attempt to deliver a stab in the back to the rest of Britain. He gleefully reported in 2009 that "as you know sterling is sinking like a stone. It's now about parity with the euro."

A further illustration of what the term "stab in the back" means in practice concerns the vexed question of banking.

Before 2007 Salmond is on record as saying "the Scottish banks are among the most stable in the world". How does he now talk about Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS)? After a £10 billion share rights issue that burned in 2007 and £47 billion of debt placed on Britain's balance sheet – together with ongoing annual losses currently at £8 billion – Salmond now describes RBS as a bank that was run from London. Funny that, because at the 2007 shareholders meeting the RBS directors, many of them Scottish, took their seats to the pumped theme music from *Braveheart*.

Rebuild

The fact remains that when push came to shove the British working class took on the Scottish bank debt (and add £37 billion of HBOS Bank of Scotland debt to the above) and treated it as a British problem. At its root is Britain's long-standing balance of payments shortfall. To resolve this will require the rebuilding of Britain, avoiding the political trap that has been set of creating false division by arguing over who owes what north and south. Consider why in 2004, when the government implemented the EU Directive on free movement of

labour, we weren't asked whether we agreed to the loss of control of Britain's borders. Compare that to now where a part of the British population is being encouraged to put up an internal border between north and south.

So one final question. If the fall of Germany's Berlin Wall dividing East and West was considered a symbol of freedom, why is it that twenty-four years later a section of the British population is being cheered on to rebuild Hadrian's Wall, an historic symbol of a foreign occupying power that at one time divided our forces and resistance?

Clearly the fabric that holds our country together is threatened. Objectively the situation is similar to earlier historic periods which saw various European countries partitioned and split up by way of trumped up referenda organised by local and regional quislings and blessed by appeasers. Salmond talks of the Scottish "small folk" and how he is here to help. The reality is that the attempted break up of Britain has been carefully prepared using a slow recipe. Workers north and south, us "wee folk", are being cooked a stew that we will choke on unless we spit it out. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings continues in 2014 on Tuesday, 4 March, 5 June, 14 October and 18 November; all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, and start at 7.30 pm. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings are advertised in What's On, see page 5.

M The theme of the meeting on Tuesday 4 March, is "Class in the 21st century". Details of further meetings will be announced in **WORKERS** and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2014, Thursday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings elsewhere in the country.

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

The end of the 18th century saw a new system that encouraged pay below-subsistence wages. It was called after an area

1795: The road to Speen

IN 1597 THE English parliament ruled that rogues and vagabonds (note the emotive terms) should be sent back to their parishes for punishment and forced labour. The Poor Law Acts of 1598 and 1601 inaugurated a system of poor relief based on parish responsibility and parish rates which was to last until 1834.

The system encouraged Justices of the Peace (usually local employers) to fix parish wages as low as possible, as workers could be kept alive by having their wages topped up by the rates. Money for parish poor relief was raised by collecting a rate, based on the estimated value of each property, and collected by the parish constable and “overseers of the poor”.

In 1637 in John Milton’s village of Horton, a local mill-owner cost parish ratepayers £7 5s (£7.25p) a week to supplement the wages of his workers. (Little wonder that ratepayers often opposed new industries setting up in the parish.)

Later, the 1662 Settlement Laws restricted the parish obligation to look after persons who had a permanent settlement; anyone else seeking assistance had to return to the place where they were born.

In 1723 the Workhouse Test Act made the poor enter workhouses in order to obtain relief. Between 1601 and 1750 a vast, cumbersome system of poor law was created, mainly serving the interests of landowners in rural society.

The Speenhamland System

In the second half of the 18th century England’s economy and society began to be transformed. There was population growth, industrialisation requiring greater mobility of labour, and mass enclosures of land. The earlier system of poor law continued, but was amended to respond to the new conditions.

In 1782 Gilbert’s Act excluded the “able-bodied poor” from the workhouse and forced parishes to provide either work or “outdoor relief” for them. It also permitted parishes to build workhouses. “Indoor relief” (in workhouses) was confined specifically to the old, sick or dependent children.

Britain was at war with revolutionary France from 1793 until 1815.



An (idealised) image of the St James’s Workhouse, London, around 1800.

‘The Poor Law Amendment Act created a system of forced labour’

Grain imports from Europe stopped, and poor harvests in 1795-6 meant grain prices shot up. Many at the time also blamed middlemen and hoarders for the rises. Food riots marked the spring of 1795. The ruling class feared that working people might be tempted to emulate the French, and revolt. Acute social and economic distress spread throughout the rural south of England, placing strains on the poor law system.

In May 1795, magistrates in Berkshire (one of the counties most affected by enclosure) met in Speenhamland and observed, “The present state of the poor does require further assistance than has been generally given them.” Seeking to retain control over the labourers and prevent disturbances, they established a minimum level a family needed to survive and decided to use the poor rate to make up the pay of those who found themselves

below the level. Their proposed basis for “outdoor relief” was that “when the gallon loaf (8lb 11oz) shall cost one shilling, then every poor and industrious man shall have for his own support three shillings [15p] weekly either produced by his own or his family’s labour or an allowance for the poor rates and for the support of his family one shilling and sixpence”. For every penny that the loaf rose above one shilling they reckoned that a man would need three pence for himself and one penny for each member of his family. This system spread rapidly and was soon adopted or modified in many other counties experiencing social distress.

“Speenhamland” was not created to support the unemployed or eradicate poverty. It aimed to provide a (mainly rural) labour force at low direct cost to employers, using local taxation (“poor rates”) as subsidies to supplement the poverty wages of farm workers.

The system allowed employers, including farmers and the nascent industrialists of the town, to pay below subsistence wages, because the parish would make up the difference and keep their workers alive. Workers’ low incomes went unchanged. Speenhamland was a tactic to institutionalise poverty without letting it reach chronic

raged employers to
in Berkshire...

Speenhamland

heights or outright malnutrition.

The impact of paying the poor rate fell on the landowners of the parish concerned. It complicated the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law because it let "working paupers" draw on the poor rates. The Berkshire magistrates had also proposed another option – that farmers and other employers should increase the wages of their employees. But that idea met with little response.

Under the Speenhamland System ratepayers often found themselves subsidising the owners of large estates who paid poor wages. It was not unknown for landowners to demolish empty houses in order to reduce the population on their lands and also to prevent the return of those who had left. At the same time, they would employ labourers from neighbouring parishes. These people could be laid off without warning but would not increase the rates in the parish where they worked.

During the 20 years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, attitudes to the poor began to change and the system was criticised by landed ratepayers as being expensive. Others said it impeded mobility of labour. It encouraged farmers to pay low wages and to lay off workmen in winter and re-employ them in spring and summer, as it enabled them, just, to survive.

Forced labour

A Royal Commission in 1834 called for the abolition of "outdoor" rate relief and recommended the maintenance of workhouse inmates at a level below that of the lowest paid workers – a crude piece of intimidation to everyone. The resulting 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act created a system of "indoor" relief and forced labour in a rapidly expanded system of hated workhouses. But that's another tale.

Systems such as working tax credit and housing benefit, and the introduction of universal credits, are basically a re-enactment of the Speenhamland principle. They are another version of institutionalised poverty, a modern attempt to divert our class from trade union struggle for wages by offering paltry handouts taken from our class's taxes (see article in May 2013 issue of *Workers* at www.workers.org.uk). ■

6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

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

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

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

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

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

3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

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

4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

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

5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

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

6: Build the Party

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

Interested in these ideas?

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

WORKERS

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A lesson from the universities

‘We don’t need the EU to tell us that the discrimination is grotesque...’

IF YOU WANT a glimpse of the kind of chaos that would engulf Britain should the SNP have its way, take a look at the universities.

The situation is bad enough as it is. There are currently no tuition fees for Scottish students in Scottish universities. Nor for students from the European Union. Only students from the rest of Britain have to pay fees. Alex Salmond’s Scottish government proposes to continue to charge students from the rest of Britain tuition fees if Scotland left Britain, unlike students from all other EU member states.

This proposal arguably conflicts with EU law. For if Scotland left Britain and joined the EU as a separate state, the rest of Britain would be like any other EU member, so Scotland would be legally obliged to provide university education free to students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is, of course, a funny old world where it’s legal for Edinburgh to discriminate against English, Welsh and Northern Irish students, as long as we’re all part of the same country. We don’t need the EU to tell us that the discrimination is grotesque.

Even if the numbers of students from elsewhere in Britain stayed at the same level as today, under EU rules the loss of funding from these students would, according to the SNP’s own figures, cut about £150 million from Scottish universities’ finances. This alone would threaten the affordability of free tuition for Scottish students, or academic employment and standards in Scottish universities, or both. Now imagine how many more would seek to study in Scotland if there were no fees.

If the numbers were to increase – and there would be a very strong incentive for young people from England, Wales and Northern Ireland to come to Scotland for a free education – the effect could be even greater. It could drain students from the

universities of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, causing a massive funding crisis in higher education throughout Britain. Yet the Scottish government expects the rest of Britain to continue to share research facilities and fund research in Scotland’s universities.

Scotland’s higher education institutions received £257 million of UK Research Council funding in 2012-13, 13 per cent of the total and a lot more than Scotland’s 8.4 per cent of Britain’s population.

The Scottish government claims that nothing would change for this funding in Scotland if it left Britain. Yet the Wellcome Trust, for example, which has invested over £600 million in health research in Scotland over the last decade, commented, “Our future commitment, and the eligibility of Scottish institutions for Trust support, would need to be reviewed. There is no guarantee that our funding would be maintained at current levels.”

The separatists keep trying to say that nothing would change, anywhere. Education would be the same, the pound would stay the pound, and so on. But that, to use a current SNP term, is preposterous. Create a different state, and everything changes.

And as the article on page 12 makes clear, the pound would not be the pound we have now if it were an item of “shared” sovereignty. Instead of being our protection against the euro, it would become a source of weakness.

Britain is clearly one nation, built up over centuries. We are all intertwined, bound together by class, culture and economy. If that were not the case, its break-up could be accomplished relatively painlessly. The chaos, the pain and the confusion surrounding the SNP’s plans only serve to show how much of a united nation we actually are. ■

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

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

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