

# WORKERS

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## HOW TO REBUILD OUR TRADE UNIONS

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



**European Union Scottish TUC debate**

**06**



**'Welfare State' Who benefits from benefits?**

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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

# WORKERS

“ And they call this freedom..”

THIS TIME last year, Cyprus was preparing to take over the “presidency” of the European Union (a grand term, signifying only self-importance and the right to organise junketing). Now Cyprus has been taken over by the EU. From farce to tragedy in 12 short months. Having allowed its economy to be dominated by financial services, Cyprus now finds it has none. Anyone fancy putting money in a Cypriot bank now?

All this to satisfy German capital. But it was ever thus with the EU. One of the lynchpins of the EU is the free movement of capital (along with goods and people). It turns out there is something in the small print to the effect of “except when Germany objects”. The freedoms of the EU are meant only for capitalism. For the peoples of Europe, they are tools of oppression.

Only recently elected on a platform of support for the euro, the Cypriot government has had to submit to the dictates of the unholy trinity of EU, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. The word humiliation doesn't even begin to cover what has happened to Cyprus. Too late, the people of Cyprus are waking up to discover that the dream is a real-life nightmare. Devastation awaits.

The leader of the Cypriot Orthodox Church, Chrysostomos II, said during one of the many rounds of bailout talks, “It is certain that [the euro] will not last in the long term, and the best

is to think about how to escape it.” But there is only one sure escape route, for Cyprus and for all in the EU – to leave not just the currency, but also the political union that gave it birth.

Among the ironies of this debacle is that Cypriots fought, literally, long and hard for their independence from foreign (British) rule. Then – like Ireland, with an even greater history of struggle – they gave it all away to be part of the EU and its lethal currency.

Cyprus and Ireland also have in common that imperialism divided their islands in an attempt to halt the liberation struggle. Something for all the people of Britain to think about as the Scots prepare for their referendum in September 2014.

We urgently need national debates on our EU membership and also on the prospect of the break-up of our country. Especially, our trade unions need to debate these vital matters. We are not “three nations” but one; not three working classes but one.

A Scottish breakaway would split the working class, create separate trade unions – and smaller is weaker – and strengthen capital. It would straightaway deliver Scotland over to the clutches of the EU and the euro, and weaken the rest of Britain in our fight against the EU.

“Unity is strength” is classic working class thinking. So is “United we stand, divided we fall”. The whole working class of Britain must unite against the forces of capital and its EU. ■



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## How HBOS was wrecked

"AN ACCIDENT waiting to happen" is how the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards described the HBOS debacle in its report in April. HBOS was born in 2001 from the merger of the Bank of Scotland and Halifax, which had been Britain's biggest building society before it was demutualised in 1997, and in 2001 had 22 per cent of the mortgages market and 16 per cent of retail savings.

From the start HBOS adopted a "wildly ambitious growth strategy", expanding its lending much faster than its deposits in what the Commission called "an asset-led, high-risk approach to growth". Deposits grew at 8 per cent a year between 2001 and 2008, against asset growth of 13 per cent. The shortfall was covered by aggressive "wholesale funding", where basically banks and other financial institutions lend to each other.

There was also a rapid increase in individual credit exposures: loan growth averaged 14 per cent a year, which the Commission said was based recklessly on "substantial risks". In September 2002 the largest amount loaned to an individual was £963,000. Within six years the largest single name approval was £2.9 billion and there were nine individuals lent more than £1 billion.

HBOS also aimed to grow aggressively abroad, particularly in Ireland and Australia, concentrating on property and construction. The property crash happened in Ireland but the company even managed to lose money in Australia, where there was no recession.

In 2004 the Financial Services Authority (FSA) told the HBOS board that the group had outpaced its ability to take risks and that it was "an accident waiting to happen". Yet the Authority only told HBOS to tighten its monitoring procedures. The FSA also highlighted HBOS's "high degree of exposure to property". In 2005 the Board acknowledged its reliance on wholesale funding was a "significant risk" and that HBOS was "structurally illiquid". In 2006 the bank's own advisers warned the board that in the longer term the position was "untenable and unsustainable". In March 2008 there was an outflow of funds which was stemmed by a statement from the FSA.

In September 2008, after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, depositors – particularly corporate and overseas customers – withdrew £30 to £35 billion from HBOS. In the ensuing "credit crunch" wholesale markets seized up and HBOS was unable to raise sufficient funds to cover its outflows. On 1 October, 12 months after the run on Northern Rock, HBOS received Emergency Liquidity Assistance from the Bank of England and it was taken over by Lloyds TSB. 98 per cent of the supposed value of the company of £40 billion had evaporated, and £8.5 billion of public money went directly to the company to take it over. Without the cash injection, HBOS would have been insolvent. ■

### EUROPEAN UNION

#### Investing in outsourcing

THE EU has been busy investing heavily in Morocco, not least in providing massive subsidies in order that Renault can start producing vehicles there.

Currently, Renault produces Dacia cars in Romania as it has done for over 20 years. Since February 2012, however, the EU has been pumping money into building a new factory for Renault, south of Tangier. The grants of around 400 million euros have been enhanced this year with a further loan of 440 million euros. On top of that, the EU has been heavily involved in the financing of "Tangier Med", a complete overhaul of the key Moroccan port.

What is the rationale for shifting production of Dacia vans and cars from Romania? Labour costs in Romania are now seen as too high, with Romanian workers earning a mighty 250 euros per month (£215)! ■

### WOMEN

#### Recession 'driving prostitution'

THE ECONOMIC situation is driving more women to prostitution and increasing the threat of violence. In a recent study Westminster Council has found that increased competition has led to a 50 per cent cut in prices and a willingness to accept more clients and take greater risks.

To make more money women are travelling further afield and taking clients who appear to be more dangerous. The chairman of Westminster's task group which produced the report said "the risk of violence has increased substantially" in a "recession-fuelled environment". ■

**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](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)**

## EUROBRIEFS

## The latest from Brussels

**The zone without jobs**

UNEMPLOYMENT in the eurozone reached a new record high of 12 per cent in January and stayed the same in February. Unemployment in the Netherlands jumped from 7.8 per cent in February to 8.1 per cent in March. A new Dutch opinion poll has revealed that 55 per cent of Dutch citizens now regret the introduction of the euro.

**Most young Greeks out of work**

IN GREECE unemployment is far worse, rising to nearly 60 per cent this January for those aged 15 to 24. The figures for all economically active workers are 24 per cent for men and 29 per cent for women.

**Reparations call**

ACCORDING TO a new poll by Marc for Alpha TV, eight out of ten Greeks want the Greek government to pursue the issue of outstanding WWII reparations from Germany. The poll also found that 40 per cent now want Greece to exit the euro.

**Unconstitutional**

THE PORTUGUESE Constitutional Court ruled that four out of nine measures in the latest budget were unconstitutional, partly since they fell disproportionately on public sector workers and pensions. After an emergency cabinet meeting, the government said that it would cut up to 1.3 billion euros from welfare and education spending. That may not be enough for the EU, which wants another 4 billion to plug the budget shortfall.

**Irish workers say no**

IRISH TRADE UNIONS have voted to reject a series of public sector pay cuts and work practice changes which the Irish government promised to the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank.

**Ten more years**

BUNDESBANK PRESIDENT Jens Weidmann warned that overcoming the eurozone crisis could take up to a decade.

**Yes, I was a dictator, says Kohl**

IN AN INTERVIEW made in 2002 but published for the first time this April, former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl revealed to journalist Jens Peter Paul that he acted "like a dictator" to get the euro introduced since he knew that he "could never have won a referendum" on the issue. ■



Photo: Workers

EU-enforced privatisation came under attack at the Scottish TUC in Perth in mid-April.

## Scottish TUC debates EU

A RAIL, MARITIME & Transport union delegate at last month's Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) annual conference in Perth condemned looming privatisation in his industry, pointing the finger of blame at the EU for forcing this agenda on Britain and for threatening his members in companies such as CalMac Ferries – a "lifeline" service in the Western Isles.

A motion from Kilmarnock and Loudon Trades Union Council calling on the STUC to explore alternatives to the EU was passed unanimously, while an amendment from the RMT for immediate withdrawal was defeated.

The STUC General Council continues to sit on the fence in the lead up to next year's referendum on Scottish separation, basically only demanding a "balanced debate"; yet a motion advocating support for the Yes campaign fell as the General Council's report was adopted.

At a side meeting organised by the Campaign Against Euro Federalism with speakers Iain Davidson MP (founder of Labour Against the Euro in the 1990s) and RMT general secretary Bob Crow, and chaired by Eddie McGuire (Musicians' Union Scotland & Northern Ireland chairman) the majority opinion was that the time had come for Britain's withdrawal from the EU.

At another gathering – with standing room only – under the title "Work Together" there were forceful arguments against breaking up Britain. The ASLEF delegate was proud to announce in his speech that his Scottish branches had given him the mandate to oppose the Yes campaign, and he emphasised the need for a united working class throughout Britain. He told WORKERS that this policy could be read on the ASLEF website as from May. ■

## UNEMPLOYMENT

## British youth hit hard

IN THE G8, the world's eight richest economies, Britain has seen the fastest rise in youth unemployment since the financial crash according to a report published by the Work Foundation. Of the 34 OECD countries only Greece and Spain have higher rates.

The Foundation pointed out that Germany, in particular, has managed to

achieve a consistently low level of youth unemployment, due mainly to its strong apprenticeship system. It also quoted experience from Australia and the complete ineffectiveness there of "work for dole" schemes the government is trying to impose here. The evidence was that forcing young people onto such schemes led to their dropping out of the system or ceasing to search for work.

Latest figures show 993,000 16- to 24-year-olds jobless in Britain, a youth unemployment rate of 21.2 per cent. ■

**TRADE****...and still the deficit soars**

BRITAIN'S TRADE deficit soared to £57.7 billion for 2012, up from £20 billion in 2011. This is the worst gap since 1989. It explodes the government's pledge to rebalance the economy away from consumer spending and towards exports.

The deficit on trade in goods was £36 billion, 50 per cent up on 2011. There

was a £27 billion deficit on trade in goods in the last quarter alone: the disaster is accelerating.

The deficit on trade with the EU was £70.5 billion, up from £43.6 billion in 2011. Britain's surplus on trade with non-EU countries was £12.9 billion, down from £23.4 billion in 2011.

The trend continues to worsen: our deficit in trade in goods was £9.41 billion in February, up from £8.17 billion in January. ■



**MEMBERS OF THE PCS (Public and Commercial Services) union outside the Houses of Parliament on Budget Day, 20 March, during the union's one-day strike over pay and pensions. In the event, the budget was noteworthy for its utter contempt for the real economy. Despite all Osborne's talk about growth, it was clear that this was not meant to refer to jobs, industry or even services – only to the housing market, as if a rise in house prices would mean that the slump was over and we could all breathe easier.**

Photo: Workers

## Opposition backs Al Qaeda

THE AL NUSRA Front, the military backbone of the US-sponsored Syrian opposition, openly swore its loyalty to Al Qaeda in a statement posted online on 3 April. Al Nusra leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was Osama bin Laden's second-in-command and is now leader of the Al Qaeda terrorist group. Ayman al-Zawahiri recently urged its members, veterans of the wars in Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, to fight to set up an Islamic state in Syria.

Al-Golani also said that the terrorist group would merge with Al Qaeda in Iraq. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of the so-called "Islamic State in Iraq", Al Qaeda's affiliate there, said that his group would join with Al Nusra under the shared banner of "The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant". The so-called Free Syrian Army has said it will continue to cooperate with Al Nusra.

The Al Nusra Front has carried out many sectarian atrocities, claiming responsibility for most of the suicide bombings in Syria, including the December 2011 attack in Damascus that killed 49 people and injured more than 160 others, the May 2012 bombing in the capital in which 55 people died and 400 were wounded, and the attack in Aleppo in October, which killed 48. Most of the casualties have been civilians.

Islamist militias, including those linked to Al Qaeda, have received hundreds of millions of dollars in cash and materiel from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other US-backed forces – all under the watchful eye of the CIA, whose agents oversee the flow of supplies to the Syrian opposition across the borders of Turkey and Jordan. ■

**WHAT'S ON****Coming soon****MAY DAY MEETINGS**

CPBML May Day Meetings: "Struggle for ideas: the battle for Britain"

Saturday 27 April, 12 noon. The Fox and Newt, 9 Burley Street, Leeds LS3 1LD

Wednesday 1 May, 6.00pm. Word Power Books, 43 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Wednesday 1 May, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

We, the British working class, have survived anything and everything thrown at us by early capitalism, capitalism in ascendancy or capitalism in absolute decline. We have survived by organising ourselves and by thinking out the strategies to defeat the brutal reality of capitalism. We now face the greatest struggle of ideas as we battle for our very survival as a class and nation.

Come to our 2013 May Day meetings and discuss the struggle of ideas that will win the battle for Britain. For more information, see advertisement on page 8, or visit [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk)

Out of the European Union, no to the break-up of Britain, defend national sovereignty!

Rebuild workplace trade union organisation!

Fight for pay, skill and industry the key to independence!

Build the Party!

**JUNE**

Tuesday 11 June, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

"Fighting for peace"



Public meeting organised by the CPBML. From European Union and NATO to the US and a string of capitalist alliances, imperialism is turning to war to break independent nations and deter any opposition to its rule. But they are not having everything their own way. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

Membership of our trade unions has more than halved since the forward to explain this fact and many attempts have been made unions, the decline continues. But it can be reversed...

## Do it yourself, and do it in the workplace: t

AS THE CRISIS of capitalism deepens so too does the crisis of thought and deed in the working class. In the face of continued and increasing attacks on our class on all fronts, the divide widens between those who want, and act for, better, and those who seek to avoid. The attack, all-encompassing – “shock and awe” – has left our class like rabbits in the headlights, and many of us are turning in on ourselves.

Our basic battleground is on pay yet there is a reluctance to fight for it. Why? Is it because our class buys into the enemy’s propaganda that the country cannot afford it due to the parlous state of the economy, as if we earn too much? Do we think there is no alternative to “austerity”? Or is it a case of we know what it will take to shift the government/employer on pay and we’re not desperate enough yet?

### Low turnouts

Recently PCS voted by 60 per cent for strike action on a 28 per cent turnout, though in general the action was supported. Teacher unions have voted 82 per cent in favour of action – on a 27 per cent turnout. Low turnouts only encourage the employer and discourage ourselves. Just how hard is it to return a ballot form? What message would an 80 or 90 per cent return deliver? We should remind ourselves that the employers in Britain hold £800 billion in cash and that’s our money.

Too many of our class behave as if scabbling around for crumbs – “Why should you have it when I haven’t got it?” – cries of “it’s discrimination that s/he is paid more for doing the same job”, etc. No more is this exemplified than on the pensions front. Lost through weakness and ignorance, final salary schemes now cover only 13 per cent of workers in the private sector. Too many don’t see why public sector workers should have them, and say so! We should be aware that some £1.5 trillion are tied up in the pensions of British workers – that’s also our money!

In general the class still hankers for partnership with the employers, despite



PCS banner on Budget Day – but a turnout for a strike ballot of 28 per cent is a symptom that v

knowing that leopards don't change their spots. We are paying the price for avoiding the struggles of the past and clinging in vain to the ideology of cowardice that has brought us to this pass.

The emasculating of trade union facility time in the civil service will be rolled out across the public sector and aped in the private. Of course, when our forebears built trade unions there was no such thing as facility time, only the determination to survive through collective strength and refusal to be wiped out. Today, the attack is sorting the wheat from the chaff in terms of commitment - far too many trade union reps are fair-weather “not in my own time” people, as if the struggle stops at the workplace exit gate!

Government also attacks trade unions financially. Larger unions such as Unison, Unite and GMB could each be deprived of up to £12 million annually due to the implementation of the Jackson Report. Set

up to review civil litigation costs under Labour and implemented with glee by the coalition government, it scraps payments for Personal Injury referrals and insurances, effectively forcing unions to pay the equivalent of more than 200,000 members’ subscriptions annually.

### End individualism

The drive to elevate individual rights above collective ones which began in the 1980s was reinforced by Labour’s introduction of the right to representation. Under the guise of greater “rights” (and trumpeted as a gain) its real purpose is to tie the time of union officers and reps up in knots with individual issues – that is why neither this, nor any other government, will ever repeal that “trade union right”.

There was a time when someone from an unrecognised workplace would be told that they would have to organise the workplace and win recognition if they wanted representation. Now there are

peak of over 13 million in 1979. Many reasons have been put to reverse the decline. Yet, in the land that gave birth to trade

## the way to rebuild our unions



Photo: Workers

workers cannot ignore.

thousands upon thousands of individual members just maintaining their membership as a form of “insurance”, draining both energy and resources, contributing little if anything to the development of their union.

Having promoted individual workers’ rights, government now attacks them by restricting their access to the justice system – employment tribunals. By the introduction of deposits (£1,200 for an unfair dismissal claim) and making it impossible to submit a claim without first securing a certificate for seeking resolution through ACAS, these “rights” are seriously undermined. Tribunal claims are often submitted as a holding/negotiating tactic to avoid running out of time and adding leverage on the employer. The employers’ response will be, as now, delay – making a claim fail by going beyond the limitation date.

Rebuilding workplace trade union organisation is not easy but has to be done. It is the foundation from which all

progress under capitalism has been built. Fundamentally, this means challenging those workers who are content for the union to exist in their workplace, but refuse to join.

### Be blunt

Shop stewards and reps must be steered to encourage existing members to be more blunt with these people. Non-members must be told that the employer has long used them against the organised and also themselves – they must be faced with this truth rather than permitting the liberal attitude that they have freedom of choice not to belong.

While many do step forward to become the union representatives of their workmates, it can often be a burden too hard to bear. We see it all the time – the poor volunteer (very few elections these days) to become a rep can also result in their setting themselves up to be a target, not just by the boss but more importantly by their workmates.

It is as if workers have the luxury of watching a show from the sidelines and giving marks out of ten. The attitude that says “We elected you to do it for us” is at the root of our problems. It is both the microcosm and essence of our problem:

**“Rebuilding means challenging those workers who are content for the union to exist in their workplace, but refuse to join...”**

social democracy and the abrogation of responsibility.

This attitude has to be challenged and if we are bold enough to do so, will strike a chord. It is the “We are all in it together” line. There is no hiding place and 100 members should mean 100 reps in attitude. When the boss tells the rep to get lost he is really telling every worker to get lost, so our response must be “What are WE going to do about it?”

The attacks will continue but ultimately, of course, it is not about the enemy class – they will do what they have always done – seek ever more vicious and inventive ways to exploit us while keeping us down. It is about us, the working class and what we do. ■

## Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain’s new series of London public meetings began on 27 September 2012, with further meetings on 15 November 2012, 12 February 2013 and 11 June 2013; 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 (page 5). Further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at [www.workers.org.uk](http://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 2013, Wednesday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings in Edinburgh and Leeds.

**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 email [info@workers.org.uk](mailto:info@workers.org.uk)

# CPBML/Workers MAY DAY MEETINGS



**Saturday 27 April, 12 noon**

**Speakers and discussion**

**The Fox and Newt (close to city centre),  
9 Burley Street, Leeds LS3 1LD**

**Wednesday 1 May, 6.00 pm**

**Speakers, music and discussion**

**Word Power Books,  
43 West Nicolson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB**

**Wednesday 1 May, 7.30 pm**

**Speakers and refreshments**

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL  
(nearest tube: Holborn)**

## STRUGGLE FOR IDEAS: THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN

We, the British working class, have survived anything and everything thrown at us by early capitalism, capitalism in ascendancy or capitalism in absolute decline. We have survived by organising ourselves and by thinking out the strategies to defeat the brutal reality of capitalism. We now face the greatest struggle of ideas as we battle for our very survival as a class and nation. We fight capitalist ideas and we fight the weakness in ourselves which says, "Live with capitalism."

Capitalist economics continue in their free fall of failure, poverty, unemployment, hopelessness and closure. Britain collapses under this government. Economic bankruptcy at home equates with imperialist war abroad. The European Union continues its 40-year colonisation to break up Britain and fragment our nation and class.

The challenges may be unprecedented but capitalist ideas are based on failure as they enter the second great economic depression in their history. Their short-term attempt to rule has created a government united only by hatred of the working class. We can destroy them by clarity of mind, rebuilt organisation, unity in the workplace and the assertion of our class resistance.

Come to our 2013 May Day meetings and discuss the struggle of ideas that will win the battle for Britain.

*Out of the European Union*

*No to the breakup of Britain*

*Rebuild workplace trade union organisation*

*Fight for pay*

*Regenerate industry*

*Build the Party!*

**Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. All welcome**

**We need to break out from a benefits system that subsidises poverty-pay employers and greedy landlords – and props up capitalism...**

## Who benefits from benefits?

THE SHEER brutality of the government's onslaught on the lives of workers is typified by its approach to so-called benefits. Government politicians demonise any worker who receives benefits, yet do not dare to mention the lack of jobs. The sole purpose of the false "debate" on benefits is to turn workers on themselves. In this they are ably aided by the Labour non-opposition.

As the various changes coming into force from April start to bite, the real effect on people's standards of living is being documented. A propaganda war is being waged on "scroungers" and "a lifestyle choice of living on welfare" to characterise larger and larger groups of workers, and to divide us. The concept of the feckless poor is back with a vengeance, to attack the notion of universal benefits and to justify the impoverishment of the people along with the continuing enrichment of the few.

The issue of benefits is complicated. A benefit is defined as something which brings improvement to somebody. So who exactly experiences improvement and for what purpose? While workers rightly reject the notion of living a life dependent on state benefits, many are allowing the distinction between different types of benefit to become blurred. The introduction by Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith of "universal credit" (see Box, page 10) later this year will do so even more.

### Universal benefits

Universal benefits such as free health care for all and the Welfare State were ceded by a ruling class afraid of workers who had successfully fought fascism in World War Two and were not prepared to accept less. Workers could now assume that their children would receive free, good quality education and training, and the old could retire and live out their lives free from poverty, although of course workers paid for all this through taxation of different kinds. The hated means tests of the old National Assistance, which smacked of the Poor Law and the workhouse, were to some extent done away with. Health care and medicines would be free to all when



**We need to fight for jobs, not the humiliation of unpaid labour and the dole.**

Photo: 1000 Words/shutterstock.com

needed.

In addition, payments such as Child Benefit – known as "family allowances" when introduced in 1946 – reflected an acknowledgement that children do not earn so cost money to feed and clothe. Likewise the old age pension, maternity and disability benefits.

The principle was that if you cannot, or should not, be working for a wage, society will ensure you can live in dignity and free from want. Some payments, such as the

state pension, required individual contributions from employers and employees via wages, but crucially they were not means-tested.

Universal free benefits such as these have been successively eroded by Conservative and Labour governments alike. Fees for dental care and eye tests came in quite quickly. Prescription charges for most adults were proposed by Labour

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

in 1951, and introduced by the Conservatives in 1952. The trick here was to introduce very low initial charges, but once the principle was breached they could rise and rise, and did so. Just look now at the teeth of people on low incomes to see the result. The move to means testing of child benefit – a retrograde step – has now been pushed through. The maternity grant – another acknowledgement of society's responsibility for children, dating from 1937 – has been abolished.

### Unemployment

But many “benefits” are nothing of the sort, simply devices to improve the lot of capitalists. For instance, unemployment benefit – the dole – was always in practice an acceptance that capitalism affords workers no right to work, and that it will from time to time require unemployment that enables workers to be available when required at the whim of the employer, and serves to keep wage rates down. For instance, Thatcher used North Sea oil revenues to fund unemployment as part of

a campaign to break trade unions' resistance to the employers.

Now the labour market has been flooded due to free movement of labour within the EU, making unemployment the biggest weapon of employers against workers, a deliberate method of depressing wages. Payments to the unemployed have been made subject to more and more harsh conditions by successive governments. Now, at a time when there is little work available in many parts of Britain, unemployed workers can be required to work for nothing to obtain this “benefit” – the ultimate indignity – or be “sanctioned” by having all payments stopped if judged to be not trying hard enough to find work. This form of slavery is unopposed by Labour. We need to fight for jobs, not the humiliation of unpaid labour and the dole. And we need to leave the EU.

Payments to those too disabled to work – a number greatly increased by the improved survival rates both of children with profound disabilities and those disabled later in life – are also being reduced or removed at a time when finding work for many can be almost impossible.

Disability payments became

**“Every worker should be able to find and pay for decent housing from wages, not benefits....”**

discredited when in the 1980s the Thatcher government sought to ease embarrassing unemployment figures by encouraging jobless workers to be registered as “sick” – a move which workers should never have accepted. Successive governments perpetuated the system. Now that it suits capitalism to do so, workers on long-term sickness benefit (retitled Employment and Support Allowance and soon to be rolled into the new Universal Credit) are accused of skiving.

### Tax credits

If unemployment benefit enables the state to charge workers in work to fund unemployment via taxation, Working Tax Credits are an even more blatant benefit to

## How we got to here: a brief history of benefits

THE PRESENT system was largely created by the 1945 Labour government based on the Beveridge Report (1942). Beveridge, note, was not a Labour politician: a liberal academic who served briefly as a Liberal MP in 1944/45, he was later as leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords.

The Thatcher government undermined many of the principles; later administrations continued the process. The major development is the erosion of the contributory element and its replacement by means-tested benefits.

National Insurance contributions for pensions and limited unemployment benefit were introduced by Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1911. It was applied to all workers, with an

expanded range of benefits from 1948.

The National Insurance Fund holds contributions and pays for contributory benefits (as well as specific payments to the NHS at times); it was not intended for tax credits or other support. The funds have a surplus currently growing by about £2 billion a year, forecast to decline rapidly. Unemployment Benefit became Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in 1996.

National Assistance (1948) created a social security “safety net” and abolished the last remnants of workhouses and the 350-year-old Poor Law. National Assistance payments were mostly means-tested, becoming Supplementary Benefit (1966) and Income Support (1988).

Disabled person employment support was set up in 1944, followed by Invalidity and then Incapacity Benefit. Disability benefits were replaced in 2008 by Employment & Support Allowance.

Housing Benefit transferred to local authorities from 1982, completed 1989 after Income Support was introduced.

Working Families' Tax Credits (1999) replaced Family Credit (1986).

Universal Credit is to be introduced later this year. It will replace income-based Jobseekers' Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits, and Housing Benefit by 2016. State Pensions will change to flat rate from then onwards. ■

employers. This institutionalising of low wages began as Family Credit in 1986, eventually becoming Working Tax Credit in 2003 under Labour. Working Tax Credit is a state top-up payment to low wage-earners – so a direct subsidy to employers who pay wages far below the level at which a worker can live. Even with the credit, it is still a poverty wage so employers are being subsidised to pay below-poverty wages with the subsidies paid for by other workers through taxes. A focus on cutting benefits, characterised as good for workers in work and not on poverty wages, takes the attention off the employer and on to a false battle between groups of workers.

Council Tax Reduction (also called council tax benefit) served the same function, though this was abolished in April this year, and the new “localised” system will compel 465,000 households in London, for example, to pay more council tax, many for the first time.

Every worker should be paid enough to live on without relying on such benefits.

### Housing benefit

Another great capitalist wheeze is Housing Benefit, a rent subsidy, introduced in 1982 (and replacing other systems of subsidising rents in place since the early 20th century). It was introduced in the Thatcher era of the sell-off of council housing and increasing deregulation of the private rental sector. It partly or wholly paid rents of low income tenants in private housing.

By the end of the 1990s government control of private rents had virtually disappeared and the “free” market apparently reigned supreme – except that landlords were now highly subsidised by Housing Benefit, enabling them to keep rents high for tenants who would otherwise be unable to pay.

Buy-to-let landlordism has become a career choice for many – making a killing for greedy parasites, and all subsidised by the rest of us. Most Housing Benefit claimants are in work but earning insufficient to pay the high rents.

Rocketing private rents in cities such

as London where uncontrolled migration has contributed to an acute housing shortage have brought with them horror stories of large families costing £2,000 a month in Housing Benefit – stories which have eased the government’s path in changing the rules. Many families are now being forced to move out of newly desirable parts of inner cities to cheaper rental areas on the margins – enabling the property companies to move in and make a fortune. So subsidised landlords give way to the even bigger profiteers created through the housing shortage.

### Decent pay for all

Workers need a programme of council housing to meet our needs, and an end to the shortage caused by mass migration. EU membership, government policy and the market in housing have spectacularly failed us. Every worker should be able to find and pay for decent housing from wages, not benefits.

At the last count, the annual Housing Benefit bill is £22.4 billion, while Working Families’ Tax Credits cost £30 billion. Compare this to cuts or threats to universal benefits. Winter fuel payments to pensioners cost £2.2 billion a year, free travel around £1 billion, TV licences for over-75s £600 million. The cut to child benefit saves £2 billion a year.

### Scroungers and fighters

So who is choosing “a lifestyle of dependency living off the public purse”? Who are the scroungers and skivers? To the poverty-wage employers and private landlords who make their money out of the benefits system, add to the list those such as the bailed-out bankers, profit-making privatised public service providers, offshore account tax cheats, MPs fiddling expenses or moving smoothly from ministerial office into private directorships, MEPs living on massive tax-free allowances, and so on and on. Successive reductions in corporation tax over time by Brown and Osborne from 33 per cent to 21 per cent next year, lowering of top rates of income tax for the very wealthy, and the laughably low levels of Council Tax paid by



**Glasgow Rent strike, 1916. Our ancestors took on landlords at source, instead of living with a system that props them up.**

the obscenely rich in their London West End palaces. Capitalists will make us pay for their system in every way possible if they can get away with it.

Workers are rightly resentful of fellow workers if they are content to live off the system – especially where they see people arriving from other countries, having contributed nothing to our society, taking advantage of our welfare system – this needs to be dealt with by leaving the EU.

But we must stop allowing the erosion of those universal benefits which any decent society needs, and which allow dignity. We must also stop putting up with the humiliation of “top up” benefits and prevent our society from becoming typified by the hated charity hand-outs of food banks for workers – the “poor and needy” who are pitied.

Reject pity and passivity. The answer to the misery of unemployment is work. The solution to poverty pay is pay we can live on. Neither has ever been handed out to us by capitalism. They come only as the fruits of struggle. Our ancestors knew that when they created trade unions, and we must recognise this now.

Fight for pay!  
Jobs not dole!

■

Defeated militarily and no longer able to extract wealth from Africa, the imperialist powers found new forms of holding on to power: trade agreements, buying up resources...

## Capitalism's ruthlessness in Africa as it succumbs to neo-imperialism

IN 1961, THE UN General Assembly passed the "Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples". After the dreadful spectacle of the imperialist Scramble for Africa (see April issue of WORKERS), it seemed that at last a new era was dawning for the continent. This declaration was a result of newly independent nations gaining UN membership and exercising their collective power through the General Assembly.

Two years later, in 1963, the UN Special Committee on Decolonization was set up to oversee the implementation of the Declaration. That same year the Organisation of African Unity was established by those African countries that had won independence and by liberation movements from a number that were still colonies.

### Unity

The OAU aimed to promote African unity, to defend the territorial integrity and independence of African countries, and to fight to eradicate all forms of colonialism. It was opposed to any outside interference in the internal affairs of African countries, took a neutral stand in the Cold War and called for respect of the artificial borders created by the colonial powers. The USSR, revolutionary Cuba and China had already committed their support, both financial and material, for colonial liberation movements around the world. So there was weight behind the liberation struggles.

But in Africa, the old colonial powers were not just going to roll over and die, and would not give up this continent with its wealth of resources and its cheap labour. They tried everything they could to keep control, even after independence.

The colonial powers tried to hand over power to leaders who would do their bidding, as Britain had done in Libya and Egypt. They tried ruthless suppression, as in Kenya. They tried post-independence sabotage as in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique.

Britain had the Commonwealth to maintain its influence in newly independent nations, many of which had no indigenous infrastructure other than liberation movements and churches. They were going

to need aid. But aid came only with strict conditions, and woe betide any country that was seen not to abide by those conditions – Zimbabwe a case in point.

France, which had tried to merge several West African territories into one to maintain its control, had somewhat similar arrangements with its Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Portugal, however, having no such mechanism, decided to fight every liberation movement that it was in conflict with. The advent to power in 1979 of Thatcher and in 1980 of US President Reagan saw a new approach.

The Portuguese had ruthlessly resisted all struggles by liberation movements in its resource-rich colonies, while Cuba and the USSR were actively supporting those movements. These wars precipitated a military coup in Portugal in 1975 by military officers tired of the war and its high Portuguese casualties. As a consequence, those colonies won their independence that year, and the new governments were friends of Cuba and the USSR.

### Cold warriors

Reagan and Thatcher, the two Cold Warriors, vowed to reverse this. South Africa was already ahead of them in the game. It had invaded Angola, determined to get to Angola's capital, Luanda, before the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola – People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), which had led the liberation struggle, declared the independence of Angola.

South Africa not only tried to topple the MPLA government in Angola but along with Ian Smith's white supremacist regime in Rhodesia was actively sabotaging Mozambique. Thatcher and Reagan put their weight behind the South Africans in order to cling on to this part of Africa.

Mozambique, independent in 1975 and led by Frelimo (Mozambique Liberation Front), is a good example of how imperialism tried to regain control of a newly independent nation. Mozambique declared in its constitution that socialism was the nation's objective. The government began to build schools and clinics.



Children in post-independence Angola – a country...

Then it complied with UN sanctions on the white supremacist government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia and closed the so-called Beira corridor, which linked Rhodesia to the sea and had been Rhodesia's lifeline. Smith's government reacted by creating RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana – Mozambican National Resistance), an armed force that began destroying schools and clinics, killing doctors and teachers. This developed into a ruthless war.

When the Smith regime was replaced by ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and majority rule, South Africa stepped in to fund RENAMO which, by now, was destroying the country's infrastructure. South African troops were directly involved.

Foreign intervention, coupled with drought, caused Mozambique to suffer what became known as the South African man-made famine: 200,000 starved to death while the death toll from the war reached 1 million.

Mozambique pleaded for food aid. The biggest donor was neighbouring Zimbabwe. The US, the biggest contributor to the World Food Programme, kept its food aid to

Africa in the old colonial way, imperialism has turned to new resources, and aid are all tools of control...

## Locks the continent dry of resources.



Photo: Workers

...that fought for its independence.

a minimum. When the situation was so bad that Mozambique had no alternative, when even its President, Samora Machel, had been murdered by South Africa, it pleaded directly to the Americans.

The US agreed to provide food aid on certain conditions. 1) Mozambique and Frelimo must remove all reference to Socialism in their constitutions. 2) Frelimo must share power with RENAMO and, most importantly, 3) No aid to be handled or distributed by the government, but instead all aid must be distributed by NGOs.

This effectively removed all power from a government now totally dependent on aid, and handed power to NGOs, most of which were funded by USAID and run by Christian fundamentalist organisations. Mozambique was re-colonised by NGOs and the churches.

The South African-led war on Angola supported by Reagan and Thatcher was also ruthless. It's another example of imperialism's determination to hold on to Africa. But Cuba was directly supporting Angola in many ways. The battle at Cuito Cuanavale in Southern Angola in 1987/8 (see [workers.org.uk/features/feat\\_0710/](http://workers.org.uk/features/feat_0710/)

[angola.html](#)) effectively marked the end of both the apartheid regime in South Africa and the colonialism defined by the Scramble for Africa of the 19th century.

There was no history of a working class in many African countries, and with the exception of South Africa, most economies were peasant agriculture. Many post-colonial countries were still dependent on big western companies exploiting their natural resources.

But EU and US industrial decline meant less demand there for many of the raw materials from Africa, while the demand from countries such as China, Russia, Brazil and India was rapidly growing, particularly from China. Is this neocolonialism? Given that the 19th-century Scramble for Africa was about finding resources and markets to satisfy the industrial revolution in Europe, the answer is possibly yes.

### Infrastructure

But this time it's not about sending armies and enslaving the native population. China builds infrastructure in the African countries it does business with instead of exchanging raw materials and commodities for cooking pots and beads. The Chinese build roads, railways, ports, airports, even houses and sports stadia. The African Cup of Nations football finals in Angola in 2010, for example, were only possible because China built all of the stadia. Imagine the Victorian capitalists doing this.

Yet there are Chinese hedge funds investing in Africa in exactly the same way as British or US hedge funds, so it is still capitalist exploitation. But EU and US holdings in Africa remain greater than China's \$200 billion worth of investment.

But what of the OAU? It was abolished in 2002 and replaced by the African Union (AU). The differences between the two are stark. The OAU declared that the old colonial boundaries should be respected. The AU says the opposite. The OAU declared that there should be no interference in a sovereign state's internal affairs. The AU says the opposite. (Hence Chadian troops in Mali). The OAU was a collective of sovereign states. The AU has an African Parliament. The AU is modelling

itself on the EU. There is even talk of a single currency.

But it's not straightforward, because Africa is not the EU. In 2009, for example, Muammar Gaddafi, President of the AU at the time and President of Libya, proposed to the AU the establishment of the Gold Dinar. This implied that those African countries exporting oil should sell it for gold and not the US dollar, and that a currency across the continent should be based on gold. This would have revolutionised the relative value of African currencies at the expense of the US dollar.

Gaddafi offered the publicly owned Libyan State Central Bank as the driving force to set it up. Two years later his country was destroyed by NATO, he was murdered, and the new regime's first act was to abolish the State Central Bank and set up a private Central Bank.

The jury may still be out on the AU. It is surely not comparable to ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas, which is based on sovereignty and non-interference. Perhaps more worrying is the foreign militarisation of Africa. The US has had a major base at Djibouti since it established the US Africa Command. There are now US drone bases not just in Djibouti, but in Niger, Libya, Ethiopia and the Seychelles and other US military bases in Uganda, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and shortly South Sudan.

France has military bases in Mali as well as Gabon, Ivory Coast and Djibouti. Britain also maintains a military presence in some of its former colonies.

Meanwhile, capitalism's bleeding of the continent continues apace. Timber, minerals and commodities are sucked out of Africa to satisfy capitalism's need for these resources across the world, from China to Brazil and from the EU to the USA. Sometimes this fuels wars, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, (which has cost 4 million lives), in order to sate capitalism's rapacious appetite for such rarities as coltan, used in mobile phones, diamonds in Sierra Leone or Angola, and, of course, gold in Mali. The African people have yet to gain control of the resources of their continent to meet their own needs. ■

A book shows how countries must accept stagnant growth and unemployment of 20 per cent or more indefinitely – or leave the euro.

## Trade imbalances and the eurozone debacle

**THE GREAT REBALANCING, Michael Pettis, Princeton University Press 2013 ISBN 9780691158686 £19.95**

WHY IS the eurozone in such a mess? Is it really, as the Germans tell it, down to the bad habits of its debtor nations? One economist has uncovered a hidden reason. In his book *THE GREAT REBALANCING* Michael Pettis examines capitalist political economy in 2013. His view is that like the globalisation before 1914, the globalisation of today has caused massive trade imbalances that are currently masquerading as a debt crisis within certain countries.

Among his examples is the eurozone debacle, where the consequences of domestic trade imbalances between euro countries are disguised as a debt problem within the overall euro balance sheet. Pettis calls the exporting of capital within the eurozone by certain countries tantamount to importing demand from other euro participants. For example, exporting capital from Germany to Spain has contributed towards an ever-increasing German trade surplus matched exactly by an ever-increasing Spanish trade deficit.

He describes Germany as effectively taking the same position lampooned by Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 as the Republican position:

“A puzzled, somewhat sceptical Alice asked the Republican leadership some simple questions:

‘Will not the printing and selling of more stocks and bonds, the building of new plants and the increase of efficiency produce more goods than we can buy?’

‘No,’ shouted Humpty Dumpty, ‘the more we produce the more we can buy.’

‘What if we produce a surplus?’

‘Oh we can sell it to foreign consumers.’

‘How can the foreigners pay for it?’

‘Why we will lend them the money.’

‘I see,’ said little Alice, ‘they will buy our surplus with our money. Of course these foreigners will pay us back by selling us their goods.’

‘Oh no not at all,’ said Humpty Dumpty. ‘We set up a high wall called the tariff.’ (In 2013 read tariff to mean the German trade priced euro.)

‘And,’ said Alice at last, ‘how will the foreigners pay off these loans?’

‘That is easy,’ said Humpty Dumpty. ‘Did you ever hear of a moratorium?’”

Today’s euro equivalent of a moratorium is the EU memorandum, where the European Central Bank forces a country into re-scheduling debt built up through trade imbalance. The re-scheduling is conducted on the proviso that the debtor country agrees to cease to exist as a sovereign entity.

One of today’s Humpty Dumpties is Wolfgang Schäuble, the German Finance Minister, who said after the fall of Cyprus “I’m known for not giving in to blackmail, by nobody and nothing.” The tragedy in countries such as the Irish Republic, Spain and Portugal is that they fail to see the Alice analogy and instead want to be one of the virtuous countries that work hard, save and repay their debts and not be one of the EU “sinner states”.

### ‘Spendthrift’ nonsense

Imbalances caused by acquiescent government policies in both surplus and deficit euro countries cannot be unravelled by simplistic views on hard work, Pettis points out. To suggest that a country runs a trade deficit because its working class are spendthrift, lazy and save too little is nonsense. “A nation’s cultural preferences towards saving,” he says, “are irrelevant because EU policies have deliberately altered the domestic relationship between investment and savings.” Realising where their EU policies would eventually lead, today’s Humpty Dumpties cloak their attack with prattle about blackmail.

The book is also careful to point out that although Germany has low debt and a high trade surplus, German workers during the coming period will be highly exposed to a fall in effective product demand. Pettis explains that France in the early 1930s was in a similar position. He cites comments made by an analyst at the time:

“One of the reasons for which opinion abroad admires the French people is their resistance to the world economic depression. France’s harmonious economic structure and the prompt measures taken by the authorities have facilitated this



Photo: Workers

Heraklion, Crete: Greek workers demonstrate against

resistance. The natural prudence of the French people, their ability to adapt, their modernity, and their courage have contributed equally.”

Conditions quickly changed. Demand for French goods vanished and very soon the French economy was in a shambles and was forced off the Gold Standard in a chaotic devaluation.

Pettis in his book shows that euro moralisers propounding populist economic thinking are really saying that peripheral countries must accept stagnant growth and unemployment levels of 20 per cent or more indefinitely, or leave the euro.

The moralisers have spotted the contradiction in the minds of many European workers – although they rail against unemployment and wage repression, they have so far failed to grasp the nettle of euro exit, instead continuing to align themselves with their national ruling class in considering that option as even more unpalatable. Hence the now ex-Cypriot Finance Minister Michael Sarris was able to say, “Cyprus has avoided a disastrous exit from the eurozone.”

Workers’ lack of confidence to take the only realistic option available and force a euro exit has led to a dangerous situation that allows the ruling class to press home



inst EU-inspired cuts

its attack. This trait can also be seen in Britain, although the euro cheerleaders have had their guns spiked.

A number of British trade unions still align themselves with the British ruling class and its political parties in wanting to remain in the EU. Downward wages, high unemployment and the break-up of nations are all EU prerequisites. In reality euro recovery is a false promise and it must be dawning on even the most economically befuddled that the EU is the antithesis of British trade unionism.

Pettis (who is not a Marxist-Leninist), has made a similar contribution to that of John Hobson, whose book *IMPERIALISM: A STUDY* in 1902 was among the publications that prompted Lenin to write *IMPERIALISM THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM* in 1916.

Pettis not only examines the euro but also analyses various forms of trade intervention, the US/Chinese trade relationship and the role of the US dollar as the dominant reserve currency. Much of his analysis rests on counter-intuitive thinking that reveals massive flaws in current populist economic views particularly concerning the capitalist balance of trade mechanism. This makes a refreshing change to the trite nonsense written about economics so often found elsewhere. ■

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

# WAGING WARS ABROAD

**Capitalism not only generates periodic world war but also on a regular basis unleashes war against individual nations. Unable to tolerate others' independence or accept restrictions on their influence, the leading capitalist powers deliberately embark on imperial wars against countries that irk and offend them. Since 1945, there have been 50 interventionist wars by powers such as the United States, Britain and France. These are warfare-gearred states, ever ready to bully weaker, less powerful, more vulnerable countries. This kind of war is calculated to coerce and intimidate, sending a brutal message to everyone in the world: don't upset our interests, or, if you do, face the consequences.**

War abroad is the imperial counterpart to war against workers at home. Hypocritically, these vengeful, destructive wars are always presented as "freedom-loving operations" to "topple nasty dictatorships" or "regime-change rogue states". In reality, each invasion brings death, economic dislocation, destruction of the social infrastructure and gross political interference. Misery and setback overwhelm the assaulted people while imperial plunder of the nation's assets is condoned by amenable, imposed placemen. Imperialism uses war to "adjust" the policies of states it disapproves of and to set the tone generally.

The real "axis of evil" today is the set of imperial powers which terrorise the world by aerial bombardments and blitzkrieg campaigns for the aggrandisement of profit and exploitation. The only "rogue states" are the ones that presume to take extraordinary measures to police the rest of the world and attack nations that pose no threat.

Wars are targeted against specific nations in order to control resources, minerals and trade and to dominate countries and regions. There is still the urge to empire but without the old-style colonial rule, except during bursts of direct military intervention.

War abroad damages and distorts the development of the invaded countries, but its costs are not limited to the peoples and countries violated: it also diminishes and impairs those at home who allow it to happen. The price comes in the form of distorted budgets, crude jingoism, the deaths of our young in foreign engagements, the distraction it allows from our real problems and the return of ex-soldiers to our society with severe physical and psychological damage.

War abroad can no longer be employed very easily. Since the defeat of the United States in Vietnam at the hands of a people's war, it is a stratagem fraught with danger. Imperial armed forces get bogged down in places like Afghanistan and Iraq while creating new forms of enmity to their rule. The financial costs of modern warfare are crippling.

More of us must take steps to end these vicious wars abroad. We must oppose attacks on Syria and prevent aggression against Iran.

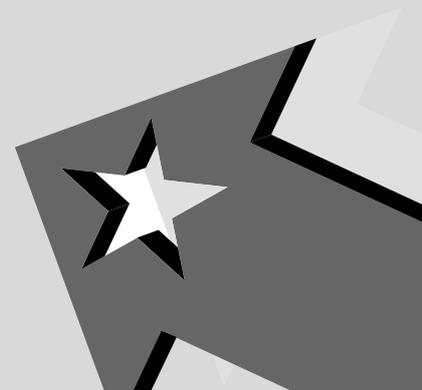
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# Back to Front – Buried, but not yet dead

**‘Thatcherism needs a stake through the heart. If you want to see the end of it, fight to rebuild Britain...’**

SO THATCHER finally died. Who says there’s no good news any more? Her last abode was a suite at the Ritz in London, a nursing home for the incurably rich and snobbish. Old and frail, memory and mind sapped and wandering, rootless and parasitic, she had grown into a grotesque caricature of the capitalism she worked for – the capitalism we in Britain have yet to destroy.

When she was driven from office by popular disdain and the cowardice of her colleagues, all red-eyed in the back of a ministerial car, there were celebrations in workplaces all round the country. It was the best day for off-licences since the World Cup a quarter of a century earlier. That was a great day, but it turned out to be too soon to celebrate.

Margaret who? To many she was just a tale told to children, a monster of myth. No one under 30 today was in secondary school by the time Thatcher was finally thrown out of office, today’s school leavers not even born.

But there is a collective memory, which needs to be acquired by those without direct experience of her rule, and re-remembered by others. “There is no such thing as society,” she said, and made the thought father to the deed. She waged constant war on the working class at home, destroying our coal mines in order to destroy a union. She delighted in war abroad – Iraq, Afghanistan, Ireland, Argentina.

For all her flag-waving, it was she who masterminded the Maastricht Treaty

of 1992, which set up the European Union and paved the way for the single currency. It was she who condemned Britain to the European Union’s single market and the removal of border controls. Free movement of goods, capital and labour – the three lynchpins of the EU’s assault on our sovereignty. Her very first act as prime minister was to lift controls on the export of capital. Some patriot!

It was a reactionary offensive that hasn’t stopped. Blair adored her, and her politics. Brown invited her back to Downing Street for tea, her first visit since her expulsion. Cameron and Clegg continue her work. Better for her to have lived and Thatcherism to be dead than the reverse.

As a working class we need to consider not just how we allowed her to come to power and continue in it for those 13 dreadful years, but how even more shamefully we have allowed her politics to thrive for the 21 years since she was cut off from power.

But it is too soon to dance on her grave. Until we have reclaimed our sovereignty, taken back control of our energy supply and water, our post and our rail, our telecommunications and the industries that were our life blood, that would be mere self-indulgence.

Like the undead, her hand still reaches from the grave. Thatcherism needs a stake through the heart. If you want to see the end of it, fight to rebuild Britain. ■

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