

# WORKERS

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HISTORIC NOTES



THE TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS 14

## FOOTBALL: WRECKED BY CAPITALIST GREED

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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# WORKERS

## “Playing the numbers

THE WORKINGS of capitalism remain a mystery to its proponents. They tell us “the market” decides, and that everything depends on “confidence”.

When things go right, or seem to, it shows how wonderful the system is. When they go wrong, well, that’s a surprise. And when they don’t make sense, that’s another mystery.

In August the statistics told us that the economy was in decline but that employment was on the rise. Truly, an economic miracle!

Precisely what is going remains – true to form – a mystery, but one fact emerges clearly:

that the government’s definition of an employed person is not the same as most people’s. The government says that if you work just a bit, then you are working. With increasing numbers working part-time or intermittently, that’s increasing numbers who don’t appear on the jobless totals – but who certainly don’t count themselves as employed.

If things carry on like this, we will reach full employment when the economy disappears completely – the ultimate triumph of capitalism. Of course, by then there may be no statisticians left to report the good news. ■

## Spare a penny for the MoD

HELP FOR Heroes has been phenomenally successful as a charity. Huge sums are routinely raised for it around the country. But now at last soldiers themselves have been sounding the alarm. As one former Royal Marine, himself a patron of the charity, pointed out last month, it seems to take its orders from the Ministry of Defence. The interests of ordinary squaddies come second.

The bulk of the money raised is earmarked for showcase facilities so that the Ministry of

Defence can boast about what it is doing without having to dig into its budget. Meanwhile, ex-servicemen are having to pay themselves for decent prosthetic limbs. In fact, the only soldiers it helps are those actually in the services. Leave, and you can forget it.

So money is being raised not for ex-soldiers, but for the Ministry of Defence to build centres it should be building anyway. It’s a funny kind of charity whose purpose is to directly subsidise the government. ■



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# Rail madness exposed

THE MADNESS of Britain's privatised railways was cruelly laid bare by recent government announcements. Huge fare increases from next year, and the appointment of a new operator for the West Coast Main Line from London to Glasgow, highlighted the fact that the railways are being run to maximise profits for private companies rather than being run as a vital public service.

Rail user groups and unions condemned average fare increases of 6.2 per cent from January 2013, with some fares going up by 11 per cent. At a time when salaries are falling in real terms, such massive increases in commuting costs will hit hard-pressed communities and do nothing to boost Britain's ailing economy. Even some government MPs are getting jittery.

First Group has wrested West Coast from Virgin, winning the race to the bottom in their bid, which promises to make huge payments to the government over the 15-year franchise. The only way it can do so is to make swingeing cuts to staff in order to protect its profit margins. RMT has already warned First that it will defend vigorously the jobs of their members, taking industrial action if necessary.

We were treated to the nauseating sight of the politician's favourite entrepreneur Richard Branson protesting about Virgin having lost the franchise. He failed to mention the fact that had he won, he was planning much the same cull of jobs.

The West Coast is the first franchise to be awarded since the infamous McNulty Report, which advocates reducing costs on the railways by reducing staff and service quality, and jacking up fares. With the government having wholeheartedly accepted the report, recent announcements come as no surprise.

The profiteering private rail companies now receive upwards of three times the public subsidy received by British rail at the time of privatisation in 1994, says railways expert Christian Wolmar. There is growing public support for the campaign to seize back the railways from the grip of privateers and return it to public ownership and control. It is a campaign that has become much more urgent. ■



Virgin train at Birmingham New Street.

## WAGES Unite survey

UNITE THE UNION estimates that the average monthly pay of its members is £150 less than a year ago, and 82 per cent who responded to a union survey said that their wages didn't last the whole month. Of those 38 per cent had to be helped by family and friends, 29 per cent had a second job or fell back on their savings, 21 per cent had an overdraft or used credit cards and 12 per cent had to resort to payday loans. Money that had to be borrowed was used mainly to pay for rent or mortgage or fuel bills or to put petrol in the car.

- In a separate report on the £2 billion a year payday loan business, Which? found that borrowing £100 for 30 days cost from £15 to £40. In one case with interest, fees, interest on the fees, debit/credit card charges, etc, the repayment on a £150 loan for 28 days would have been £205. ■

## US Urban bankruptcy

STOCKTON, the river port city 90 miles east of San Francisco particularly badly hit by the US property crash, could become the largest American city to go formally bankrupt. A quarter of the city's police force has been cut, a third of its fire staff and 40 per cent of all other workers. Wages and medical benefits of the remaining workforce have been slashed.

Violent crime rates are now among the highest in the US and the unemployment rate is nearly twice the national average. The Californian cities of Mammoth Lakes and San Bernardino have also filed for bankruptcy. ■

**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 jobless zone**

EUROZONE UNEMPLOYMENT was 11.1 per cent in May, the highest level since records began in 1995. Meanwhile, manufacturing is contracting: Spain, Italy, Greece and France all reported steep falls.

Unemployment in Greece was a record 23.1 per cent; and 54.9 per cent for the 15-24 age group. Suicide rates are up by 40 per cent. Yet the Greek government wants to cut another 11.5 billion euros in 2013-14, breaking its pledge to renegotiate the bailout.

Spain is similar: 24.3 per cent unemployment and over 50 per cent amongst the young. The number of households with no wage earner has risen by 10 per cent since January, up to 1.7 million. Over 1 in 5 of Spain's 47 million people are at risk of poverty. The government wants to cut 27 billion euros, yet by mid-2015 Spain faces a funding need of 547.5 billion euros. That's over half its GDP and more than half its debt.

**Helping Germany out**

THE BRITISH government is backing EU treaty changes Germany wants to keep the eurozone alive. It is pushing through a Bill to approve the necessary EU treaty change to give legal status to the EU's bailout funds, without calling the referendum it promised.

**We want out**

AN ANGUS REID poll in August about British membership of the EU found that 46 per cent of respondents would vote to leave; 29 per cent would vote to stay and the rest are undecided. The proportion of Britons who would be willing to adopt the euro as the national currency remains in single digits (6 per cent), and over 80 per cent would vote against any change. A separate poll in July found that 63 per cent of us want either less integration with the EU or complete withdrawal from it.

**Iceland's second thoughts**

ICELAND COULD withdraw its application for EU membership early next year after elections in June. The elected president Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson and runner up Thóra Anórsdóttir both campaigned against it – and won 85 per cent of the votes between them. Anórsdóttir asked, "who would rent a room in a burning hotel?" ■



Photo: Dariusz Gora/Shutterstock.com

## Milk action delivers results

IN JULY thousands of dairy farmers demonstrated in London against the latest cut in the price the big processors are paying them for milk. The reduction of about 2p per litre followed hard on the heels of a similar fall in May. Agriculture Minister Jim Paice was howled down when he suggested farmers should look at their own costs.

Days after the demonstration, hundreds of farmers blockaded milk processing plants throughout the country with their tractors and threatened to hold back their milk from suppliers – saying they would rather pour it down the drains at Westminster. Stephen Britten of the newly formed Farmers for Action said they could not go on any longer. Supermarkets must pay more for milk "but it has to come out of their profits and not from consumers". The National Farmers Union (NFU) reckons that its members are losing up to 6p on each litre of milk they produce and that many are deserting the industry.

The farmers' action has produced results. But as some of the main supermarkets increased the price paid to farmers, they have also deferred some of the price reductions planned for August and their agreement to a new code of conduct designed to give the farmers more bargaining power. The government has also said it will try to persuade supermarkets to source more of the milk used in cheese, butter and yoghurt from British farms rather than importing it.

In 1933 the Milk Marketing Board was formed to guarantee a market for British dairy farmers. It also ensured that milk was clean and free from diseases such as brucellosis. Production was controlled by any excess liquid milk being turned into butter or cheese for which the farmer got a lower price.

The Board was sacrificed as part of the deal for Britain joining the Common Market, the forerunner of the European Union. Only a system such as capitalism would destroy a coal industry in an island made of coal and a dairy industry in a land of rain and grass. Are we to end up drinking French milk in the same way that we now import Polish coal?

- According to publicly funded research, Britain imports 40 per cent of its food (see, for example, [www.foodsecurity.ac.uk](http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk)). Many people recognise that it is crazy to import food that can be grown here. Around the country local groups are springing up with the aim of tackling this issue – no point waiting for politicians to do anything! Just one example is Incredible Edible Prestwich and District – a community group set up two years ago by people living in and around Prestwich, in north Manchester. They have held a number of public meetings on the issue. For details of their next event, see What's On (page 5). ■

## AIRLINES

## EU threat to crew safety

NEW RULES proposed by the European Aviation Safety Agency would seriously threaten the safety of airline pilots, crew and passengers, says the British Airline Pilots Association, the pilots' union. For example, pilots could be required to land a plane after having been awake for 22 hours. The union accuses the agency of ignoring

scientific advice and points out that even Britain's present more stringent standards have their own weaknesses, such as the under reporting of fatigue.

The effect on air safety of tired pilots is a growing issue. For example over Canada recently a pilot nodded off and awaking with a start mistook the unusually bright planet Venus for an oncoming aircraft. Following correct procedure he immediately put the plane into a steep turn resulting in extensive injuries to passengers and crew. ■

## PORT WORKERS

### Victory at Portsmouth

QUAY ASSISTANTS at Portsmouth International Port are claiming victory after settling their dispute with the employer at the end of July. Unite regional officer Ian Woodland said, "This demonstrates the importance of collective action. We had a 100 per cent turnout on the vote for industrial action and this strong action made management reconsider its position.

The 18 assistants, responsible for tying up and releasing cross-Channel ferries, voted for industrial action earlier in June

after the employer decided to dismiss them and rehire them on inferior contracts – in effect creating a two-tier workforce, said the union. Among other things, the new contract demanded that quay assistants guarantee to service vessels beyond their contractual finishing time of midnight.

Management made their move against the workforce after hiring new staff on the inferior contracts. But under the agreement reached after the assistants balloted for action, the two-tier arrangement is to be scrapped. "Basically, management has agreed to bring people on inferior contracts up to the contracts and all overtime after midnight will be voluntary," said Woodland. ■

## Forensic archive at risk

THE GOVERNMENT wants to close the archive of the Forensic Science Service – all that is now left of nationally organised forensic provision, forcing each individual police forces across England and Wales to maintain its own storage system without extra funding.

The archive costs just £2 million to run and holds nearly 2 million case files, some going back over 30 years. It is regularly used to investigate unsolved crimes and in appeals against unsafe convictions, and has been characterised by the Association of Chief Police Officers as "a safe, secure and efficient facility".

Andrew Miller MP, chairman of the Science and Technology Select Committee, has warned: "They have destroyed a very valuable resource. They have put nothing in its place and miscarriages of justice will occur." He also pointed out the potential effect on future scientific advances that up until now have been possible with a central facility.

Alastair Logan of the Law Society, who was involved in the freeing of the Guildford Four, has described the closure as an act of vandalism and has asked how police forces will know, for example, about different rapes committed by the same person in different parts of the country. Dr Peter Bull of the University of Oxford, an expert in forensic sedimentology, says the new measures are totally inadequate and could lead to major miscarriages of justice. He called the decision "horrendous, absolutely horrendous".

Separately, new Home Office figures reveal that police officer numbers are at their lowest for nine years with a fall of 5,000 in the last year alone. The number of civilian police staff and community support officers has also fallen. ■

## EUROPEAN UNION

### Permanent bailout

THE EUROPEAN Union on 29 June agreed changes to its European Stability Mechanism. The ESM has become a permanent eurozone bailout fund, not for nations or governments, but for banks.

It can now give directly to failed private banks funds intended for indebted governments. Taxpayers' money is again hijacked to prop up failed banks. Once again, workers subsidise private profits and bonuses.

There is no limit set to the demands made on taxpayers. Workers face unlimited liability. Its constitution says, "ESM Members hereby irrevocably and unconditionally undertake to pay on demand any capital call made on them ... such demand to be paid within seven days

of receipt." (Article 9.) Its Article 8 says, "The authorised capital stock shall be 700 billion Euros", but Article 10 says, "The Board of Governors ... may decide to change the authorised capital and amend Article 8 ... accordingly."

Governments cannot take action against this unaccountable body. It is beyond review, beyond the law.

As its constitution says, "The ESM, its property, funding, and assets ... shall enjoy immunity from every form of judicial process..." (Article 32.)

Its "Governors, alternate Governors, Directors, alternate Directors, as well as the Managing Director and other staff members shall be immune from legal proceedings with respect to acts performed by them in their official capacity and shall enjoy inviolability in respect of their official papers and documents." (Article 30.) ■

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### September

**To 9 September. Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2DD.**

#### Make it in Great Britain

With all the focus on the finance industry and its alleged importance to Britain, a welcome look at the country's manufacturing champions, showcasing leading products and processes from a wide range of industries.

**Sunday 2 September, 11am to 4.30pm  
Burston School Strike Rally**

Village green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk. Celebrating the longest strike in British history, a fight against the local squirearchy. Speakers, entertainment, march, stalls. Car and coach parking available in Burston. The nearest railway station is four miles away at Diss, but several organisations are laying on coaches. More info at [burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/the-rally/](http://burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/the-rally/)

**Wednesday 12 September, 7.30pm.  
British Legion, Bury Old Rd (near Heaton Park Metrolink), Prestwich**

#### Food Growing Revolution in Cuba

Public meeting organised by Incredible Edible Prestwich. In 1989 the collapse of the Soviet Union meant Cuba lost its main export trade and its economy was dramatically destabilised. Then the US tightened its existing trade embargo. The Cuban people, almost totally isolated from the rest of the world, faced starvation. But rather than roll over and die, Cuba responded to the crisis with a restructuring of agriculture. Can we learn from the experience of Cuba? Can we produce more of our food locally and still at reasonable cost? Can we create jobs and a greater sense of community in the process? Come to the meeting and find out more. For info, see <http://incredible-edible-prestwich.org.uk/events>

**Thursday 27 September, 7.30pm.  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.**

#### "The European Union – War on Europe's Peoples"

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. The European Union doesn't just want to break up Britain. It wants to destroy all independence within Europe and subject its nations' peoples to direct rule by Brussels – and by capitalism. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

## Energy: eyes wide shut

THE GOVERNMENT'S Energy Bill and Electricity Market Reforms (EMRs) are clearly at odds with the TUC's 2011 "Roadmap for Coal" strategy, but like previous governments this one has its fingers crossed and its eyes firmly closed. The drive from the EU, signed up to by all British governments since the 1984-85 miners' strike, has been for a mix of low-carbon generation. This has meant essentially the dash for gas with the cosmetics of wind farms polluting the countryside and coasts, closure of coal power stations and either indecision or closure with regard to nuclear power stations.

The challenges to Britain's energy industries are clear: to provide a low-carbon generation mix; to implement carbon capture and storage; to provide security and affordability of supply.

The numbers employed in coal mining and the electricity supply industry have dwindled to the lowest ever: around 60,000 miners and 4,250 power station workers. But there is the potential to increase those employed, adding between 150,000 and 400,000 highly skilled wealth-generating jobs, by using Britain's energy expertise to become an energy-building centre for the world.

## Where the power comes from

Understanding Britain's electricity supply industry is critical. There are an estimated 1000 years of coal reserves in Britain. Britain mines 18 million tonnes of coal at present and imports approximately 34 million to make up the coal-fired power station burn of 52 million. Nineteen of these power stations produce 28 per cent of Britain's generation; gas generation produces a further 47 per cent, with nuclear, renewables and imports making up the rest. Britain is committed to substantial decarbonised-fuel generation by 2030 with complete carbon-free generation by 2050.

There are 28 gigawatts of coal-fired generation at present. Under the EU Large Combustion Plant Directive five coal-fired power stations will close in 2015, taking 8 GW out of the coal-fired power stations' capacity and contribution to demand.

The government plan is that imports of gas will cover the shortfall. Otherwise the shortfall will mean instability of supply and power cuts. Deals to import ever-increasing amounts of gas from Norway, Russia and North Africa are literally in the pipeline. And then a gas-fired power station – a glorified gas fire in an aircraft hangar – can be thrown up in months as opposed to the 10 to 15 years lead-in time to build a coal or nuclear power station, subject to planning permissions, modernised designs and carbon capture technology being in place. To build a new coal mine would take a similar lead-in period of 10-15 years.

But gas is not clean, reliable in supply or in the long run affordable. So the question as to what happens first – provision of clean, reliable, affordable energy or power cuts – is the question exercising many minds in industry. ■

## With the TUC Congress convening in renaissance in recruitment. But the g unions...

# Trade unions: collective

THE BRITISH STATE has released the results of its latest Labour Force Survey. What does it tell us about trade union membership and activity? A different picture emerges in public and private sectors, but it is not all gloom and doom. Overall a drop of 143,000 trade union members, but with an increase of 43,000 members in the private sector. That means 186,000 public sector trade unionists lost, but bear in mind there were 369,000 public sector jobs cut in the last 12 months.

Membership density in the public sector is up, representation in bargaining units is up, trade union presence in workplaces is up. The private sector, though increasing members by 43,000, saw density drop by 0.1 per cent, while bargaining remains the same at 16.9 per cent and presence in the workplace dropped marginally from 29.6 to 28.5 per cent.

But the increase in this sector reversed a huge drop during the previous three years, where over 450,000 members were lost, leaving 3.9 million members in the public services and 2.5 million members in the private sector – 6.4 million TUC affiliates. It is estimated that non-TUC affiliates account for roughly the same number with density the best since 2000 and presence in bargaining units up for the first time since 1998.

### Desertion?

So after two years of the Coalition and its economic programme of poverty, have workers deserted their trade unions? Obviously not. There are quirks in the figures as Lloyds Bank and Royal Bank of Scotland trade unionists are now classed as the "public sector" and as yet it is not possible to determine how many outsourced trade union members who have been privatised have contributed to the increase in the private sector.

But the most draconian anti-union legislation in Europe is about to be made even more vicious. This time the attack is not only against the collective of trade unions but also at every individual employment right exercised by workers. The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill is part of the Coalition's attack. Their rhetoric is that over-regulation in the workplace holds entrepreneurs and business back from growing out of the economic disaster they have been responsible for.

"Efficiency" and "competitiveness" are the buzzwords, to create cowed workers who will do whatever they are forced to do while the threat of dismissal and long-term unemployment and poverty hang over them. In other words, all legal protections achieved in the workplace need to be removed. Hence the much-trailed Adrian Beecroft report on employment law, Lord Young's report on Health and Safety, the review on sickness absence, the "streamlining" of the national minimum wage and so forth. All are intended to return the whip hand to the "masters" in the workplace and a clear understanding by us, the "servants", what servitude means.

So what is Beecroft's proposal? He says, "I strongly favour a fourth approach which allows an employer to dismiss anyone without giving a reason provided they make an enhanced leaving payment....This type of dismissal could be known as Compensated No Fault Dismissal." So scrap unfair dismissal law and legal precedents and go back to hiring and firing as in the good old days – but with a caveat of limiting compensation to £12,000 maximum. Plus raise the one-year qualifying period for compensation to two years. This means employers can often sack without even paying any paltry sum.

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Brighton this month, there are encouraging signs of a possible  
 overnment is gearing up for yet another legal assault on trade

# action is the keystone of strength



Photo: Andrew Wiard/andrew-wiard.com

Trade union membership in the private sector has been rising, including at the RMT, which has maintained tight organisation.

**CPBML/Workers**

**Public Meeting, London**

**Thursday 27 September, 7.30 pm**

**“The European Union – War on Europe’s Peoples”**

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

The European Union doesn’t just want to break up Britain. It wants to destroy all independence within Europe and subject its nations’ peoples to direct rule by Brussels – and by capitalism. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

*Continued from page 6*

Small businesses would be exempt from almost all employment legislation. Discrimination law as introduced in the Equality Act 2010 is to be binned. Employment Tribunal Procedures and Awards are to be stood on their heads and fees for every case lodged to be introduced – make the victim pay! There are further attacks on pensions and tweaks to the Criminal Record Checking System which will introduce additional costs of £50 million for a watered down system. Changes are being made to work permits; getting migrant workers into Britain by bypassing Jobcentre Plus and going straight abroad to recruit.

There is a full-blown attack on the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations, most of can have a coach and horses driven through it even now. Likewise, we see weakening of collective redundancy consultation and Equal Pay legislation; abolition of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority; and abandonment of the Agency Workers Regulation – another EU directive ineffective in protecting agency workers.

Beecroft's and similar reviews were leaked and then extensively published in 2011. The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill in nine short pages addressing employment law brings in all if not worse options though it drops the Compensated No Fault Dismissal. It introduces a lesser measure whereby an employer can be "fined" up to £5,000 for sacking someone unfairly, a small sum in the scale of things.

Fees for hearings will be introduced; compensation for loss of earnings claims slashed by 65 per cent, which ironically Beecroft opposed; awards will be capped, with differing awards depending on the size of the company and so forth. In the name of setting business free, the existing employment law, which already works on the principle that a worker is guilty until proven innocent, should give a still bigger stacked hand to the employer.

Of course the idea that employment rights are what hold back business and economic revival is nonsense. Employment rights are a response to the inequality in

the workplace. They have never been a solution. With these changes, workers are going to have to face up to the reality.

There is no third way of ducking issues. There will not be that day in court which always gives the victim some illusion that all wrongs will be righted. Usually the worker loses anyway when the employer shows "reasonableness" in process or decision making despite behaviour which borders on criminal.

### **Back to the union**

So where does it bring us back to? Being organised in the workplace and asserting our collective rights as workers. That means being members of our respective and appropriate trade union. Not as some meaningless so-called community, divorced from the workplace, unwaged, non-working, with an affinity to a local pub or park, but as "The Union".

What does being the union mean? Coming together around our employer, around our skills, around our economic interests, around the things which unify us

at work or through the work, not some separate or sectarian agenda which removes us from the workplace.

What constitutes, past and present, our greatest strength and greatest victories? It is our collective action in the workplace, not dissipated outside the workplace – whether in election, demonstration, rent strike or other. The contradiction of being in conflict with the employer, whether public or private, large or small, being at the workplace as the sharp end is far more valuable and instructive than stepping outside and taking that energy elsewhere.

Workers are going to have to find out or rediscover that when under attack that the only form of defence is to attack. Our first move in battle will be to find re-awakening class consciousness. Workers might also reflect on the fact that every EU country and many others – as far flung as Australia and the USA – are almost identical in their clamour for their so-called austerity programmes. And the first thing to go are workers' rights at work. ■

## **M** Meet the Party

**The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings begins on 27 September, with further meetings on 15 November, 12 February and 11 June; 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 first meeting, on Thursday 27 September, is: "The European Union – War on Europe's Peoples". Details of further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk).

**M** Catch our WORKERS sellers this month at the Burston School Strike Rally (see What's On, p5).

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

Tragedy has followed farce as one of the most prestigious names in Scottish football has fallen victim to capitalist greed...

## How capitalism relegated Rangers



Photo: Workers

Rangers v Dundee at Ibrox, 2 May 2012. Rangers won 5–0. Now the erstwhile Scottish Premier League club is in Division 3...

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL has always attracted crooks and frauds. Many clubs and their supporters have suffered, the more so since rewards have grown greatly over the past 20 years. But few events have been as spectacular as the fall of Glasgow Rangers, one of the most prominent and successful clubs in Britain.

The dominance of English sport in the media and the 2012 Olympics have overshadowed the story, so too have other financial crises. In any other year this unfolding story would have made headlines across the country, not just locally in Scotland. The events at Rangers mirror those at other clubs, but few have been so dramatic or on the same scale.

Rangers FC started this season in Scottish League Division Three against Peterhead, until relatively recently members of the Highland League. They are beset by legal and financial difficulties and

are in dispute with the sport's governing body. Yet at the start of last season they had won three consecutive titles and expected to play in Europe every year. How did this happen?

The company running the club went into administration in February 2012, with potential debts of £134 million. The greatest established debt was £27 million owed to Ticketus, a finance company, and secured on three years' future ticket sales. This loan was part of deal by Craig Whyte to take over the club from a company run by long-term Rangers chairman Sir David Murray. Rangers were in effect under a double burden.

The forward ticket sales security was a similar arrangement to that which nearly brought down Leeds United a decade ago. Using the club's own assets to fund a takeover was the method used by the Glazers for their acquisition of Manchester

United in 2005.

The greatest threat to the club at the time of the administration was a tax tribunal case for which the potential liability is estimated at £93 million. A verdict from the tribunal is still awaited. The dispute with HM Revenue & Customs is about the alleged use of Employee Benefit Trusts (EBTs) to reduce tax bills of the club, the former owners and its players, over more than ten years. Payments through EBTs are not confined to football; they are used most notably in the financial sector for the same purpose – to avoid deduction of income tax and national insurance.

The BBC Scotland documentary *RANGERS, THE MEN WHO SOLD THE JERSEYS* broadcast in May, revealed that around 100 players, club staff and Murray Group

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employees benefited from the scheme through payments totalling £47 million, though several of those named deny receiving such untaxed payments.

After the club went into administration, the tragedy turned to farce. Despite much publicity and the obligatory stories of rescue by “lifelong” supporters backed by mysterious overseas businessmen, bidders dropped out one by one. The most often quoted reasons were uncertainty about the size of the debt and a lack of transparency about the dealings that led to the administration.

### Last bid

The last bid remaining was from a consortium led by Charles Green which bought Rangers’ assets for £5.5 million. Green was chief executive of Sheffield United from 1996 to 1998. At the end of the period that club’s losses had grown from around £60,000 to £5.9 million, which Green attributed to the large wage bill. Supporters at the time suggested instead that the club had been over-ambitious and poorly managed. While it’s too early to say if history will repeat itself, football has seen many serial offenders who pass from club to club, seeming to repeat their mistakes each time. That may be another burden for Rangers.

In May the Scottish Football Association (SFA) imposed fines and sanctions on the club and the now removed director Craig Whyte. These were in connection with a failure to disclose that in 2000 he had been disqualified as a company director for seven years. The SFA considered that he was not a fit and proper person to be a director and that both he and the club had brought the game into disrepute.

Whyte said none of this was going to affect his life, and shed crocodile tears for the club’s fans. Rangers’ supporters believe that it is unfair to burden the club with the mistakes of the past and to punish it to a greater extent than the perpetrators. They blame Whyte and Murray for effectively destroying the club. Fans ask more pointedly why the SFA is blessed with great

**“The whole of Scottish professional football is likely to lose sponsorship and other income as a result of Rangers’ demotion...”**



Photo: Workers

hindsight, but can never spot rogues before the damage is done, just like their counterparts in England.

Other factors caused Rangers greater problems than the SFA fines. Punishment for bringing the game into disrepute included a transfer embargo. The club can only sign players under the age of 18 for the next year.

England has a “football creditor” rule under which a club emerging from administration must first pay off debts to other clubs – at the expense of other creditors. No other type of business is allowed to do that and it does not apply in Scotland. Rangers owed money to other clubs in the Scottish Premier League (SPL), and were charged by the SFA with failing to pay gate receipts to Dundee United from a Scottish Cup match. That had consequences later on, when Rangers needed support from those clubs.

Green’s plan was apparently to take Rangers out of administration by coming to

an agreement with creditors, paving the way for a return to the SPL. Players and staff agreed wage cuts to enable last season’s fixtures to be completed. Such gestures were not going to be enough to satisfy their creditors and HMRC. The old company lost its SFA and SPL registrations and will eventually go into liquidation. A new company was set up and had to apply afresh to be admitted to the league.

There was no way out for new Rangers. There were disputes with players who rejected the claim by the new club that their registrations transferred over from the old company. A majority of SPL clubs rejected the application for re-election. The Scottish League only permitted Rangers to join at the bottom, playing against clubs whose regular attendance is lower than in the English Conference. The whole of Scottish professional football is likely to lose sponsorship and other income as a result of Rangers’ demotion.

There is no certainty that Rangers’ own troubles are over. In August the SFA set up a commission to consider if the EBT payments by Rangers broke SFA rules. As well as a massive tax bill, there could be further sanctions against the club for breach of SFA rules. These require that all payments to players must be declared; it’s said that those made into EBTs were not.

### Supporter-owned clubs

Supporters elsewhere have in several cases set up supporter-owned clubs after their club has been hijacked. The most notable and successful of these is AFC Wimbledon, which started from scratch in 2002 and is now in the Football League. In other cases fans have raised money to “rescue” a club, but have only succeeded in giving it to those who created the problem, with no control.

This tale has many parallels with the wider economic crisis. Supporters believe that a club is a social and cultural institution, and that it only exists because of their support and patronage. Capitalists believe that if they own the shares of the limited company currently running the club, it’s theirs to do with as they will. Both are right, and in the end irreconcilable. ■

## In the name of infrastructure, capitalists are to be enriched and our pensions funds looted. But there is another way...

# For genuine economic development

THE SHORT-TERM vision of today's capitalists is nowhere more obvious than when you look at infrastructure – for example gas, water, electricity, railways. At present Britain's decision-making on infrastructure is conducted by different sets of capitalists, influenced by different concerns and not paying much attention to each other. This goes some way to explaining the obstacles that currently restrict economic development. Apart from the maximisation of profits there is no strategy or co-ordinated planning.

Now is the time when we should catch up with infrastructure needs too long neglected. But the capital demands for this work are such that they could never attract voluntary investment on the scale required from those private organisations that currently control our utilities. This is because the costs and time needed for the building of new infrastructure would mean tying up their capital for too long before generating any profit.

So private capital hoarders are only interested in infrastructure already built from public finance which then becomes available for asset-stripping through political connivance.

Bearing this in mind, it is not by accident that Coalition thinking on infrastructure is confined to new projects only. It conveniently overlooks the privatised infrastructure that was grabbed when many members of our class decided to play the fool by agreeing that our assets should be levered from public ownership – as when the “Tell Sid” adverts of the 1980s urged people to buy a few shares in hitherto public utilities while the controlling stake was grabbed by finance capital.

So in an attempt to “skin the cat twice”, the Coalition now seeks to confine itself to greenfield sites and load start-up costs onto the backs of workers via a levy on the price of gas or other utilities. If they can find any way to wrap up and market such levies inside a bit of green environmental nonsense, then so much the better.

To run alongside this, the Coalition has also been investigating other ways of



Photo: Workers

using our assets to do the grunt work. As little helpers, the local government think-tank Localis and Lloyds Banking Group have come up with the idea of setting up a National Infrastructure Bank that could be used to syphon capital from our public-sector pension funds.

Our trade unions must be clear and active about this scheme. Having dismembered the Coalition's “we are all living longer” arguments for downgrading our pensions expectations, unions should now push forward and reject any proposal that permits our pensions assets to be used as infrastructure start-up fodder for capitalist companies.

### Go further

We need to go further – to rid ourselves of the parasites who pretend to address social needs through levies and raids on pensions funds and take back our existing infrastructure from private ownership and control. Such an approach would free up for use here a steady flow of revenue now going in the form of profits to companies mostly based abroad. Instead this revenue should be used to finance fresh

loans for new infrastructure arrangements.

Apart from the economic benefits and the ability to raise large loans immediately, it would also serve to bring together workers in building new projects throughout the British Isles, combining expertise with a national rather than a regional perspective. Such ideas are anathema to the Coalition, representing the exact opposite of the instructions they take from the EU on further privatisation and geographical division of the country – for example, to push forward the EU annexation of Scotland.

The British government, as we have recently experienced, has no problem with nationalisation. During 2008 Northern Rock, RBS and Lloyds (HBOS) were nationalised in all but name. But what that nationalisation amounted to was the socialisation of debt by placing bank losses onto the balance sheet of Britain's public accounts.

This private sector mess has since resulted in Government debt rising to some £1 trillion. In contrast, nationalising (socialising) our infrastructure would help provide a way out of the mess by fully utilising current infrastructure revenue to raise credit as an instrument of planning in pursuit of growth.

No doubt the idea of taking back these assets from the privateers will raise squeals from the opposition and naysayers hoping that we will fall for their fake National Infrastructure Banking ruse, and so on. But their smoke-and-mirror techniques are no longer working.

The desire of the working class, having experienced the effects of over 30 years of industrial decline, is now for genuine national economic development. This puts the Coalition, the private capital hoarders and the other managers of Britain's decline under the spotlight. In particular, they get uncomfortable when they are forced to talk about economic growth.

Within their limited vision they have no idea how to make it happen. Time for our class to take the lead. Only we have the country's interests truly at heart. ■

It's become a tried and tested formula: find some wealthy foreign the country they have left, build them into opposition heroes, th

## International law violated as NATO and its



Photo: Jan Kranendonk/Shutterstock.com

Syrians demonstrate for Syria and Assad in the centre of The Hague, Holland, on 19 May.

suspending Syrian arms deliveries, Qatar and Saudi Arabia had flooded the opposition with weapons, making sure that the best, including anti-tank missiles, went to their Salafist and Islamist protégés.

Meanwhile US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for regime change. With Kofi Annan's ceasefire plan in tatters, he organised the conference in Geneva and managed to achieve a common agreement between the five to call for the formation of a Government of National Unity in Syria, a timetable for elections in a fair environment and the maintenance of government institutions.

Later in the UN Security Council, Russia proposed a resolution to endorse the Geneva Agreement, only to find Britain, the US and former colonial power France proposing a resolution that reasserted their position of regime change and more sanctions. This is what led Kofi Annan to resign as UN/Arab League Envoy to Syria. While the British media falsely declared that Annan had blamed Russia for his resignation, the US, Britain, France, Qatar and Saudi Arabia rejoiced that they were now free to continue supporting the "opposition" with arms (hinting at anti-aircraft missiles), money, communications and special forces.

### Any opposition will do

The most quoted opposition group is the Syrian National Council that British Foreign Secretary Hague recognises as the "legitimate representatives of the people of Syria". Its main spokesperson is Paris-based Bassma Kodmani. The SNC is effectively made up of a plethora of Syrian exile factions and is currently based in Turkey. Kodmani has been vociferous in calling for foreign armed intervention in Syria. Interestingly, she attended her second Bilderberg Conference in Chantilly, Virginia. Bilderberg Conferences are a gathering of the world's capitalist elite. At the 2008 conference she listed herself as French.

In September 2005, after the collapse of Syrian/US relations, Kodmani was made Executive Director of the Arab Reform

NATO IS targeting Iran through its ally Syria. Sir John Sawers, head of MI6, is preparing to "fix" intelligence on Iran, as his predecessor Sir John Scarlett did by creating "dodgy dossiers" hyping the threat of Iraq's non-existent "weapons of mass destruction". On 4 July, Sawers told British senior civil servants that Iran is "two years away" from becoming a nuclear weapons state. Even the CIA does not believe this.

Since March 2011, al-Qaeda groups, covertly backed by NATO and Israel, have carried out terrorist attacks in Syria, just as they did in Bosnia in 1992-95, Azerbaijan in 1993 and Kosovo in 1997-98. These mercenaries have targeted the police, armed forces and innocent civilians, as the Arab League Observer Mission reported.

The USA and Britain are planning a "humanitarian" military intervention like the one on Libya. Special forces from Britain, France, Qatar and Turkey are already on the ground inside Syria in blatant violation of international law.

NATO and Israel are backing Kurdish separatists in northern Syria, who are linked to the Israeli-backed Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. The aim, as the Jerusalem Post said, is to 'Break Syria into Pieces'.

NATO countries and their new Islamist allies have deliberately undermined any solution to the unfolding tragedy in Syria, frustrating all efforts by Kofi Annan and the United Nations. Consider the 30 June Geneva meeting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and its aftermath. Despite Russia earlier

Foreign exiles with absolutely nothing in common with the people of Syria impose them on the country...

## Foreign allies seek to dismember Syria

Initiative, the brainchild of US neo-conservative think-tank the Council on Foreign Relations, which includes Peter Sutherland, the chairman of Goldman Sachs International, Brent Scowcroft, a former US National Security Advisor and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who succeeded him, among its board members. Financial oversight of ARI was transferred to the Centre for European Reform overseen by Lord Kerr, who is chairman of Royal Dutch Shell, and by Charles Grant, a member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, which lists as one of its members Bassma Kodmani, along with financier George Soros.

So here we have a coming together of intelligence, industry, banking and foreign policy with Kodmani, the “pro-democracy activist”, as she is hailed by the British media, at its centre. She is not the only one with links to the US and EU elites. Radwan Ziadeh, another oft-quoted spokesman for the SNC, is closely tied in with US neo-conservatives. Another is Najib Ghadbian, a political scientist at the University of Arkansas – and so it goes on.

### US funding

Many of the exile opposition groups declare funding from the US “Democracy Council”, which is in turn funded by the

**“NATO countries and their new Islamist allies have deliberately undermined any solution to the unfolding tragedy in Syria.”**

US State Department, headed of course by Hillary Clinton. Then there is the US Syria Democracy Program, which offers grants to “accelerate the work of reformers in Syria”, and then the Syrian Business Forum thought to have assets of \$300 million launched in Qatar to “support all components of the revolution in Syria”. There are around 200 disagreeing Syrian opposition factions, with now three “governments in exile” competing for these funds.

So these are the people that our Foreign Secretary, the US State Department and President Hollande want to take over in Syria, effectively the re-colonising of the country. Hollande’s first declaration after being elected as president of former colonial power France

was to call for military intervention in Syria. So NATO is following the example of what the US and Britain did in Iraq: build up wealthy foreign exiles who have nothing in common with the people living in Syria and impose them on the Syrian nation.

### al-Qaeda

But what about those fighting inside Syria? Two British news photographers were recently captured in Northern Syria by a brigade claiming to be al-Qaeda. Interviewed after their release they described their al-Qaeda captors as Chechens, Pakistanis and British. It’s known that Jihadists and Salafists from Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Iraq are among the fighters as well as some Syrians who fought for al-Qaeda in Iraq.

But the real factor determining who fights who is the clan system, fatally misunderstood by the US in Iraq. After US planes notoriously bombed a wedding party in northern Iraq close to the Syrian border in 2003, US forces were surprised that Syrian members of the same clan crossed the border into Iraq to avenge those deaths by killing Americans. Many of the groups in the “Free Syria Army” are clan based. The US and Britain should note that clans can also change sides. ■

## The think-tank that’s thinking about intervention

THE ROYAL United Services Institute for Defence and Security (RUSI), a London-based think-tank, with close links to both Britain’s Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon, says “some sort of western [military] intervention in Syria is looking increasingly likely ...” What the RUSI has in mind is outlined in its SYRIA CRISIS BRIEFING, A COLLISION COURSE FOR INTERVENTION.

It says, “A better insight is needed on the activities and relationships of al-Qaeda and other Syrian and international Salafist jihadists that are now entering the country in increasing numbers. The floodgates are likely to open even further

as international jihadists are emboldened by signs of significant opposition progress against the regime. Such elements have the support of Saudi Arabia and Qatar and would undoubtedly have a role in Syria following the collapse of Assad.

“Issues include the possibility of an Islamist-dominated or influenced regime inheriting sophisticated weaponry, including anti-aircraft and anti-ship missile systems and chemical and biological weapons that could be transferred into the hands of international terrorists. At the tactical level, intelligence would be needed to identify the most effective

groups, and how best to support them. It would also be essential to know how they operate, and whether support might assist them to massacre rivals or carry out indiscriminate attacks against civilians, something we have already witnessed among Syrian opposition groups.”

The briefing confirms that continued and effective support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels will eventually require the use of “air power in the form of fighter jets and sea, land and air launched missile systems” combined with the influx of Special Forces and the landing of “elite airborne and amphibious infantry”. ■

# The Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported for resisting starvation trade union...

## 1833 – 1838: The Tolpuddle Martyrs

IN 1833 FARM labourers in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle suffered severe reductions in their wages, prompting forty men to form a trade union. In February 1834 six of them were arrested: James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield and John Standfield. Convicted of swearing a secret oath, they were transported to Australia, triggering widespread agitation for their release and return.

Progressing alongside the Industrial Revolution was a parallel agrarian revolution, and poorly paid agricultural workers were a significantly large though often overlooked group. The long process of enclosure, whose high point came between 1770 and 1830, saw land carved up by act of parliament and given to bigger landowners. Lands once held in common and villagers' small strips of land for food production were expropriated. If you remained in the countryside and wanted to put food in your belly, you had no choice but to work for large landowners who dictated the rate of pay.

With no land of their own, the Tolpuddle labourers earned a weekly wage on the farm of George Frampton, a major local landowner. At the beginning of the 1830s the going rate in Tolpuddle was 9 shillings a week. This would have been sufficient to buy bread but not enough to pay rent and purchase other foods. Yet, in 1833, the landowners cut the rate from 9 shillings to 8, then later to 7 and were considering a further reduction to 6.

### Starvation wages

These were starvation wages. How did the rural poor respond to such desperate conditions? Some suffered in silence, others moved to work in the growing cities. Some fought back: in the Captain Swing uprisings across East Anglia in 1830, labourers set fire to hayricks: 644 were imprisoned, 481 transported, 19 hanged.

A different approach was taken in Tolpuddle. Farmworkers there met with delegates from the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU) and then founded the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in order to overturn

the wage reductions, which were an acute problem in remote parts of southern England, where farmers did not have to compete with the higher wages paid to workers in London or the northern industrial towns. The introduction of mechanisation and a surplus of labour made the situation worse.

The Tolpuddle farm labourers were prepared to stand firm and push Frampton for a living rate of 10 shillings a week. They presented their "perfectly reasonable demands" believing the landowner would have to agree, as they represented a substantial part of the village workforce. The landowners and local magistrates took

fright and wrote in 1834 to the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, to complain about the union. As there was no law against forming a union (the Combination Acts having been repealed in 1825), the six were arrested and tried at Dorchester Court for breaking an obscure 1797 law, the Mutiny Act, which prohibited the swearing of oaths to stop mutiny at sea. A jury was selected from those most unfriendly to the farm labourers' cause – landowners and land-renters.

Their stated "crime" was that each had made an oath promising not to reveal the content of their meeting. In fact the martyrs were punished for having the audacity to

### Rally commemorates martyrs' struggle



Photo: Workers

EVERY YEAR workers gather in Tolpuddle to remember the martyrs' struggle. Here's a report on this year's march from one participant.

"My coach from the Isle of Wight had 18 trade unionists of various political persuasions on board. I sold a number of copies of WORKERS and handed out leaflets on the '10 reasons to leave the EU.'

When I got to the Tolpuddle memorial site, I started to hand out the leaflets to everyone who walked near me. Most took the leaflet, but a small number, maybe, about three, people, gave them back, horrified at the thought of leaving the EU!

Most people took the leaflet and after glancing at it, some people said, "Only ten reasons to leave the EU. You must be joking". It would appear that most of the trade unionists who took the leaflet couldn't wait for a referendum on leaving the EU. After a number of lively debates on the topic and running out of leaflets, I got myself geared up to carry the Isle of Wight Trades Council banner.

There were banners from as far afield as South Wales, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth, London and all places in-between. It was quite a festive event, with bands playing various types of music, with everyone jigging about as they walked through the village of Tolpuddle.

While I was having a pint in the beer tent, I met a number of fellow Unite members. One, a young shop steward for the binmen in Southampton, had been involved in the industrial action with the City Council, which secured a restoration of his wages after they had been cut by the previous council administration.

I had a number of discussions with trade unionists about growing the union to fight for wages and conditions, and saving Britain from destruction by capitalism. I felt, as I boarded my coach back to the Island, it had been a good day." ■

## wages and forming a

form a union. Secret oaths undertaken by freemasons in their lodges were common, but secret oaths by workers smacked of revolution to the rulers of the day.

George Loveless observed in their defence, "We have injured no man's reputation, person or character. We were uniting to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and starvation." Summing up, the judge remarked, "If such societies were allowed to exist it would ruin masters, cause a stagnation in trade and destroy property" and "The object of all legal punishment is not altogether with a view of operating on the offenders themselves, it is also for the sake of offering an example and warning." The Martyrs were sentenced to a maximum sentence of seven years' transportation. Their convict ship took four months to reach Australia, where they worked like serfs in penal settlements, on chain gangs and farms in New South Wales and Tasmania.

### Grand Meeting

The treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs triggered huge opposition. In March 1834 over 10,000 people attended a Grand Meeting of the Working Classes called by the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. On 21 April a vast demonstration assembled near King's Cross in Copenhagen Fields. 800,000 signatures were collected for their release. Because families of the transported men and other members of the Tolpuddle union were refused parish relief by farm-owning local magistrates, the trade unionist London Dorchester Committee (LDC) collected financial support for the families.

A campaign to take legal action against the Duke of Cumberland (the King's brother) on the grounds that he took a secret oath as head of the Orange Lodges of Freemasons led to a full pardon from the King in 1836, though they only returned to Britain in 1837. James Hammett returned in 1839. Until 1845 the men leased two tenant farms in Essex out of LDC funds. Only Hammett returned to Tolpuddle working in the building trade. He died in the Dorchester workhouse in 1891. ■

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

# B BRITAIN'S DESTINY

**People are increasingly grappling with fundamental questions about our national destiny. Where is Britain headed? What is happening to society? What kind of Britain is on offer and what ought it to be? Once, working people shied away from such reflections. Now these discussions are commonplace.**

No one selling their labour for a living feels safe or secure. A deep unease pervades the country as declining capitalism bombards us with the everyday terrors of mass unemployment, underemployment, privatisation, worsening conditions, attacks on pensions, impoverishment, assaults on the NHS and state education.

The only remedy to this state of permanent anxiety is for workers to take radical steps. There needs to be a deliberate change of direction: putting an end to a failing system, constructing a socialist society that meets the needs of working people.

Capitalism is fundamentally flawed. Its manic adoration of private profit skews the direction of society in an anti-social fashion. Its entrenchment and defence of wealth accumulation for capitalists in every nook and cranny of society means the exclusion of workers from economic progress and political control. Its premise leads to the elevation of a profit-sucking elite which is set apart from society. The system shuns the mass of working people and condemns millions to unemployment.

After the revolution, a different Britain will emerge with a superior set of values. The prime shift will see everyone's right to work honoured. The constricting homage to private profit will disappear. A new reverence will move centre-stage: generating social profit through the construction of a modern economy based on multi-faceted, wealth-creating industry and a planned investment in the whole population which will unleash a full flowering of the latent talent left to slumber and atrophy under capitalism.

A new Britain will introduce innovative ways of involving the whole society of workers in actually governing and running everything. The working class, representing all facets in an interlocking society, will become the political community. The discharge of political decisions will not be devolved elsewhere. A changed society will bring a marked change in our country's relations with the world. Our armed forces will not be used to intervene as an imperialist force in other people's internal affairs. Our military will defend the gains of the revolution inside Britain. Abroad, we will want to trade goods with the world and exchange culture.

A better life for all workers is possible, but it will have to be struggled for. We find capitalism wanting and in decline. Rather than tolerate untold riches and privilege for a few, we should seek a new arrangement, where society allows workers to prosper collectively and in a national combination of mutual support.

#### 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.

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# Back to Front – A nation reclaimed

**‘It was a great party, a party of and for Britain. But the hangover will come...’**

ANYONE BRITISH who watched the opening ceremony for the London Olympics could not fail to understand what it was saying. It was a celebration of – among other things – work, industry, the NHS, and of the breadth of our culture, from symphony orchestras to TV soaps. It was also a celebration of Britain, of our nation, of our one nation.

As the wonderful athletes got going and the medals began rolling in, it was Team GB that won them. It is hard to think of a more perfect rebuff to petty-minded micro-chauvinists like Alex Salmond: Scots, Welsh, English united by one flag. Except, of course, in football, where the Scottish FA declined to contribute. Their loss.

It was hard, too, to think of a more perfect contrast to the naked commercialism and disregard for the people of London and Britain that characterised the run-up to the Games. We the people were shut out from almost everything: virtually no jobs for local people building the stadia; too few tickets on general sale; the military taking over blocks of flats to site surface-to-air missiles; the Zil lanes for the Olympic “family” (and what an extended family that one is) and the bloated corporate sponsors.

They even re-routed the Marathon so no one would have their TV screens soiled by glimpses of East London. Londoners have had their city hijacked. You couldn’t buy any British beer in the Olympic venues, leave alone London Pride (whose pumps were ripped out of Lords for the archery events), because Heineken was the Olympic sponsor. Time for a boycott there.

The only thing really left to the people was the bill. Nine billion pounds and counting. We will be paying for these Games for decades to come. Cameron had the nerve to say that the project came in on budget! True, but it wasn’t the original budget, nor the second one.

With the Paralympics ending, it will all be back to normal, they hope. The Olympic Park will be shut and “repurposed”, with the housing stock and sites for new housing sold off to Qatar. Tough luck for the original inhabitants of the Park, displaced around the wilds of outer East London and Essex.

The Olympics also turned a bright spotlight on plans to enable the selling of yet more school playing fields, exposing the government’s lies.

And yet it was a great party, a party of and for Britain (with the hangover to come). Andy Murray singing (some of) the national anthem at Wimbledon. Chris Hoy and Mo Farah wrapped in the flag.

For so long anyone in the labour movement talking about Britain has been called, somewhat oddly, a “little Englander”. Governments, Labour and other, keen to invite in foreign corporations and low-paid migrant labour, have sneered at the very concept of Britain. The ultra-left have denigrated support for Britain, for our country, our place, our home, as on a par with support for the extreme right.

So if one result of the Games is that Britain is once again back on the national agenda – and back on the agenda of some trade unions as well – then that will be a result to savour. ■

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