

WORKERS

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AND THE FOUNDING
OF ENGLAND



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WORKERS

“ It’s class war...against the workers

WITH CAPITALISM in absolute decline, the ruling class is using the crisis they caused to attack industry and services, our whole class. The increasingly corporate state is destroying democracy, local government, the civil service, higher education, the national education service, the NHS, housing and pensions.

It is class war. The ruling class knows this. What does the working class think? What is the working class plan for dealing with this? Is the working class embracing the necessary ideas of a united Britain, of workers’ nationalism, rebuilding industry, opposition to the free movement of labour, leaving the EU, and building the Marxist-Leninist party?

To some extent, and unevenly, they are,

but nowhere near enough. As ever, the “ultra-left” assists the capitalist class. It smears as fascist, chauvinist and reactionary these vital ideas.

Too many of us just see and moan about what the ruling class is doing to us. Too many close their eyes and hope it will go away.

But there is a way forward. We can do something about it all. We can take responsibility for our workplaces. We can assert that we have the skills and professionalism to make a difference, to take control.

We can no longer live with a capitalism that is intent on destroying us. To live with any dignity, we will have to go beyond capitalism.

What’s the difference?

THERE IS not just the smell of death around this Labour government – there’s something worse. It’s the stench of a party that has left its union roots and its (always shaky) principles so far behind that its only political response now, whatever the issue, is to say about Tory proposals that it thought of them first.

So it tried to outbid the Tories at their conference: whenever Cameron’s henchmen

suggested something bad, Labour went one step worse.

If more proof be needed, look at its approach to the Royal Mail, dribbling on about “the business”. It doesn’t recognise a public interest in a public service. In fact, Labour is no longer capable of recognising a public interest at all – just the interests of the bankers its leaders hope to join. It deserves no support.

Cover image of pickets at Mount Pleasant sorting office, London, © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com



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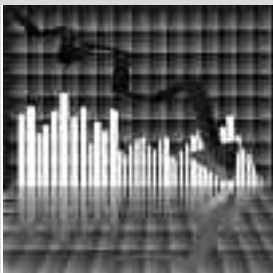
Set to rise

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Coming soon

The slump continues



BRITAIN'S ECONOMY contracted by 0.4 per cent between July and September, according to official figures. Almost every City analyst expected there to be positive growth in the third quarter. But, as usual, every City analyst got it wrong.

So we are still in recession. Germany, France and Japan have all come out of recession – technically – and we haven't.

This is the first time our gross domestic product (GDP) has contracted for six consecutive quarters since quarterly figures were first recorded in 1955. The economy contracted 5.2 per cent compared with the same period last year, which was marginally better than the record figure of 5.5 per cent in the previous three months.

Unemployment is now 2,470,000. It has risen for 14 successive months. This is part of the war on workers. Manufacturing (not financial services where the crisis originated) has been the hardest hit sector. Manufacturing has lost 8.5 per cent of its jobs; finance and business services 3.8 per cent. Recent figures showed a 2.5 per cent decline in industrial output in August alone.

The recession has hit investment into Britain harder than any other nation. Last year, foreign direct investment (FDI – regarded by bourgeois economists as a measure of success) into Britain fell by half to £97 billion. Globally, foreign investor flows fell by 44 per cent in this year's first quarter. World FDI fell from \$1,700 billion last year to (probably) less than \$1,200 billion this year. Total investment here fell between April and June by more than 18 per cent on last year.

Without investment, what recovery can there be? One in five people aged between 16 and 24 – a million young people – is now registered as looking for work, the highest on record.

Both Labour and the Tories have said they want to more than halve the budget deficit by 2013/14. At the TUC, Brown threatened cuts, then tried feebly to soothe his audience by repeating his age-old promise to "implement a blacklist on uncooperative tax havens". Leaked Treasury documents include plans to cut spending across departments by a total of 9.3 per cent over four years from 2010. There is a Con-Lab-Lib united front demanding spending cuts, all to meet arbitrary fantasy financial targets.

REFERENDUM**N. Ireland Assembly vote**

THE NORTHERN Ireland Assembly voted on Tuesday 20 October, by 47-19, in favour of Britain holding a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, and calling on "those parties aspiring to form the incoming Government of the United Kingdom to give an unequivocal commitment to hold, within a twelve month period from assuming office in 2010, a binding referendum on the Lisbon Treaty that is unconditional and unrelated to how other member states choose to vote, and the result of which will not be held in abeyance pending a further referendum on the subject."

HEALTH**All-Ireland response**

UNISON'S RESPONSE to the crisis in health care provision in Northern Ireland has been a rallying cry across the province and the Irish Republic to stand up for Health. With the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, it has called a series of all-Ireland rallies and demonstrations to take place on Saturday 7 November to protest at the £65 million-plus health budget crisis in the North.

This is the culmination of protests, lobbying, action bordering on strike action across Belfast, Mid-Ulster, White Abbey and all other Trusts and Health Boards in Northern Ireland.

For two years Unison has been warning that the budget cuts, the pretence of health care improvements, gibberish about efficiency and ignoring of the real financial crisis would lead to slashing of services, patients suffering and jobs being lost.

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

We still want a referendum

A NEW ICM poll found that 70 per cent of voters want a future Conservative government to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty even if it is already in force. The poll also found that 40 per cent want Britain to leave the EU altogether and 58 per cent believe individual states should take more decisions.

Backing for Czech check

A RECENT poll showed that 65 per cent of Czechs support their President Václav Klaus' decision not to sign the Lisbon Treaty. Yet a German MEP, social democrat Jo Leinen, has called for Klaus to be impeached if he does not ratify it. The German media are waging a massive anti-Czech campaign. These are illegal interventions in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. The Czech Republic is wary of the Lisbon Treaty because it cannot forget that German bullying of the Czechs at Munich in 1938 led to a world war.

The Munich tradition lives on

AS AT Munich 60 years ago, the French government has joined in the bullying. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said, "I believe we ought to keep a firm hand since everyone has already voted, including the Czech Republic." That will be news to voters in Britain and other countries who were promised a referendum, but denied a vote once EU leaders saw that they would lose. According to the only independent poll of all 27 EU member states, 75 per cent of voters across Europe, and a majority in every country, want a referendum on the Treaty.

Forced learning on the curriculum

THE EUROPEAN People's Party in the European Parliament says there should be compulsory classes on the EU for 14-year-olds in all member states. Portuguese MEP Mario David wants cross-party support and hopes for EU studies in schools within two years.

Monster trucks

THE EU is preparing to allow 60-ton foreign "mega-lorries", a third longer and heavier than those currently allowed, onto Britain's roads. The European Parliament could adopt the regulation in early 2010.



Leeds, 10 October: GMB & Unison held a benefit entitled Refuse to be Beat with Keith Allen & his band. The gig and rally at the O2 Academy were in support of the city's 600 striking street cleaners and refuse workers. Leeds City Council intends to cut their pay by £6,000 a year as a way of introducing equal pay – levelling down not up.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Anti-SATs campaign hots up

ALL AROUND the country parents, teachers, school leaders and children have been getting involved in the combined campaign of the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers to end SATs tests in primary schools. Many "SATs Saturdays" – activity days in local town centres – have been held and the support from the public has been overwhelming on Saturdays in July, August, September and October.

Later this term both the NUT and the NAHT will be asking members who teach in maintained primary and middle schools where Key Stage tests are still taken, (they have been discarded in secondary schools) whether they think SATs should be abolished and whether, if called upon in a formal ballot, they would be prepared to take action to not prepare for and administer SATs in 2010. It is vital to show government the strength and depth of feeling on this issue, by members and head teachers voting Yes in substantial and overwhelming numbers in these indicative ballots later this term.

Thousands have already signed the NAHT/NUT joint petition to end SATs and support is also growing among contemporary authors such as Phillip Pullman.

Two "End SATs" newspapers – one for teachers and one for parents and governors – have been centrally produced to raise the profile of the campaign.

Maximum strength and unity between the NUT and NAHT needs to be developed to ensure a good response in the indicative ballots, as the government appears loath to banish SATs in England, a principal method of policing and curbing teachers. Only a strong professional voice combined with growing parental opposition will kick this costly and mechanical, enthusiasm-draining process into touch.

Releasing the teaching profession from being coerced into spending so much time teaching to the test will liberate the curriculum and allow a broader, more interesting and creative educational environment for the next generation of our children. Moreover, it will also encourage teachers to reclaim other parts of their professional life from the irksome control and interference of soulless management dogmas, data crunching, league table tyranny and bureaucratic overload.

REFINERIES

Sugar jobs axed

ONE HUNDRED and fifty jobs have been axed at the French-owned Syral sugar refinery in Greenwich, London. The refinery was part of Tate and Lyle until 2007, one of the few industrial users of the Thames. The closure is blamed on changes in EU regulations controlling the sugar market and the refining of wheat flour for glucose,

sweeteners and animal feed.

The refinery, one of the oldest on the Thames and in need of major reinvestment, just happens to sit on the Greenwich Peninsula and is a prime site for housing and redevelopment. Are the EU regulations merely a convenient excuse for asset-stripping and housing speculation?

The Thames moves ever further away from its heritage as an industrial artery to the heart of London, becoming a riverscape of endless blocks of flats.

'State-imposed' learning

THE BIGGEST independent review of primary education in 40 years has accused government of introducing a curriculum "even narrower than that of the Victorian elementary schools". Based on 28 research surveys, 1052 written submissions and 250 focus groups, the Cambridge review was headed by Professor Robin Alexander at Cambridge University, and involved 66 research consultants and a 20-strong advisory committee. Its remit was far wider than the government-backed Rose Review.

Its report is damning of Labour government intervention in primary education, the promoting of a "state theory of learning". They write, "We do argue for a rolling back of the powers of the state and reversal of the centralisation of how teachers teach." It condemns what every primary teacher knows to be true: SATs testing combined with league tables has reduced what is taught to a narrow diet of the 3 Rs, excluding other subjects to the margins. This is not based on good evidence about what works for young children, but comes from successive ministers treating education as their private fiefdom: "The politicisation of primary education has ... gone too far. Discussion has been blocked by derision, truth has been supplanted by myth and spin, and alternatives to current arrangements have been reduced to crude dichotomy," they write.

Nevertheless, primary schools can be "the centre that holds" for many children, succeeding in spite of government. The Review recommends that formal lessons should wait until children are 6, extending the rich play-based early years curriculum until then.

COLLEGES

Tower Hamlets victory

UNIVERSITY AND College Union members at Tower Hamlets College in east London won a victory in late September after nearly a month of strike action.

In June the college announced 25 redundancies and plans to halve student numbers on its Skills for Life courses, among other cuts. In this poor London borough with high unemployment, local people rely on such courses to enable them to get the skills they need to be able to apply for work.

Having balloted for action, the

lecturers immediately planned carefully for the strike to begin at the beginning of the autumn term. There would be minimal strike pay, so they raised money from other colleges, unions and the public to support members as necessary. Funds raised would go where most needed, for instance where a couple would both be striking, or a member was in real hardship. Picket rotas were drawn up to ensure coverage from first thing in the morning until the evening, involving the maximum number of members and keeping morale high.

The compulsory redundancies were finally withdrawn after talks at ACAS, and UCU members returned to work in late September ready to fight another day.

but a further throttling with existing legislation.

Even the union's use of article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the right to strike was dismissed.

This decision was handed down by the Court of Appeal nearly twelve months after the initial ballot commenced. So the direction in which trade union and related civil liberties are going is that the only lawful ballot can be one that is conducted by lawyers based upon legal interpretations that change from dispute to dispute – and every interpretation is against the unions.

There is no restriction on the employers challenging on any false, facile, imaginary ground or last-minute basis – the courts will hear the case.

If the delay incurred undermines the timeframe of the ballot then the employers can challenge again, so effectively permanently preventing a legal ballot!

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Thursday 12 November, 7.30pm

"Marxism – Why You Should Be A Communist"

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

The third in a series of three public meetings organised by the CPBML and Workers magazine (see advertisement, page 10). All welcome.

WORKING AGE

Set to rise

THE QUESTION of whether workers can be forced to retire at 65 years has been referred back to the UK High Court from the European Court of Justice. The High Court has now decided that the Default Retirement Age Act introduced by the government in 2006 following European Union Directives against age discrimination (and the government's interpretation of it), is correct. Workers can be forced to retire at 65 years.

But the Court and government have both indicated that they expect the mandatory retirement age to be lifted to possibly 70 or 75 years within the next 12 months. Age Concern and Help the Aged, which brought the case, are not appealing as they will welcome this possible increase in the mandatory retirement age.

This is an example of workers pursuing and setting bad legal precedents because we are not challenging the very cause of pensioner poverty in the first instance. Adequate pensions should be the alternative to pensioners having to work until they die.

When men asked for equality with women and the right to retire at 60 years the government turned the equality argument on its head and increased the retirement age for women to 65 years.

Now it is "resolving" pensioner poverty by extending the working life or blaming the mismanagement of pensions schemes – totally the responsibility of the government and the employers – on pensioners, hence extending the working life before receiving a pension.

This is nothing more than a sleight of hand and robbery – a sleight of hand supposedly stemming from the European Union but written in Whitehall.

The first pensions, introduced in 1908, were payable to those who reached 75 years; 100 years later the same "work 'em to death" philosophy is being spewed forth.

ANTI-UNION LAWS

Another blow

ANOTHER HAMMER blow to the right to strike follows from the Court of Appeal decision of Metrobus versus Unite. Effectively the court decision places further restrictions on legally called strike action by insisting on the union notifying the employer of the ballot decision almost the instant that the union knows the result of the ballot, likewise the members.

This notification of the ballot result must come to the employers irrespective of whether the union is going to call for action or not.

New complications are introduced into the notice of ballot and notice of action served on the employer by the union. These are reinterpretations of sections of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Consolidation Act, so not new legislation

It has issued a Directive on privatising postal services. One of its bureaucrats is even on secondment as a PostComm commissioner. And its own man, Mandelson, is involved...

Why is Brussels messing with our mail?

THE ROOTS of the current attacks on the workforce of Royal Mail lie not in the internet or the increased use of e-mail, but in the European Union Directive 97/67/EC which specified the rules for the development of the internal market for EU postal services. Like all such EU directives, it was intended to provide more markets, more opportunities for a dying capitalist system to make money at our expense.

The Royal Mail and the Post Office are institutions close to the heart of ordinary people because they provided us with a reliable service and operated on a universal basis.

Just as the NHS was intended to provide free health care to all so the Royal Mail would deliver mail to any part of the country for the same price and the Post Office would provide basic financial and postal services to all, locally, without the mentality of a predatory bank.

Perhaps they think that this kind of service is too good for us. More likely, capitalism sees in public services like these the opportunity to make a killing at our expense. All that capitalism needs is the mechanism to pass laws to put their plans into operation. They have this mechanism in the European Union.

In response to EU Directive 97/67/EC, the British Government set up PostComm, the Postal Services Commission that describes itself as the “independent”

regulator for the postal market. It describes its functions as a) protecting the Universal Service to guarantee daily deliveries and the principle that anyone can post a letter to any part of the country for the same price; b) licensing postal operators; c) introducing competition into mail services; and d) regulating Royal Mail. PostComm opened the market to private bulk mail services in 2003 and the full market in 2006.

So this “independent” body decides which lucrative parts of Royal Mail will be hived off to the private sector such as TNT, UK Mail, DHL, DPD, etc.

So who exactly are the PostComm Commissioners? Well, here’s just a few of them, past and present, just to give you a flavour of their “independence”.

Appointed on 1 January 2008 on secondment from the European Commission, Ulf Dahlsten is a former Director General of the Swedish Postal Services and was actively involved in the deregulation of Swedish postal, taxi and telecom services. He was chairman of TNT Express Worldwide as well as a director of Stena Line and of SAS.

PostComm Chairman Nigel Stapleton is a non executive director of the Reliance Group which provides outsourced security services to Royal Mail. He is also an independent director of KazPost, the Kazakh postal service and Samruk Energy,

a Kazakh electricity generating company.

Chief Executive Tim Brown, the former Marketing Director of DHL, joined Royal Mail from KPMG where his work included a review of the future of Royal Mail for the government. His son holds a senior position in TNT Express.

Commissioner Professor Stephen Littlechild is described as an “international consultant on regulation, competition and privatisation” and an adviser to governments and the World Bank.

Commissioner Simon Prior-Palmer was an investment banker with Credit Suisse.

Commissioner Tony Cooper is the father of Yvette Cooper, Chief Secretary to the Treasury and consequently father-in-law of Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, who is also Gordon Brown’s closest ally.

Commissioner Wanda Goldwag is an adviser to private equity firm Smedvig Capital.

Management demands

After PostComm invited private mail companies to take on the more lucrative parts of Royal Mail on 1 January 2006, the management demanded far-reaching change from the workforce that would result in 60,000 job losses and extensions to the working week.

TNT and UK Mail were consequently allowed to strip revenue from Royal Mail. For example, the profit on a single posted letter before PostComm was established would have been in the region of 10p. Royal Mail now makes a maximum 3p down to a loss of 2p on delivering TNT’s mail (see Box, How the EU rigs the market).

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) went on strike in 2007, resulting in a “truce” between a macho, bullying Royal Mail management and the workforce. Under this truce, changes in working practices were to be implemented through consultation with the workforce. Encouraged by Business Minister Peter Mandelson, Royal Mail management stepped up its attacks on the workforce, demanding more work, heavier loads and longer rounds, sacking staff for trivial

How the EU rigs the market

NEW RULES introduced by Royal Mail in August 2006 called “Pricing in Proportion” required post items to be priced by size as well as weight.

The rules resulted from EU legislation designed to harmonise postal services, namely the Postal Services Directive (97/67/EC) “on common rules for the development of the internal market in Community postal services”, designed to liberalise the EU’s postal services by opening them up to competition. Private companies have been allowed to take

the most lucrative of the postal services market with Royal Mail losing 40 per cent of its bulk business mail.

So far only Britain, Finland and Sweden of the 27 EU member states have introduced full competition in their postal services. This would mean, for example, that a Dutch service provider could operate and compete here but the Royal Mail could not do so in Holland. In addition EU state aid rules place limits on the level of subsidy that can be given to rural post offices.



Photo: Workers

Thursday 22 October: Pickets gather outside the Tyneside Mail Centre

offences and deliberately provoking the CWU.

More recently, Lord Mandelson of Foy and Hartlepool, First Secretary of State, as he is now known, proposed the part privatisation of Royal Mail. He tried to blackmail the CWU by saying that the government would only cover the £5 billion black hole in the Royal Mail pension scheme if it accepted this privatisation.

The “black hole”, of course, was caused by the government in the first place. Prime Minister Thatcher declared a “pension holiday” in 1990 which lasted until 2003. This meant that the government did not pay its contributions to the pension scheme while Royal Mail workers did.

The situation was made worse by Gordon Brown’s first budget in which he abolished tax relief for pension funds. And then the financial collapse of last year caused by Brown’s light touch regulation saw billions wiped out from pension funds. During this same period, the government failed to invest in Royal Mail’s infrastructure.

Mandelson was thwarted in this attempt to privatise Royal Mail by a successful campaign by the CWU. He then gave the nod to Royal Mail managers to step up the attack on the CWU. The result was a response from the CWU, which called for local synchronised industrial action, withdrew from local consultations and subsequently successfully balloted for national industrial action, whilst all the time offering to involve third parties such

as ACAS.

So what does the EU, acting on behalf of capitalism, have in store for us in terms of a postal service?

If Royal Mail tries to deliver a parcel to a home when the occupants are at work or out of the house, they will leave a note advising that the package is at their local sorting office a short distance away. It is a public service.

If, say, competitor DPD finds itself in the same situation, they will leave a card telling you to phone a telephone number to rearrange delivery on another day when you will have to wait in the house from 07.00am to 20.00pm. You can opt to have it delivered on a Saturday, but you, the recipient, will have to pay a surcharge of £10 for the privilege. It is impossible to speak to a human being on the phone

number and if you miss the second attempt, they will return the goods to the sender. This is just a small example of “modernisation” or “efficiency”.

So what we are witnessing is the direct result of a decision (the Directive) made by the European Commission, over which the British people and Parliament have had no say, over which the Royal Mail workforce has had no say.

The workforce is responding in the only way they can – by resistance. But with all three Parliamentary parties now having declared war on workers at their recent conferences, outbidding one another with promised “cuts”, we have to assume that what is happening to post workers now will be every other worker’s lot in the near future – unless they fight to prevent it.

Going the final mile

THOSE RUBBISHING the postal workers cannot decide whether the service is irrelevant because everyone uses the Internet or whether the strike is causing huge disruption. And despite opening up postal services to private “competition”, many private companies still rely on the Royal Mail network of sorting offices and postal delivery workers – “the final mile”. This is the really expensive bit, which the public appreciates and wants to defend.

Some other facts:

- 76 per cent of postal workers voted

for strike action.

- Royal Mail made £321 million profit last year.
- Postal delivery workers are expected to “walk” at 4 miles per hour.
- Royal Mail “modernisation” included a cut from two to one deliveries a day, an end to Sunday deliveries, reductions of collections from postboxes.
- “Ban bullying week” has been pulled by Royal Mail management.
- Royal Mail has reduced staff by 20 per cent.

When Barack Obama was elected, he promised a law to allow workers to choose collective bargaining against massive opposition from industry and the US's army of union-busting politicians.

Land of the free? Tell that to American workers



Photo: David Bacon/reportdigital.co.uk

February 2009: San Francisco hotel workers, members of UNITE HERE Local 2, march and rally against the Meridian and Hyatt hotels, protesting against the refusal of the hotels to agree to a card check process to recognise the union and agree a contract.

THE UNITED STATES of America has often been held up as a beacon of freedom, where everyone is free to choose. For those workers whose choice involves establishing a trade union, the choice is somewhat limited.

Even in health care the situation is dire, and largely unreported in Britain. For example a private health company called Resurrection Health Care (!) has settled 15 cases recently under the National Labour Relations Board (NLRB). These are cases which were identified as “unfair labour practice charges” filed by workers who have alleged interrogation, harassment and interference in organising activities against the prohibition of the distribution of union literature.

A veteran nurse employed by Resurrection Health Care, Kelly Beringer,

says, “We are made to feel like traitors and disloyal when we talk about forming our union. Union newsletters and legislation updates have been removed from break rooms and torn down from our locker rooms. We are constantly told we are free to choose, but how is this freedom of choice, when words like ‘disloyal’, ‘extortionist’ and ‘negative’ are used to describe those of us who have made a pro union choice?”

One of the many promises made by Obama in his election campaign is to establish new legislation, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). This, act, which has not yet been passed, promises to remove current obstacles for employees who want collective bargaining, guarantee that workers who can choose collective bargaining are able to achieve a contract

(an agreement between the union and the employer) and allow employees to form unions by signing cards authorising union representation.

This point is seen as critical for employees like Beringer. Currently, an employer can demand a company-controlled election and workers would have no say in the matter. The EFCA would require the NLRB to certify a bargaining representative without mandating an election if the majority of the bargaining unit’s employees sign up to such cards. Critically, the choice would be up to the workers not management.

This “sign up” was a feature of the National Labour Relations Act in America, enacted in 1935 by the least reactionary of American presidents, Franklin Roosevelt. Lest it be thought that

workers to choose to have collective bargaining. It has come up
union-busting lawyers...

Workers trying to get unions recognised

Resurrection Health Care is an especially bad employer, the following figures might enlighten:

- 78 per cent (91 per cent in Chicago) of employers force workers to attend one-to-one meetings against the union with their own supervisors.
- 51 per cent of employers threatened to close the plant if the union wins recognition.
- 75 per cent of employers hired consultants or union busters to help them fight organising drives.

Exporting union-busting

The union busting, for which America should be well known, has been exported all over the world.

Opponents of EFCA have immediately launched a \$200 million campaign to defeat it. Working through front organisations with innocuous sounding names such as the Centre for Union Facts, organisations like the National Association of Manufacturers and the US Chambers of Commerce, as well as giant corporations, are bombarding the airwaves and filling major newspapers with expensive advertisements designed to turn public opinion against the proposed

legislation. They are also deluging members of Congress, who will have to decide whether or not this becomes law.

There are more than 2,500 lawyers in America involved in what is euphemistically called the “union avoidance” industry. These lawyers are engaged in such pleasant activities as, when involved in one-to-one discussions with workers, jerking their tie upwards to suggest a hanging, and openly telling other workers to spread negative lies about unions because the Labour Relations Board “doesn’t really care if people are lying”

A recent visitor to America (a former LSE scholar studying this multi-billion dollar industry) said recently, “The United States has an entire industry dedicated exclusively to stopping workers from forming a union. Several of these US consultants are now operating internationally and are seeking to expand their businesses in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. It is essential that union busting is not allowed to flourish on this side of the Atlantic. It is already here though; a recent case of a company being fined £5,000 for running an illegal blacklist of union members was described

as an ‘inadequate’ response.” You can say that again!

The response of the TUC, to work closely with the AFL-CIO, is interesting. “Winning the organised workplace” has been one of the objectives of unions such as Unison for many years. And if unions are not seeking to win the organised workplace, then what are they there for? The fact that in America union membership has dropped in the private sector to 7.5 per cent, compared with 30 per cent in 1960, means that the American unions’ approach may be a much-needed one; it certainly hasn’t been a successful one though, so we should beware of copying it too slavishly.

Whether or not the EFCA becomes law is a matter over which we in Britain have no control (although various interfering lawyers have arrogantly prevailed upon the TUC to seek to “mobilise support” for the passage of the act).

What we have got control over is recruiting workers into unions in Britain, and in particular going to young workers who are benefiting from generations of union organisation. They must be made aware now of what the risks of losing these benefits will be.

CPBML/Workers

Autumn Series of Public Meetings, London

Thursday 10 September

The economy – why workers should run Britain

Thursday 15 October

Stopping the parliamentary road to fascism

Thursday 12 November

Marxism – why you should be a communist

All meetings are held from 7.30-9.00 pm Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn. Everybody welcome.



What happens to a country run for generations by a tiny oligarchy and the power of the American corporations?

Coup in Honduras: an attack on progress, U

ON 28 JUNE this year a military coup in all but name took place in the Latin American country of Honduras. It brought to mind many of the dark events of 1970s and before: the fascist coup in Chile in 1973, the bringing down of the democratically elected Guatemalan government in 1954, and the anti-Sandinista contra war of the early 1980s. The background to the coup is enlightening.

Honduras, like many of its Latin American neighbours, is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is marked by several distinguishing features, which do not apply to other countries in that region.

First, the country has been run for generations by a small oligarchy estimated to consist of only ten families. Their power over society has been quietly exercised and is not dynastically visible, as it was for example with the Samozáreg regime in Nicaragua. To these families, the election by the Honduran people of a progressive president, Zelaya, was not only a political but a personal affront.

Second, Honduras is the only country in Latin America that had, until Zelaya, never voted for a progressive government of any kind. No socialist or communist government had been elected in that country, uniquely. Even the country with one of the worst human rights records in that hemisphere, Guatemala, did famously elect the progressive Jacopo Arbenz government which was so violently overthrown in 1954 (and whose downfall the young Che Guevara was on hand to witness).

Third, the country is so poor that it is estimated that when Zelaya introduced the minimum wage, it applied to 80 per cent of the population, who immediately gained substantial benefit from a progressive government indicating the high levels of poverty before his election. The overwhelming opposition of the people to the coup can be directly related to the benefits people in the country gained from the actions of the Zelaya government.

Fourth, only two American companies controlled the distribution of all the oil and other petro-chemicals in Honduras.

When world prices were dropping, these two companies increased prices for the Honduran people already suffering great poverty. This was one of the turning points in recent Honduran history, as we shall see.

Included in the 80 per cent of the population who benefitted from the minimum wage for the first time were domestic servants. This not only raised their disposable income considerably but also enabled them to have access to state pensions. The overwhelming majority of domestic servants being women, this measure at a stroke also struck at the reactionary nature of the patriarchal regime in Honduras.

Retaliation

Following Zelaya's election, the introduction of the minimum wage legislation and the retaliation of the American-owned oil companies, the President went to the institutions of the financial establishment, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other US-controlled agencies, in order to raise funds to pay for his social programme.

Zelaya had made no bones about the fact that he would have been prepared to accept even the harsh conditions attached to neo-liberal financial transactions, which would have been financially crippling for his economy. But he felt so strongly that the social programme he was elected on needed to be followed, that he was prepared to undergo the rigours of IMF loans.

But these American-controlled institutions were not prepared to lend a cent to a government bent on alleviating poverty. They refused all financial assistance and at this point the real turning point took place.

Cuba, Venezuela and then Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador and several other countries established the ALBA pact, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA means dawn in Spanish).

ALBA is a growing alternative economic bloc in Latin America, inspired by the example of Cuba and now Venezuela, which provides co-operation between countries in developing a social



Pro-Zelaya protesters marching in the Honduran

model of economic development outside capitalism. Having been refused finances to improve the lot of its people by capitalism, Zelaya went to ALBA.

Access to oil

The immediate effect of this was that Honduras was given access to one of ALBA's economic arms, Petro-Caribe, a 14-strong organisation of countries that have developed an alternative oil and petro-chemical distribution system, largely based on Venezuelan oil reserves. At a stroke this enabled Honduras to break the stranglehold monopoly of the two American companies on the Honduran

Why when someone gets elected who challenges their power and upheld by the United States



Photo: from Wikipedia

capital, Tegucigalpa. There has been a stream of protests since the coup in June.

petrol and oil market. It can be imagined what hatred this caused in the ruling class in Honduras.

Honduras then became not only a full member of ALBA, but hosted an ALBA summit. Indeed, little comment has been made on the fact that the last inter-governmental speech Zelaya made was at this ALBA summit, and described by Fidel Castro as “brilliant”, further fuelling the ire of the ten families!

Zelaya then moved on to confronting one of the biggest problems in his country. In order to make progress in many of the other ALBA countries – Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia – steps have

had to be taken to change the reactionary and unequal constitutions, often a legacy of colonialism but always a legacy of direct interference by North America.

The Honduran constitution is an odd creature as it (allegedly) cannot be altered but Zelaya began the process of change by organising a “consultative referendum”. The purpose of this was not to change the constitution but to begin a nationwide dialogue about why it was seemingly unchangeable.

It was the beginning of a long road but one that could have ended up with the dismantling of possibly the most reactionary constitution in Latin America.

The constitutional referendum was scheduled to take place on the 29 and 30 June 2009. It was pre-empted by the coup, which took place on 28 June.

Zelaya was kidnapped and bundled out of the country. The reason this happened is that the coup leaders learnt a lesson from the attempt to destroy Chavez in Venezuela in April 2002. When that fascist coup was perpetrated the mistake was to leave Chavez within Venezuela (and not to kill him!). Had they removed him from the country his task of regaining control would have been made

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much more difficult.

As it was, the people, trade unions and civic organisations rallied around the Chavez Government. He was freed and the path of progress resumed. Zelaya has been attempting ever since the coup to regain entry to Honduras. This campaign is partly led by his wife, Xiomara Castro, who has also fronted marches and protests in the teeth of provocation and much violence, seeking the return of the democratically elected President to his country.

An attempt was made to fly him in but the army blockaded the runway. Zelaya managed to smuggle himself back into the country and, as *WORKERS* goes to press, is still resident in the Brazilian embassy. That the largest country in Latin America, and not yet a member of ALBA, would risk the wrath of the north by extending hospitality to Zelaya, speaks volumes. It shows how isolated the coup leaders are – their only supporter seemingly is Barack Obama.

Trade with the US

The new American government has denounced the coup but could re-instate Zelaya at the snap of a finger. Eighty per cent of Honduran trade is with the USA, and this trade is undertaken under the Free Trade Act of the Americas (FTAA). This means the trade is extremely favourable to Honduran companies which engage in it (the Americans keep the FTAA afloat) and if this trade was in any way threatened, let alone suspended, the Honduran Government would fall.

Yet, despite its willingness to engage in sanctions against any country you care to name, Iran, previously Iraq, North Korea, any “axis of evil” country, there has been no question of there being such an embargo or interference in trade with Honduras.

After all, the fact that an economic blockade of 50 years’ duration has been inflicted on neighbouring Cuba should not be taken to mean that any other country

“The USA only blockades countries to prevent progress, not to prevent progress being undermined...”

that has close links to America can in any way be interfered with; the USA only blockades countries to prevent progress, not to prevent progress being undermined. Indeed, this shows more than anything where the coup’s supporters are.

This putsch is an important event for many reasons. To begin with, ALBA is a brave, bold, and ingenious attempt to subvert the stranglehold of American financial and military control in countries immediately adjacent to the giant. It is a way devised to avoid direct military confrontation, in order to bide time to build that defensive capacity (although this will of course be denied).

There have been many attempts to destroy an ALBA government – not just the attack on Chavez but also that on Evo Morales, the no less prominent president of Bolivia, who has also had more than one attempt on his life. So it is no surprise that this military attack on an ALBA country has been made – possibly the country with the strongest oligarchy, with the greatest power over their country’s military.

The response to it has been exemplary. Civic organisations and trade unions (three out of the four national federations are part of the organised opposition, and the fourth will be soon) have been demonstrating and organising guerrilla strikes throughout the economy ever since 28 June.

Whatever happens, Honduras cannot return to its former state. The change has been made and the battle is now being fought.

**As a nation we have o
Workers looks at the l**

Alfred the Great

ALFRED THE GREAT was crucial to England’s development, not just in the military field but also for his remarkable social and political contributions. He earns his standing as one of the greats in history as a result of his outstanding role in the formation and unification of England, his essential role in the expulsion of the Vikings and his extraordinary achievements in developing culture and an educational style of kingship.

Militarily, he was an innovative military leader who radically transformed the situation of Wessex (the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in south-west England) and England itself, sending it in a new direction. A central feature of his military greatness resided in his courage and inspiration to others, best illustrated in the seemingly hopeless circumstance of 878 (see below).

Alfred was able to turn the tide in his people’s favour, even though he saw his land of Wessex – England’s most powerful kingdom – almost completely destroyed in the space of only a few weeks by Viking invaders, his country being reduced in size to the tiny Isle of Athelney. However, he refused to succumb and led initially a very small, brave group of Anglo-Saxons who struck out relentlessly and tirelessly against the dominant Vikings in five weeks of guerrilla-style raids in order to transform this near ruinous situation.

In the wilderness

Alfred exercised a special role during his strange sojourn in the wilderness when, though rejected by all around him, he decided to fight back. In the process he set in train a revolution that would lead eventually to the foundation of England and colour much of what it would later become.

After the guerrilla raids, Alfred called together the three fyrds (the Anglo-Saxon militia) of Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire to battle; they answered loyally and he placed an army of perhaps 4,000 men against Guthrum’s Vikings in the battle of Edington in 878 which was a complete triumph, forcing Guthrum to

our heroes, though we can often be coy about celebrating them. Life of a man who laid the basis for England – and for Britain...

at and the foundation of England



Alfred the Great: an engraving made in the 16th century.

accept Wessex domination. He eventually withdrew to East Anglia. Alfred had emerged from near-disaster to leave his descendants a completely altered, favourable situation.

Alfred learned essential lessons from experience, particularly from defeats, thereby making his military expertise the best in both defensive and mobile warfare. Apart from the battle of Ashdown, his early encounters with the Viking/Danish forces were unsuccessful.

He soon realised that his military machine was old-fashioned, consisting of a largely peasant army that could not compete with the highly mobile Viking war bands overwhelming his country. Therefore, he remodelled the national

defences, introducing new methods of defending his territories, not just restoring existing ones.

That Wessex did not go the way of the other Anglo-Saxon states of East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia is largely down to him, as he evolved a series of strategies to change the balance of forces, all of which worked to prevent the Vikings' highly mobile forces dominating their land, rivers and adjoining seas.

During the military campaigns of 871 to 878, it had been the Vikings who were in strategic control, seizing and often fortifying defensible sites. Learning from the humiliation of being reduced to just the Isle of Athelney and following the decisive defeat of the Vikings at Edington,

“He saved the English language from possible extinction...”

Alfred systematically created from 880 a chain of defensive fortifications, an organised network comprising 33 fortified burhs (fortified communities, the origin of boroughs) each located within 20 miles of another.

They deliberately obstructed the navigation of rivers with fortified bridges and towns to prevent Viking advances. The garrisons provided a staggering total of 27,671 men out of a population of perhaps just half a million. Alfred's burh network worked and had a devastating impact on the Vikings' ability to conduct mobile warfare by land or by river.

When the wars of 893 to 896 are compared with the desperate struggles of the 870s, a clear difference appears. By the 890s the Vikings were unable to penetrate into Wessex like their predecessors in the 860s and 870s who had moved freely not only up and down eastern England but on three occasions well into Wessex.

But in the 890s the Danes' army did not penetrate Wessex. The fortified towns were not merely defensive but had offensive purposes, allowing mounted forces based within the garrisons to pursue Viking raiders in their locality and ensuring that large enough forces could be brought to bear upon any threat. In addition, Alfred reorganised the army so that a part of the total was under arms in case of attack, while the rest were working on the land; each part took their turn.

Also, Alfred introduced a greater mobility into the Anglo-Saxon army, which had been lacking previously; by the wars of 893 and 895 his army pursued the Danes in a wide range of movements and with a mounted force.

Although it is doubtful that Alfred was actually responsible for the creation of an

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English navy, he did introduce new ways of fighting at sea. He appears to be the first English ruler to organise a national naval defence and have a fleet at his command. He wanted to prevent invading Danish expeditions from disembarking more than 5,000 fighting men at any one of a score of undefended ports, as they had been wont to do. He wanted to disrupt their power at sea and stop their harassment of the Wessex coast.

He created a small, defensive fleet, built to his own design, with ships twice as long as those of the enemy, allowing commanding numbers of fighters on board. As they were to serve in home waters, they could be bigger than the Viking boats which had to have a "one-piece" keel necessary for deep-water sailing. Alfred's ships could carry a larger complement of fighting men. By 885 his fleet was able to confront a Viking fleet and capture 16 of its warships.

Alfred's policy was to find his enemies at sea before they could start their attack. Therefore he had ships built that were of a size, speed and superior design that could bring them quickly to danger and give an advantage to his fighting men. Towards the end of his reign his ships were not only larger but also higher than the Danish ones and had more oars. Taken together,

Alfred's military approaches changed how the Saxons fought.

Alfred's major achievement was that he began the process of uniting Anglo-Saxon England, when it appeared that Saxon society might be completely overrun. He respected the traditions of other Saxon kingdoms, shown most clearly with Wessex's besieging and conquest of London in 886. Alfred occupied London and all the English people that were not under subjection to the Danes submitted to him.

Though he restored the old Roman defences and built a new city within, he then handed control of London back into Mercian hands, displaying a great deal of political sensitivity but making it abundantly clear who was in charge. For the next generation Mercia continued to be a loyal ally and in effect a province of Wessex. Alfred did not actually complete the unity of Anglo-Saxon England (a feat that fell to his son and successors), but by the end of his reign his achievements had created the first signs of English national consciousness and a rapid increase of Anglo-Saxon power under the leadership of Wessex.

Alongside his military efforts, Alfred created totally new forms of kingship, especially for his time: for him, reviving learning was just as important as building burhs. He was an unusual king because he



was an enlightened cultural influence at a time when kings often were not interested in such matters.

In many ways it was what Alfred achieved after his military victory which raises him out of the ordinary. He overhauled procedures of government, but

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

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

The so-called Constitutional Treaty is just the despised Constitution in another form, as even Giscard d'Estaing, author of the first attempt, has admitted. In backtracking on the referendum promise Gordon Brown is trying to wipe out a thousand years of independence and sovereignty using his tame party in Parliament.

The will of the British people has been clearly expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll. Now it is time for a poll of a different kind, a referendum. The TUC is already trying to renege on its September vote for a referendum. Don't let power slide over to Brussels.

FIGHT BACK with a Referendum Now badge (actual size 25mm), available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to "WORKERS".



Statue of Alfred the Great in Winchester, Hampshire.

most remarkably he initiated a scheme for the encouragement of learning and involved himself personally in its implementation. He translated important works into the vernacular from Latin and wrote and sponsored books – in so doing, says Melvyn Bragg, he saved the English language from possible extinction.

Knowledge matters

Alfred set up court schools to ensure that future generations of priests and administrators would be better trained. He had a conviction that a life without knowledge or reflection was unworthy of respect. He was determined to bring the thought of the past within the range of his people's understanding. He insisted those who held positions of authority become literate, just as he had overcome the illiteracy of his youth.

Alfred personally wrote translations of Gregory, Boethius and Augustine. He also ordered the compilation of the Anglo Saxon Chronicle in order to weld together and inspire his people. And as no king had codified the law for about a hundred years, Alfred drew up his law-code in the late 880s or early 890s. This also respected Mercian and Kentish traditions for a number of unifying reasons, strengthening the ties of the nation and binding the country together.

Alfred, as the youngest of five brothers, would in normal circumstances not have been expected to become king; perhaps this destiny spurred him on with a high duty to save the Saxons. It is one thing to win a war, another matter entirely to use the peace constructively.

"In a world falling into ruins he had the courage to plan for a happier future; not only to plan defence, but to plan for a fuller and richer life for his subjects. In this there is something heroic. The achievement is impressive; the vision astonishing," wrote historian Christopher Brooke. We could learn today from Alfred's tenacity and ingenuity.

Continuing our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

FIGHTING FASCISM

It is a fact that the only force to defeat fascism is the organised working class. Sometimes in a particular country, as in Britain prior to the Second World War when Mosley was broken – the only country of Europe which saw off the internal fascist coup. Or internationally as in the Second World War, when the forces of progress epitomised in the Red Army cleared Europe and became the beacon for the rest of the world.

It is also a fact that the emotive misuse of the term results in anti-fascist forces chasing all sorts of diversions. Confusion around race and migration, around nationality and place, around phobias and alleged communities, around victims and being a victim, around patriotism and internationalism – all are introduced to fog and divert from concentrating on clear class understanding and analysis. All are introduced to divert energy and purpose into cul-de-sacs, wasted action and anything and everything but the real enemy – capitalism.

Fascism simply is when capitalism can no longer live with the working class and every weapon at capital's disposal is used to destroy the working class. And every weapon at the disposal of the working class must therefore be deployed to defeat fascism, starting with dispensing with the state of mind which elects a Hitler or a Thatcher.

The internal contradictions in Britain and Europe which have brought the present state of affairs about should see us respond in kind – no more reform, no more sticking plasters, no more patching them up, no more social democratic views that capitalism is safe in their hands. Away with capitalism!

Real fascism is about how capital has used parliament to bring about a fundamental and they hope permanent shift in the balance of forces. Britain's desperate ruling class huddle together with other dark EU figures to consolidate their power at our expense. These are the real politics of their 'Final Solution' – to finish us off as an organised working class.

The threat to the British working class does not come from far-right cretins. Put to one side the BNP and its creation based upon EU legislation, EU "rights" and EU money. Look carefully at the EU itself, nothing more than a fascist dream of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Mosley from the 1920s and 1930s: one unified capitalism, its sole purpose to defeat the working class and destroy the Soviet Union.

The EU model, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is still to continue with that destruction of organised working class independence, thinking and organisation. That's the real source of fascism now, of the assault on our civil liberties, and it is where our fight must be directed. Want to fight fascism? We halt fascism by changing our thinking. No more parliamentary cop-outs. No more passing responsibility to someone else.

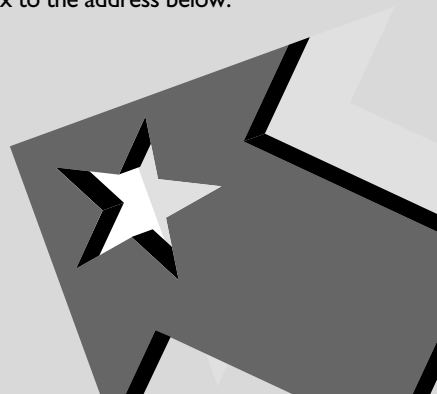
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Back to Front – A province once more

‘Could this happen in Britain? Ireland’s decision has brought the nightmare closer...’

SO AFTER two centuries of struggle for liberation from British colonialism, the Irish Republic, in saying Yes to the Lisbon Treaty, finally capitulated to EU neo-imperialism.

This is a sorry outcome for a country with a proud history of resistance, including rejection of the Nice Treaty and of the original EU Constitution. The long-term implications are dire.

The referendum result, however, was not a surprise. Ireland had long ago accepted the euro, a major step towards domination by the EU. The Irish economy had been mismanaged and exposed to the toxic effects of capitalism, borrowing 25 billion euros a year, with a 9.8 per cent drop in GDP in 2009 – the largest fall in the industrialised world, according to the OECD. The “Celtic Tiger” had become dependent on the EU and the USA.

These two blocs campaigned together to protect tens of billions of dollars and “send a message to American boardrooms” – as the Irish Business & Employers’ Confederation put it. Ironically, given that the economy was heading for collapse on an Icelandic scale, membership of the Eurozone seems not to have helped one jot. The claims of the EU to create prosperity are patently false.

To the joy of Gordon Brown, pressure by American IT corporations, as well as the likes of BP and meddling EU politicians (flown in courtesy of Ryanair) helped to sap the will of the Irish to hold out. The Treaty was euphemistically billed as a “reform plan” – a mere “streamlining” exercise. Legally dubious protocols on neutrality and abortion swayed many.

But excuses are no excuse. This was the Irish people’s choice, and they will have to live with the consequences. More significant than the seduction and the bullying tactics, there was an unprincipled

alliance of most unions (though not the Irish Unite T&G) with the multinational and bourgeois interests.

All the arguments for Irish independence from Europe had been well rehearsed since debate on Maastricht in 1992. But in the end tired resignation and wishful thinking lost the argument – from those who said they wanted to vote No but didn’t dare for fear of unemployment (bankers were observed in the queue for jobs at M&S) to those who hoped that Lisbon, with its Charter of Fundamental Rights, might offer some kind of nirvana where workers’ rights would miraculously trump the drive to profits.

The result is that Ireland has held its last referendum on anything of political significance. It has become a province of the EU, with almost no voting powers. Speaking in Dublin on 9 September, British MP Gisela Stuart warned: “Lisbon does not give you, as a citizen, the means to control the executive or the politicians who decide on your behalf, and that’s the hurdle it falls on...The nature of democracy is really at stake.” She should know – she helped draw up the original constitution.

The question now is: Could this happen in Britain? The threat cannot be underestimated. Ireland’s decision has brought the nightmare closer.

Britain’s path will be far from easy. There are pressures around the world – from the oil states and from the US – to exclude sterling in favour of the Eurozone, Russia, Brazil, and the Far East.

Though there is yet no clear consensus in Britain for leaving the EU, in a recent poll 84 per cent wanted a referendum on Lisbon. All parliaments are for capitalism. British workers cannot rely on so-called eurosceptic alliances, whether Labour or Tory. Patriotism and democracy, in the last analysis, rest with the working class.

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