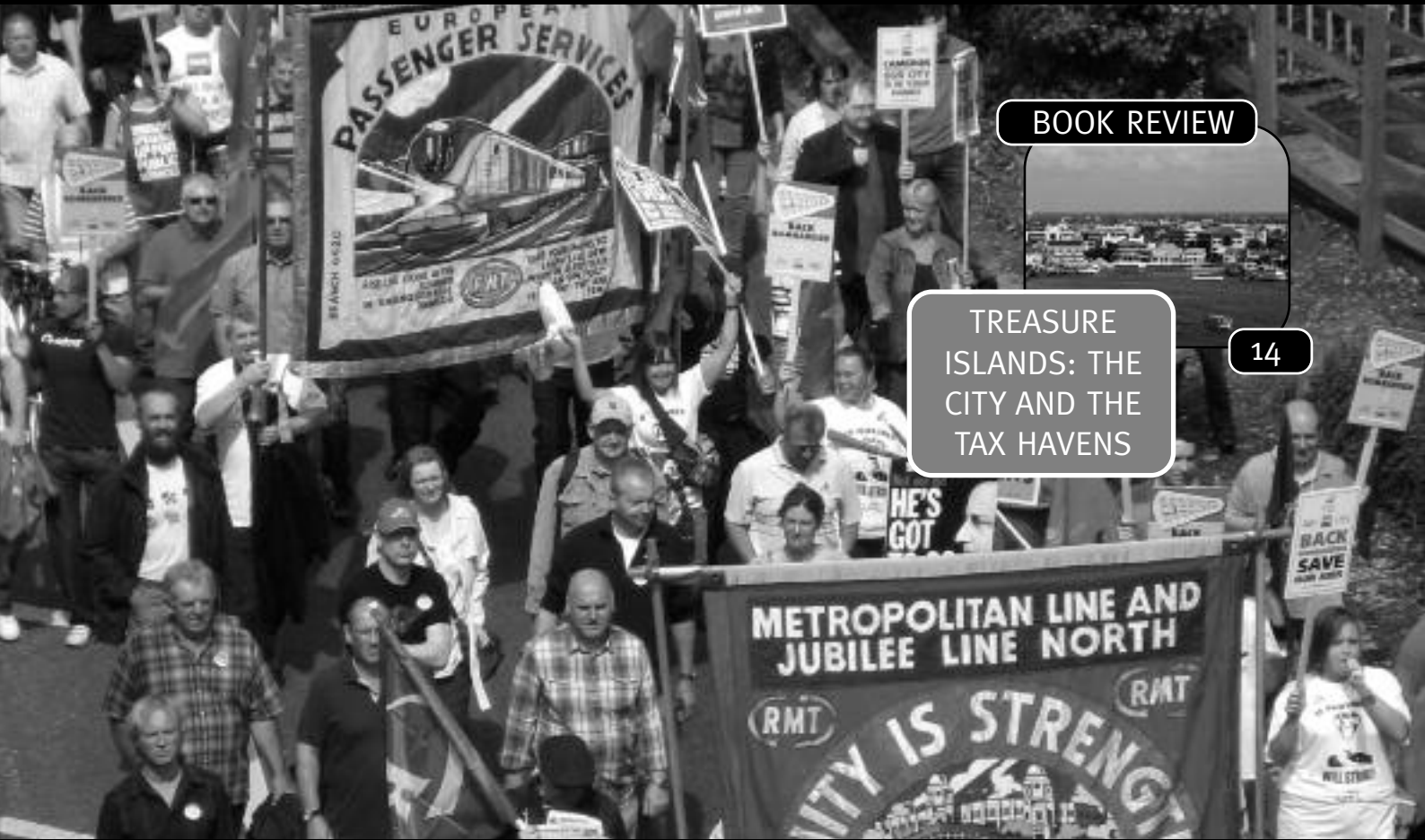


WORKERS

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BOOK REVIEW



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WORKERS

“ Take responsibility

AUGUST'S RIOTS should ring alarm bells for the organised working class. Everything that comes from employment, skill and collectivity – dignity, pride, confidence – stands in opposition to the looting and robbery that swept across some parts of England in August.

Capitalism has created an industrial wasteland, and has cultivated moral wastelands as well. Some members of our class have embraced with gusto the capitalist morality of wrecking and grab what you can. Looters waltzing into JD Sports are an imitation – even if a pale and ghastly one – of the unrestrained ransacking of Britain under this government, and those before it. Looters and arsonists destroyed the places where workers live and work, pathetically copying the destruction being wrought by the economic depression.

MPs have looted the public purse. Bankers have filched our national wealth. Newspapers have bought police officers. Ministers move seamlessly from public service to corporate boardrooms. Profiteers steal the assets created by our work. Why work for a living when you can steal one?

And after the riots, the crackdown. Draconian sentencing: six months for stealing two bottles of mineral water. By that yardstick, MPs stealing £30,000 should have been banged up for thousands of years. And the

capitalist class is handed the excuse to sharpen the tools of oppression which it will use against political opposition, with talk of water cannon and plastic bullets (used in Ireland) and bringing in the army for civil control.

Most unemployed people don't loot and burn, and don't ape the worst practices of the ruling class. The people of Britain have not lost their sense of morality. But the effects of unemployment reach far and wide. The overwhelming majority of those prosecuted in the riots are under 24 and unemployed: of around 1,000 cases analysed by THE GUARDIAN, only 8.6 per cent of defendants had jobs or were students. Only a fool – or a politician – would say there is no connection.

The organised working class must confront the abandonment of youth in practical ways and the young must take responsibility too for their futures. Those in work must demand jobs for our young people – and that means forcing their own employers to take young people on, to provide work, training and apprenticeships. Communities must demand facilities for their young people.

Don't expect the government to do anything: only we can find the solutions. It's time – in truth, long past time – for workers to take responsibility and impose a working class morality on Britain. ■



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PFI: a failed policy

THE HOUSE OF Commons Treasury Select Committee has belatedly analysed the economics of Gordon Brown’s Private Finance Initiative and concluded that PFI does not give good value for money.

PFI is an “extremely inefficient” method of financing projects, according to the committee. But poor investment decisions may continue to be encouraged across the public sector, because PFI allows government departments and public bodies to make big capital investments without committing large sums up front.

Investment could be increased in the long run, the MPs point out, if government capital investment were used instead of PFI. The average cost of capital for a low-risk PFI project is over 8 per cent, as against the long-term government gilt rate of around 4 per cent. The difference in finance costs means that PFI projects are significantly dearer to fund over the life of a project.

This all amounts to a significant cost to taxpayers. Analysis commissioned by the committee suggests that paying off a PFI debt of £1 billion may cost taxpayers the same as paying off a direct government debt of £1.7 billion.

The Committee heard that design innovation was worse in PFI projects, and saw reports which found that building quality was of a lower standard in PFI buildings. PFI is also inherently inflexible, especially for NHS projects. This is in large part due to the financing structure and its costly and complex procurement procedure.

PFI was invented by Conservative chancellor Norman Lamont, but was hardly used until Labour came to power in 1997. For Gordon Brown it was a way of raising money without – apparently – raising government debt, since the cost was treated as capital rather than as debt. But the consequence of such dishonesty is that hospitals, schools and so on, have actually been saddled with outrageous limitations on what they can do in “their” buildings, which actually belong to the PFI consortia.

And taxpayers are having to pick up an extortionate bill. More than 900 PFI schemes have been completed, with a total capital value of £56 billion, while the amount the taxpayer will have to repay is £229 billion, and rising.

Despite dismissing PFI as “discredited”, current chancellor George Osborne has backed more than 60 PFI projects costing almost £7 billion. ■

EMPLOYMENT

Importing labour

THE NUMBER of jobs occupied by people born outside Britain grew by almost 300,000 over the three months to June, while the number of British-born people in employment fell by 50,000, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics. The number of British-born people in employment was 25 million over the three months to June, a fall of 50,000 on a year earlier. Conversely, the number of people with jobs who were born outside Britain was 4.15 million, an increase of 289,000.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed 16- to 24- year-olds grew by 15,000 to 949,000 between March and June. This means more than one in five young people, 20.2 per cent, are now unemployed. And figures released in August showed national unemployment climbing to 4.19 million, with a steep rise in London. ■

TRADE GAP

‘Unexpected’ rise

BRITAIN’S TRADE gap in May rose “unexpectedly” to £8.5 billion, up from April’s £7.6 billion. Newspaper reports said that analysts expected it to fall.

In June, British factory output also “unexpectedly” fell by 0.4 per cent, and Britain’s deficit in goods trade with the rest of the world worsened to £8.873 billion, the biggest deficit since December. The analysts had expected a deficit of £8.1 billion.

Every month these analysts make their forecasts, and every month they get it wrong, and always in the same direction. Who pays them for all these bad guesses? ■

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

More money for bailouts

Parliament voted in July by 274 to 246 to increase Britain's contribution to the IMF by £9.3 billion. Many Labour MPs were "unavailable" or abstained, although their party recommended voting against. The IMF will use this money to fund futile bailouts of eurozone countries. The IMF told the EU to end its "unproductive debate" over debt restructuring and to integrate faster and more deeply, an unprecedented intervention in EU affairs.

Irish diktat

The European Central Bank warned that it may remove 50 billion euros in liquidity from Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide if the Irish government forces their bondholders to take losses. The ECB backs bondholders and not people, or even governments.

Rates rise

On 8 July, the ECB raised interest rates to 1.5 per cent, even though the eurozone is deep in economic trouble. Even Germany could only grow 0.1 per cent in the last quarter. ECB President, Jean-Claude Trichet, hinted it may soon impose another rise.

Expensive for Italy

On 11 July, Italy's cost of borrowing reached its highest point for nine years. eurozone finance ministers proclaimed their "absolute commitment to safeguard financial stability in the euro area" – with no idea how that might happen.

Euro=unemployment

Since they joined the euro, unemployment has doubled in Greece to 16 per cent, more than doubled in Spain to 20.7 percent and more than tripled in Ireland to 14.7 per cent. Meanwhile, the Centre for Economics and Business Research says that if Italy and Spain try to pay back the debt, they will have to cut their people's living standards by 19 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Unwanted advice

Nick Clegg said on 8 July, "It's not my role, or the role of the British government, to predict the future of a currency union we're not a part of." His government has anyway decided to back full fiscal union for the 17-nation eurozone.



Kayaking on Windermere: the agency overseeing safety on adventure holidays is now slated for closure.

Photo: Stephen Meese/Shutterstock

Attack on safety agency

AS PART OF its much-vaunted cutting of bureaucracy, the government is proposing to abolish the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, an arm of the Health and Safety Executive. The AALA regulates the operations of commercial providers of adventurous activities to the under-18s. Throwing AALA onto the bonfire of the quangos caused a stir within the activities arena, but the tragic death of a schoolboy killed by a polar bear last month has reignited the debate about safety on adventurous activities, and indeed the wider debate about regulation versus personal responsibility.

Since education began, teachers have been taking pupils off-site to broaden their horizons, enrich the curriculum and give opportunities that are simply not available in the classroom. Such activities are called educational visits in current parlance (school trips in old money), and range from a walk to the local park to a trekking expedition in Nepal, and yes, expeditioning on a Norwegian island.

All the evidence suggests that such visits have a profound impact back at school in terms of attainment, behaviour and attendance. Additionally, well managed visits give pupils opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others, and to begin to manage risks for themselves. Unsurprisingly, more complex and adventurous activities deliver the biggest impact, but come with a greater risk of something going wrong, of someone coming to harm. The point is whether we reduce risk by eliminating activities, or by managing them as best we can.

Most educationalists take the view that to curtail activity, or confine it to the lowest level of risk is limiting, and closes off valuable learning experiences. A ship is safe in a harbour, but that is not what ships are for.

AALA was established as a result of the Lyme Bay canoeing disaster in 1995, when four young people drowned because of the failure of the activity centre to organise the activity appropriately. It monitors best practice in the field and sets the benchmark for competent management. It has enormously reduced the frequency of young people dying or coming to harm, and has squeezed the maverick providers out of the industry. These providers are rubbing their hands now! ■

MEDIA

Jobs fight at BBC

JOURNALISTS at the BBC held their second one-day strike against redundancies on 1 August. There was action right across the country, with major disruption to news and sports programmes.

The 1 August strike involved members of the National Union of Journalists, though some members of other unions also refused to cross picket lines. In Wales, a

strike by BECTU members at BBC Wales due to be held on 26 and 27 August was averted only a week before it was due when a temporary agreement was reached.

NUJ members in other parts of the industry have been involved in their own struggles. Twenty-four journalists working for Johnston Press in Doncaster are striking against plans to axe half the workforce. And in London members at legal information firm LexisNexis named three days of strike action after the company failed to improve its 2.2 per cent pay offer. ■

EUROZONE WOES

More money for the IMF

EARLY IN July, Parliament voted by 274 to 246 to increase our contribution to the IMF by £9.3 billion. Many Labour MPs were "unavailable" or abstained, when their party recommended voting against. The IMF will use this money to fund futile bailouts of Eurozone members. The IMF has told the EU it must end its "unproductive

debate" over debt restructuring and, in an unprecedented intervention in the EU, told it to integrate faster and more deeply.

Chancellor George Osborne agrees. He called in August for eurozone members to accept the "remorseless logic of... greater fiscal integration". In practice this would mean the few eurozone countries with budgetary surpluses (basically this means Germany) dictating to the rest how to run their economies. This has already happened to Italy. ■

Afghanistan toll mounts

THE DEATH TOLL mounts: three servicemen were killed in action in July on top of six in June, and yet (or perhaps unsurprisingly) the war in Afghanistan has failed to reform Afghanistan. US General David Petraeus says the Afghan government "is a criminal syndicate". The UN's Assistance Mission there sums up, "women are denied their most fundamental human rights". The United Nations reports that in the past seven years life expectancy has fallen and child mortality has risen.

When Afghanistan achieves development and democracy is up to the Afghan people. NATO cannot and will not do it for them. To make NATO forces' withdrawal depend on achieving development and democracy there would mean staying for ever.

Last year's YouGov/Sun poll confirmed that the British public wants the troops to withdraw. 28 per cent said they should be "withdrawn immediately", while a further 44 per cent said that "most troops should be withdrawn soon, and the rest within the next year or so". That is, 72 per cent want the troops out. This is almost exactly the same figure as in previous polls.

An 8 June BBC World News America/Harris Poll found that 52 per cent of Americans believe that the United States should move to get its troops out of Afghanistan "now", with only 35 per cent believing that the troops should stay. A Pew Research Center poll of mid-June showed 56 per cent of Americans want an "immediate" pullout.

US president Obama recently said that the US should not be spending billions on wars overseas while the country is struggling economically and he promised to shift from foreign to domestic issues. He said, "America, it is time to focus on nation building here at home." In the midst of economic crisis, his government pours workers' money into war. ■

GREECE

Back on the taxpayer

AUGUST SAW once again a eurozone crisis over Greece, and once again a bailout. The main effect of the second Greek bailout will be a major transfer of Greek debt from private creditors to taxpayer-backed bodies like the European Central Bank. Greek debt and interest payments through August amounted to 18.2 billion euros, so despite the release of 12 billion euros, Greece may not have enough funding to make it through to the end of September.

While the Greek parliament was passing a package of privatisations and cuts to public services at the insistence of the EU and IMF, police used unprecedented levels of violence to suppress mass protests and prevent demonstrators from blocking the parliament. The austerity measures do not address the causes of the crisis, but

make public service workers pay for a crisis they did not cause. The extra burden for an average family of four will be 2,795 euros a year - a month's income. This is a ruinous deal for Greece.

Credit agencies Standard & Poor and Fitch dealt a blow to plans to make the private sector contribute to a second Greek bailout, saying that this could trigger a default, something which EU leaders and the ECB want to avoid at all costs.

Many commentators say that the solution to the Greek crisis is simple: default on the debts and leave the euro. US economist Martin Feldstein argues, "the only thing which will help Greece is to leave the eurozone." Another Harvard professor, Kenneth Rogoff, agrees: "I don't think there is any question that if you look at it narrowly from Greece's point of view, it would be better to default now, clean it up and move on." The eurocrats are already saying that Greece will need a third bailout, of 85 billion euros. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

September

Saturday 4 September, 11am to 6pm

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 labour movement organisations are laying on coaches.

Thursday 29 September, 7.30pm.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

"Britain: What Next for Workers?"

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. Rocked by financial crises they can neither understand nor control, with unwinnable wars abroad and rising discontent at home, the ruling class has become the clueless class. But what about us? Will we go down with sinking capitalism, or strike out for ourselves? Come and discuss how the working class can rebuild industry and Britain. Everybody welcome.

SCHOOLS

Resistance to academies

THE IMPORTANCE of union organisation, even where schools become academies, was underlined by the successful resistance at Crest Girls Academy in Brent, north London this summer.

In February the academy announced that 22 jobs would be cut at the school, due to a drop in student numbers and lower funding. Unions tried to negotiate with management, but to no avail - when schools become academies managements often assume they can do whatever they want. Not in this case however, as the teaching unions NUT, ATL and NASUWT got together and voted overwhelmingly for strike action on 11 May.

E-ACT, the charity which runs the school, called off the compulsory redundancies just before the strike day, and has returned to negotiations.

At Tile Hill Wood school in Coventry, resistance to plans for an academy continues. NUT members have staged three strike days against the plans, with local people expressing their anger that the project is to be pushed through without consultation or discussion. ■

NEWS ANALYSIS

Cutting back on student nurses

THIS MONTH sees a 10 per cent reduction in student nurse places in universities in England and similar reductions in Scotland and Wales. The government aims to reduce numbers by a further 10 per cent in 2012 and again in 2013. At the same time, significant numbers of nurses are nearing retiring age and the attack on the pension fund may also spur a sudden drop in nursing numbers as nurses leave before the changes are implemented.

Anyone on the street could tell you a country with an ageing population needs more nurses but the government is asking everyone to ignore the obvious.

One group which refused to accept the government's logic was the nursing staff at the Glasgow University School of Nursing. Despite being the second highest rated nursing school in Britain it was threatened with closure earlier this year with a government minister describing Scotland as being "overprovided with nurses". They fought back with support from unions across the city and they have won a stay of execution.

A draft consultation report by a university panel delayed a decision "until after the outcome of the Chief Nursing Officer's review of nursing and midwifery education". This is due in spring 2012, so the whole country had better wake up fast and tell the Chief Nursing Officer what they think.

Posts lost

The fall in nursing student numbers is leading to the loss of other posts in nursing departments across Britain by a combination of voluntary and compulsory redundancy. Just before their summer holiday 12 staff in the nursing and primary care departments at Middlesex University were told they were in the "at risk" pool for compulsory redundancy, along with colleagues from other disciplines. The local UCU branch is now in dispute and fighting the compulsory redundancies.

The number of nurse teaching posts lost nationally to voluntary redundancy is not known, but this is an alarming development as it means the loss of the staff group needed to reverse the wider trend. The last time that nursing student numbers and nursing teacher posts were reduced was during the Thatcher era, which resulted in Britain poaching nurses from all around the world, from Zimbabwe to the Philippines, to make up the "shortfall".

This time the alarm has been sounded by the trade unions and a report called "The Decisive Decade" published in July by the leading health workforce expert, James Buchan of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. The report says Britain has 352,000 qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors – below the European average for the population served.

Unless the current trends are reversed Buchan predicts the number will reduce to 253,000 in a decade. A report changes nothing, but it is useful ammunition: read in full at www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/394780/004158.pdf. ■

The government's decision to go to carriages for the new Thameslink route puts our own industry in jeopardy...

Bombardier – the death of train manufacturing?

BRITAIN'S LAST train manufacturing plant, owned by Canadian-based Bombardier in Derby, is threatened by the government's decision to give "preferred bidder" status to Siemens in Germany for the contract to supply 1200 new train carriages for London's Thameslink commuter route, which crosses the city from north to south. The order is worth £1 billion.

On 23 July, over 10,000 trade unionists and their families marched through Derby in support of the campaign to save Britain's last train factory, with the possible loss of 3,000 jobs. They were cheered enthusiastically by shoppers and bystanders, indicating the huge support for the campaign in the city. Unite, RMT, TSSA and GMB members at the plant were supported by other unions and trades councils who recognise the importance of this fight to Derby and to the whole country.

At the rally at the end of the demonstration, trade union general secretaries and Labour MPs queued up to profess condemnation of the government. The Tory leader of Derby City Council, and the Bombardier Chairman joined them on the platform, calling upon the government to review its decision. Liberal Democrats were out in force on the demonstration, concerned to protect their political futures by being seen to oppose a massive loss of jobs in Derby. In government, LibDems have a poor record of supporting British industry (remember Sheffield Forgemasters?), like Labour before them.

Still, the degree of unanimity across the political spectrum in support of the campaign to save the Derby plant has rarely been seen. Tory-controlled Derby City Council has been unanimous in expressing support, mindful that up to 12,000 jobs associated with the factory such as those in the supply chain, many in Derby, are under threat. The Derby Rail Forum, representing the many rail employers based in Derby, has also been at the forefront of the campaign.

The cost to the taxpayer

Transport Secretary Philip Hammond has so far dismissed this opposition to his decision. When challenged by the trade unions at a recent meeting, he admitted that in considering the bids, it did not factor in to the calculations the costs to the British taxpayer of the redundancies at Derby that would result, nor did it consider the long-term future of British train manufacturing. The wider economic impact of their decision on Derby and the British economy was ignored.

This government has blamed the previous government for tying Andrew hands, a claim dismissed by Hammond's predecessor, Lord Adonis. Hammond has sought to hide behind European Union procurement law, knowing full well that the French government ensures that French trains are built in France, and that Germany sees to it that their trains are built in Germany! If they can do it, why can't the British? As RMT general secretary Bob Crow put it, "They look after their manufacturing workers, so our government should look after ours".

Hammond is dismissive of the threat posed to the world-leading railway technical expertise to be found in a myriad of companies clustered in Derby that are to a large extent dependent on the Bombardier plant. The closure of the plant may well result in this

Germany for the trains manufacture

n of British

expertise being dissipated across Europe as these companies move to countries where trains are being built.

The government has not looked at the technical merits of the rival bids either. The Siemens bid seeks to use unproven technology, while Bombardier's bid is based upon tried and tested designs. Bombardier's trains would be lighter and more energy efficient, and the order would have allowed the Derby plant to be a world leader in aluminium extrusion techniques for train manufacture.

The government has said several times since coming to power that it wants to rebalance the economy away from reliance on finance and towards manufacturing. Yet given a chance to secure the future of the manufacture of rail vehicles in Britain – trains and trams – Hammond, almost certainly with the backing of Cameron, has chosen not to do so.

Bombardier is currently completing a few small new train orders, and soon will have no work. Unsurprisingly, it has announced that the company proposes to make redundant 446 permanent staff; 983 agency workers will also be laid off. The company has also stated that it will conduct a review of its UK operations to be completed shortly, and has clearly indicated that total closure is now possible.

The unions have also expressed real concerns about other Bombardier maintenance, repair and testing plants across the country, including the one at Crewe. Failure to win the Thameslink contract will mean that these plants will suffer potential job losses as work that would follow from the building of the trains at Derby will not materialise.

The real scandal is the fact that Bombardier's Derby plant was reliant on this one contract to secure its future. Privatisation of Britain's railways has created a huge amount of uncertainty in train manufacturing, with alternating periods of feast and famine reflecting the lack of central planning. Train manufacturing requires a steady flow of

Photo: Workers



23 July: over 10,000 trade unionists and their families marched through Derby.

orders to ensure stability, and to ensure job security and retention of highly skilled engineering staff. It is for this reason – lack of planning and flow of orders – that Britain has but one rail vehicle manufacturing plant left.

Despite the economic crisis, Britain's railways are booming, with passenger numbers being at levels not seen since the 1920s. Current trends will soon mean passenger numbers at their highest levels ever, as more people abandon their cars in the face of increasing fuel costs and traffic congestion on the roads.

Investment

Many trains across the country, not just in London and not just commuter trains, are packed. The trains that are running are in many cases over 25 years old, and many are completely unsuitable for the routes they run on. Britain's railways now compare very unfavourably with those in most of Europe. The answer is investment.

New lines like Thameslink, Crossrail, and HS2 (the high speed line from London to the midlands and the north) are desperately needed, though these take many years to build. Even more urgent is the need for new modern trains that could

be running in a relatively short timescale.

Given this, the future of Bombardier's factory should be secure. It is not – because the government is intent on attacking the nation's skill base and organised labour, choosing to end manufacture of trains in Britain.

The Transport Select Committee meets on 7 September to discuss the Bombardier situation, and the opportunity will be taken to lobby them and other MPs. A train is being provided free by Derby-based East Midlands Trains to take workers to London, a sign of the support throughout Derby and the railway community.

This autumn, the TUC congress and the party conferences will all see lobbies and demonstrations. On 25 October, a major lobby of Parliament and rally is planned.

The workers at Bombardier and their supporters are intent on keeping up the pressure on Hammond, knowing that the contract with Siemens has not been signed, and the government can still be made to change its mind. The contract will not be finalised until December.

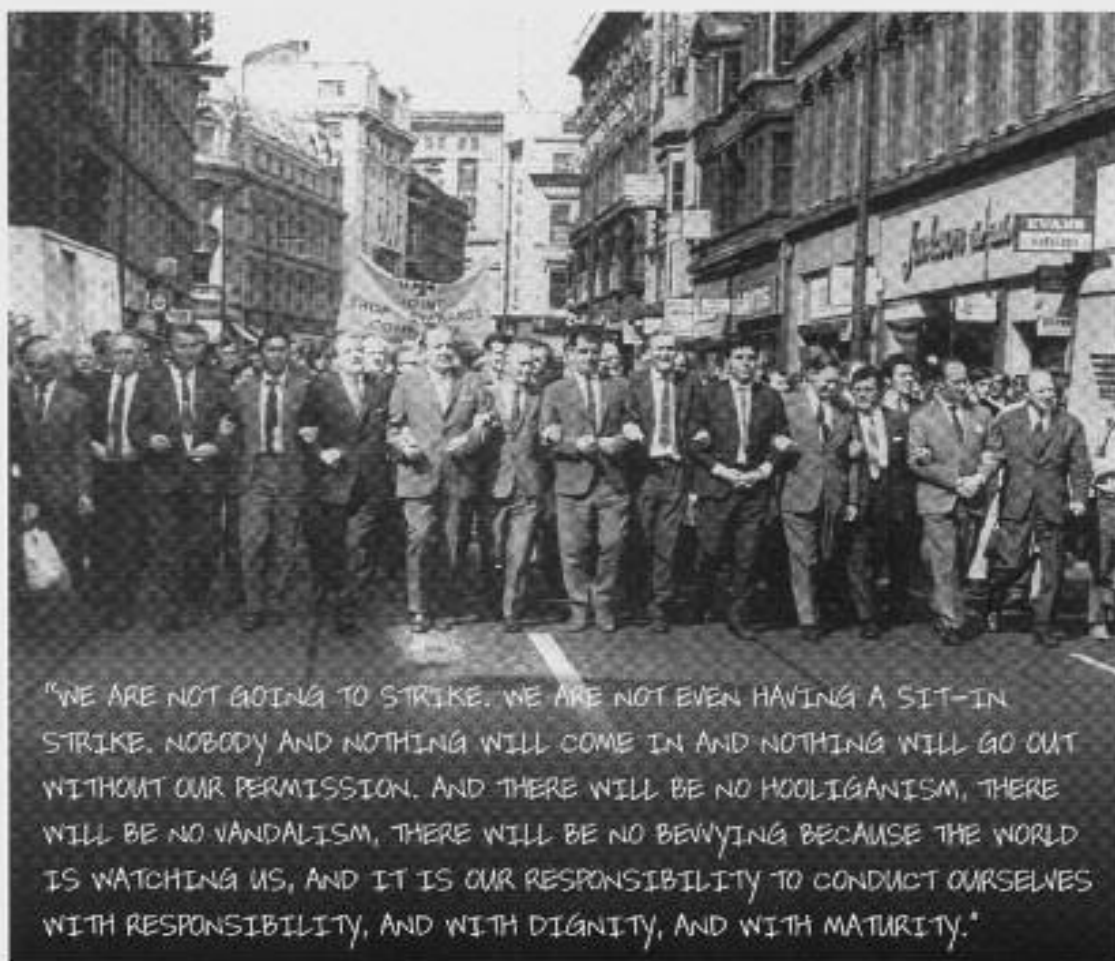
This fight for manufacturing is one which is supported by engineering workers across the country. It is a struggle that must be won for the future of Britain. ■

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Tony Benn Pat Kane Jimmie Macgregor
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Fraser Speirs Kevin McDermott Simone Welsh
The Whistlebinkies Alba Brass Sax Ecosse
PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS



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As delegates prepare for the Trades Union Congress in London this month, they need to recognise that workplace power is the only solution...

TUC 2011: Dump all diversions!



TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber poses on the steps outside the 2010 TUC Congress, Manchester.

Photo: Andrew Wiard / www.wiard.co.uk

THE TUC returns to London, no longer trekking round seaside towns – Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brighton – or the new conference centres – Liverpool, Manchester – but back to Britain’s capital city. The symbolism of the TUC speaking up for Britain’s workers from Britain’s capital will sadly be lost or submerged in some phoney EU internationalism mixed with a diversion about the ‘far right’ threatening to murder us all in our beds at night. The Cameron-Clegg-Miliband threat and circus will be fudged, a far too challenging issue.

Reduced in number of affiliated members as mergers of unions continue, and with the total membership of those unions affiliated dropping below 6 million, the TUC is still permeated with the idea of ‘big is beautiful’. Reduced is the size of union delegations (long overdue) so as to squeeze into the TUC conference centre, but for the wrong reason: the continuing

decline of organised labour.

The TUC now has the smallest number of affiliated members since the early 1940s. Set against a backcloth of civil disturbance across Britain, the questions arising about organised versus non-organised labour – hope and aspiration of a working class as against desperation of the unemployed and supposedly unemployable – should start to focus trade union minds.

Survival

The question before trade unionists at the TUC is the one which has seemed unsolvable since Thatcher in 1979: How can the working class through its organisations, primarily the trade union movement, grow and survive in the face of the most vicious, reactionary, vindictive and brutal capitalist class in our history?

It’s a capitalist class trying on the

imported US political labels “neo-liberalism” and the even more extreme “neo-conservatism” to justify the excesses always associated with capitalism and the accumulation or re-accumulation of wealth that is happening in Britain today. A capitalist class which has unceasingly overseen the destruction of Britain’s core industrial identity for over 30 years, irrespective of which parliamentary party has been in government. A capitalist class which continues to dismantle all social progress that the working class has achieved – education, local government, housing, planning, health, social care.

The answer for our class is two-fold: reassert that sense of identity, class identity, which primarily comes from the workplace; and challenge the very root of capitalism as an economic system.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

We cannot reassert class identity unless we identify ourselves as workers, in the workplace – however that is defined in the 21st century. We cannot challenge the root of capitalism if we eternally delude ourselves by affiliation to the Labour Party and its worship of capitalism.

Issue politics, internet pressure groups, community organising and do-gooding will not do the job either. When one of the last surveys of the Labour government under Brown asked the question of how people would define their class, 86 per cent saw themselves as working class – irrespective of income, residence or job. How do we motivate the overwhelming majority of workers, nearly 30 million of them now in Britain, to promote their aspirations consciously as a class?

TUC economic analysis compares the early 19th-century growth of capitalism with events that are happening in Britain in the early 21st century. Yes the parallels are there, with instability, short-termism, unemployment, disorganisation, long hours, reduced wages, market-driven chaos and anarchy. But there the parallel

ends. This is not reborn capitalism full of dynamic growth: this is capitalism in absolute decline.

In Britain the acquisition of wealth has much criminality involved in it – drug trafficking, people trafficking, sex trade, and financial usury – generating profits faster and easier than manufacturing. Britain has a higher density of these capitalist activities than any other country in Europe. All roads for drug cartels, prostitution, and child slavery now seem to lead to Britain.

Unemployment

The figures in May 2011 for unemployment showed 2.46 million unemployed plus 2.35 million “economically inactive” people of working age (largely hidden unemployment), together making 4.81 million people. These figures have risen over the summer.

The largest factor in the dip below 6 million from 6.5 million trade unionists affiliated to the TUC is unemployment – systematic closure and dispensing with workers. Estimates of youth unemployment affecting 16- to 25-year-olds now range upwards of 20 per cent. This is no accident: debt-burdened

students, unemployed school leavers and the mass influx of workers from abroad willing to work for a pittance represent the destruction of the seed corn of Britain’s future.

One aspect of the capitalist destruction of Ireland’s now flayed “tiger economy” is the estimated 1 million people who will leave Ireland to seek work elsewhere. Britain now sees wave after wave of mass migration sponsored by the EU and welcomed by capitalist politicians of every stripe, all of which will ensure a further decline in the quality of work – unskilled, low wage, long hours, no job security, no or limited employment rights, minimalist terms and conditions, no training and no future for young workers. An estimated 25 per cent of British workers are now defined in this manner. Unemployment – war on workers – can lead to deteriorating health, debt and hopelessness.

Real wages are in decline relative to the 1970s, or more aptly in reverse gear. The wealth gap increases, profits rise, bank bonuses run at unprecedented rates. The fall in real incomes is now the sharpest for over 40 years with the largest drop in consumer spending for more than 30 years. Wages are frozen if not cut.



CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London

Thursday 29 September, 7.30 pm
“Britain: What Next for Workers?”

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

Rocked by financial crises they can neither understand nor control, with unwinnable wars abroad and rising discontent at home, the ruling class has become the clueless class. But what about us? Will we go down with sinking capitalism, or strike out for ourselves? Come and discuss how the working class can rebuild industry and Britain. Everybody welcome.

Collective bargaining is being abandoned as union density drops in workplaces.

Unite the union has seen staggering membership losses in the last 12 months – over 250,000 – paralleled only by losses in the 1980s and 1990s in mining, steel, textiles, docks, and fishing. Regional and plant bargaining to the detriment of national agreements, localism, individual pay and performance-related pay are all on the march, leading to destruction of terms and conditions. This is the employer agenda that has to be challenged. Workers are going to have to stand together and fight to survive.

Fragmentation of workplaces by outsourcing, home working, hot desking, architecture that isolates workers, new technology and the exploitation driven by email and electronic management – all of these challenge traditional ways of organising. It means that tradition has to change and getting organised by whatever method around work and the workplace must become the norm. Wages, terms and conditions, safety, skill and stability of employment have to be the renewed battlefields to produce the resurgent trade union movement. Struggle generates collectivity, identity and consciousness. Consciousness then in turn generates more struggle.

Undermining consciousness

The undermining of workplace organisation during the past 30 years, deeply damaging what trade unions can or seem to deliver, has undermined consciousness. These defeats can be reversed if workers decide to take responsibility for themselves, for their workplace, for their union. Not some gigantic edifice of a union machine covering every occupation and every industry but organically grown workplace identities turning division into unity and fragmentation back into strength.

The TUC will debate at length calls for trade union freedom based on a strategy to persuade a future Labour government to abandon British and EU anti-trade union legislation – the new Combination Acts. The Labour government of 1997 to 2010 strengthened this anti-union

legislation, the most draconian in Europe; none was ever removed from the statute book.

Workers have resisted anti-worker legislation dating back to its first introduction under the Tudors and throughout every century since. The Master and Servant Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries epitomised how the ruling class saw us and our place. A declining membership base will do nothing more than reassure the employer class that we are defeated and our place is now in the history books.

A different message

A vibrant new unionism transforming the workplace will send a different message. There have been numerous trade union survival strategies and fads since the decline in the 1980s. We have mergers and big is beautiful – one unionism. We've had the Australian organising model. We've had the US organising model. We've had

the EU organising model. We now have the mantra that community organising is the key as opposed to workplace. We have managerial trade unionism – if the unions were better managed people will join. We have business trade unionism just to keep certain people employed and we have every fad for whatever the flavour of the moment is.

None of them works. Why would anyone want instruction from the US trade union movement with its 5 to 8 per cent density and elements of gangsterism, or the EU model of corporate integration with the state? Or “community” organising – another US import from a different legal and employer tradition, totally alien to Britain's trade union movement.

There is only one solution: power in the workplace. The workplace is the bedrock, with workers organising themselves just as we always have done: a class for itself taking responsibility and being responsible. Dump all diversions! ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings begins on 29 September, with further meetings on 10 November and 15 February; except on May Day, all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn. 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 29 September, will be “Britain: what next for workers?”. Details of further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at www.workers.org.uk.

M Catch our WORKERS sellers this month at the festival in Burston (see What's On), and at the TUC.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2012, Tuesday 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



In the name of balancing the public purse we are witnessing the dismantling of the welfare state. What we need is the rebuilding of our industry...

Debt, the only thing capitalism gives us

THE NET DEBT of the public sector stands at £900 billion – and rising. This is a shocking figure, but hardly surprising. Debt has always been a feature of modern economies.

Up until the 1690s, the British state raised new taxes to fund its war debts, but the Nine Years' War with France left government finances in ruins. The war spurred government to recognise the need to rebuild a powerful navy in order to compete for power globally.

As there were no public funds available, a group of money lenders offered to supply money to the king, and £1.2 million was raised in 12 days. The terms of the loan were an astonishing 8 per cent interest per annum plus a £4,000 per annum service charge for the management of the loan.

This was the birth of the Bank of England. Interestingly, the massive industrial effort involved in rebuilding the Navy began to transform the economy. It was this industrial (and agricultural) transformation, alongside the power of the Navy, which combined to make Britain the dominant world power of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

And the national debt rose: from £12 million in 1700 to £850 million by the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The First World War brought another increase, from £650 million in 1914 to £7.4 billion in 1919. After the Second World War the debt had grown to £24.7 billion, a staggering 250 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

Some 150 years ago, in his great work *Capital*, Marx made the following observation. "...The system of public credits (national debt), whose early beginnings can be traced in Genoa and Venice before the close of the Middle Ages, spread all over Europe during the manufacturing period. The colonial system, with its seaborne commerce and its trading wars, served as a forcing house. National Debt, i.e. the sale of the State, gives the capitalist era its characteristic stamp."

Presciently, Marx went on to say "...

The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the possession of the peoples is their national debt. Hence, logically enough, the modern doctrine that a nation grows richer the more deeply it is in debt. Public credit becomes the *credo* of capital. With the rise of the system of national debt, want of faith in this institution comes to be regarded as the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost."

And how the chickens have come home to roost, as we see a generation of young people who have been conditioned to see debt as natural, a part of everyday life.

If we take time to digest Marx's challenging assertions, particularly when he attacks the prevailing wisdom that scepticism about national debt is a sin, we hear a distant echo of the ever-present mantra of today.

Now it is financiers or "the markets" that are guilty of that sin, speculating that nations may be unable to pay their debts. And unlike them we are required to be believers. How many times have we been told that we must cough up to restore confidence in the system? Bail out the banks to restore confidence. During the present crisis, this has been the cornerstone of government policy – to shore up the system at all costs.

Punitive cost

And the cost as we speak is punitive. In the name of balancing the public purse we are witnessing the dismantling of the welfare state. The attack on pensions, the onslaught on health and local government, are all necessary, we are told, to staunch the haemorrhaging of public spending. "We have been living beyond our means" cry politicians of every side, with no room for discussion. It pays us to examine this proposition in a little more detail.

The Thatcher period was characterised by the destruction of swathes of British industry, which in past has always enabled us to pay for the things we needed and wanted. This loss

of national earning power was the price the government at the time was prepared to pay to attempt absolute control over British workers.

When we finally repudiated her and her ilk in 1997, we should have demanded a programme of reinvestment and rebuilding of industry, much as happened after World War Two. What we got was the Blair/Brown years, when manufacturing continued to slide, and Britain borrowed massively to preserve the appearance of normality.

The problem with this kind of borrowing is that it simply postpones the day when the debt is called in. Fine when your lenders believe they will have no difficulty in recovering their loan. But when you borrow further to pay the interest on the loan, your creditworthiness comes into question. Then the cost of borrowing goes up and government finances spiral further and further out of control.

This is a direct consequence of pinning your faith in speculative finance and its promise of fast bucks today, instead of generating wealth the old fashioned way, by making things and selling them.

We have seen the same sorry spectacle being played out across the Atlantic these past few weeks, with Republicans locking horns with Obama in a game of brinkmanship over whether to cut public spending dramatically or raise the previously agreed ceiling for borrowing. A rock and a hard place that one, since neither will restore dynamism to America's becalmed economy.

The decision by the aptly named credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's to downgrade US creditworthiness from AAA to AA+ (below that of the Isle of Man) has rocked corporate America. Many feel betrayed by an unpatriotic American institution and seek to blame the messenger. They would do well to reflect that it was the decision of credit rating agencies such as S&P to slap AAA ratings on dubious sub-prime mortgages that precipitated the present crisis.

Back to Britain and what we know



Born out of the need for debt: the Bank of England.

best. It cannot be denied that we have been spending more than we can earn. Present government policy seeks to redress that imbalance by reducing spending. Hence the proposals to cut state spending on benefits for example. And everyone knows someone who knows someone living the life of Reilly, with a six-bedroom house, exotic foreign holidays, a gas guzzling 4x4 and all courtesy of the taxpayer.

Tax evasion

Yes, there is abuse. And yes, where it goes on (and it is endemic in parts of our class) it should be stopped. But if we are serious about getting public finances in order we need to look at the big players. Tax evasion is currently running at £15 billion, compared to benefit fraud at £1 billion.

And that is as nothing compared to the (legal) avoidance of tax by large companies through sharp practice, loopholes, off-shore accounts, tax havens and the like. The relatively recent development of protesters sitting in peacefully to draw attention to the tax

avoidance of major high street retailers and others has successfully raised general awareness of this practice, which has all the morality of fare dodging but on a corporate scale.

And now we have the debate over whether the 50 per cent tax rate for the wealthy should be scrapped. George Osborne whines that a punitive tax regime will drive the skilled and the entrepreneurial abroad. Yet even that doyen of finance capital, billionaire US investor Warren Buffet is arguing that the wealthy are not discouraged by higher taxes. Osborne's proposal, naturally, would be financed by yet more draconian cuts in public services.

And of course, there is the greatest loss of all to public revenue, which is represented by unemployment. Latest figures show that a further 38,000 are estimated to be out of work this month. That is another 38,000 who will be claiming benefits (albeit reduced), 38,000 buying fewer goods and services, 38,000 who will not be creating wealth.

Any prudent householder seeks to live within their means. So too for the

nation. If we are spending more than we earn let's address it. Let's cut what we don't need. Britain's public spending shopping list currently stands at just over £700 billion. Defence (for which read attack) costs us £37 billion, excluding the spending – said to be from "reserves" – to fund Britain's criminal involvement in Libya.

Are munitions for battleships and fighter planes better for this country than schools and hospitals? International aid costs £6.2 billion. EU contributions cost £7.9 billion. Even the interest on the debt we owe stands at £43 billion a year. If there are to be public spending cuts, let's open the books and have a real debate about what we need and what we don't need.

But more importantly, we have got to get to the nub of the question. If earnings and spending are out of balance, instead of concentrating exclusively on the spending side of the equation, we need to recover that understanding that a successful economy can only be built on industrial foundations. ■

A new book shows how tax havens undermine the rules, systems that promote the public good...

The City: purveyor of tax havens to the world

TREASURE ISLANDS: TAX HAVENS AND THE MEN WHO STOLE THE WORLD, by Nicholas Shaxson, paperback, 329 pages, ISBN 978-1-847-92110-9, Bodley Head, 2011, £14.99.

THIS INTERESTING and important book comes from Nicholas Shaxson, a vastly experienced financial journalist. He explains how offshore finance is centred on Britain, the EU and the USA – but above all on Britain. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has identified Britain itself as a tax haven. The City of London runs half the world's tax havens and holds more than \$3.2 trillion in offshore bank deposits, half the world total. The City's web stretches to the Crown Dependencies on islands dotted around Britain, to Britain's Caribbean islands (particularly the Cayman Islands), to Asia and to Pacific atolls.

Some 830,000 companies are registered in the British Virgin Islands alone. One small office building in the Caymans is the registered address for more than 18,000 companies. Successive British governments approved the changes in the Crown Dependencies' laws that let them aid and abet criminal activities. When the Labour government signed the UN Convention against Corruption in 2000, it exempted all the Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories.

Shaxson notes, "More than half of world trade passes, at least on paper, through tax havens. Over half of all banking assets and a third of foreign direct investment by multinational corporations are routed offshore. ... The IMF estimated in 2010 that the balance sheets of small island financial centres alone added up to \$18 trillion – a sum equivalent to about a third of the world's GDP ... 83 of the USA's biggest 100 corporations had subsidiaries in tax havens ... 99 of Europe's hundred largest companies used offshore subsidiaries."

Developing countries lose \$1.6 trillion a year to illegal capital flight. As Shaxson writes, "Africa's supposedly natural or inevitable disasters all had one thing in common: the movement of money out of Africa into Europe and the United States,



Photo: Debra James/Shutterstock.com

One of the biggest tax havens in the world: Grand Cayman, in the Caribbean.

assisted by tax havens and a pinstriped army of respectable bankers, lawyers and accountants."

Tax havens' secrecy provides the necessary cover for tax evasion, bribery, corruption, money-laundering and the receipt of stolen loot. US law allows US banks to profit from the proceeds of foreign crime, making the USA the world's largest receiver of stolen goods. Terrorists, drug smugglers, the Mafia, arms dealers, the CIA, corporations and corrupt politicians all use the same offshore system. Crime is built into the system. The City of London and Wall Street are financial pimps for the world's crooks.

Corruption

Banks, accountancy firms and law firms are all involved in the price-fixing, bribery, corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. Banks lend billions of dollars, and

law firms provide legal services, to help to develop and sell potentially illegal tax shelters.

Shaxson points out that US postwar aid to Europe was less than Europe's capital flight to the USA. Under the Marshall Plan, US taxpayers paid for policies benefiting Wall Street. London's Euromarkets in the 1950s gave US banks an escape from regulation. From 1965, US corporations could keep their money offshore, untaxed, i.e. they got free loans from the government.

He observes, "US corporations paid about two-fifths of all US income taxes in the 1950s; that share has now fallen to a fifth. The top 0.1 per cent of US taxpayers saw their effective tax rate fall from 60 per cent in 1960 to 33 per cent in 2007, as their income soared. Had the top thousandth paid the 1960 rate, the Federal Government would have received over



\$281 billion more in 2007.”

British corporations do even better: a third of Britain’s 700 biggest businesses paid no tax at all in Britain in 2006. Barclays alone has 315 tax haven subsidiaries: it paid £113 million in corporation tax in 2009 on global profits of £12 billion, a rate just a shade over 1 per cent.

Capital no longer flows into the most productive investments, but to where it can best evade laws and taxes. As Shaxson urges, we must “confront the British spider’s web, the most important and most aggressive single element in the global offshore system”. But proposals for reform come up short against finance capital.

Offshore thrives at our expense. To rebuild Britain’s manufacturing industry, we must be able to invest the capital we create, so we must defeat the offshore system and retrieve our capital. ■

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

THE MYTH OF THE MARKET

Over the past 32 years, Britain’s political leaders have lectured us with their mantra of disaster, “Let the markets decide!” Though the personnel in Downing Street have changed (from Thatcher and Major through Blair to Brown and now Cameron), the message has remained obsessively constant as our leaders seem cloned to the same way of thinking, always eager to spin that there is no alternative to the worship of free markets.

Since the late 1970s, a myth has been promoted that prosperity was dependent on scaling back government, having the private sector dominate the economy and establishing freedom from regulation. The pitch was that the invisible hand of capitalism’s markets is the best mechanism and will transmute individual acts of economic self-interest into socially desirable collective outcomes. How this would happen was never addressed or spelt out.

With hindsight the claim that free markets generate good outcomes for working people is now seen as utterly risible. Not even Adam Smith, the 18th century’s foremost advocate of markets, took such a benign view of their workings, as he envisaged the necessity of society intervening to ensure protections and safeguards. Needless to say his contemporary followers tend to overlook the caveats of the founder.

So what has been the effect of this dogma being unleashed as an economic policy? What have three decades of financial deregulation and dizzying privatisation actually produced? They have hatched a bleak world of economic slump and growing poverty for workers.

Capitalism tries to fog its workings. It clothes its operations in mystique, portraying the market as some irresistible, almost godlike, objective force performing exchanges throughout an economy. But there is no mystery for those who care to see; markets are social constructs, not impersonal forces. They are controlled by real people – capitalists – who exercise control over exchanges in the economy, at each stage of which they seek their own benefit and extraction of profit, not the interests of society.

The market is merely a convenient euphemism to shade the murky, greedy processes in which various sets of capitalists are making a killing at our expense in each individual process of the economy – in finance, commerce, the labour market, merger and takeover of companies, public services contracts, etc.

Deference to the whims of the market has held sway too long. The market has failed. We must rein it in under capitalism and eventually abolish it under socialism. Under capitalism for instance, export of capital should be ended and banks must be compelled to reinvest in British manufacture; whereas socialism’s arrival will allow a working class to control society’s economic exchanges as the visible hand of progress.

Interested in these ideas?

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Back to Front – Libya: Britain’s shame

‘A victory for imperialism and illegal war, funded lavishly by the government even as it cut billions from spending in Britain...’

AS WORKERS went to press, there was fighting inside Tripoli, which looks likely to fall to rebel forces. Should that happen, it will not be a “liberation”, but an occupation by a ragtag army sustained by NATO.

Cameron rushed back from holiday (quicker than he did when parts of Britain’s cities were being ransacked) to prepare a “victory” speech. If so, it is a victory for imperialism and illegal war, funded lavishly by the government even as it cut billions from spending in Britain.

Remember what Libya was: a small country which did not threaten its neighbours, and posed no threat to Britain. A basically secular state, it kept religious fundamentalism under control.

Its crime was to produce 1.5 million barrels of very high quality oil a day – light, sweet oil that needs a minimum amount of processing – and not be under the thumb of an imperialist power.

While Cameron seeks (let us hope futilely) for his “Falklands moment”, the Libyan people face a future of chaos. The National Transitional Council is largely an unknown quantity, but what is known is deeply unpleasant. Its brief existence has been marked by political assassinations, and the dismissal of an entire cabinet. It is deeply split, and utterly dependent on NATO. Religious fundamentalists based in Benghazi and associated with Al-Qaeda (some have been captured in Afghanistan) will want to have their say.

“We’ve won because we believe in god – and NATO,” said one rebel spokesperson. Well, god help any country that believes in NATO. It is a force for evil in the world, a bearer of war.

Certainly, though, NTC advances were only enabled by NATO/British bombing and the involvement of “special advisers”.

The shameful bombing could perhaps be a model for future imperialist interventions, bolstered by the development, reported in August, of a US military plane being tested that can reach anywhere in the world in an hour – and bomb it. So far that plane has yet to make a decent flight, but expect billions to go into its development.

Meanwhile it is said one of Gaddafi’s sons is to be handed over to the global kangaroo court, the International Criminal Court at The Hague, an institution that only indicts people who have offended the imperialist powers in some way. What next? A public execution for Gaddafi in the manner of that inflicted on Saddam Hussain?

Once they think Libya is under their control, Obama and Cameron will move their attention to Syria, another country that won’t do as it’s told by imperialism. Like Libya, Syria is no threat to Britain, nor to the US. The forces of war are on the march.

It’s easy for Cameron to say that Britain is helping to fight a dictator – the region is full of them, as is Africa generally. But there are dictators and dictators, it seems. The rulers of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are deemed friends of imperialism, such that there was no outcry from NATO or the UN Security Council when Saudi troops moved into Bahrain to help the unelected king there repress his own people.

Our money is not being spent to take down dictators but to change them. Cameron is no more fond of democracy abroad than he is of it here, home to the most oppressive anti-union laws in the developed industrial world. Britain’s actions in Libya have been shameful and cowardly. Expect more of the same, in Britain and abroad, unless we stop it. ■

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