

Trade unions • Economy • Women • Environment • USA

Socialist Appeal

May 2009 issue 173

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



FIGHT BACK



www.socialist.net

editor: Mick Brooks
 PO Box 50525
 London, E14 6WG
 tel 020 7515 7675
 contact@socialist.net
 www.socialist.net
 www.marxist.com
 www.newyouth.com

contents this month

www.marxist.com

Editorial: Our enemy – the capitalist state.....3
 Women workers: Forty years on and still fighting for equal pay..4-5
 Education: Reject increases in top up fees.....6
 Students: NUS – don't disaffiliate.....7
 Factory occupations: Occupy!.....8-9
 Economy: Human nature, capitalism and the global crisis.....10-11
 Perspectives: Where is Britain going?.....12-14
 Our history: The ballot and the miners' strike.....15
 The Thatcher offensive.....16-18
 Climate change and capitalism: Bangladesh under water?.....19
 International: US news20-21
 Europe: Onslaught on the working class.....22-23
 Trade unions: Exploitation in TV industry worse than ever.....24
 Mitie cleaners fight on.....25
 Blacklist heroes.....26

www.socialist.net

Join us In the fight for Socialism!

I would like to find out more about *Socialist Appeal*

I would like to join and help build *Socialist Appeal*

Name: _____

Address _____

Post code: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Return to:
 Socialist Appeal, PO Box 50525,
 London E14 6WG



or email us at
 contact@socialist.net

Bulletin Board

Upcoming Events:

⇒ **May Day London.** Assemble on Friday May 1st at Clerkenwell Green at noon

⇒ **May Day Edinburgh.** Assemble on Saturday May 2nd at Market St at 11.30. Che Guevara's daughter Aleida will lead the demonstration

⇒ **South Wales Day School** Saturday May 2nd 2009 in Swansea At the Dolphin Hotel, Whitewalls (near Indoor Market) 11am to 1 pm The Manifesto of the Communist Party By Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Its relevance today. Speaker; Darrall Cozens
 1.30 pm to 3 pm Is the Chinese way the only choice for Cuba? Speaker; Fred Weston

⇒ **Demonstrate for Construction Workers' Rights** Wednesday May 6th at the Olympic site. Assemble at Pudding Mill Lane DLR from 6.30am

⇒ **ULU Marxist Society.** Every Thursday, Room 2A ULU, Malet St, WC1 Contact Josh Holroyd j.holroyd@ucl.ac.uk 07533 256587

⇒ **HOV Screening of 'FRETECO'** about the occupied factory movement in Venezuela and Britain! With speakers from Visteon, Mitie and Venezuelan embassy. Wed. May 13, 7pm Bolivar Hall, 56 Grafton Way, London W1T 5DL.

PARTICIPATE!

www.socialist.net
 The Marxist website for workers and youth

The *Socialist Appeal* website: **www.socialist.net** is updated 5 days a week. It brings you the latest news and Marxist analysis from Britain and beyond. With online books, documents, audio and video.

The Deadline for content for Issue 174 is May 20th

Our enemy - the capitalist state

THE EVENTS around the G20 demonstrations have underlined the fact that, when working people stand up against capitalism, sooner or later we come slap up against the capitalist state. The police were talking up the prospects of violence well before the G20 began. Ian Tomlinson was killed by riot police on his way home. He wasn't even part of the demonstration against the G20, just a worker going about his business. Complaints and evidence about heavy-handed and brutish policing are pouring in. Des Heemskerck led a group of workers in Basildon, concerned only about protecting their jobs, to occupy their factory - Visteon. They came up against police in full riot gear with snarling dogs on hand. (See p. 8)



Ian Tomlinson died from internal bleeding after being pushed by police

In times of class peace many workers believe the police are there to preserve law and order, catch burglars and such like. Coppers do help old ladies cross the street and they certainly spend a lot of time dealing with the anti social behavior that capitalist society perpetuates, but that changes as soon as we begin to take action. Though drawn from the working class, the police as a body act as agents of the establishment, defending the bosses against the workers, not once or twice... but every time.

Institutional Violence

Generations of workers have learned this painful lesson in the course of struggle. Thirty years ago Blair Peach was killed in Southall as the Asian community defended itself against fascist attack, an attack aided and abetted by the police. Forty years before the police had seen themselves as the protector of Moseley's Blackshirts against the anger of the local working class in Cable Street. Blair Peach was killed by the Special Patrol Group. There was an outcry against their thuggery and they were disbanded. Now the Territorial Support Group have been seen playing the same paramilitary role at the G20 demonstrations, often concealing their police numbers so they and their assaults can go unpunished.

Make no mistake. This is not an excess of enthusiasm, not a matter of inadequate training, nor a case of individual police officers panicking when they find themselves outnumbered. This is institutional violence. It goes way beyond the ranks of the police themselves. They are only

the instruments of the capitalist state. In Plymouth five young people were arrested on the eve of the G20 meeting, under the Terrorism Act, guilty only of spraying anti-capitalist graffiti, hundreds of miles away from the summit. The Terrorism Acts have been used extensively to make arrests in the North West and create an atmosphere of hysteria allowing the state to curtail our liberties. Remember the Ricin plot in 2002? No poison was found and nobody was put on trial. There have been other dawn raids and mass arrests that have failed to throw up any suspects. But they achieved their real aim of creating an atmosphere of alarm and suspicion, resulting in further anti-democratic measures. At the same time as the G20 114 people were arrested in the Midlands for 'conspiracy.' They had done nothing. They were green protestors - conspiring to stop capitalism polluting the planet.

Clearly the state is building up a regular stockpile of special laws a mass of contingency plans. Against whom? The people the ruling class fears most - an aroused working class. They understand that fully mobilised we won't stop till we have torn up capitalism by the roots and wiped out their grotesque privileges.

Over a hundred years ago Engels wrote, "This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons and institutions of coercion of all kinds." Since then the apparatus of state repression has been enormously expanded. CCTV is everywhere except, mysteriously, at Stockwell tube when police shot Jean Charles de Menezes dead. The capitalist state is our enemy and we have to be prepared to fight it.

Democracy?

But don't we live in a democracy? The state is really deeply undemocratic and Parliament is little more than window dressing, while under capitalism big business takes all the important decisions. Top functionaries in the state machine are drawn exclusively from the ruling class and vetted against anti-establishment attitudes. The armed forces take an oath to the Queen, not to Parliament. Would they be used against a socialist mass movement, as General Pinochet launched a coup against the socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973 in Chile? In the 1970s spies and retired generals in Britain felt themselves entitled to formulate coup plots against Harold Wilson, a right wing Labour Prime Minister governing at a time of crisis.

Any serious movement for socialism in this country would meet the resistance of the capitalist state. The ruling class will throw anything at us in defence of their wealth and privileges. We know that in Venezuela, a revolution is in process and millions of ordinary people are actively involved in the political process. Mass involvement is our only defence against the capitalist state in trying to transform Britain along socialist lines, and that is ultimately how we will change society. □

Forty years on and still fighting for equal pay!



By Rachel Heemskerk

PCS DWP Group Women's Committee
Personal capacity

NEARLY FORTY years after the Equal Pay Act women still earn on average 12% less than men. There is still a culture of discrimination and an undervaluing of jobs where women are in the majority, a lack of support and recognition for carers and unequal access to jobs with higher earnings. This all disadvantages women and the problems are even greater for part time workers, the majority of whom are women.

This inequality continues into retirement where, because women have had time out to care for children and often need to work part time due to the responsibilities of the family, they are unable to accrue a full pension. The Home Responsibility Protection on the National Insurance contribution covers the pension while children are under 16 but this is not a magic age and children still need caring for. And it is often as children reach this age that women become carers for older relations and have no protection of their pension then. The government and society must recognise the work women do in the home that saves the state money. Under capitalism this work will never be recognised fully because the system will not allow it.

Skills not Recognised

Women today will be familiar with working in an environment that does not recognise their skills, women working in childcare, catering, cleaning or care of the elderly, all areas of the labour market where women predominate. This costs an average working woman £330,000 over the course of her working life. That is the price of the average family home!



Women predominate in care work

The fight for equal pay has been a long and hard one and can be traced back to the first equal pay strike in 1968. At that time Fords were paying semi-skilled women sewing machinists 15% less than a semi-skilled man at the

same Dagenham car plant. The women took three weeks of strike action which rapidly brought the whole of Fords Dagenham production to a halt. This inspirational strike and the fight it began for equal pay forced the Labour Secretary of State for Employment, Barbara Castle, to introduce the Equal Pay Act in 1970, outlawing unequal pay between men and women and showing what strike action can achieve. But it took another six week strike in 1984 for the women Ford machinists to finally win their fight for equal pay for work of equal value.

Gender Gap

Women are still undervalued in the work place and still have to fight for recognition and equal pay in all walks of life. The present equal pay laws are not strong enough and it is far too easy for employers to avoid the legal obligations of the 1970 Act, which gave employers until December 1975 to get equal pay in place. The government is currently drafting a new Equality Bill for 2009 that will bring together existing discrimination laws into one Act. This will include current equal pay laws and gender equality duties but it will not make it a legal requirement to conduct equal pay audits. Recently Nicola Brewer, the Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the body created 18 months ago by the Labour Government, said in relation to compulsory pay audits that "I think we need to be realistic about the economic climate". So much for equal pay!

Collective Action Required

What is required is collective action to force through the implementation of equal pay legislation. Four years ago a huge victory was won in Cumbria Health Authority in terms of equal pay for work of equal value that was worth £340 million for 1500 women Health Workers. The case was taken by Peter Doyle, at the time the Regional Officer for UNISON in Carlisle. The case precluded the introduction of Agenda for Change in the health service. Instead of Agenda for Change addressing equal pay for women by increasing pay it just reduced the pay of male comparators with the support of the union leadership! It has been the failure of union leaderships to lead a proper fight for equal pay that has enabled employers to ignore equal pay legislation and to continue to divide workers.

In the civil service pay bargaining has been delegated to over 200 separate areas, leading to wide variations of pay rates and an increase in the gender pay gap in areas where the majority of low paid workers are women. This has resulted in a gap between women and men which is even higher than the UK average at 14%. For example women workers in the Driving and Vehicle Licensing

Agency are paid 16% less than a male equivalent in the executive officer grade and in the Home Office it is even higher at 18%, but the worst civil service department is the National Weights and Measures Labs at 28.5%. With women making up 52.9% of all civil servants these figures are a disgrace. The government as an employer must be forced by unions to address low pay issues.

The PCS union is calling on the government to take action in areas where the government is the employer and to introduce stronger legal rights. PCS is using the equal pay laws and age discrimination to take hundreds of tribunal cases. These cases can take years, as was seen in the 24 years it took for the Ford machinists to finally win their equal pay fight.

Open the Books!

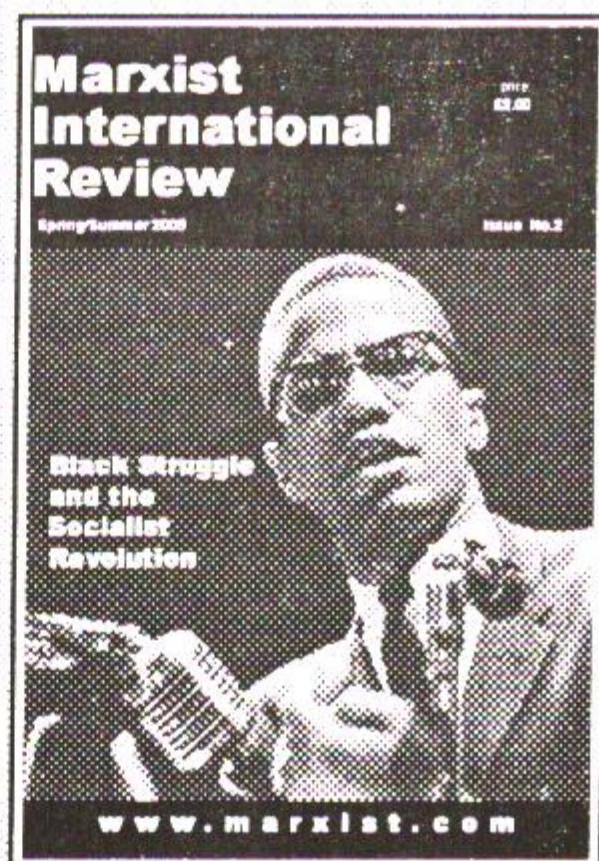
We need to attack the secrecy over pay, so women are not forced to take long and costly legal action to find out if they are being treated fairly. We need to get the tribunal service working so women get justice quickly. It ought to go without saying that people ought to get paid in accordance with the demands of the job they do rather than their gender. As Ford Machinist Terri Taylor said "We don't have to play second fiddle to men. If we do the same job as them we should get the same money"

Women, like men, make a major contribution to the economy. Yet the gender pay gap is one of the highest in Europe. It is a third higher than the EU average and twice that of Ireland.

As socialists we should be fighting for equality for all now not in 20 or 30 years time. □

Marxist International Review

NEW ISSUE:
'Black Struggle and the Socialist Revolution'
(Winter/Spring 2009)
NOW OUT.



Order for just £2.50 including postage
online at: www.wellred.marxist.com
or by post: to Wellred, PO Box 50525, Poplar
London, E14 6WG (Cheque payable to Wellred)

odds'n'ends

Tax dodgers' £4 billion raid. Wealthy individuals are costing UK taxpayers at least £4 billion a year through use of tax havens, according to TUC research. In the first ever analysis of the cost of individual tax havens to UK taxpayers, the study reveals that Jersey, Switzerland, the Isle of Man and Guernsey are the main centres used by the rich to avoid paying UK taxes. The research underlines the extent of tax avoidance caused by offshore havens - and the scale of the loss to the public purse.

Cost of unpaid overtime to workers nearing £30bn. TUC analysis of government statistics from the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) reveals that five million workers in the UK work unpaid overtime. This overtime is worth £26.9 billion, and employees would receive on average an extra £5,139 a year if they were paid for the additional hours they put in.

Bail-out. The cost to US citizens of bailing out the banks and financial institutions has reached \$11.6trn so far - and there's no end in sight. By way of comparison the entire cost of World War Two was \$3.6trn (adjusted for inflation since the 1940s), less than a third as costly. At least we can say the USA won WW II. There's no guarantee they'll beat the curse the bankers have brought any time soon.

1 in 10 Americans - 32.2 million people now receive food stamps to help them pay for groceries. It's a record. Unemployment in the USA is officially over 8%.

There is no real doubt that Binyam Mohamed was tortured in Guantanamo. So who's in trouble? His lawyers are being threatened with six months in prison for writing a letter to the President about Binyam's case. Their accusers regard this as 'unprofessional conduct.' Officials at Guantanamo censored the lawyers' memo till nothing was left but the title so that President Obama (presumably the censors' boss) couldn't read the accusations. Binyam's lawyers are being told they broke rules, but not which rules they broke.

Court rules in favour of the sick over leave. Workers on long-term sick leave do not lose their right to paid annual leave, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has ruled. The ECJ said that where a worker is off sick for an entire leave year, the employer can refuse to allow paid annual leave during the sick leave only if the worker is permitted to take the accrued leave at some other time.

Reject increases in top up fees

by a University and Colleges Union member

A YEAR before the next general election is due the Labour Government is proposing another increase in top up fees for UK students. Currently universities can charge up to £3,000 per year. It is being proposed that they can be raised to £7,000.

The record of New Labour on higher education has gone from bad to worse. In 1998 student grants were abolished and loans introduced. Then fees were introduced at around £1,000. A proposal for top fees up to £3,000 was introduced in 2004, to be implemented after the general election in 2005. This was done in 2006. Nearly all universities and colleges chose to move to maximum top up fees and now charge students £3,000 for their courses. Not even the Tories had dared to carry out such measures.

Debt

The result of all this has been that students leave university now heavily in debt – estimated to be £12,000 - £15,000 at the start of their working lives. The National Union of Students predicts that raising top up fees to £7,000, which the government is proposing, could leave many students as much as £32,000 in debt. This is very bad news in the present economic climate. This rise in top up fees will hit most heavily those students who do not come from affluent homes and those who will not go into high pay jobs in banking and finance! So much for widening access to higher education.

Students graduate

2009 is the year when the first students who paid top up fees graduate and they could not have faced a worse job market. The government has argued that graduates will go into well paid jobs, but they must start repaying their loans once they are earning over £15,000 a year – hardly

a high salary! This year the Association of Graduate Recruiters has reported that 65% of firms have cut graduate recruitment. Banks have cut graduate recruits by 28%. Many graduates will never be high paid. Indeed many graduates start on a salary of less than £15,000. This year students are being advised to take voluntary work if they cannot find paid employment – a suggestion many employers are likely to exploit. In this situation it would not be unlikely for the students' loan company to hit serious financial trouble and have to be bailed out by the government.



Students protest in London against fees

What about the universities themselves? As government support for higher education has declined – by 40% in real terms per student between 1976-1996 (Association of University Teachers 2001 election leaflet), the number of students to academic staff has increased, from 9 to 1 in 1980 to 17 to 1 in 1998. Students find that they are not getting sufficient attention from hard pressed academic staff and sometimes they even struggle to find a seat in the canteen or the library.

Lack of Funding

To compensate for lack of government funding in the face of pressures to meet targets on recruitment, increasingly university heads are treating their institutions as commercial businesses and their students as a source of profit. The LSE student magazine, The Beaver reported how

shocked students were when referred to as "loss-making" at a students' union meeting, by the LSE director, Howard Davies. A new breed of university heads look to students as part of their business plans, milking the lucrative overseas student market.

To see students as cost-effective only in terms of whether their fees cover the cost of their education is completely short-sighted. What about the contribution the student will play in the economy and society at large as a result of their qualifications? The Association of Universities Teachers (now UCU) leaflet from 2001 quoted a

report that showed how £100 spent in higher education generated a further £73 in the economy as a whole. Society needs doctors, teachers, social workers and other qualified people.

In the light of the recession applications to universities increased this year by 8%, but the government is scaling down its target of having 50% participation in higher education.

Access not widened

The increase in the numbers in higher education has been significant – 1 in 20 in the 1960s, by 1997 this was 1 in 3 of 18 year olds. But this has not widened access and surveys have shown that the poorest 25% of households are still excluded. Those from lower income groups who do enter higher education tend to go to the least prestigious institutions with the highest drop out rates.

So any increase in top up fees must be opposed. In 2004 the government only got top up fees passed by five votes – 316 to 311 – for a government which had a majority of 161, such was the scale of opposition within the Parliamentary Labour Party. There should be a return to public funding to ensure that all those who can benefit from higher education should be able to attend. Education should be seen as an investment for life not as a profit making activity. □

NUS: don't disaffiliate

by **Kerem Nisancioglu**
Sussex University

THE RECENT wave of student occupations in solidarity with Gaza has highlighted a renewed political consciousness among students, and the success that can be achieved through direct action. The spontaneous and independent basis of the occupations also revealed the potential for mobilisation through grass-roots organising in channels outside of the National Union of Students. This has led to calls for student unions to disaffiliate altogether from the NUS

There are numerous reasons behind the calls to disaffiliate. In part, they are a product of the persistent failures of the NUS to properly represent students. In April 2008 the NUS accepted that students should now have to pay for their education, dropping its commitment to free education and adopting a more 'moderate' stance of 'fairer funding'. The final straw for many occurred in January this year, when a new NUS constitution was passed under the guise of 'modernisation', placing limits on democratic procedures and crystallising the dominance of the New Labour executive.

Right-wing dominated

Calls for disaffiliation immediately ensued among sections of activists. The creation of a new, more representative, more radical, student body was presented as a necessary alternative to the right-wing dominated NUS. According to the disaffiliators, for student politics to be properly radical, it needed to be cleansed of any right-wing elements that may prevent students from mobilising.

Sussex University, a hotbed of radical activism, recently rejected disaffiliation by a staggering 87.4%. Why? An argument persists that the referendum results were skewed by the self-interest and lack of political consciousness among the voters. In other words, students voted for affiliation not because of any political ideal, but because it ensures 10% discounts on groceries, for example. For disaffiliators, this itself underpins the reactionary policies of the NUS leadership - so long as students aren't banging on the door, we can keep it shut.

Attacks

Whether their decision is enlightened or not, the majority of students, like those at Sussex, still undoubtedly see the NUS as an organisation that could effectively campaign for their rights (even if they have been entirely ineffective in doing so) as reflected by the result of the referendum. They might well have voted for cheap booze but increasingly they will draw revolutionary conclusions from the developments surrounding them.

The British government is in crisis and will seek to attack students and young people in their attempts to 'save' the capitalist system. The government's National Internship Scheme will urge graduates to work below

the minimum wage for a host of multinationals. A recent government report recommends increases in the amount universities can charge students, while two-thirds of Vice Chancellors would according to a BBC poll, like to see an increase in fees. Such measures will ignite opposition and mass movements by students, struggles the NUS is currently incapable of leading. As more and more disaffected young people become radicalised, so too will the rank and file of the NUS, placing the right-wing leadership in an untenable position. Turning away from an organised body of students at such a time would be counter-productive in building a progressive student movement.

This reveals a more fundamental reason behind calls for disaffiliation: sectarianism. The most radicalised students see the NUS bureaucracy as a hindrance to the promotion of student rights. And they are correct. The conclusions drawn from this are, however, wrong. One cannot expect student politics to become revolutionary by name alone. While disaffiliation from the NUS certainly means disaffiliation from its right-wing leadership and its bureaucratic stymieing, it also means disaffiliation from its members - 7 million students. It means the isolation and fragmentation of the left-wing. It means giving the NUS leadership a free reign for any further reforms. It means abandoning new generations of radical students. By disaffiliating, the most politically advanced layer of the student movement would be turning their backs on the very people they claim to be fighting for.

Work among students cannot take place on the periphery. It must be in contact with the mass of students who, like it or not, are affiliated to the NUS. Certainly the occupations indicate a massive upsurge in political consciousness amongst students that, if generalised, can help build a radical student movement. If we are to build effectively, we must not resort to sectarianism. A concerted radical movement within the NUS has the potential to transform student politics beyond what could be hoped for by disaffiliation. □



Sussex students occupy the university in Jan 2009 and win demands

OCCUPY!

A new tactic in the class struggle

IN BRITAIN Visteon (component suppliers to Ford) declared itself insolvent and gave 600 workers in Belfast, Basildon and Enfield ten minutes to evacuate the premises. Not even a month's wages was on the table, for workers with up to thirty years' service. The workers refused to put up with this treatment. They occupied all three factories.

In February 2000, during the vote by workers on whether to accept the separation from Fords, the union leadership and plant convenors at the time recommended that workers accept the guarantees given and the workers voted to accept. Socialist Appeal supporters issued a leaflet at the time to all Visteon Plants warning that jobs were at stake if the Visteon spin-off from Fords went ahead without a fight.

Collective strength Broken

We pointed out that Plants would face closure in 5 to 10 years time if the collective strength of all Ford workers was broken. An article written in the March 2000 journal pointed out the threat to Dagenham workers if the separation of the Visteon factories went ahead. Sadly this has all proven to be the case. Fords now claim the Visteon closures are nothing to do with them. They have divided the workers and weakened both Ford and Visteon workforces. Ford is still a going concern. It still needs components. The fear is now that a new Company set up by the former Visteon Directors will start production under a new name with a new workforce on lower pay.

A few weeks before this, PRISME packaging plant in Dundee was abandoned leaving the workers with no jobs and no redundancy pay. The workers responded by occupying.

These are the first factory occupations in Britain since the 1980s. They will not be the last. As the jobs' tsunami sweeps across the nation workers will have no choice but to

fight back.

Occupation is no picnic. The workers at Belfast had to sleep on cardboard to start with. In effect they're in a state of siege. If they leave, the police and bailiffs will take over, so they won't be let in again. They just have to put up with it night after night, away from their loved ones.

Workers at Enfield and Basildon were intimidated by police and gave up their occupations. Enfield workers had a court order issued against them threatening them with mass arrest. At both Enfield and Basildon the workers are maintaining picket lines, so asset stripping management can't just get away with it. Belfast are still occupying – since March 31st.

This is completely new for Britain, or so the present generation of workers is led to believe. But workers all over the world face the same problems. And we learn from one another. The Belfast Visteon workers were inspired by the Waterford Crystal occupation in the South of Ireland.

Latin America has been in the lead in challenging the rule of capital. In Venezuela the capitalist class have often simply abandoned their factories as unprofitable, leaving the workers to rot. These workers have indignantly stood up for their rights. For years past they have struggled to occupy these factories as a way of maintaining their livelihoods. They are ahead of us in Britain and the rest of Europe. We should learn the lessons. Inveval is a factory making huge valves for the oil refineries of the petrol industry in Venezuela. It has been under workers' management since 2005. As a result of their battle for survival Inveval workers have taken part in setting up FRETECO (The Revolutionary Front of Workers in Occupied and Co-managed Factories) in February 2006. Its activities now spread across Latin America as a whole. In Venezuela and beyond the slogan is, 'A factory closed is a factory occupied.' A new movement is on the march! □

What happened at Basildon

by **Des Heemskerk**, Former Basildon Plant Deputy Convenor



Pickets at Basildon with Des Heemskerk on the right.

WE ARRIVED here at 10am on the day after closure was announced. There was divided opinion as to whether to occupy. The advice from the union (Unite) was that occupation would be illegal. We entered through a back gate. We got in completely unhindered. We occupied the plant from 10 onwards, conducting radio interviews and generating publicity for the occupation. With the smallness of our numbers, there was a build up of police during the course of the day.

There were over 100 police in riot gear, with police dogs barking and a lot of intimidation. They were walking through the factory and peering into the board room, which we had occupied. A police negotiator turned up and told us we'd all be arrested. Five of the 24 decided to go up on the roof, as had happened at Enfield, where they had 80 on the roof. The roof here was unsafe and that didn't give us confidence, and what with the smallness of our numbers and concern about being arrested, we voted to end the occupation. So we walked out in a dignified manner to tremendous applause. Although the occupation didn't succeed, it gave our cause tremendous publicity. □

Fighting Redundancy A workers' guide

Take union action. The first lesson is that the only way to defend jobs is to fight.

Open the books. Management try to winkle out workers who they think they don't need any more. In both PRISME and at Visteon there have been financial shenanigans. Management have tried to pull the wool over workers' eyes. Workers' power will force management to open the books.

Solidarity is vital. We can do without

management. When the bosses scarp, then the workers wonder what useful thing they ever did in the first place. At Enfield workers make plastic components for Ford cars. They can make anything in plastic. PRISME workers can carry on producing packaging just as well now the boss has done a runner. The workers have the skills.

Spread the action. An occupied factory can survive, but it'll be a battle all the way. The Inveval workers have been in place since 2005. But they know better than anyone that their factory is an island of socialist principle in a capitalist sea.

Defending the right to work. The right to work is a fundamental right under capitalism. Arguably it is the only real right we have as wage labourers. If capitalism can't provide us with a job, then it's time the system went.

Workers need political action to get rid of the bosses. Inveval was nationalised in 2005 by President Chavez. It is true that the factory survives through the collective intelligence and democratic planning of its workforce, but the decisive act of expropriating the former private owners was made possible by political action.

Forward to socialism!

Occupations spread to schools in Glasgow

by Ewan Gibbs

GLASGOW CITY Council is deciding whether to go ahead with the proposed closure of twenty primary schools. There is huge opposition. House windows, local businesses and street corners are covered with posters asking for support for the occupation. After a campaign that has seen rallies of hundreds in George Square outside the city chambers, parents at two Glasgow schools in Maryhill, Wyndford and St Gregory's primary schools, occupied the buildings for two weeks. Visiting the St Gregory's occupation over a week later it was clear that the parents were determined to maintain their struggle as long as necessary.

The occupiers were not hardened activists but a fresh layer of people who had thrown themselves into a campaign to save a corner stone of their local community. Clare from St Gregory's told me that, after they had occupied, the council had used heavy handed tactics that went to the extent of sending a heavy police presence including an armed response unit to the school!

Security Presence

The council's treatment of the parents throughout the campaign has been nothing short of scandalous. As the parents have pointed out, their representatives are elected to work for them and not for part of a service-slashing and cost-cutting agenda. Throughout the campaign the Labour group has remained unrepentant in the pursuit of closing the schools.

The council has also insisted on a security presence at the occupations, costing two thousand pounds a day, which they are of course blaming the parents for. It is ridiculous to suggest that this group of people, acting in a responsible way to defend their community, were remotely violent!

One of the occupiers made it clear to me that she was



Posters in support of the occupation of the Wyndford and St Gregory's primary schools threatened with closure.

not just fighting for her own child's school and that she saw this as a struggle against all cut backs, as one closure would only lead to the remaining services being further strained. This stance is to be welcomed and clearly stands in the tradition that an injury to one is an injury to all.

An injury to one is an injury to all

No sooner have the occupations at St Gregory's and Wyndford drawn to an end than parents concerned about closures at Our Lady of Assumption and Victoria occupied. At Our lady of Assumption the parents were on the roof and explained to me that they had come to the school early in the morning and only occupied the roof so as to allow the school to function as normal. One woman told me that she did not want to disrupt the children's education but that they would not be leaving until the council had guaranteed the future of the school.

At St Gregory's Clare explained to me that the experience of the campaign in defence of the schools has raised the consciousness of those involved. The school occupations may well prove not just to be an impressive example of community action but the start of a far wider struggle. □

Human nature, capitalism and the global crisis

By Michael Roberts



ALAN GREENSPAN has just turned 83 years old. He was Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank for over 19

years before he stepped down in January 2006, just before the great boom turned into the awful credit crunch and brought global capitalism to its knees.

Greenspan presided over the biggest credit boom in capitalist history and the largest rise in property prices that the US had ever seen. He was praised to the heights during those years and as the helmsman of capitalist success globally and in America. Bob Woodward, one of the journalists who exposed the Nixon Watergate scandal back in the 1970s, wrote a book about Greenspan in the year 2000, in which he described him as 'the maestro'.

Back then, Greenspan claimed the hi-tech and internet revolution of the 1990s set the scene for an uninterrupted period of economic growth for capitalism based on increased productivity from new technology. But then in 2000-2001 came the so-called dot.com bust, when thousands of tech companies went bust and stock markets collapsed (they have not returned to the levels of 2000 even now).

Then Greenspan described the booming property market of the early 2000s as an exciting way to expand the economy and the new forms of credit like derivatives that it engendered as wonderful innovative instruments to reduce risk and boost growth. Then came the property bust of 2007 onwards and the biggest credit crunch in human history. It's not a great track record.

Over the Easter weekend, Greenspan was interviewed on the US cable TV business channel, CNBC, about why the great boom turned into the biggest economic slump for capi-

talism since the Great Depression of the 1930s. He said it was not because he and other bankers who ran the citadels of finance capital were stupid.

Not their fault

That conclusion was in sharp contrast to the answers that the top bankers in Britain gave to the House of Commons Select Committee. When they were asked what went wrong, they said it was a financial tsunami that came from nowhere, that nobody could have predicted, a one in a billion chance – not their fault.

Greenspan differed. It was not because the bankers were stupid; "they knew what was going on; it's just that they thought they could get out before everything came to an end". As Chuck Prince, the head of the now bankrupt US investment bank Bear Stearns said at the time: "we know the party will come to an end, but while it lasts, we have to keep on dancing".

Greenspan argued that what brought everything down was sheer greed. The bankers knew they were being reckless; they knew that what goes up must eventually come down. But they just went on because they had to make more and more money for their shareholders and for their bonus payments. Greed was the driver. But Greenspan said greed is 'human nature', so this boom and bust will happen again some time in the future.

There we have it. For Greenspan and the ideologists of capitalism, it is 'human nature' that caused the crash and the slump, not the particular form of social and economic organisation that he operated under and supported - capitalism. Human beings can be 'greedy and selfish' and they can be 'cooperative and selfless'. It depends on the circumstances. Capitalism is a system of production of goods and services for profit; it is built on competition, on the drive to make more

money (not things or services people need). It is a system designed to promote greed and selfishness. The 'human nature' that Greenspan blames



Greediness is paramount to functioning under capitalism

for the economic crisis is nothing more than the human nature needed to survive under the capitalist system.

The booms and slumps of the global economy began with capitalism. In a recent study by Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff of the US National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) on banking crises, they found that from the very early beginnings of capitalism in the 14th century up to the present day, there have been booms and slumps brought on by the operation of a system of production based on profit, competition and private appropriation of value.

Reinhart and Rogoff concluded that, as capitalism spread its tentacles across the world from the 18th century onwards, so the frequency and scope of economic crises grew. Sure, there had been crises of production before capitalism, based on famine as harvests failed or due to conquests from foreign invasions. But economic crises due to the failure of money, credit and banks are uniquely capitalist.

64 'official' slumps since 1854

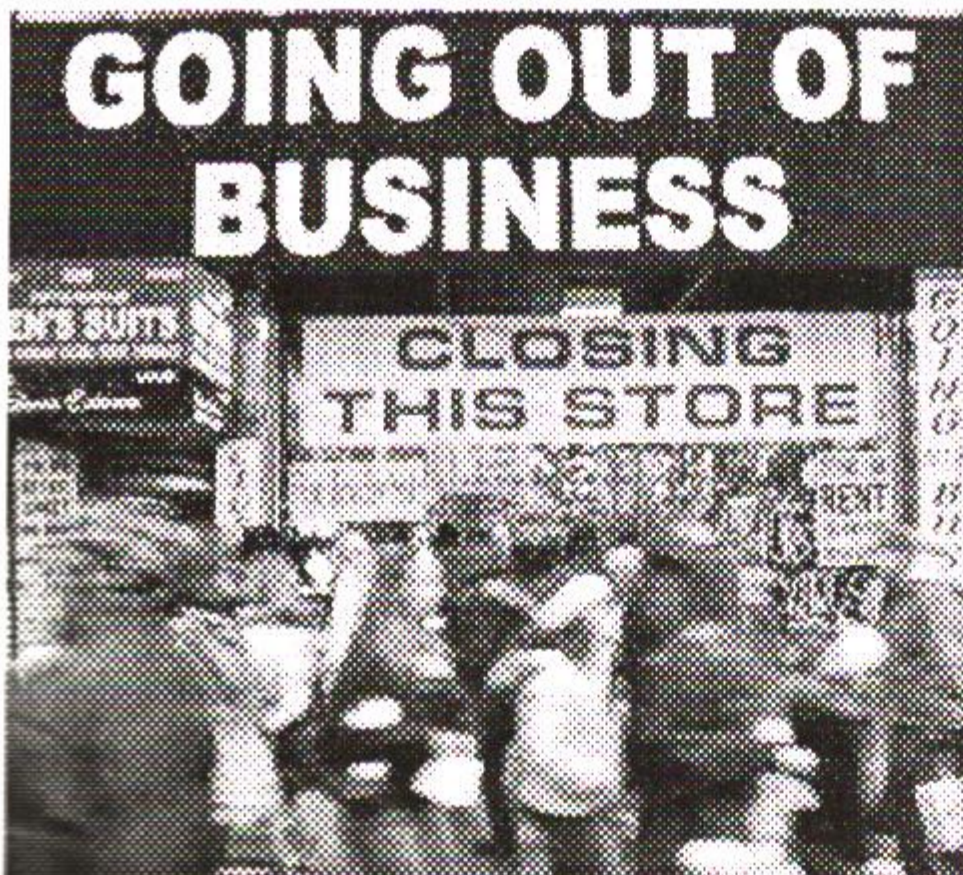
According to the NBER, there have been 64 'official' slumps in capitalist production since 1854 - 'human

nature' is powerful, it seems. What a waste of output, economic resources and above all, what damage to people's lives in the loss of jobs, homes, well-being and even early deaths that slump and economic depression bring!

Most important, Reinhart and Rogoff concluded that as capitalism was increasingly free from government regulation and control and became more 'globalised', so crises grew in number and impact. Indeed, this latest period of globalisation since the 1980s was not one of success in reducing booms and slumps, as the likes of Mr Greenspan and other capitalist economists have argued, but quite the reverse. The last 25 years have seen more financial crises than ever: in emerging economies (1980s and 1990s), Asia (1997-99), Japan (1990s), US loan companies (1990s); Nordic banks (1990s) and so on.

But nothing beats this current financial crisis, except perhaps the Great Depression of the 1930s. This credit crisis has triggered off a major slump in capitalist production. There is a crisis of over-accumulation of capital relative to profit: the mass of profit in the US, Europe and Japan fell by the biggest margin ever in the last quarter of 2008. That has led to an 'overproduction' of goods and services globally on a scale not seen for over 60 years.

As I write, all the capitalist economists are agreed that the advanced capitalist economies are in slump, with annual output after inflation falling by up to 5-6% across the board in 2009. In the less advanced, so-called 'emerging economies', the situation is even worse, with falls in production in newly converted to capitalism Eastern Europe likely to be over 10%, in



Singapore and other Asian exporting countries even more.

The Great Depression

The question now is how much longer the slump will last. The Great Depression was called that because the slump did not end after a year or so. It started in summer 1929 and continued through to March 1933 (43 months). Then there was a recovery for a while, lasting until May 1937, before the slump resumed. Only preparations for the terrible world war of 1939-45 and the temporary ending of much of the capitalist system of production cut across the slump.



A depression-era banner reads 'Organise or Starve'

Since 1945, the average capitalist slump has lasted ten months, a much shorter period than before. The NBER says that this slump began at the end of 2007. So already this crisis has lasted 16 months and will continue for at least double the previous post-war average. But will it be longer?

Most capitalist economists say no. They reckon that the huge bailouts of the banks and other financial institutions with taxpayers' money, plus the massive expansion of government spending and tax cuts to 'boost' demand in the economy will turn things around.

But this will not provide a turn-around in profitability. Banks and businesses may get government funding, but you can lead a horse to water, you cannot make it drink. Not until profitability improves will investment start again; job losses stop rising; and house prices bottom. And for that to happen, capitalism needs to destroy more of the weak.

However, as I write, there is an air of optimism in the ranks of capitalist

investors on the stock exchange. After reaching yet another new low in stock prices in March, the stock indexes have risen nearly 30% since as governments pile in public money, banks claim they are starting to make profits again; there is even talk of a 'bottoming' of the housing market in America and Britain; while China is supposedly about to renew its strong growth after a pause.

But this is more wishful thinking than judgement. I suspect that there are more shocks to come before we reach the bottom of this nightmare slump. The banks may be 'saved', but many businesses are set to go belly up this year and the jobless rate is nowhere near its peak yet. House prices still have further to fall and capitalist profits too.

And there is the payback afterwards. That's likely to be so large as to keep capitalism comatose like a zombie for years ahead. The bailouts, of course, are socialism for the rich, while working people get capitalism for the poor in job losses, wage cuts, repossession of their homes and soon reductions in public services and higher taxes.

Printing Money

Gordon Brown, Barack Obama, and most of the political leaders of capitalism tell us that they are putting in such huge amounts of money to stabilise the capitalist system. For the moment, governments are increasing their debt and borrowing to take on the rotten debt of the bankers. They are paying for this borrowing by printing money (sucking funds out of thin air).

But there is no free lunch (except for bankers). Eventually, all this public sector debt (likely to hit 100% of annual output in the UK, the US and others) will have to be paid back or serviced with interest in perpetuity. That means higher taxes and reduced public services. It means pensions and benefits for the old, the sick, the carers and the unemployed must be massacred. Capitalism cannot be revived without the help of the state, and that means at our expense. □

Where is Britain going?

by Rob Sewell

THIS TEXT is based on a speech given by Rob at the recent conference of Socialist Appeal.

THE WORKING class is facing enormous challenges both in Britain and internationally. We are facing conditions not seen for generations. The days when not much seemed to be



February - Unofficial strike action taken by workers from Lindsey Total Oil Refinery take employers and union leaders by surprise

happening have gone and we have now entered a period of very sharp and sudden changes, a period of renewed struggle in the labour movement.

Without doubt, world capitalist crisis has returned with a vengeance. What has been astounding is the sheer scale and speed of the economic collapse. This has resulted in absolute panic in the ranks of the capitalists internationally. They are, to use Trotsky's words, 'tobogganing to catastrophe with their eyes closed'. All their proposed celebrations to welcome the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall have been completely overshadowed by a new turn of events: the biggest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s and the Great Depression.

The unfolding world crisis is the background to events which are unfolding in Britain. Already British capitalism is facing a very deep crisis. According to the International Monetary Fund, because of its reliance on finance and the City, Britain will be one of the countries worst affected by

the crisis.

Already in the final quarter of 2008 the British economy shrank by 5.9%, a bigger contraction than occurred in 1931. Industrial production has fallen by more than 10%, with further falls to come. Unemployment stands at 2 million, with 3 million being predicted for next year. The British Chamber of Commerce are saying it could go even

higher, to more than 10% of the workforce. This at a time when the government is attempting to force another million off incapacity benefit as well as forcing single mothers back to work.

There has been an avalanche of redundancies from Woolworths to

Nissan. Over the next 3 months, some 320,000 are expected to lose their jobs. Hundreds of thousands face short-term working and wage freezes.

With the collapse of the housing bubble some 40,000 houses were repossessed last year. This year the figure is likely to rise to 75,000. Many families find themselves in negative equity as house prices continue to fall. It has been estimated that half of all mortgages on the books of Northern Rock will be in negative equity this year. Thatcher's idea of a property-owning democracy has turned into a nightmare. The idea that it would bind workers to the system and provide social stability has turned into its opposite.

The working class has reacted with shock and fear at what is happening. This is mixed with a large dose of anger. This anger is being directed at the bankers who have received billion-pound bail-outs. An estimated £1.3 trillion – equal to the entire year's GDP of Britain – has been placed at the feet of bankers in Britain. This hatred

of bankers has boiled over into a hatred of capitalism. Even John Prescott has chimed in against "greed" and "capitalism in the raw", despite the fact that he was in a government pushing the free market idea.

We are in a very explosive situation in Britain. The scenes at the BMW plant in Cowley were an example of this when workers were confronted with losing their jobs. The anger was apparent when the union convener attempted to justify the sackings. "What the hell is the union for?" demanded the workers, who received a week's pay and their P45s. If there was ever a time when militant unions were needed it was now. In the Fiat tractor plant in Basildon, when the workers overwhelmingly rejected a wage freeze and voted for strike action, the union convener and shop stewards' committee prevaricated, not giving a firm lead. This shows how even at rank and file the local leadership, elected in the past in different conditions, can become a brake on the growing militancy of the workers instead of articulating their anger.

However, the struggle at the Lindsey Oil Refinery shows how this anger can break to the surface in a militant fashion. The fact that this was unofficial action from below was a marvellous testimony to the workers involved who said enough was enough. The attempt by the bosses to undercut terms and conditions provoked these workers to take action.

Given the level of anger in the working class the question of factory occupations, can also assume great importance in the next period. Many years ago a factory occupation at Timex in Dundee was an example to all workers. Today, workers in a packaging plant in Dundee, who were threatened with the sack, again gave an example by occupying their workplace. In the current climate this could become generalised as workers realise that wage cuts and short-time working are no solution in this capitalist crisis. The question of nationalisation will

also find an echo amongst workers fighting redundancies.

The stormy period opening up in Britain was hinted at in the recent police report of a new summer of discontent. The report explained that given the numbers losing their jobs and homes, anger would spill over into violent street protests and riots. It compared the situation to what happened in 1981 with the Brixton/Toxteth riots, as well as to the stormy scenes during the miners' strike.



Recession-fueled riots broke out in 1981 in Brixton, London and Toxteth, Liverpool

The Labour government appears to be heading for the electoral rocks. After being buoyed up by the world boom over the last 12 years, the government is now facing a dire economic situation. The capitalists are keen for Brown to clear up the economic mess and shoulder the blame for the crisis. In the press, Brown went from Zero to Hero as he strutted about the international arena. But that has very quickly come to an end.

The Labour government has pumped in billions to bail out the banking system, including the nationalisation of Northern Rock. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, in order to restore credibility to the public finances, public expenditure will need to be cut by an extra £20 billion EVERY YEAR until the end of the next parliament. These are truly draconian measures! Even with these cuts, public sector debt may not return to pre-crisis levels for more than 20 years. Public spending cuts and tax rises would remain until the 2030s. This makes the £8 billion cuts of the

Callaghan government look like chicken feed.

In other words, the British working class are facing 20 years of austerity, not seen since the inter-war period. Whoever wins the next general election – whether it be Labour or Tory – it will be a government of crisis. A new Labour government under Brown would not be able to hold the line for the ruling class. It has exhausted its role of keeping the workers in check. There is growing industrial unrest which the government will be unable to control. "The Moor has done his duty and may go." (Shakespeare) Divisions are already opening up in the party. This can be illustrated by the episode over the proposed privatisation of Royal Mail. This scandalous act which Lord Mandelson is pushing through the House of Lords is causing "civil war" in the Labour Party and unions. This has stirred up opposition from the trade unions who are threatening to withhold money from the party.

The ruling class will be looking for a strong government to carry out its austerity programme. A hung parliament would be of no use, and would be open to crisis from the beginning. Labour can no longer hold the line. The only alternative will be to bring back the Tories to power with a big majority. All the forces of the establishment will be brought to bear to see this comes about – despite the shallow leadership and policies of the Tories.

If such a government comes into office, it will dramatically change the whole situation in Britain. The Tories will attempt to unload the burden of the crisis fully onto the shoulders of the working class and this will cause a huge workers' backlash.

There are parallels here with 1970 and the coming to power of the Heath government. Within six months we witnessed the biggest movement of the working class since the 1926 general strike. There was a dramatic increase in the class struggle that

resulted in the TUC threatening to call a general strike in 1972. Eventually the Tory government was brought down by the miners' strike in 1974. Once the workers in Britain are defeated or blocked on the political front they tend to swing to the industrial front, and vice versa.



Heath - Conservatives came to power in 1970 followed by a strike wave

At the same time, the huge wave of militancy resulted also in a radicalisation within the Labour Party. The 1970 defeat shook up the party, with the mass strikes and generalised militancy having the effect of pushing it to the left. Tony Benn, who was a right-wing minister in the Wilson government, shifted rapidly to the left. He then became the standard-bearer for the left wing which dominated the Labour Party.

Even now there are rumblings within the Labour Party. As a result of the crisis, nationalisation and socialism have appeared back on the agenda. Even the right-winger Austin Mitchell MP has called for the nationalisation of the building industry to mop up the unemployed and build houses. Jon Cruddas MP has also been making left noises, especially when he has addressed trade union conferences. Even Harriet Harman has been increasingly trying to distance herself from New Labour. This represents the first stirrings, the wind blowing the tops of the trees. The wind will turn into a hurricane, and these hairline splits will become a chasm if Labour is defeated.

The Blairites will be sidelined after such a defeat. In such conditions the party will have no alternative but to move to the left to rebuild its support. The unions will also be demanding action and a rejection of the failed policies of the past.

Under the hammer blows of events, a new left wing will be formed, first inside the trade unions

and later the Labour Party. The capitalist crisis will force the ranks of the movement to re-think everything and seek a new orientation. The reason why John McDonnell was deliberately kept off the ballot for Labour leader when Blair resigned was the fear that he could have attracted a groundswell of support. This discontent that has built up for years will come to the surface and push the situation to the left. A left figure emerging under these conditions would become a catalyst for this shift to the left.



Visteon workers occupy their car parts factory

This new situation will see a revival of the workers' movement in Britain. New, fresh layers of workers and youth will come into the trade unions as they see the need to struggle, filling out the local branches and renewing the shop stewards committees in the process, and from their experience in the trade union struggles they will start to draw political conclusions with many gravitating towards their local Labour

Parties. Thus, all the organisations of the working class will be revived and transformed.

All this is an inevitable outcome of the impasse facing the capitalist system as a whole. In the past the capitalist system 'resolved' its crises through world wars. Now, and for the foreseeable future, that option is ruled out. No power can challenge the might of American imperialism in open warfare. However, that does not mean that there will not be plenty of local, "small" wars such as the war in Iraq or Afghanistan. The crisis will also manifest itself in trade wars, currency wars, but more importantly in war between the classes.

The period we have entered will witness convulsions as the ruling class tries to make the workers pay for the crisis of capitalism. This is the perspective which confronts us. Of course, this process will not be in a straight line. There will be periods of setback, apathy and indifference. However, these will give way to periods of greater radicalisation. Millions will be drawn into the arena of struggle. This in turn will serve to transform and re-transform the mass organisations. A mass left wing will be created under these conditions, in which the Marxist tendency will participate and fertilize with the ideas of Marxism. This is the reason for our long-term work in the mass organisations.

Capitalism has entered a new phase in its long term decline. The reforms of the past are no longer possible. Capitalism in its senility means cuts in living standards and austerity. The working class will be propelled into action to prevent it being thrust back into destitution. On the basis of the mighty events which impend, the ideas of Marxism will become a point of attraction.

A mass Marxist force within the British labour movement would finally lay the basis for the overthrow of capitalism in this country and with the coming to power of the working class we would prepare the ground for the socialist transformation of society in Britain, and uniting with our brothers in Europe and internationally, we would begin the process of building a socialist world. □

Mayday greetings from:

HARLOW TUC

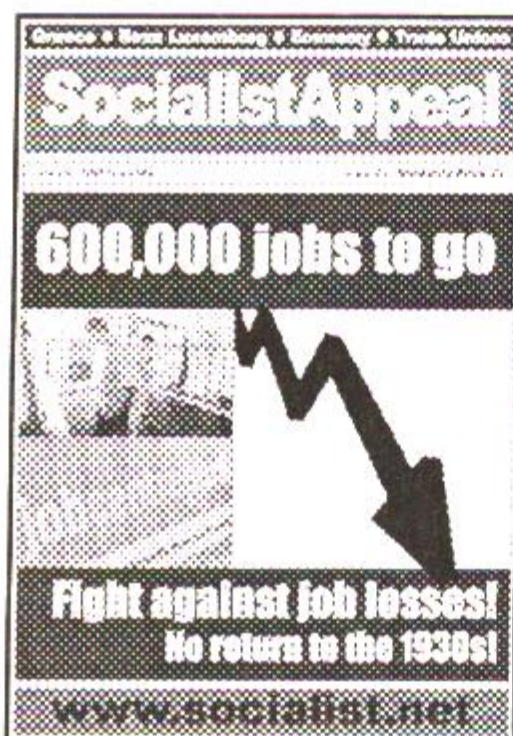
Representing trade unionism in Harlow.

We meet every second Friday of the month at Harlow Town Hall to discuss various issues of concern to trade unionists.

Subscribe to SocialistAppeal

Fed up of getting your views from papers that are run as businesses in the interests of big business? Then subscribe to 'Socialist Appeal.'

Rupert Murdoch owns 247 papers. All 247 editors supported the invasion of Iraq. Does that sound like they think for themselves? Do you imagine those editors, or Murdoch, want you to think for yourself?



If you think for yourself, read 'Socialist Appeal'. 'Socialist Appeal' supports the interests of working people, not big business. We give you the facts, figures and arguments and make the case for a better world.

I want to subscribe to Socialist Appeal for one year starting with issue number..... (Britain £18/Europe £21/ Rest of the World £23)

I want to subscribe to Socialist Appeal for one year at the solidarity rate starting with issue number..... (Britain £35/Europe £38/ Rest of the World £40)

I enclose a donation of £..... to Socialist Appeal Press Fund

Total enclosed: £..... (cheques/ PO to Socialist Appeal)

Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

E-mail.....

Return to: Socialist Appeal,
PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG

The ballot and the miners' strike

by Andy Viner

ONE OF the defining issues that affected the miners' strike of 1984-85 was the question of a ballot. It was raised time and time again from outside and within the Labour and trade union movement.

For those who were not active in the movement, or not even born at the time, here's the background. The hated Tory government had just introduced legislation that required unions to hold a secret postal ballot for industrial action. This was not an attempt to democratise the unions as they claimed at the time but, as we can see today, to tie up unions in legal bureaucracy to prevent strikes and militant class action. There had always been a tradition of mass union meetings held in the course of the working day, when everyone could participate and decide to take strike action or not, with a show of hands at the end of the meeting. This, of course, is a tradition that the Lindsey construction workers have returned to. The miners had a long tradition of holding mass meetings before strikes took place.

Solidarity

The miners also had an excellent and longstanding tradition of solidarity. An injury to one was regarded as an injury to all. That is why almost all the miners walked out at the beginning of the strike, though only a small number of pits were threatened with immediate closure. In fact many pit men took the view that you had no right to vote for someone else to lose their job.

One of the tactics used by the Tories and the ruling class was to try to play off area against area and miner against miner. It was believed, for instance, that the jobs in the Nottinghamshire coal fields were quite safe, while some of those in Yorkshire were under threat. As we know, once the Tories had won the strike they destroyed the entire industry, including the jobs of their loyal dupes who scabbed during the strike.

By March 13th 1984 141 out of 171 pits had been picketed out. But the core of the remaining scab miners was in Nottinghamshire. Some of the pits remained open for work, though in the early stages of the dispute little coal was mined. But it was among these 'working' miners (as Thatcher called them) that the clamour for a ballot was used as an excuse for blacklegging. We believe their bluff should have been called. If Scargill had called a ballot, we believe he could have won and left them with no excuse for their treachery.

Treachery

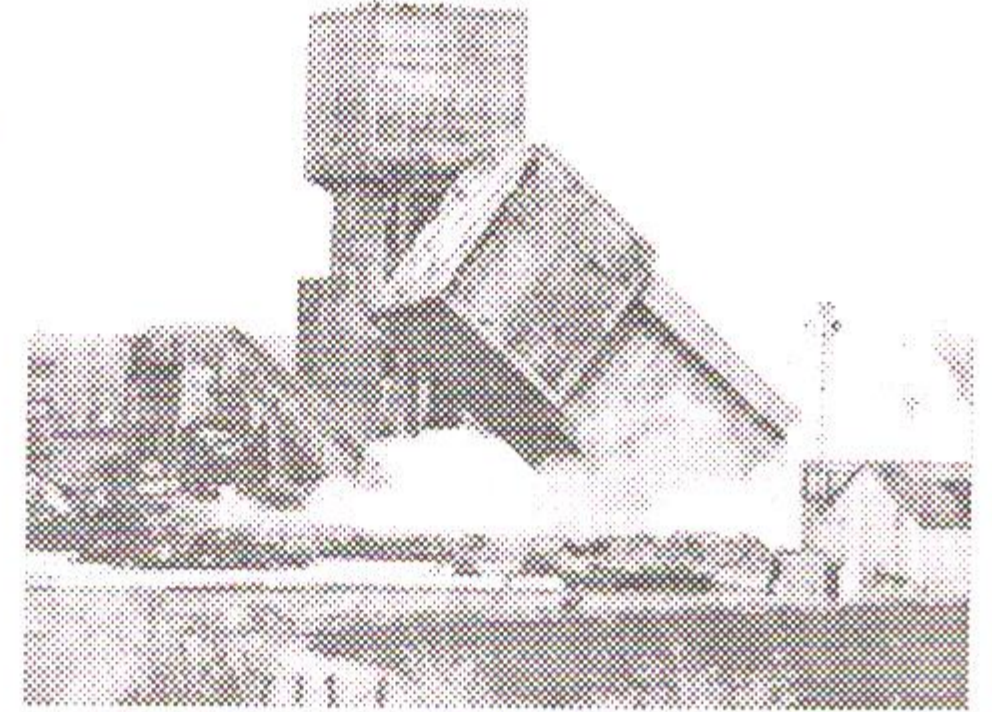
Thatcher, the Tories, the whole state and especially the media went into overdrive, screaming 'ballot, ballot - the miners must ballot'. This was the case even though pit after pit had voted to join the strike. The members of the NUM had made their intention clear - they wanted to fight to keep pits open.

Like sheep the traitorous union leadership of our movement and Labour Party leader of the time, Neil Kinnock, all followed like sheep. 'Baaallot, baaallot', they bleated. These so called leaders were promoting 'new realism' - to you and me called class collaboration. If these individuals had put half the energy in supporting the miners as they did working against them, we would be in a different situation today politically.

Postal Ballot

It became clear that those wanted a ballot were against the strike, those who did not were in favour. The ballot became a truncheon to hit the miners with. It became an issue of legitimacy for the strike. The ruling class jumped on this to divide the class. The trade union leaders who were against the strike used the ballot as a fig leaf as to why they would not support it.

To have a postal ballot before a strike is not a principle. It is a tactical question. What is the best means to unite those that are striking and those



After the defeat of the miners, most coal mines were destroyed.

15% of energy used in the UK still comes from coal, half of it imported

you are seeking support from?

At the time Arthur Scargill as a trade union leader was head and shoulders above, other union leaders. He and the union hailed from the era of mass meetings, calling strikes with a show of hands. In the middle of a class battle quite often the tactics being used are not ones that Marxists would agree with. But for Marxists to call for a ballot in the middle of the strike would have been seen as lining up with the Tories, Kinnock and those trade union leaders who were using the issue as an excuse not to support the strikers. In the middle of the strike the issue was 'whose side are you on'?

In that sense it would have been the wrong thing for Marxists to call for a ballot, even though it was actually the right tactic to win the strike. A ballot would have been won overwhelmingly. That being the case, it could have been a weapon to demand support and expose the other union leaders for what they were - class collaborators. More importantly it could have united our class. But the miners, who stood by their leaders, would have had to have been won over first to the tactic of calling for a ballot.

Sometimes tactical questions can make or break a strike. 25 years later lessons can be learnt from this heroic strike. The methods used then will be reused today. We must learn from past disputes to win the strikes of the future. □

The Thatcher Offensive

by Terry McPartlan

"Where there is discord may we bring harmony..." said Margaret Thatcher on the day 30 years ago this month when she was elected as British Prime Minister in 1979. Some politicians are remembered for their achievements, in Aneurin Bevan's case the founding of the NHS; others like Tony Blair will be remembered as warmongers and traitors to the ideals of the Labour movement. Meanwhile John Major will be remembered, if at all, for his ineffectual personality and his blandness. But very few will have been hated by working people with such intensity as Margaret Thatcher.

Destruction of Industry

Margaret Thatcher presided over the destruction of more industry in Britain than that destroyed by the Luftwaffe in the Second World War. She plotted to smash the National Union of Mineworkers and to dismantle the welfare state and all the reforms that had been fought for over decades by the working class. She slashed welfare payments, attacked the old and the sick and basically co-ordinated a one sided civil war against the British (and Irish) working class. There were many people in Britain whose lives were cut short by unemployment, by sickness and poverty as a result of the politics of Thatcherism, many families that fell apart, many children who went hungry. Yet, she was admired by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, who wants her to have a state funeral when she goes, the sort of event normally reserved for royalty.

But how did Margaret Hilda Roberts the grocer's daughter from Grantham come to power in the first place and how did she get away with so much for so long?

Thatcher's rise to power in the Tory party reflected two different processes. On the one hand the

power of the Tory grandees, the big landowners and the industrial bourgeoisie, was on the wane by the early 1970s. Britain's long slow industrial decline which Trotsky alluded to in 'Where is Britain Going' written in 1925, was only accelerated by the War and the dominance of US imperialism, the development of the colonial revolution in the Post War period and the rise of smaller regional powers in Latin America and the Middle East.

Relative Decline

On the other hand this relative decline was superimposed on the definitive end of the Post War boom and the beginning of a period of general political and economic crisis in the entire capitalist world.



1970s - the decade of strikes

The balance of power within the British and international bourgeoisie had tipped towards the financial bourgeoisie. In addition the British bourgeoisie were in a state by the mid seventies. The waves of industrial struggle, including the two national miners' strikes, one of which resulted in Ted Heath being dumped from power in 1974, had radicalised the working class and society was becoming increasingly polarised. On the one hand many workers were beginning to draw revolutionary conclusions, while on the other hand sections of the Tory Party were drifting to the right. Revolution and counter revolution develop side by side after all.

That is because of the class nature of society.

Britain was as close to revolution as it has been at any time since the General Strike of 1926 in the 1970s as Thatcher was clawing her way to leadership of the Tory party. The selection of Thatcher represented the ruling class rearming for a period of storm and strife. They had abandoned the politics of consensus dominant in the Post War boom and were preparing for confrontation with the working class that they saw as necessary. Thatcher was their chosen instrument.

Instrument of Ruling Class

Thatcher represented a new brand of Toryism, ostensibly more middle class and 'ordinary' than many of their predecessors. Thatcher and Norman Tebbit - 'the Chingford skinhead' - sought to appeal to the backward prejudices of the middle class and to layers of the most backward workers. Thatcher was heralded as possibly the first woman UK Prime Minister. She would understand therefore the needs of ordinary women and so on. Hardly a day went by without her appearing on telly armed with a shopping basket bemoaning the lot of the 'little people'. The fact is however that she was anything but ordinary. Married to oil millionaire Dennis Thatcher, she represented the most vicious and small minded layers of the bourgeoisie.

It used to be said that the British bourgeoisie thought in terms of decades and centuries. At their height they dominated the Asian sub continent and it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. But the social forces that underpinned Thatcherism were those of finance capital. The laws that she observed were those of the balance sheet and the speculator, where decisions were counted as long term if they had a

currency of 10 or more minutes. A similar process had led to the election of Ronald Reagan in the USA. Reagan, an ex Hollywood cowboy actor represented a sharp turn to the right in US politics. Even more than George W Bush however Reagan was a mouthpiece, a front man for the ruling class.

Class Compromise Dead

The ideas of class compromise and a formal commitment to the goal of full employment that were dominant in both big parties during the period of the Post War boom and were based on the theories of Keynes were abandoned. Thatcher embraced monetarism and neoliberalism. Her ideology was a ragbag of reactionary prejudices and crackpot economic theories, but they also represented a coherent set of ideas and programme to attack the working class with.

It's no surprise that the dominant economic and political ideas that Thatcher and Reagan supported were those of the Chicago school of economics - ideas known as monetarism, that had been promoted by the likes of Milton Friedman and Hayek. These ideas had been tried before of course. They had been put into practice in Chile under the murderous military regime of General Pinochet. There the 'Chicago Boys' had advocated tight monetary controls ostensibly to reduce inflation - which means smashing up the public sector, mass privatisation and attacks on the poorest in society.

'No Such Thing as Society'

This was combined with a political programme to advocate self help, standing on your own two feet, and all the other alledged petty bourgeois virtues. Thatcher went as far as to say that there was no such thing as society. This was the green light for a massive onslaught on the working class, their communities and their organisations. This onslaught wasn't restricted to Britain either. It generated a programme of liberalisation and deregulation, that was ruthlessly applied by the IMF and the World Bank across the ex-colonial countries.

Thatcher dressed up this reactionary programme as the logic of common-sense and thrift, armed only with a handbag (and a small onion for when she needed to shed a tear - according to Private Eye) she set off to put the world to rights.

Thatcher's programme of privatisation and so called 'popular capitalism' was wrapped up with the idea of a 'property owning democracy', where everyone owned their own council house and had shares in the gas board and the electricity board. They would travel to work on privatised buses, or privatised tubes and trains. Because everyone was thereby 'standing on their own feet' they would forget about the evil ideas of socialism and accept the god of 'market forces'. The fact is though that the assault on the public sector had much more to do with providing productive fields of investment for the bosses. Compulsory competitive tendering and



Gruesome Twosome

the internal market within the health service served to batter down wages and conditions across the public sector. In the 'service' sector the vast majority of costs are in wages. The logic of compulsory competitive tendering meant that private companies could undercut council services, by the very straightforward policy of cutting wage levels and staff numbers. Thus, once they had also built their percentage profit into the equation, resulting in a massive growth in the exploitation of some of the poorest sections of the working class. Of course Thatcher also opposed the minimum wage as it would 'harm industry'.

Recession

The recession between 1979 and 1981 had a huge impact on the working class. Unemployment shot through the roof as millions lost their jobs. What was the Tory answer? These, they said, were weak old fashioned industries that were uncompetitive and overstaffed. In other words they took the same attitude as their Victorian predecessors; they introduced 'laissez faire' capitalism. In other words Thatcher did absolutely nothing; the Tories just let the industries fold with calamitous results for working class communities up and down the country. What about the unemployed? Well, they were lazy, layabout shirkers, 'moaning minnies' and scroungers. The Tories slashed the number of tax inspectors and took on hundreds of people to police the benefit system. There were huge tax cuts for the rich while benefits were cut and people were encouraged to "get on their bikes" and look for work.

Did the medicine work? Monetarism meant that unemployment went higher sooner in Britain than in any other major capitalist country. Neoliberal policies didn't solve anything. They are now totally discredited and the policies introduced by Thatcher in the 1980s are seen as being a factor in the present crash.

Whole Towns Devastated

But the effects of the recession were such that whole towns were devastated. Well over 3 million were on the dole, while at least a million more weren't counted. The Tories changed the way that they counted the unemployment statistics some 20 times. New Labour has only continued massaging the figures. Towns like Consett had grown up around the steel works and went into freefall when they closed down. The Wearside shipyards, huge swathes of industry in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Teesside, Tyneside and the cotton mills in Lancashire and West Yorkshire were written off as sunset industries. In one town in the North East - North Shields - which had a working population of around 40,000, 10,000 jobs were lost. The effect was particularly felt by the youth. Youth unemploy-

our history

ment hit 50% in some areas. This was at a time when only a minority went into sixth form and even fewer into university. In many industrial areas it was said that people walked out of the school yard into the mill, the pits or the shipyards. Then all of a sudden the apprentice schools closed down and the factory gates were shut. In the summer of 1981 the anger of the youth erupted into rioting, the most famous examples being the riots in Brixton and Toxteth. Essentially they were outbursts of deep anger and frustration which were aggravated by huge youth unemployment, racist policing and terrible social conditions.

Young people were massively politicised, there was a huge polarisation. Everything was political, music in particular and there was a huge radicalisation of young people. As for Thatcher, she was public enemy number one for working class youth. She was and still is deeply resented and hated. Many people in their 40s and 50s today represent the lost generation who suffered years of unemployment and weren't given the skills to get work when the boom years eventually came.

Left on the March

The left in the Labour Party had been developing throughout the 1970s and by 1981 Tony Benn had come within a whisker of winning the deputy leadership of the Labour Party. Under these conditions it's no surprise that the Marxist led Labour Party Young Socialists mushroomed. But far from winning the 1983 general election Labour was slaughtered, the Tories gained seats and the right wing began to regain control of the party.

In Ireland Thatcher is remembered for being the prime minister who callously sent the 1981 hunger strikers to

their deaths. Although it is now clear that the Tories had been in contact with the Sinn Fein leaders during the hunger strikes, the public persona was of no discussions with 'terrorists' and no negotiations. The net effect of Thatcher's stubborn refusal to negotiate was probably to prolong the 'troubles' for years.



*Bobby Sands MP
Died 66 days into hunger strike*

Falklands Factor

One of the biggest factors in the victory of the Tories in the general election was the Falklands war. Out of the blue, or at least it appeared to be, the Argentinean army invaded the Falklands Islands or Malvinas a small bleak and utterly inhospitable group of islands with a tiny population massively outnumbered by sheep, penguins and elephant seals. The Argentinean Junta's invasion unleashed a wave of jingoism on behalf of the press, which Thatcher used to present herself as a great war leader, casting herself as the successor to Winston Churchill, Joan of Arc and of course Britannia. The Tories sent a task force to the South Atlantic to retake the islands in what was essentially the

most expensive election campaign in history. It's clear that the Argentine military were surprised by the level of the response from the British.

But for Thatcher it was too good an opportunity to miss, an opportunity to play on all of the long faded traditions of the British Empire, Rule Britannia and so on by showing "the argies" who was boss. The response of the Labour leadership on the other hand was seen as weak and vacillating. The Marxists opposed the war, and called for a general strike in both Britain and Argentina against



both Thatcher and dictator Galtieri. Far from being inevitable or necessary the Falklands war was essentially a fluke, an empty net.

SDP Defection

The ruling class was in danger of losing control of its second eleven. As the Labour ranks moved left they engineered the split away of the Social Democratic Party from the Labour Party that kept Thatcher in power. It should never be forgotten that though she won two landslides, Thatcher never got the support of more than 43% of those voting. For most of her reign she was miles behind in the opinion polls and deeply unpopular in the country.

Falklands Fluke

Apart from the 'Falklands factor' another factor in Labour's defeat in 1983 was the confusion spawned by the right wing split led by Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams, David Owen and Bill Rogers. The SDP had been established in 1981 after a section of the Labour right wing, frightened for their careers decided that they would split in an attempt to cut across the growing support for the Labour Party. After initial polls indicated that the SDP would win over 50% of the vote it collapsed, but still managed to affect the Labour vote, giving Thatcher another accidental boost. The effect in the Labour Party was further polarisation and a further development of the left. Under Thatcher, class struggle was the order of the day. □

Next month: Thatcher - decline and fall

Bangladesh under water?

By Daniel Read

TUCKED ALONGSIDE the banks of Lake Carter, within the grounds of Lancaster University, floats an unusual piece of art. Kept on the surface via tyres strapped to the underside, a bamboo frame hosts a base of artificial grass alongside a picket fence and roses. Closer inspection reveals that this Floating English Garden also sports a watering can, privet hedge, and other assorted paraphernalia.

However, Christine Dawson's work is not meant to be just another curiosity to pique the interest of the passing art lover. The piece is modelled on the green and red flag of Bangladesh and with jute making up a prominent part of the installation – jute being one of Bangladesh's principle exports – it exists to convey one message: Bangladesh is sinking.

Disaster Coming

For decades now global warming has been the hot topic – no pun intended – for scientists and politicians the world over. But it is only relatively recently that the effects of catastrophic climate change have begun to be felt.

The disaster facing Bangladesh has its roots in the low lying and high silt composition of its soil. Due to proven effects of global warming, the rising sea level of the Bay of Bengal has begun to permeate the landmass, causing fresh water rivers to experience a rise in salt content.

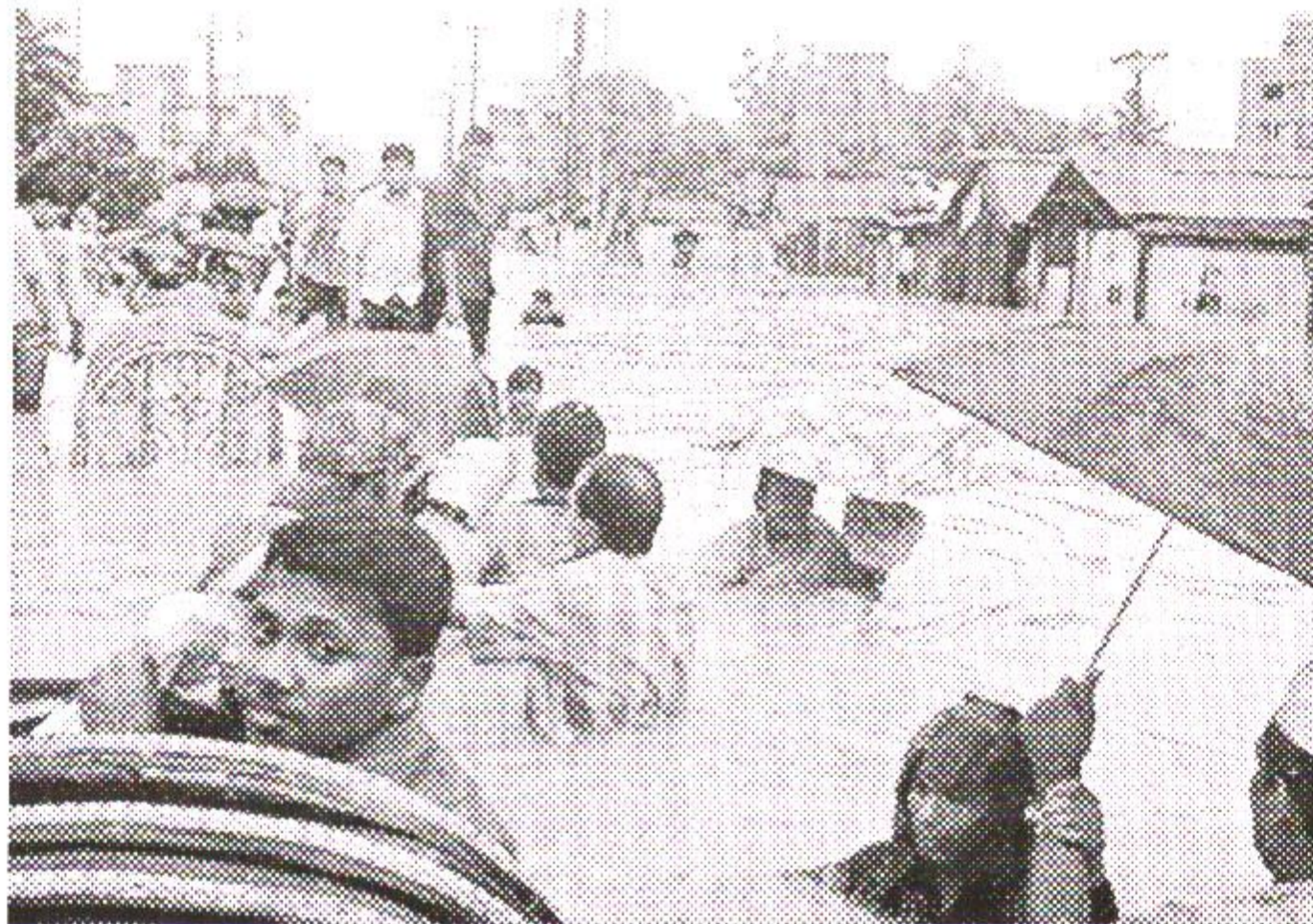
This has served to kill off much of the fish population, as well as affecting rice production; a staple diet for many. The water has also seeped into adjoining fields, making them all but useless for the purpose of growing crops.

Those dependent on such water sources for fishing or something to drink have found themselves with few options. Disease from consuming unclean – albeit salt free – water is on the increase, with a rising death toll to match.

Bangladesh has an abundance of over 230 major rivers which once made the area ideal for agriculture. As salt water overruns them however, the rivers are also being swelled by meltwater coming down from warming glaciers of the Himalayas.

Although up to 30-70% of the nation is generally affected by floods each year, the increased volume of water coupled with rising salt content has led to a curtailment of land suitable for habitation.

The rising sea level has also caused some areas to disappear altogether. The island of Bhola, the nation's largest, has now lost over half of its mass to the ocean in the past decade.



Sinking fast

Cyclones

Cyclones, which used to be relatively common, are on the increase in frequency and strength. In November 2007 Cyclone Sidr smashed through the nation's south, taking 3,000 lives and devastating entire settlements. Since then, cyclone warnings have become reoccurring, which has hit the fishing industry hard, in the process further plunging people into poverty.

Wide Scale Poverty

Bangladesh is counted as the most crowded nation on earth. With a population of over 150 million people, the nation suffers from wide scale poverty with a per capita income of just around 370 US dollars. Around 75%

of the population live in undeveloped rural areas, whilst millions of workers in the urban centres languish in low paid jobs producing goods for export.

It is not currently known if the government has plans in place to counter the alarming effects climate change is having. Such a policy would have to be implemented at an international level, with the governments of the industrial hubs of the US, the EU, Japan and China accepting responsibility. The only solution would be on a global basis.

Unfortunately, capitalism has proven itself incapable of doing this. The complete failure of the world's leading governments to make a significant dent in carbon emissions has

become a nightmare for working people. As a system, capitalism does not have a tendency for making long term projections outside of a potential profit margin.

Staggering Contradiction

This staggering contradiction between the objective needs of the people – in this case not to drown or starve – and the drive of capital to accumulate profit is being amply demonstrated. Instead of attempting

to implement a plan of production to utilise cleaner energy sources, we see the Bangladeshi government continuing to develop fashionable tourist enclaves in coastal regions that are themselves under threat.

Antarctic Ice to Melt

In the long run, it is now thought that the Antarctica ice sheet could melt entirely if carbon dioxide levels reach 400 parts per million; something which could happen as early as 2050. This will raise sea levels by around 16 feet.

However, according to some sources, by 2050 Bangladesh could already be mostly under water. □

Pure evil, or the logic of capitalism?

IN PENNSYLVANIA earlier this year judge Mark Ciavarella and the judge of the juvenile court, Michael Conahan, pleaded guilty to having accepted \$2.6m (£1.8m) from the co-owner and builder of a private prison where children aged from 10 to 17 were locked up.

The cases of up to 2,000 children put into custody by Ciavarella and Conahan over the past seven years are now being reviewed in a scandal called "kids for cash".

Delinquent

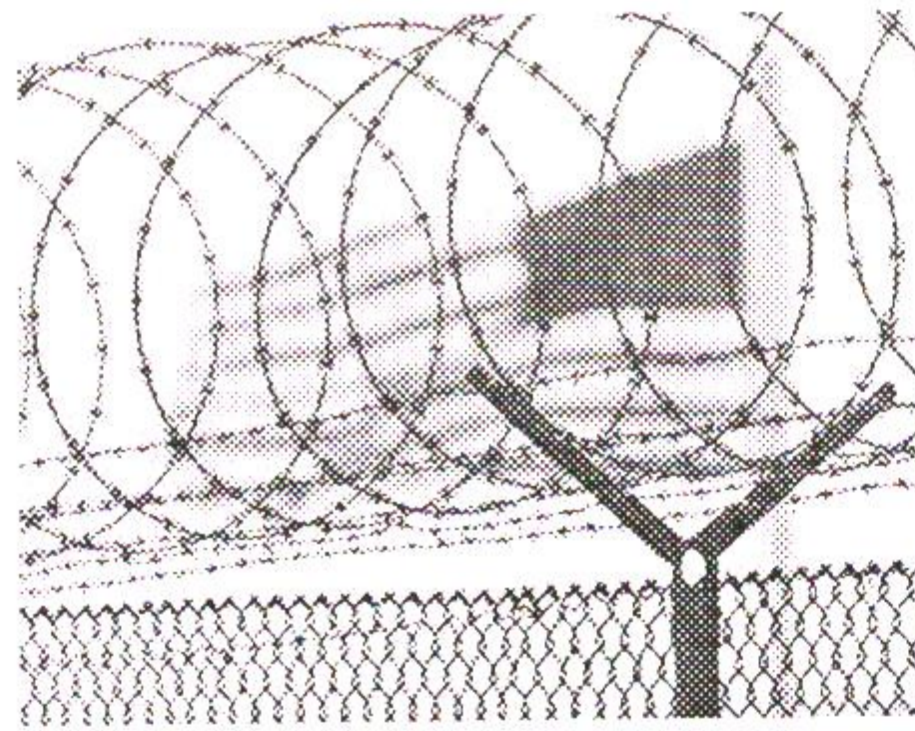
One case involved 14 year old Hillary Transue, who put up a hoax MySpace page making fun of a school vice-principal she thought was too strict. What happened next was that Hillary found herself in their courthouse. Within one minute the gavel came down and she was led away in handcuffs and sentenced to three months in prison as a 'delinquent'. She was not allowed to present her side of the story and not told she was entitled to representation in court.

We now know the judge who jailed her was being paid a bounty by

the prison company who locked her up. This sort of thing may have happened two thousand times, going back to 1999. One child was locked up for stealing a \$4 jar of nutmeg, another was incarcerated for throwing a sandal at her mum and a third got six months for slapping a friend at school.

Assembly Line of Criminals

This was all part of an assembly line process of producing 'criminals.' After all, if you're building nice shiny new prisons you need to fill them up. And the more 'evildoers' you can manufacture, the more money you can make. So the judges and the pri-



vate prison company entered into a mutually beneficial arrangement where both made money, by criminalising young people.

Over the years the judges received at least \$2.6m in kickbacks from the firm P A Child Care. In late 2004 a long-term deal was secured with PACC worth about \$58m. The two judges bought a condominium in Florida with the proceeds from the bribes.

The Real Criminals

Now the real criminals are behind bars, is that the end of the matter? Not really. For a start nobody from PACC has been charged with any offence. After all, they were just doing what comes naturally.

The real lesson of this sorry tale is that the case shows the logic of privatisation. Capitalism has an insatiable need for profit. For PACC the children were just something they handled and made money out of, just like other capitalists sell cabbages. You can either have a system that serves the public or you can have private capitalism. You can't have both. □

What they really think

HERE ARE extracts from a letter by **Andrew Lahde** to the *Financial Times* published on October 17 2008. Lahde, who ran a hedge fund, was able to retire completely from the world of business at the ripe-old age of 37 because he had become very rich as a result of the stupidity of the 'masters of the universe.' These were the people who ran the banks and financial institutions into the ground and created mass unemployment and distress all over the world.

Trying not to Gloat?

"Today I write not to gloat. Given the pain that nearly everyone is experiencing, that would be entirely inappropriate... Instead, I am writing to say goodbye.

Recently ...a hedge fund manager who was also closing up shop (a \$300 million fund), was quoted as saying, "What I have learned about the hedge fund business is that I hate it." I could not agree more with that statement. I was in this game for the money. The low hanging fruit, i.e. idiots whose parents paid for prep school, Yale, and then the Harvard MBA, was there for the taking. These people who were (often) truly not worthy of the education

they received (or supposedly received) rose to the top of companies such as AIG, Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers and all levels of our government. All of this behavior supporting the Aristocracy only ended up making it easier for me to find people stupid enough to take the other side of my trades. God bless America."

Lahde goes on to offer advice. "Throw the Blackberry away and enjoy life..."

Capitalism Corrupt

Finally he assesses the role of government in the disaster and considers the future of capitalism. "First, I point out the obvious flaws, whereby legislation was repeatedly brought forth to Congress over the past eight years, which would have reined in the predatory lending practices of now mostly defunct institutions. These institutions regularly filled the coffers of both parties in return for voting down all of this legislation designed to protect the common citizen... Capitalism worked for two hundred years, but times change, and systems become corrupt..."

Got the message? □

State repression backs bosses in Iran

By The Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network

ON MARCH 12th the management of the Ahvaz Pipe Manufacturing Company sacked over 2,000 workers on temporary contracts. The workers haven't just put up with it. They've been holding daily protests, gatherings and marches.

These workers were sacked just one week before the Iranian new year and were laid off when they were still owed two months' wages! They have vowed to continue with their daily protests until they are allowed to return to work and to have job security and legal safeguards.

The workers' protests have included gathering outside the factory gates, as on March 16th. On that day their representatives announced that the demonstrations would continue until the factory was reopened and the workers reinstated. Within two hours of this protest and the representatives' announcement, the security forces summoned five of the workers' representatives and demanded an end to the protest.

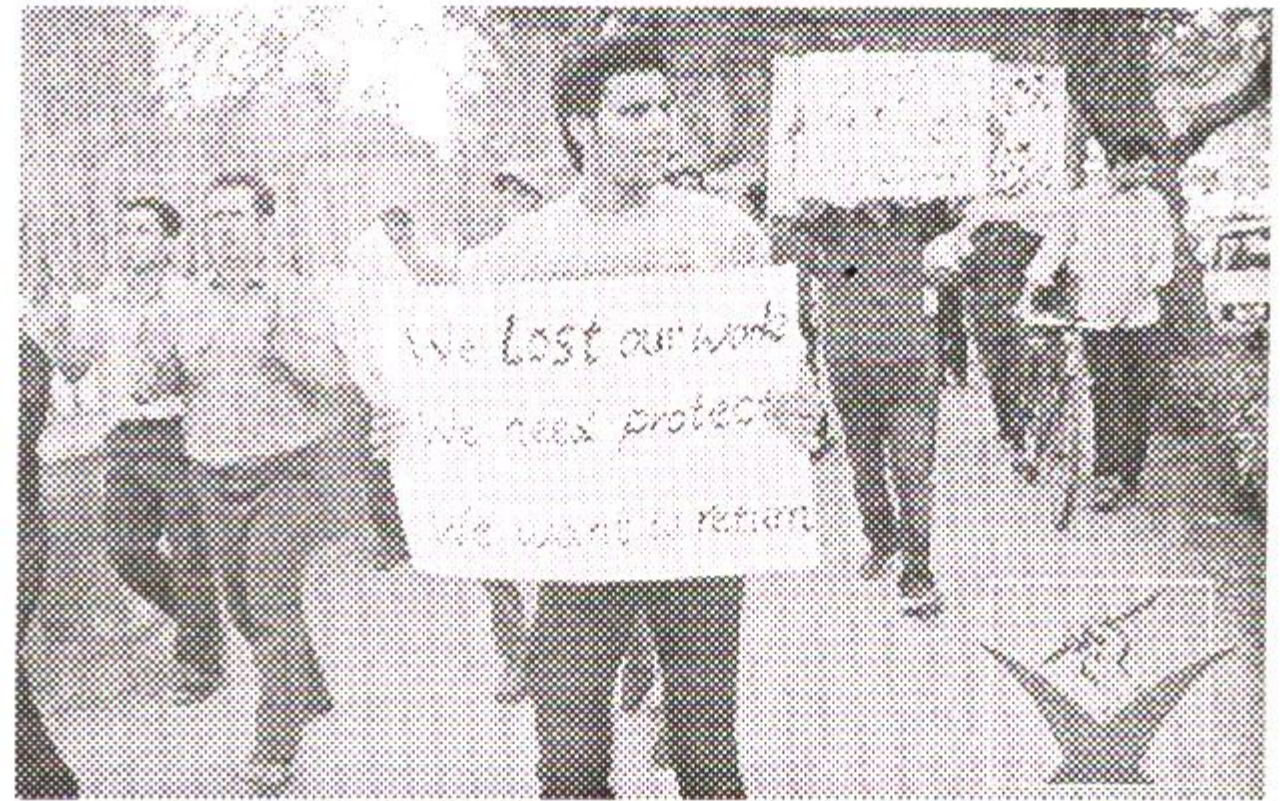
But the workers are fighting on. On the morning of April 14, 300 sacked workers marched through Ahvaz city. They marched from the factory gates to the governor's

office; shouting slogans like "Having a livelihood is our absolute right".

So far no one in management or from the government has been willing to meet the workers to discuss their grievances.

Ahvaz Pipe factory is in Ahvaz city, in the oil-rich Khuzestan province in south-western Iran. Around 600 official workers and workers on long-term contracts continue to work there.

For the sacked workers the struggle goes on. □



Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network (IWSN)

BM IWSN
London, WC1N 3XX
iranwsn@fastmail.fm
www.iwsn.org

Letter

This letter was sent as a follow up to a review of the book 'The man who hated work but loved labor: The life and times of Tony Mazzocchi' in last month's journal.

Tony Mazzocchi: a view from the USA

TONY MAZZOCCHI had been on record as supporting a labor party. Around 1989, he and the author of this book, Les Leopold, had an op-ed article about the idea of a labor party, which was published in the bourgeois press.

In Oakland, California a meeting was called on the issue of a labor party. Mazzocchi agreed to speak, but he came to the meeting expecting 10 to 20 workers at most. The meeting took place on December 12, 1989 and more than 140 workers attended. Mazzocchi looked happy, but also was very surprised at the turn out.

In my opinion, it was as a result of this meeting that Mazzocchi began an organization called Labor Party Advocates (LPA).

The sole purpose of this organization was for people to pay dues and advocate a labor party. There could be no discussion of what should be in a labor party program, nor

would it run or support candidates that ran independent of the two capitalist parties until the formation of such a party. The LPA would also not attempt to recruit youth sections. Mazzocchi also stated that the LPA would only call for a founding conference of a labor party once it had at least "100,000 members."

Gradually, Mazzocchi allowed the LPA to form itself as the Labor Party, but he insisted that it should not engage in electoral campaigns. It is my understanding that Mazzocchi kept the labor party on the sidelines of the events in the late 1990s and 2000 and it gradually became largely inactive.

Due to the role of the labor leaders, whatever Mazzocchi and the forces around him could do, would not have led to a mass labor party at that time. However, I believe if he had been more flexible and more willing to clash with the labor bureaucracy, the Labor Party that did emerge could have developed as a modestly-sized national party that could have had an effect on the political situation and would have been a bench mark for a future mass labor party. Instead, it is not active in the present situation. Today, we can see the capitalist crisis unfold. This will eventually lead to the changes in consciousness and battles in the unions that will lay the basis for a mass party of labor in the U.S.

Comradely, Tom Trottier Bronx, NY □

Onslaught on the working class

by Mick Brooks

UNDER CAPITALISM there is a steady unremitting pressure on workers' living standards from the capitalist class, particularly as they compete with one another, and with bosses all around the world, to cut costs - especially labour costs. This need for employers to attack the wages and conditions of European workers has been intensified by the onset of crisis.

There are huge discrepancies between national rates of pay within the European Union. Naturally bosses would like to exploit these differences. And the European Court of Justice is trying hard to help them.

The institutions of the European Union have always been a site of class struggle. As a rule, like the institutions of a capitalist nation state, they have served the interests of the ruling class. Now the European Court of Justice has handed out a number of anti working class judgements. They have become in effect vanguard fighters for European bosses. These cases are a serious threat to all European workers.

One of the EU's 'four freedoms' is the free movement of labour. Actually socialists defend the principle of the free movement of workers. We believe that all workers should have the opportunity to do the best for themselves.



'Free movement of labour' is used by the European Court of Justice to undermine workers' rights all over Europe

Any attempt to restrict the movement of workers under capitalism would be an attempted restriction of free movement in search of a better life. That could only be in the interests of the capitalist class. This was the purpose of the pass laws restricting the movement of black workers in apartheid South Africa, for instance.

But that does not exhaust the question. Workers throughout history have bettered their lot not through individual endeavour, but through collective action. Whether to work abroad is a decision for an individual worker. But, wherever they are working, they become part of the working class in that country. To fight for a better life, they need to get involved in the labour movement there.

Four Freedoms

Workers sell their labour power collectively, as part of a work force. The workers formerly employed by the subcontractor Clarks at Lindsey Oil Refinery in Lincolnshire on the desulphurisation plant naturally expected to be taken on by the successor firm. This is the normal procedure in the industry. They were all part of the same team. In a sense this shows the fictitious nature of the subcontracting process in the construction industry, where the workers are regarded as self-employed. Whoever pops up as the employer for the time being makes no difference to the work being carried on, who does it and (usually) the rate for the job.

The bosses' onslaught is made easier in the construction industry because of the jungle of subcontracting on sites. Bob Blackman of Unite explains why subcontracting is so convenient for construction employers, and what is needed to combat it. "In order to tackle the self-employed anarchy on the sites across the country we must have legally enforceable standards that apply to every single worker in the industry on every single contract... At the present time it is the better employers that are dragged down by the cowboys. This has got to stop."

British workers in the engineering construction industry have fought to have all workers in the industry covered by the NAECI (National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry) agreement. The agreement is not a utopia. It is arrived at by col-

lective bargaining between the bosses and the unions involved. Nevertheless it upholds the industry standard.

The successful struggle at Lindsey, and the current battles at Staythorpe and the Isle of Grain, are all about maintaining the minimum standards laid down by the national agreement. The ECJ wants to undermine national agreements in the interests of the boss class.

It is a lie to say the workers in action were fighting for 'British jobs for British workers.' Their objection to the IREM subcontractors, who took over from Clarks at Lindsey, was not that the workers hired were Italian or Portuguese, but that they were not being paid the national rate. IREM workers were actually housed on floating barges in the North Sea. They were told not to show their wage slips to anyone.



Construction workers at Lindsey went on unofficial strike to maintain hard-won pay, terms and conditions

Legal Battle

The legal battle before the ECJ is around the Posted Workers' Directive, dealing with the minority of migrant workers who are sent to work abroad by their employers. The Directive was actually pushed for by the German government to prevent German building workers being undercut by cheap foreign labour. It was aimed at 'social dumping'.

The Directive was weakly drafted. It was left to national governments as to whether posted workers automatically were cut in to existing national agreements and received the normal

wages and conditions, or whether they were just covered by the minimum wage for the country where they were working. The reason the Directive was weak and ambivalent was because of lobbying behind the scenes by the British Tories, and then by New Labour.

Alarmed by the loopholes, the TUC approached the British Labour government and received an assurance in the Warwick Agreement of 2004 that national implementation of the Directive would not allow undercutting. Gordon Brown addressed the 2005 TUC Conference with the words, "I am here today to tell you that Tony Blair and the government will as a priority put in place this year and next legislation honouring in full the Warwick Agreement." This was a black lie.

Anti-TU Legislation

It is important for British workers to understand that the attack on their rights comes from two sources – the ECJ and the British government itself. In particular the anti-trade union legislation passed by the Tories and never repealed by New Labour leaves workers without legal protection against undercutting

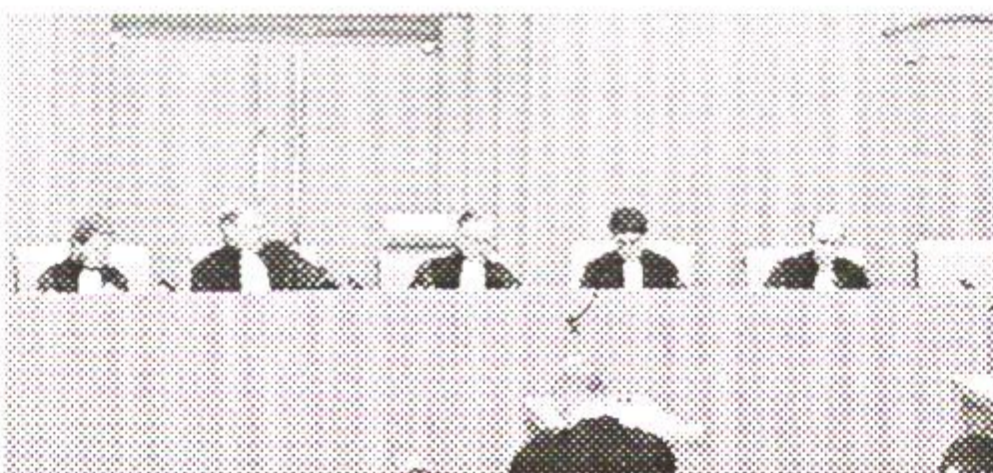
The European Union now has a population not far short of 500 million. According to a survey in 2000 about one in ten workers worked in the construction industry. In Britain, for instance, there are 1.4 million building workers, plus many more in associated trades and industries. If the bosses can drive down standards across the board in the industry, that would be an important defeat for us all.

The question is: are posted workers covered by conditions in the host country or the home country? The European Court of Injustice has found for the employers in a number of cases. In the Viking case, for instance, a firm operating ferries in Finland got rid of its Finnish workforce and reflagged the ships, replacing the crews with Estonians. The ECJ held that the company only had to pay Estonian rates. The sole restriction on employers was that they had to pay the minimum wage in the host coun-

try, Finland. This is a dagger aimed at the heart of the well-paid, well organised Finnish working class. Bosses could just nip across the Baltic and employ workers for half the wage!

Free Movement of Labour

The ECJ rammed the message home in the Laval case. Laval was a Latvian company who posted workers to Sweden to work on a school at Vaxholm, outside Stockholm. When approached by the Swedish builders' union Byggnads, Laval refused to sign the collective agreement (The equivalent of the UK NAECI Blue Book) and Byggnads blockaded the site. Again the Court decided that, since collective action interfered with 'the right to provide services,' it was illegal. They are trying to establish this as a general principle.



Who elected the European Court of Justice?

Generally the ECJ is using the 'free movement of labour' to trump the most fundamental freedom of all for workers, the right to take collective industrial action, including the right to strike. The 'free movement of labour' in turn is interpreted to mean the right of employers to undercut wages all over Europe. This actually militates against the principle of non-discrimination and the right to equal treatment, rights which are continually asserted in EU law, but which are actually upheld by the working class and are effectively trampled over by the hostile Viking and Laval cases.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the ECJ is saying 'to hell with the right to strike.' Who are they to say this? Who elected the ECJ? They assert this despite the fact that many countries inside the EU have the right to strike enshrined in their constitution, and that right is part of the EU's own fundamental rights and freedoms.

The Laval and Viking judgements

(and there have been others) came out in 2007, before the onset of the present crisis. Clearly the bosses were already preparing for a showdown. The crisis will force them to go on a sustained offensive. This legal offensive is part of a wider bosses' onslaught.

The enforceability of national agreements, and the standards that have been built up with them, is being seriously undermined by the ECJ. These national agreements have been imposed upon the boss class by collective action. The ECJ has challenged the right of unions to take collective action. It has given the green light to rogue employers, and there are a lot of them about in these straitened circumstances, to try to systematically undercut wages across the EU, specially in the construction industry. The construction industry is riddled with subcontractors. This could lead to a race to the bottom. We have to stop them.

Race to Bottom

The onslaught can and must be fought back. It will not be defeated, as the European TUC seems to think, by legalistic arguments and appealing to powerless bodies such as the European Parliament. The British working class defeated the attack on long-established conditions at Lindsey by militant action. The onslaught will be defeated by a European-wide mobilisation of the working class against unjust laws and the boss class offensive. If we do this successfully, we can use our victory as a springboard for further success and as a way of cementing the wider unity of the European working class. □



The only way to win is collectively

Exploitation in TV industry worse than ever

By Will Roche, BECTU

LANDING A job in British Television would be considered by most to be a real prize. The industry has long since been associated with decent wages, prestige, and glamour. It's no surprise then that thousands of young people compete to get into the industry each year. But the industry is hiding a dirty secret. Many of these young applicants, who have often gone to great effort and expense to gain media degrees, are given their first job in the industry paying them... wait for it... £nothing. That's right. Nothing!

Over the past decade, as budgets have shrunk in an ever more competitive market, privately owned production companies, collectively known as the independent sector, have been cheating applicants into accepting unpaid 'work experience' positions. Lured by the shallow promise of 'promotion' later down the line, 'work experiencers' are often held for many months before being offered paid work. In many cases companies never offer them pay at all.

Mundane Tasks

Many are forced to work extremely long hours doing mundane tasks, like photocopying, moving heavy tape machines, or transcribing interviews. One 23-year-old researcher who wished to remain anonymous stated, "No one is going to take you on without experience. So you just put up with it, hope you get a job at the end of it and keep your mouth shut in the meantime." This is not work experience. It's free labour. Companies are clearly abusing the fact that there is an overabundance of applicants.

Unpaid jobs are now routinely advertised on trade websites, with one company causing an outcry by requiring applicants to pay for work placements. Other jobs offer less than the minimum wage. One company posted an ad on a well-known website asking for "an amazingly keen runner for 18 weeks. Previous experience of filming, research, office admin, post-production, client liaison is essential. Must have driving license. Region: Soho.

Salary: £200 per week."

Paul, a 25-year-old runner with three years' experience who worked on a major terrestrial reality series for one of the big independents was expected to work a minimum of 10 hours a day for six days a week. "It later ended up being 11-13 hours, and in the prep week 15 or 16 hours including weekends," he says. "I was being paid £275 per week".

Starvation Wages



Mundane tasks, not 'work experience'

A senior staff producer at a large independent who asked not to be identified states, "It's common knowledge that big companies are undercutting each other by paying nil or starvation wages. The bottom line is that by cutting corners with junior staff you can cream off more of the production budget as profit."

This is destabilising the whole industry. Cheap labour in the private sector has become an irresistible lure for the BBC management. Director General Mark Thompson plans to dramatically increase the amount of production bought in from outside the corporation. As far as they're concerned, why pay decent wages to BBC staff when you can get it done on the cheap in the private sector?

Driving down Quality

This process is also driving down the quality of TV programmes. Aside from the obvious impact of smaller budgets, these 'work experiencers' are not receiving proper training. Companies are substituting investing in future talent for immediate profit.

It's also impacting on society too.

Many of these 'work experiencers' are forced to stay living with their parents rent-free. In other words, parents are subsidising our TV industry! Of course, families on low incomes could never afford to do this, so kids from working class backgrounds often never make it into the industry. Therefore TV lacks diversity. It tends to have a middle to upper class character.

Upper Class Character

With precious little done by the government, the solution is for working people to organise and fight back. That's exactly what's happening. The 'TV Wrap' campaign set up by a collective of workers in the industry has started to effect some change. Supported by the broadcasting union BECTU, the campaign has submitted petitions to government, and has successfully pressurized some of the offending companies into paying proper wages. But to effect fundamental change we need to address the root cause.

Competition for Profit

It's competition for profit that has led to this recent exploitation of 'work experiencers'. It's also responsible for driving down wages and extending working hours throughout the industry over the past decade. As well as increasing profits, lowering wages allows companies to undercut each other when vying for commissions. The paying broadcasters then see that programmes can be made for less money and further reduce budgets, paving the way for further exploitation. This is a systemic problem endemic to a market economy.

Capitalism is completely incapable of solving these problems, which have burdened working mass populations for nearly two hundred years. Marx pointed this out as early as 1848 in the Communist Manifesto:

"...labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market..." Marx continues: "The growing competition

among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The increasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious...".

Organise in Work Places

The way to fight against this, as Marx knew only too well, is for us to organise in our work places and trade unions, and also in our universities, to help equip students and workers with the necessary political skills to fight for their rights. If it's competition for profit that is driving this destructive process, then surely the independent TV sector should be transferred over to the public. Extend the working conditions within the BBC throughout the whole industry. Ultimately, to put an end to exploitation, ruthless competition and the false promises of a market economy we should replace it with a planned socialist economy. □



BBC strike over job cuts in 2005

Mitie cleaners fight on

by **Melanie MacDonald**

DESPITE THEIR small numbers, the Mitie cleaners are punching well above their weight. Every Friday at 1pm they gather in front of the offices of Willis insurance brokers in the heart of London's business district, and with the help of a megaphone, they begin their protest. The cleaners and their supporters don fluorescent vests, blow whistles and shout slogans demanding the reinstatement of the unfairly sacked cleaners. After a shout at Willis, they head to HBOS just up the road.

Justice for Cleaners



Clients like Willis and HBOS use subcontractor Mitie for building services like cleaning and security. In 2007, a group of cleaners got organised and fought for a pay rise through the Unite campaign

Justice for Cleaners. They eventually won and their wages were increased from £5.75 to £7.45. Then, in what the cleaners see as a bid to punish and separate the activists, including shop steward Edwin Pazmino, the company moved them from day-shifts to night-shifts (from 7-11pm to 10pm-6am), which was almost impossible for those with children. About 17 workers refused to work the new hours. Despite Mitie being one of the largest service corporations with a myriad of clients, workers and sites, it couldn't seem to accommodate the remaining handful of workers who wouldn't accept the changes in their terms and conditions, so they got the sack.

The cleaners are dedicated to winning their struggle. They have been demonstrating for 9 weeks in a row and have been spreading the word at union branches and public meetings.

The Mitie workers are linking up with the larger Latin American community on the issue of the exploitation of immigrant workers.

Immigrants Vulnerable

Despite the fact that this group of British workers is often skilled and highly educated, they are offered low wages, especially if they don't have their papers in exact order in an immigration system that changes the rules of the game almost every month. Because immigrant workers are vulnerable, they are forced to accept some of the low-



Fired Mitie cleaner, Edwin Pazmino, spoke to a meeting of the Latin America Coordinadora

est wages in Britain, and work longer hours in order to support their families, often sending money back to relatives in their home countries.

So it is often the case that they don't have the time or the resources to learn English as well as they might like and to fight for their rights. We believe no one is illegal, papers should be for all and that Latin American workers must link with British and other exploited workers.

In an act of solidarity, the Mitie workers even visited the picket line at the formerly occupied Visteon car parts factory in Enfield, North London. They plan to go back. □

Blacklist Heroes

by Steve Kelly, Unite

I have been an active trade union member of Unite the union in its various forms since 1986 when I first joined EEPTU. I was first properly involved in rank and file activity in 1988 on a site in London where I was an elected safety rep. Then in 1990, I became a deputy steward, and again in 1991, I was elected as a safety rep.

I regularly attended union branch meetings in London for many years. I am an electrician by trade. While I was on sites, there were constant battles with various firms as well as union officials who always seemed to be trying to undermine our rank and file activities, especially when we hit the gate or cabined up.

On every occasion they always told us to get back to work and the union put out a disclaimer to disassociate themselves from our unofficial actions. Given the strong feelings the workers would reject such advice, believing that the union officials were often as not in bed with the bosses.

From 1996 to 2000 I worked on the Jubilee Line extension. At one point there were 600 workers involved, all of who were union members. We were well organised with 12 elected stewards and deputy-stewards, as well as safety reps and two full-time elected convenors.

Jubilee Line Extension

Boy oh boy, when needed, we got stuck into the employers hard. We had many disputes, none of which we lost, as we always stuck together. In addition, we ignored the pleas of those who said we should get the job finished on time and at all cost. Our main concern was to carry out our work with proper safety and without cutting corners.

This experience on the JLE was the best 4 years of my working life. It will be the subject of much discussion and fond memories for years to come.

However, after the work finished, I found great difficulty getting work on other sites and was eventually forced to leave the construction industry in 2002. I did eventually find work in the maintenance industry but it was never the same. I missed the solidarity of the building sites. I miss the struggle and the fight on behalf of the men.

Given my failure to secure work in construction, it was clear to me that I was on

some kind of blacklist. Many of my ex-workmates were in the same boat. However, when I raised the issue at union branch meetings, the union officials always denied that there was a blacklist.

A few weeks ago, I managed to obtain my file from the Information Commissioner's Office, which clearly proved that a blacklist was in operation for all those years. It was an 18 page document containing allegations that I was a "trouble maker", "trade union militant", "strike organiser", "intimidating workers to join the union", "threatening supervisors", and even "writing abuse on the toilet walls"!

It went on to state that I was an EPIU activist who was in an alliance with Manchester EPIU activists to "take over other union branches throughout the country." (The EPIU was a breakaway union from the EEPTU trade union for electricians.) The fact of the matter is this is completely untrue. The document also contained personal information about my home addresses, National Insurance number, letters I had written to newspapers, copies of leaflets advertising rank and file meetings with my name on it, and even a copy of a union branch meeting minutes where I was present. As a union member, I wonder how this information ended up on the blacklist file.

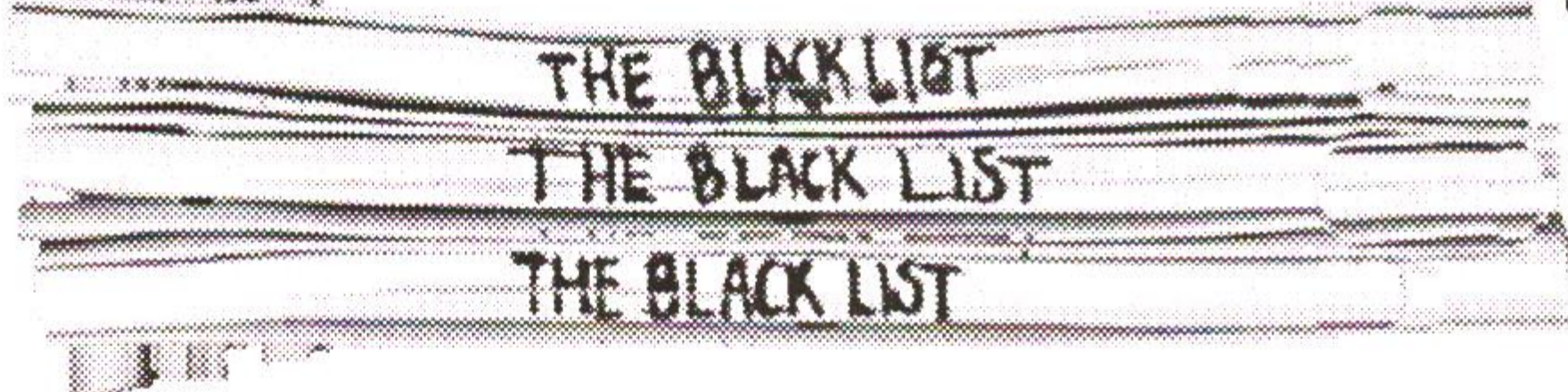
Conspiracy

I believe that I have a claim under the Data Protection Act against Ian Kerr Associates, who set up the blacklist and charged companies a fee to obtain 'information' about trade union activists, who have never committed any crimes, and whose only aim was to improve the health and safety of fellow workers. Last year, some 72 workers were killed and 1,000s seriously injured on building sites. There is likely to be similar numbers for this year.

I honestly believe the state and government are involved in this conspiracy with the employers. They are trying to prevent rank and file workers obtaining decent working conditions and nationally agreed rates of pay, as the Lindsey dispute recently showed.

They see the militant actions of construction workers as a real threat to their profits and want to undermine workers' solidarity and organisation. As in the 1972 building workers' strike, the employers, along with the state, were even prepared to frame and imprison the leaders of that dispute in Shrewsbury. Only through effective trade union organisation, especially at a rank and file level, can we resist these attacks and prepare the ground for the future.

Despite the blacklist, we must do everything in our power to further the struggle of working people and use the valuable lessons from previous struggles to educate, agitate and organise. Contact the Information Commissioners Office (telephone 0845 630 6060) if you think you might be on the blacklist. You could be one of the 3, 200 heroes! Also contact us at contact@socialist.net if you need more information. □



Launching... Friends of Socialist Appeal

by Rob Sewell

THE IDEA behind this was originally put forward by Pat Wall, who was the Militant MP for Bradford North but who unfortunately died in 1990.

Pat's initial suggestion arose from the large periphery of supporters around the Militant tendency who, for various reasons, wanted to help out but did not want to get too involved. Pat asked: why don't we organise these supporters on a more formal basis to help the movement financially and in other ways? Today, at this time of deep capitalist crisis, we are resurrecting this idea for sympathisers of Socialist Appeal

First Class Marxist Analysis

Today, Socialist Appeal provides a first-class Marxist analysis of events in Britain and internationally. The unfolding crisis of world capitalism – the deepest since the 1930s and the Great Depression – is a confirmation of the ideas of Marxism.

The mood in the working class is being transformed by these events. If we do our work properly, this will provide

the Marxist tendency with enormous opportunities. Of course, this will not just happen. We need to organise these forces and generate the necessary resources to raise our ideas inside the Labour and trade union movement.

Basically, facing these tasks, we need as much help as possible. We are urging you to become a 'Friend of Socialist Appeal'. What does this entail? If you are prepared to make a regular monthly contribution to Socialist Appeal – preferably through a standing order – we will arrange for you to receive a regular update on the progress of the tendency and its work. Add a subscription and we will send you a copy of the journal and other publications.

Mood being Transformed

By becoming a 'Friend', this will allow us to build up and plan our resources more effectively. If you do not wish to sign up to this project then please consider making a donation to our Fighting Fund.

If you decide to become a 'Friend' please drop an email to rob@socialist.net or write to our address. □

Socialist Appeal Stands for:

✦ **For a socialist programme to solve the problems of working people.** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies.

✦ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £8.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.

✦ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.

✦ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.

✦ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.

✦ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

✦ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.

✦ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

✦ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

✦ **Trade unions must reclaim the Labour Party!** Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.

✦ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.

✦ **No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

✦ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

✦ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice for labour and youth

JUSTICE FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Construction workers are under the hammer. Basic rights that are in theory available to most other workers are just not there on the sites. For a start most sites employ workers through a jumble of sub-contractors. Then employers find it convenient to preserve the fiction that workers are self-employed. Well, we don't feel self-employed. It's just a way of depriving us of the rights that directly employed workers take for granted. The bosses use the ever-changing snake barrel of subbies to try to deny us continuity of employment, which could lead to the establishment of basic standards and conditions for all the workers in the industry.

We are taking a stand at the Olympic site because it's one of the biggest sites in the country - certainly the one with the highest profile with high level visitors virtually everyday. It should be a showcase for the industry and a model for construction workers all over the country to look up to. Instead the employers are looking to turn it into a jungle of dodgy, unsafe practices and short term profit taking. Let's make sure it doesn't happen.

Construction workers at the Lindsey oil refinery took action and won a great victory over terms and conditions that were being undermined by the bosses. We need to ensure that all workers employed on the Olympic site are guaranteed their correct terms and conditions as well.

The workers are demanding:

- 1) Direct employment
- 2) Stick to the national (NAICEI, JIB and WRA) agreements in full with correct rates of pay and terms of conditions
- 3) No bogus self-employment
- 4) Fight against blacklists
- 5) Trade union control over hiring of labour

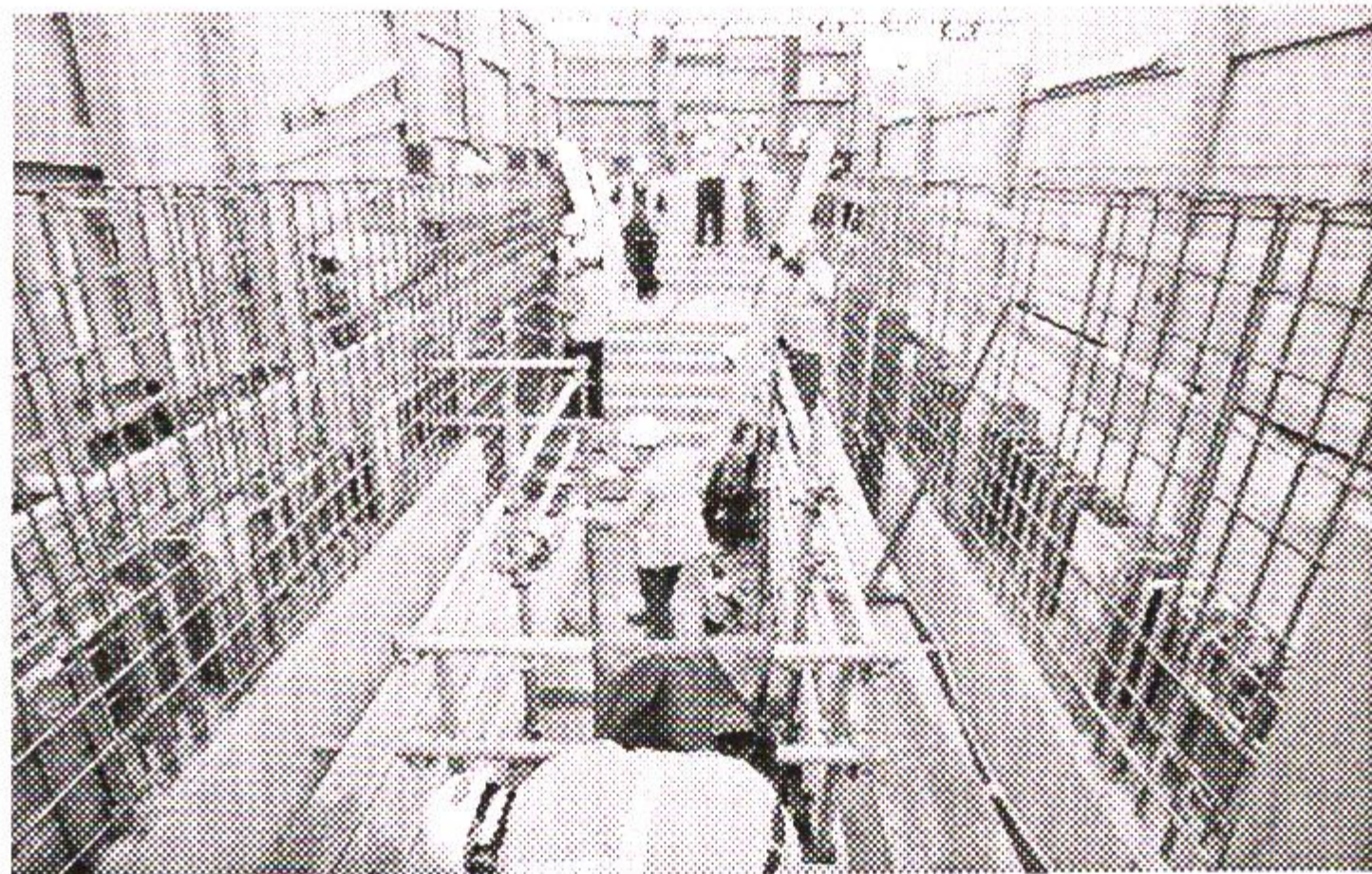
Hundreds of workers will be coming down from all over the country to help support the 6.30 am demonstration called by construction workers in London on Wednesday May 6th outside the Pudding Mill Lane entrance to the Olympic site in Stratford, East London.

The demo has been endorsed by a meeting of London

activists in Unite. Sadly full time officials have sought to try and withdraw support for the demo on the grounds that it is getting 'too big.' It is time that some people remembered whose side they are supposed to be on.

Later that day workers will then travel into Central London to attend a meeting called in the name of John McDonnell MP, being held at 12.00 inside the House of Commons (Committee Room 6) where they will hear speeches from MPs and trade unionists on the key questions raised by the demo. There will also be an opportunity for workers to meet and lobby their MPs - it is the day of Prime Minister's Question time, so they should all be there!

MPs should be asked to support the EDM being laid down by John McDonnell on the question of the blacklist inside the construction industry. The EDM expresses full support for those fighting for justice for having been victimised by the use of the blacklist by the main construction companies. It says that those responsible for operating the Blacklist should be open to prosecution for wilfully bringing about unwarranted hardship. It also calls upon the government to immediately enforce the Employment Relations Act of 1999 which made the Blacklist unlawful. In the meantime, companies found operating the Blacklist should be banned from operating on the Olympic project or any other construction site in the UK.



www.marxist.com