

WORKERS

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JULY 2010 £1

DEFAULT ON THE DEBTS!

LET THE BANKS PAY THE BILL!

REBUILD BRITAIN!



The crisis Paying to save capitalism

06



State control Call this democracy?

08



Marxist thinking Manufacture matters

15

WORKERS

“ How about banks that lend?

SO FAR, our class has given the banks a trillion pounds of tax-payer support through quantitative easing, etc., and the country has lost a trillion pounds' worth of production.

Yet the banks' outstanding loans are still worth five times our national output – proportionately greater than in any comparable country – and these loans are backed by only £1 for every £50 lent. A further crisis is inevitable.

The IMF recently noted that ten major banks here have no capital to back the £1 trillion's worth of the derivatives – bets they have made on the future prices of financial assets – that they hold. Barclays, RBS and HSBC still have more than 1,000 secret subsidiaries each designed to avoid tax and regulation. The

bankers' bonuses were £6 billion last year, and on top of that they increased their basic pay.

Only 3 per cent of banks' lending in the decade before the crash went to manufacturing; three-quarters went to commercial property and residential mortgages. Investment in manufacturing industry adds to growth, investment in property doesn't. The result? Wrecked industries and sky-high property prices.

We must stop wrecking the country to save the banks. We must stop paying the bankers' debts. They are not our debts. Clear the decks. Reject the failed model of finance capital. Let's create national banks for industry and for development, to lend to invest in building assets and increasing production.

Gangster radio

THE US SENATE Committee on Foreign Relations has decreed that Radio and TV Martí, the voice of Cuban counter-revolutionaries, gangsters and CIA toadies, has no credibility – that they blatantly lie, use “offensive and incendiary language” and after 18 years have “failed to make any discernable inroads into Cuban society or to influence the Cuban government”.

It is recommending that radio and TV Martí

are absorbed into the official US propaganda framework of Voice of America and relocated from Miami to Washington.

The Senate Committee further highlights the corruption and crime associated with these media outlets and estimates the Miami mafia aretop slicing some \$500,000 from the \$32.5 million annual budget. This rather puts it in a nutshell, though it fails to highlight the CIA role in this cesspit of “media freedom”.



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Contents – July 2010

News

Media battles erupt, p3; Olympics: vultures circling, p4; Energy gap postponed, p5; News Analysis: Trouble in the zone, p6

03

Features

Just one policy: make us pay..., p6; ...but there's money to buy finance firms, p7; Call this democracy? p9; Cuito Cuanavale – Africa's Stalingrad, p12;

06

Historic Notes

The same old refrain: attack the working class, p14

14



MEDIA	Battles erupt
BANKS	The next great crisis
OLYMPICS	Vultures circling
EDUCATION	Day of Dissent
ENERGY	Gap postponed
WORKING HOURS	Disappearing breaks
GLASGOW	Strike over hiving off
EUROBRIEFS	Talking about the euro
NEWS ANALYSIS	Trouble in the zone
WHAT'S ON	Coming soon

Media battles erupt

SOMETHING IS stirring in Dundee, headquarters of the DC Thomson newspaper and magazine group. The company is notoriously non-union, but in recent weeks and months dozens of workers there have been joining the National Union of Journalists. The union says it has been "inundated with membership applications from editorial staff".

The surge in recruitment began with the company's introduction of an ironically named Reward Project for staff. Said the Dundee Branch of the NUJ, this offered the hard-working journalists the choice between a two-and-a-half hour rise in the working week or a 10 per cent pay cut – plus the promise of a pay freeze for up to three years for almost a quarter of staff deemed to be receiving too much pay.

In May the first meeting of the Dundee Branch for over a year saw more than 60 journalists attending. The announcement on 18 June that 350 printing jobs were to go with the closure of its Guthrie Street plant – where it printed magazines and books – has only added to the impetus to join the union.

As well as publishing newspapers THE COURIER, EVENING TELEGRAPH and THE SUNDAY POST, the company is well known for magazines such as the BEANO and PEOPLE'S FRIEND.

Meanwhile, the NUJ has lodged a formal complaint with the Press Complaints Commission over the way that the introduction of a new content management system at Johnston Press is inviting journalists to break the editors' code of conduct. A memo from the managing director of South Yorkshire Newspapers, owned by Johnston Press, says that editors "should not continue with the old practice of reading every story".

The NUJ is locked in a bitter battle with Johnston Press, one of the largest regional newspaper publishers in Britain, which had one overwhelming ballot result for strike action overturned in the courts.

Recruitment also continues apace at Mirror Group Newspapers. The NUJ lacks negotiating rights there – a historical anomaly resulting from bitter infighting that saw the NUJ General Secretary and Mirror Group representative Steve Turner leave the union and found the British Association of Journalists in 1992. The BAJ is only recognised at the Mirror Group and one of its former titles.

The NUJ has appealed to the BAJ to work jointly with it to resist plans to axe 200 jobs. NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said, "This savage package of redundancies is also a stark warning to editorial staff at national, regional and local newspapers all over the country, as they reveal the real, cost-cutting intent behind the introduction of content management systems such as Contentwatch, as used at the Trinity Mirror group and ATEX, as used across Johnston Press."

BANKS

The next great crisis



BANKS FACE another crisis as tens of millions of pounds of commercial property loans are due to be refinanced this year and over the next three years. Borrowers are struggling to repay the loans and investment banks fear the value of their commercial property debt holdings will be reduced by between 30 and 50 per cent with "write-downs" and "fire sales".

The amount of debt backed by European commercial property requiring refinancing is expected to more than double this year to more than £4 billion, before rising to £12 billion next year and nearly £20 billion by 2013.

There are serious credit crunches ahead and capitalist banks face further crises in the future. The more we know, the more we realise capitalism is based on reckless profiteering for a few and is inherently unstable. Time for us to create a different sort of society based on industry and work, without finance capital.

- April's goods trade deficit was £7.3 billion; the overall trade deficit was £3.3 billion. When eurozone countries cut back public spending and therefore their demand, our exports fall. So despite a 25 per cent drop in the pound's value since 2007, Britain is not exporting more.

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

EUROBRIEFS

We need to talk about the euro

'A violation of every rule'

FORMER BUNDESBANK President Karl Otto Pöhl said, "The foundations of the euro have fundamentally changed as a result of the decision by Eurozone governments to transform themselves into a transfer union. This is a violation of every rule. In the Treaties governing the functioning of the European Union, it is explicitly stated that no country is liable for the debts of any other. But what we are doing right now is exactly that. Added to this is the fact that, against all its vows, and against an explicit ban within its own constitution, the European Central Bank has become involved in financing (member) states."

'Control and surveillance'

EUROPEAN CENTRAL Bank President Jean-Claude Trichet has said, "We are a monetary federation. Now we need the equivalent of a budgetary federation in terms of the control and surveillance of the application of public finance policy."

'It's deceitful'

ITALIAN CENTRAL Bank Chief Mario Draghi, who is in the race for the next ECB President, said, "It has been deceitful to believe that the single currency alone could build up Europe. Today the only viable solution is the reinforcement of the EU as a political construction."

'An absolute general mobilisation'

FRENCH PRESIDENT Sarkozy, following the agreement to commit an extra €500 billion in loans to struggling Eurozone countries, said on 9 May, "It is an absolute general mobilisation: we have decided to give the Eurozone a veritable economic government."

'States should have courage'

EUROPEAN COMMISSION President Barroso said on 13 May, "Member states should have the courage to say if they want an economic union or not. Because without it monetary union is not possible."

'The experiment has failed'

JOURNALIST Wolfgang Munchau wrote in the Financial Times on 2 May, "The experiment of a monetary union without political union has failed. The EU is thus about to confront a historic choice between integration and disintegration."



An asset waiting to be stripped: the Olympic Stadium, east London.

Photo: Workers

Olympics: vultures circling

EVEN BEFORE the 2012 Olympic stadium and assorted developments in the £9.3 billion Olympic Village have been finished, the vultures are circling to asset strip this vast publicly funded site. More than 100 bids have been made for the Olympic stadium alone, with assets across London being earmarked for a future sell-off. With the government hell bent on cutting its perception of the public deficit, instead of treasuring this huge investment of public monies, a quick return fire damage sale is planned.

The Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC) will oversee bids for the assets. Their decision will be arrived at in 2011, before the Games begin. There will be a massive handout to big entertainment businesses. The joint bid by Newham Borough Council and West Ham Football Club for the stadium, associated health centres and social housing looks likely to run into the sand. The US-based company AEG, which already owns the £350 million refurbished O2 Dome in Greenwich, has made very loud noises about taking over the stadium. The chairwoman of OPLC was the then civil servant that agreed AEG's takeover bid of the O2 from the government's Millennium Dome project.

AEG had originally planned an entertainment and sporting complex in Greenwich. This would have seen the O2 Dome coupled with a takeover of failing Charlton Athletic Football Club with the intention of creating a mega-series of entertainment complexes in South East London. This would have rivalled the recently rebuilt Wembley complex. But the opportunity to capture a state-of-the-art, brand-new site with 21st-century transport connections, has meant poor Charlton, beset with 19th-century travel difficulties and access, being unceremoniously dumped.

All the promises to the International Olympic Committee of retaining the Olympic Village as a publicly owned world-class athletic and sporting venture are to be reneged on. The mantra from the Legacy Company is that only the "market" can save the Village from becoming a white elephant like the sites in Barcelona, Athens and Sydney. Only someone like AEG can find the annual maintenance costs of £1 million, or so the mantra drones. AEG is reputed to be looking at bringing international and county cricket as well as international and national football to the stadium topped off with American football. There is the whiff of the Colosseum in London's decline – circuses and sports.

- Figures released by the Olympic Delivery Authority show that only 350 fully qualified craftsmen and women will comprise the tidal wave of the skills legacy left after the 2012 Games – a mere 3 per cent of those employed out of the 10,000 construction workers. Figures indicate that only 1 per cent of those employed are British citizens. So much for jobs in the East End and skilled jobs for the future!

To date only seven apprentices have qualified: five electricians, one bricklayer and one plumber. Most apprentices will not complete their training during the Olympic build. The construction trade unions, led by UCATT, are campaigning to ensure that all these young workers are retained in public works construction so as to be able to fully qualify. To date the Olympics has cost £9.3 billion.

EDUCATION**Day of Dissent**

TRADE UNIONISTS from all unions in further and higher education institutions in Britain participated in a wide ranging series of activities to mark Monday 21 June as a Day of Dissent against the government's attempt to strangle education.

Some £200 millions have already been

cut from FE, HE and adult learning services budgets, with 200,000 student places cut and 70 per cent of FE colleges indicating cuts in provision.

Petitions, rallies, lunchtime protests, town centre leafleting, lobbying of MPs, protest picnics, Early Day Motions and so on have all highlighted the "United for Education" campaign to save education. From Days of Dissent to Days of Resistance – the Coalition has to go.

Energy gap postponed



Photo: Workers

A SHORT-TERM BODY swerve by the EU has granted a temporary reprieve from the lights going out in Britain. Coal-fired power stations facing arbitrary closure under the EU's so-called green strategy can now continue generating. The forecast energy gap now moves back by three to five years, more towards 2020 than 2015.

The energy crisis that needs tackling may instead have been ducked by this deficit-slashing smoke-and-mirrors government. Totally contradictory positions are at play in the Coalition over new energy sources. Their arbitrary decision to set the next general election as May 2015 may mean that a future government has to grapple with what happens when the lights go out rather than them having to face reality over this question now.

But the reality is that the EU-driven demand for a third of British generation to come from renewable energy sources within the next ten years – wind, solar, and so on – is undeliverable. And it takes between seven and ten years to build a new power station – be it coal or nuclear. The decisions for new build need taking now.

The energy industries need an investment of £200 billion to ensure security and expansion of supply. The reality is that this sum won't be forthcoming from the greedy, monopolistic energy companies.

GLASGOW**Strike over hiving off**

ANGER HAS grown over recent months among workers in Culture and Sport Glasgow in reaction to attacks on their pay and conditions. The city council last year carried out what amounted to a privatisation, by hiving off these services to an "arms length" company.

The long-suspected intention of such a move (as other cities' workers have experienced) has been revealed as a cost cutting exercise, with jobs and standards in the firing line. The stated aim was to attract private funds. Now we know the implications. These workers are among the

lowest paid and are tired of being made scapegoats for failures of council investments during this financial crisis.

"All the trades unions in Culture and Sport Glasgow are united in their opposition to these attacks on their members pay and conditions," said Brian Smith, the Glasgow Branch Secretary of Unison. "We have tried to negotiate with CSG, but have been left with no option other than to use strike action in an effort to defend ourselves."

The latest of a series of actions culminated in a three-day strike ending on 20 June that affected the UK Swimming Masters Event. Brian Smith said "our strike is rock solid", with managers the only ones in attendance.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****JULY**

Saturday 10 July

Durham Miners Gala

All day, Durham

There are no mines left in Durham, but the miners' gala still draws in packed crowds, with the highlight the parade of union banners.

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, Dorset

Just a few years ago this was a quiet affair. Now it's one of the biggest dates in the labour movement calendar, with bands, speeches and the annual march. This year includes a discussion on which way forward for education with the general secretaries of the ATL, NAS/UWT, NUT and UCU ... and a Freedom Hike from Dorchester Prison to Tolpuddle, sponsored by the Prison Officers' Association. See www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk

WORKING HOURS**Disappearing breaks**

ONE IN FOUR people is risking ill health by working through the day without a break, according to a new survey by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Heavy workloads meant that a third also said they took no lunch.

An "expert" representing a personnel institute ventured the view that "These findings should ring alarm bells for employers." But long experience shows that employers tend to be deaf to the concerns of individual workers. Collective action through trade unions needs to be taken to ensure there are lunch and other breaks, fought for and won by previous workers, are kept.

POVERTY**More on free school meals**

MORE CHILDREN are becoming eligible for free meals at school, according to figures disclosed by the Department for Education. Almost 1.2 million pupils can claim free lunches this year – a rise of more than 83,000 in 12 months.

Now 18.6 per cent of primary pupils are eligible; 15.4 per cent of secondary. This evidence shows more families are being tipped into poverty by the capitalist depression: hardship and privation are increasing.

THE CHAOS in the eurozone continues, with the European Commission issuing instructions left, right and centre. Increasingly, these edicts from the beleaguered bureaucrats in Brussels are being ignored or simply overtaken by events. The euro, the so-called currency of the future, is in headlong retreat.

The Commission's latest finger-wagging has been directed at Cyprus, Denmark and Finland. On 15 June Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn recommended the opening of "excessive deficit procedures" against these countries. And Denmark isn't even in the euro, having, like Britain, negotiated an exemption.

Now all the talk is of France and Germany pushing for a "two-tier" euro – a new euro for the stronger economies and the devalued old one for the rest. That would avoid the embarrassment of kicking countries out of the euro, but only on a technicality.

All of this highlights the ignorance and stupidity of the likes of Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg. He's the one who said in 2001, "If we remain outside the euro, we will simply continue to subside into a position of relative poverty and inefficiency compared to our more prosperous European neighbours." Two years later he pontificated: "The single



currency, far from being an agent of continental style corporatism, is probably the greatest export vehicle of Anglo-Saxon economics. The euro has done more to enforce budgetary discipline, to promote privatisation and force through labour and product market liberalisation in the rest of Europe than any number of exhortations from the IMF, the OECD, or the editors of *The Economist*."

The crisis did not shake him. Only last year he said, "The euro may well come to be regarded in the coming years as part of the answer to saving the City from permanent decline. It was easy to dismiss the fledgling euro as a 'toilet currency' before we realised our own economic growth was built on sand." And, "The strict rules attached to the euro could emerge as one of the best ways to persuade the markets that we will put Humpty Dumpty back together again, put the public finances in order."

But by 7 April this year, he was admitting, in preparation for linking up with the Tories, "I don't think the euro is for now. ... I accept that Eurozone interest rates over the last few years would have been wrong for Britain."

Yes, wrong for Britain, wrong for the nations of Europe, wrong for the world.

Despite the news that the budget is far worse than expected, the government is launching an attack on Britain...

Just one policy: make

THE POST-ELECTION choreography that has occurred over the past month is revealing. Suddenly rather than adopting a graduated approach spread over four years, the notion of immediately slashing public sector expenditure is considered to be a sound government policy.

The timing of this slash and burn agenda has coincided with credit ratings agencies such as Fitch issuing well publicised "independent" investigations into Britain's finances, giving support to an immediate attack.

Nevertheless, this shock and awe choreography became stretched just before the 22 June budget when the actual shortfall between government expenditure and revenue for the year ending 5 April 2010 came in at £152 billion. This is £22 billion lower than the estimated £174 billion deficit that had been headlined across newspapers since October 2009, something the government tried to brush aside.

Debt and deficit

Remember that deficits are only estimated budgetary shortfalls at a point in time. Nevertheless the term debt (which is a definite sum of money owed) and deficit (which is a projection) are often portrayed as meaning the same thing. Similar debt/deficit muddling is also part of the technique used when attacking final salary pension schemes.

When the £22 billion improvement became known, the government immediately smothered the news by stating that Britain's finances are actually worse than previously thought. Even the Treasury's new Office for Budget Responsibility struggled to support the Government on that one, but still helpfully managed to tinker with some future growth assumptions to give the Osborne budgetary message credibility.

Fake independence

Of course the Office for Budget Responsibility is another of those fake "independent" bodies that have just been set up. It is chaired by that useful idiot Alan Budd, who was the economist of choice for both Nigel Lawson and Norman Lamont when they were chancellors in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Obviously all this budgetary posturing by the government is designed to weaken working class resolve, but the important point to make in terms of political economy is that this is not a 1979 moment. For example it is now begrudgingly acknowledged that Britain's position would be far worse had we joined the euro. The fact that we are not in the euro is entirely down to the working class and we should use this as part of our drive to bring about working class ascendancy.

Labour, Tory, Liberal, SNP and any other parliamentary rubbish would all have liked to have pushed us into joining the euro. They and their chattering experts were wrong and

etary shortfall is less is accelerating its

e us pay...

the working class was right, so why on earth now listen to any of their nonsense? They have just one policy and that is “make the working class pay”.

To illustrate how threadbare this approach has become, when asked why public finances have been landed with the £130 billion cost of shoring up bank balances, a Treasury spokesman said that supporting banks this way rather than consolidating them into just one British bank, maintains consumer choice. How lame.

In the circumstances it is down to the working class to move forward with the intention of taking control at the first opportunity. Our current debt is just over £900 billion, while our savings including invested pension assets are double that amount.

So rather than waste our savings supporting future government debt and foreign creditors in the manner that they have planned, we must use our capital to develop a self-reliant industrial economy completely outside of the EU, with a preparedness to trade throughout the world. We may then happily deal with Britain's creditors but we will never become their slaves.



5 May, London: university teachers, supported by students, march for education.

...but there's money to buy finance firms

ON 7 MAY the Prime Minister delivered a speech in Milton Keynes, declaring the national debt to be £1.4 trillion with interest payments of £70 billion a year.

On the same day the annual Prudential shareholders meeting proved to be a stormy affair. There was anger over the attempt to take over AIA, Asian arm of US parent company AIG. The original offer was \$35.3 billion (£24.5 billion), but later reduced to \$30.4 billion. This was rejected by AIG, leaving Prudential with costs of £450 million and nothing to show for it. Investors savaged the board, demanding resignations. The chairman did not resign, although he did apologise. At the end of this little tempest most shareholders

apparently felt they had “had their moment”.

The original offer was almost a third of Britain's projected national annual interest payment. Just one company working in finance, the sector that plunged Britain into debt in the first place, has access to such funds, much of it from British workers. And not a single pound was intended for rebuilding British industry or indeed any investment in Britain.

There's no lack of money, only the will to direct it to meet our common needs here. Even if Prudential's chairman had resigned to assuage the anger of shareholders, nothing fundamental would have changed. Another chairman would

have taken over and then, business as usual. Just like after a general election.

Canada is being cited as the example of the efficacy of intended economic policies. In 1992 its budget deficit was 9 per cent of GDP, which it had reduced to 5 per cent by 1995 and was in surplus by 1997. All due to parsimonious housekeeping by the government, or so it is being claimed: in fact those five years were years of global growth that allowed Britain's Tories to claim they'd handed on a healthy economy to Labour in 1997.

Canada also benefited from having the USA and its burgeoning economy as its

Continued on page 8

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain is planning a series of public meetings in London throughout autumn and spring 2010-2011. All meetings will be held in the Bertram Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, 7.30pm start.

M The meeting dates will be: Thursday 23 September; Tuesday 16 November 2010; Thursday 3 March 2011; Thursday 23 June 2011. The meeting themes will be announced nearer the date. Interspersed with these public meetings, the Party runs regular political study and discussion groups for interested workers.

M The Party's annual London May Day meeting will be held on Sunday 1 May 2011, in the Main Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, 2.00pm start with speakers, food, bar and interesting political discussion.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

M And if you're out and about this summer, meet our WORKERS sellers at the Durham Miners' Gala on 10 July and at Tolpuddle on 18 July.

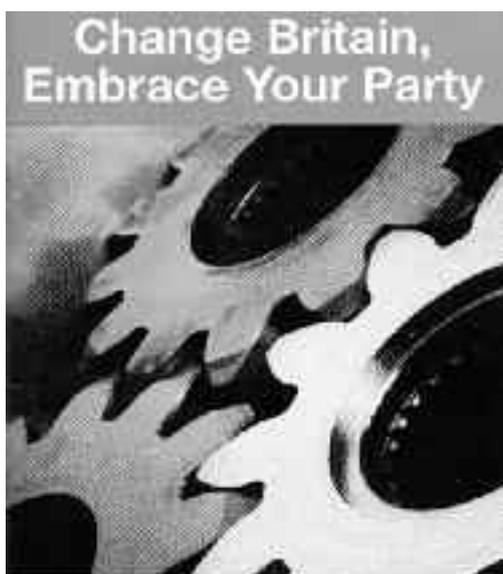


Continued from page 7

neighbour. There's no such global pick-up to support Britain's austerity measures today and the neighbours, the eurozone countries, are mired in crisis. Cutting public spending will most likely depress growth and lose 750,000 jobs with little or no private employment capacity to compensate, so unemployment could officially reach 3 million, adding further pressure to public finance.

Unless the working class realises it is not responsible for the failings of capitalism, and not only refuses to cooperate with the government's measures, but formulates and fights for its own economic demands, it will be made to pay.

Public services can be defended and investment demanded for production and the cultivation of skills that make the creation of wealth, real wealth not speculation, possible and sustainable. As the Prudential demonstrates, there is the money, now the political will is required to appropriate it.



New pamphlet: Change Britain, Embrace Your Party

This pamphlet brings together the statement from the Party's 2009 Congress with those from two former Congresses in 2003 and 2006. Also included is a statement on the European Union: "The fascist dream of a united Europe resurrected".

The pamphlet represents a decade of thought and analysis of the situation in Britain, and considers how to move forward as a British working class.

Available now: £2.75 (incl. P&P).

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020 8801 9543
info@workers.org.uk



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The state of British politics is almost a joke. But it's gone beyond satire. There's something rotten in Britain. It's the whiff of fascism, and it's coming from the state...

Call this democracy?



IN MANY UNIONS, we were exhorted to vote to keep out the BNP. Stop fascism, they said. But though the BNP is many things – vile, bigoted, Nazi, thuggish – it is not where fascism in Britain is coming from. Instead of joining the patronising rush to leaflet Barking and Dagenham, we should have been looking closer at the state of Britain.

We are the most watched people in the world. There are upwards of 4 million CCTV cameras in Britain. There are around 7,500 CCTV cameras in London. Wandsworth alone has more CCTV cameras than Boston in the USA, Johannesburg and Dublin – combined. Corby has more than San Francisco. Yet

for every 1,000 CCTV cameras in London, just one crime is solved per year. At a cost of £500 million spent over the 10 years to 2006. So what are they being used for?

Spying on us

You don't need to be paranoid to work out that they are spying on us. Along with the 10,500 automatic number plate recognition cameras the police have installed in secret locations. They hold data on where your car has been for five years.

We used to look aghast at the United States with its gun-toting police and overflowing jails. But look at Britain. In thirteen years, the Labour government

passed into law no fewer than 3,600 new criminal offences. No wonder the prison population has more than doubled in 17 years.

We lock up proportionately more children than any country in Western Europe. In England and Wales alone we have more people in prison on indeterminate life sentences than any other country in Europe, including Russia – combined.

No wonder Labour was building new prisons at such a rate. In the last two years of its rule there were more new prison places than new council houses.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

The police are using Section 44 of the Terrorism Act to arrest photographers, professionals and members of the public, simply for taking photographs in public places. Or the Police Reform Act: just define taking photographs as anti-social behaviour, and the police can, and do, arrest press photographers for not giving them their details.

The right to strike is more tightly restricted after 13 years of Labour rule than it has been since the Combination Acts were repealed in 1824. With the BA cabin crew, even a majority of more than 90 per cent on a ballot of 85 per cent was ruled unlawful because a handful of people who shouldn't have taken part did. And one of the grounds for ruling the ballot result unlawful was that industrial action would cause disruption. So another ballot took place. Same result. The only wonder is that BA didn't try to get that declared unlawful.

The National Union of Journalists is re-balloting for industrial action among 550 journalists at Johnston Press in England and Wales. The employer secured an injunction against the first ballot because it said it doesn't employ any journalists – they're all employed by its subsidiaries. Never mind that it sent out announcements of pay freezes on its headed paper to go up on its subsidiaries' notice boards.

So workers in their ingenuity have resorted to all sorts of ways of getting round this. The most common is to re-ballot. Some chapels in Johnston Press – the YORKSHIRE POST, for example, and journalists in Scarborough – conducted a separate ballot, on the same issue. But sooner or later capitalism will try to catch up. A judge, or a parliament, will make a new ruling or law, and British workers will again exercise their ingenuity.

Sooner or later, too, we will have to be not only ingenious but also simple and direct. Like the BA baggage handlers in 2005.

What kind of a democracy is it in which the police inquiry into the killing of



Photographers fighting state control: mass photography in Trafalgar Square in January this year in protest against police abuse of section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Blair Peach is not published until 31 years after the event? And even then, the Cass report only appeared with the names of the police officers blacked out, "redacted" – a word we hadn't heard until we saw the early version of the MPs' expenses.

What kind of democracy is it where a year later no one has been charged for killing Ian Tomlinson at the G20 protest in London? This is what we get for putting a cross on a piece of paper every four or five years?

Anti-strike laws

Thatcher's anti-strike laws were not touched by Labour. And Labour, in turn, laid the groundwork for new restrictions by the next government. With capitalism in crisis, a new government is just another turn of the screw. The ratchet of bourgeois democracy moves only in one direction if they get their way.

For decades now, any area of public life that had an element of democratic control has been attacked. Nationalised industries? Privatise them. Local councils? Take away their powers, privatise many of their services, subject them to diktats from government and the EU – like fortnightly rubbish collections.

And all the while, we see the creation

of a top layer of administration paid massive salaries to put through government policy. In the midst of rampant unemployment, local authority and public sector bosses have seen their pay soar. The rate for the job? More like blood money. They are being paid to manage decline, and you can see them in services all over Britain.

There have been successes, too. But where they have occurred – for instance in areas of the NHS such as the London Ambulance Service – they have come about because the workers in that service have exercised their collective will, their professionalism, their democracy, to improve things. Not because of parliament, but despite it.

And all the time, we have the darkening shadow of the European Union. From its judgments on labour law to its encouragement of mass migration, it is the opposite of democracy. It claims to have sole jurisdiction over our fisheries, it interferes in policies big and small, from whether we can build power stations (and we have to build power stations) to fortnightly rubbish collections. It has been the driving force for the privatisation of rail, steel, coal, post, telecommunications, and airlines. It wants to make criticism of

itself illegal. It wants its own army.

In the depth of the dark days of Thatcher, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, came to the TUC Congress and promised the helping hand of Europe. Some fell for it. Others jumped for it.

Now we can see the result of British membership. Instead of getting progress without struggle – the vain dream of social democracy down the years – we have allowed Thatcher and Labour reaction to be exported to Europe, then re-imported in even more vicious form. The europhiles said the EU would not damage national sovereignty. Tell that to the Greeks.

There's nothing inherently democratic about putting a cross on a ballot paper. It depends what the context is: whether it is part of a process that empowers the people, or not. Voting in an election where the people you elect have no obligation to carry out your wishes is not inherently democratic. What would have been democratic would have been a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. But to

get that we need to demand it, as parliament will never grant it.

Disaster for Britain

Whoever won the election, it would have been a disaster for Britain. The Financial Times had already given the next government its agenda. Any government seeking to halve the budget deficit will have – among other things – to cut public sector pay by 5 per cent; axe winter fuel payments, axe free TV licences for the over 80s, axe bus passes for pensioners; freeze benefits; means-test child benefit; halve road building; stop building schools. The list went on. The actual budget (to be announced shortly after WORKERS goes to press) will be even worse.

Governments get worse as capitalism declines. Heath's 1970 election manifesto reads like rabid leftism now. Blair and Brown's Labour government was by any objective standards, in terms of what they actually did, the most reactionary for over a century. Had Labour won again in May, they too would have been even worse. There is no choice of evils. Just the one:

capitalism, a system that is transforming itself into fascism before our eyes, all the while talking of respect for human dignity.

There is an alternative. But it's not about finding a new "left" party to take over from the Labour Party and drain funds from union coffers. It will start when workers realise that they cannot delegate the job to anyone: they have to do it themselves. Politics cannot be a spectator sport. The state and all its organs, including parliament, are not neutral. They are not above class. Yet throughout its history the working class has tried to avoid this truth.

Forty-two years ago, the working class created our Party, because it did not want to live with capitalism. To win socialism in our country, the class must reject all diversions, all scares, all ideas that human dignity or justice or equality are compatible with capitalism. We can only become the rulers of society when we know our enemy.

We need to rise again. Active, not passive. Democracy, not parliament.



New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the CPBM-L, this pamphlet publishes – for the first time – an analysis of the British trade unions by founding Party Chairman Reg Birch. Available now, price £3 including p&p, from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB. Please make cheques payable to "WORKERS".

In Britain, the trade unions were created, uniquely, as the "weapons of a working class". They were an "organic coming together of a class out of the conflict of class relationship" – a necessary tool for survival, built for defence not attack, against the employer in an economic system based on class exploitation.

This is the starting point for this speech, given by Reg Birch in 1982, which goes on to outline the history of our trade unions – tracing them back to at least the 14th century – and to analyse their development, peculiar to Britain.

The CPBM-L is re-issuing the text of this important speech by its founding Chairman, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Party, not as an academic exercise or a historic curiosity, but because Reg Birch's analysis raises important questions for us today.

Read it, consider it, and discuss it with your fellow workers.

The epic story of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola up to it show how small yet decisive actions by workers can bring

Cuito Cuanavale – the story behind the battle

YOU COULD argue that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale all started with the actions of Cuban workers through their trade unions, that led first to the Cuban revolution of 1959, and then through their crucial role in Africa to the establishment of independent Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, handing a decisive defeat to Portuguese and US imperialism in Africa and contributing to the victory against apartheid in South Africa.

Without the Cuban revolution, one Jorge Risquet would not have led an armed column to Congo Brazzaville in 1965 at the request of the newly independent Congolese government. Here contact was made with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) who were fighting for independence from Portugal.

Neither would one Ernesto Che Guevara have led another column to Eastern Zaire via Guinea where he talked with Amilcar Cabril, the leader of the independence movement for neighbouring Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) that was conducting armed struggle against the Portuguese colonialists and who were considered to be the best organised liberation movement in Africa.

The consequences of these engagements were very significant. Cuba sent to Guinea Bissau 31 volunteers – 11 mortar experts, 8 drivers, 1 mechanic, 10 doctors and an intelligence officer, all of them black to be unnoticed and all in time for a battle to take the Portuguese fortified camp at Madina de Boe.

The doctors were to go to the liberated areas and the mortar experts were sent to instruct on the use of artillery that Cuba would send along with trucks, munitions, olive uniforms, medicines and, of course, cigars and brown sugar! Cuba also trained 31 students from the Cape Verde islands in guerrilla war tactics and returned them to fight with PAIGC. By 1967 there were 60 Cubans in Guinea Bissau.

In 1969, US Ambassador Dean Brown reported from Dakar “The war in Portuguese Guinea has gone from bad to worse for the Portuguese during the past three years despite increased Portuguese troop strength from 20,000 to 25,000.

PAIGC controls 60 per cent of the country”. In November 1970 the Portuguese resorted to attacking the capital of neighbouring Guinea hoping to overthrow that government and so end its backing for the PAIGC’s anti-colonial struggle.

The attack was a fiasco and the writing was now on the wall. With Portugal about to lose Guinea Bissau to PAIGC and fighting the MPLA in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique its army was set to mutiny. On 25 April 1974, revolution overthrew the fascist dictatorship in Portugal, whose troops were withdrawn from Guinea Bissau by November.

In 1975, Portugal was set to hand over power to Frelimo in Mozambique and to a combination of three independence movements in Angola: the MPLA; the FNLA funded by the CIA and Mobutu’s Zaire; and Unita, backed by apartheid South Africa. In July 1975, the US agreed secretly to fund both the FNLA and Unita.

Double invasion

Fighting broke out in 1975 between the deeply unpopular but well armed FNLA, whose Zairian leader had not stepped foot in Angola since 1956, and the MPLA. At the same time Zairian troops entered Angola from the north and South African forces from the south to support Unita. Eventually the MPLA would take control of the whole of Luanda, the huge capital city, where it had mass support.

As Independence Day approached in November 1975, the MPLA appealed to Cuba for military instructors, weapons, clothing and food as Zairian and South African forces headed towards the capital.

Cuba sent 480 instructors who would create four training centres that opened in October 1975. They also sent weapons, clothing and food and were set to train 5,300 Angolans in three to six months. However, as the South Africans and Zairians advanced, they found themselves having to go into action themselves to defend their training camps.

Cubans were queuing up to volunteer to go to Angola, but the USA did not find out about this until weeks after the first Cubans arrived. It was described as the



Angolans bid farewell to Cuban troops in 1989.

world’s best kept secret – only eight million Cubans knew about it! They crossed the Atlantic on old Britannia planes dressed as tourists, with weapons in their suitcases and in the hold of the planes. They went by ship as well. Jorge Risquet was politically in charge of the military and civilian Cuban missions.

As the South Unita and Zairians/FNLA closed in, all seemed lost. But with the MPLA fighting on their own turf, Soviet

la in 1987/89 is little known in Britain. But the events leading to the battle about massive changes in the world...

Battle that became Africa's Stalingrad



military equipment arriving and Cubans going into action straight from their plane, Independence Day came with the MPLA in control of Luanda and the joint Cuban/Angolan forces pushing back the South Africans and Zairians. Victory was sealed after a few months. However, FNLA and Unita continued a slash and burn war.

Cubans began to help Angola build health and education services, carrying out vaccination and anti illiteracy campaigns

and training the Angolan Air Force and Army (FAPLA). Whilst Cuban and Angolan forces still had to battle with Unita and FNLA, the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), fighting for Namibian independence from South Africa, set up bases in southern Angola with Cuban and Angolan support.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) set up what it called the 32nd Battalion, comprising ex-FNLA soldiers who had fled to occupied Namibia plus other black mercenaries under white SADF officers, who murdered and sowed terror in Angola. South African bombers frequently attacked Angolan towns, cities and Namibian refugee camps. Invasions of southern Angola were frequent.

Eventually, after another South African invasion of southern Angola in 1987, the combined forces of Cuba, Angola and SWAPO forced the South Africans back to the Namibian border taking the strategic Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale. The South Africans responded with airpower and tanks and tried to retake the town, knowing its strategic importance. Cuba sent reinforcements, tanks plus Cuban and Angolan MiGs.

As Jorge Risquet said, "There were negotiations going on between Angola and the US, who was after all behind the South African government. In southern Angola, the SADF responded with aircraft and stopped the FAPLA offensive. FAPLA withdrew to Cuito Cuanavale where elite Angolan troops were gathered. The SADF laid siege to Cuito Cuanavale aiming to liquidate the Angolan troops in the midst of negotiations. If they won they would have demanded Angola's full surrender.

"The US had refused to allow Cuba to participate in the negotiations and Cuba had said that it was prepared to stay in Angola until apartheid was defeated, but would only stay as long as Angola wanted them to. However, the SADF launched an attack on Cuito Cuanavale on January 13 1988. By then Cuban reinforcements had arrived and Cuba's best pilots were flying sorties against the SADF inflicting heavy casualties. The South African attack was defeated. This changed the balance of

forces and the US agreed by the end of January to the participation of Cuba in the negotiations.

"In March another meeting was held between Angola, Cuba and the US after the South Africans suffered another defeat in their second attack on Cuito Cuanavale in February. Five attempts to take Cuito Cuanavale were made by the SADF and all failed. We built an airstrip in record time and our planes could now reach SADF bases in northern Namibia and this forced South Africa to accept the first four-party negotiations in May. It was time for the US to stop serving as a messenger between Angola and Cuba on the one hand and South Africa on the other. It was time to seat the declared enemy at the table and seek a negotiated settlement.

Decisive

"So Cuito Cuanavale was decisive. The negotiations came later. The battle of Stalingrad took place three years before the fall of Berlin, but it was at Stalingrad that the outcome of World War II was decided. The South Africans arrogantly used delaying tactics but the die was cast after two more defeats at nearby Tchipa and Calueque. They realised that a frontal war in southern Angola and Northern Namibia would be the swan song for apartheid. So they were forced to negotiate."

The result was full independence for Namibia, no further South African or US support for Unita, withdrawal of all SADF forces to within South Africa's borders and withdrawal of Cuban troops. The SADF was broken and so was apartheid.

In April that year, Nelson Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison from Robben Island and in December to Victor Verster Prison to negotiate the end of apartheid, followed by his release on 11th February 1990. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa sweeping Mandela and the ANC to power.

No wonder so many ANC activists and trade unionists said at the time that those elections were made possible by not only their struggle but by the Cubans at Cuito Cuanavale.

The main capitalist political parties all agree that there must be public spending. Their common demand in 2010 echoes unmistakably in the public spending debt crises of 1921 and 1931...

The same old refrain: attack the working class

WORKING CLASS families suffered terrible hardship and suffering during the 1920s and 1930s, and especially now we must examine this part of our past to see what happened last time the political parties imposed such policies. Otherwise we will be condemned to repeat history endlessly.

The Geddes Axe 1921

During and after the First World War, government expenditure in Britain rocketed and the national debt rose rapidly. Also, 1920 had seen a prodigious boom and speculative mania. However, boom quickly turned to slump and the banks were left holding debts that could not be repaid. Unemployment soared and fluctuated in 1921 between 1,664,000 and over 2,500,000.

The owner of the DAILY MAIL, Lord Rothermere, created the Anti-Waste League which between February and June 1921 started winning by-elections on a manifesto of attacking 'excessive' public spending.

Whereas in 1913–14 the Civil Services and Revenue Departments cost £81.3 million, by 1920–21 they cost £523.3 million, and in 1921–22, £590.7 million. Before the war, the Armed Forces cost around £77 million but approached £190 million in 1921–22. The National Debt and other Consolidated Fund Services had increased dramatically over the same time too.

In August 1921, the Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, appointed a businessman, Sir Eric Geddes, as head of the Committee on National Expenditure to find where "economies" could be found in various government departments for 1922–23. His Committee recommended a severe retrenchment in government expenditure, which advocated cutbacks totalling £87 million and became known as the "Geddes Axe". Total defence expenditure fell from £189.5 million in 1921–22 to £111 million in 1922–23; total social spending (education, health, housing, pensions, unemployment) fell from £205.8 million in 1920–21 to £182.1 million in 1922–23.

Most controversial were the cuts in



1934: one of the marches organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement.

social services. Lloyd George had promised the First World War soldiers "a land fit for heroes" but then cut back on those promises. The blade of Geddes Axe fell primarily on education and social housing. More workers became unemployed and there was a general attack on wages. Unemployment benefits were reduced. Distress was widespread.

The May Commission 1931

The economy never recovered during the 1920s. Instead there was a further economic slump and depression from 1929. Unemployment rose to two and a half million. The cost of unemployment benefit rose from £12 million in 1928 to £125 million in 1931. There was a collapse of European banks and a balance of payments crisis. A loan was negotiated from international bankers who stipulated public expenditure cuts.

In February 1931 the Labour Chancellor, Snowden, set up a Committee on National Expenditure chaired by Sir George May and other industrialists, which reported at the end of July 1931. Its

conclusions were decided on the say-so of the majority, the 4 Conservative and Liberal nominees. The report calculated that the deficit for 1932–3 would be £120 million. They recommended that the deficit be "cured" by retrenchment in public expenditure, arguing that such expenditure was "definitely restrictive of industrial enterprise and employment". They argued for wage cuts for the police, teachers and sections of the armed forces. Most cutbacks were to be made in the social services and public schemes of work. The attitude was that all public expenditure was wasteful. The total cutbacks amounted to £96.5 million; the largest individual cutback was unemployment insurance; there was also additional taxation.

The Labour Cabinet appointed an economy committee. There was a run on the pound (surprise, surprise) to pressurise a decision. When a consensus could not be reached on cutting unemployment benefits, a National Coalition Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald was formed to enact the

massive cuts in
ably what happened

class

cutbacks, splitting the Labour Party.

Much can be learned from the experience of these two previous exercises in cutting public expenditure. Interestingly, just as now, then there was a massive degree of unity between the Liberal, Conservative and Labour parties on cutting public expenditure in the 1920s and 1930s.

There was wholesale cooperation and connivance with these political attacks on our class by finance capital and big business in a deliberate attempt to shift the balance of power and protect their profit-making regime. Informal or formal party coalitions against the interests of the people were the norm.

Again, just as now, the excuse was that there were to be only "economies" or "removal of waste" or other sickening weasel expressions, no acknowledgement that what was being imposed were actual cutbacks of jobs, skills and services essential to a working class and its quality of life.

Attack on public sector

Crucially, the public sector workers laid off (or whose pay was cut) spent less on goods and services, no longer paid taxes and claimed unemployment benefits, which in turn deepened the recession and actually worsened the public expenditure finances. If allowed to happen today, the same things will recur.

The British economy remained in the doldrums for two whole inter-war decades: unemployment remained at least at one million and was often more than double that for nigh on twenty years. Capitalism's economic recipe was a disaster for British workers; but the bankers and industrialists who had caused the crises lived well.

In essence, the government attacks on public expenditure in 1921 and 1931 helped sustain a permanent slump with millions either out of work or on low pay, and those conditions only ended in 1939 with the emergence of a nationally state-directed economy in a world war: a chilling reflection on and indictment of the workings of capitalism.

More from our series on aspects
of Marxist thinking

MANUFACTURE MATTERS

At the heart of the birth and development of our working class – and hence of the nation itself – is making things, "manufacturing". The knowledge, skills and research that went into the development of industry have created a national working class and culture that can take us beyond the catastrophically failing capitalism we see today. Manufacturing, with the rich array of skills and social activities that flows from it, is our life blood. Revitalising it, reinvesting in it, is essential for the health and strength of both our class and nation. Such a boost could point a way out of the current economic crisis.

But capitalism is solely interested in its own survival now. Overseas conquest, wars, import of cheap, undercutting labour and divide-and-rule are among its armoury of techniques when profits are under pressure. It is in manufacturing, where skills are highest and awareness of this class struggle is most acute, that the capitalist class always attempts to act decisively against workers who resist.

Hence the long history of repression: the Combination Acts against the formation of trades unions in the 19th century, the Defence of the Realm Act in 1916 and Thatcher's anti-union legislation (never repealed by Labour) in the 1980s. There was a protracted fight against Thatcher's destruction of manufacturing. Yet following Thatcher, Labour presided over a blitzkrieg on manufacture, its skills and jobs. Big but shrinking unions responsible for resisting failed in the task, merged and dared not rock the Labour boat. It has taken the reality of capitalism in absolute decline to reawaken the spirit of resistance and a realisation that workers themselves could run the show much better in our own interests. Workers at Lindsey Oil Refinery have shown how to take the initiative.

And at the heart of that vision is manufacturing: Do we want a thriving island nation or a wasteland? Only a revitalised industry, with all the skill, research, standards and culture that go with it, can keep us alive. The potential is tremendous. The old Victorian infrastructure needs thorough renewing – the water and sewers, rail and waterways for example. That backbone of manufacture, steel, must be revived Britain, brought into our own hands again.

Underpinning the whole of manufacturing of course is the power needed to do the job. And that's where having our own energy production – again, in our own hands – is vital. We have the ability to benefit massively from such technologies as safe nuclear energy production, deep ocean oil extraction, clean coal mining and other projects resulting from innovative research. All feeding into and in turn revitalising both school and higher education for future generations.

Let's make a start in achieving all this – take the initiative.

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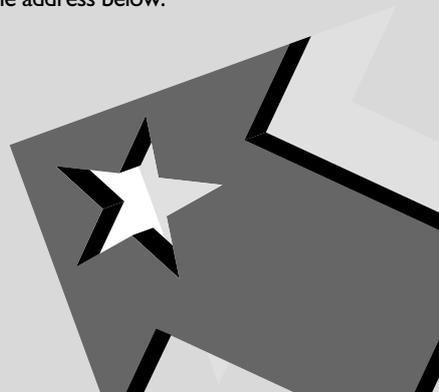
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email info@workers.org.uk

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Back to Front – Easing into debt

‘That £200 billion is going somewhere. It is going to the banks, virtually free money...’

COMMENTATORS like to talk about “defining moments” in the history of governments. Here’s one for them: the decision to abandon support for Sheffield Forgemasters, announced in the second round of pre-budget softening-up cuts.

The company needed a loan of £80 million to fund an expansion programme that would have brought 180 industrial jobs and allowed it to meet contracts for the nuclear industry.

As the name Forgemasters suggests, it makes its living from producing forged metal components. But not just any components – components for the nuclear industry so large and needing such fine tolerances that there is only one other company that could take its market. That company is in Japan.

Instead of making what we need for our new power stations here, creating British jobs with the 15,000-tonne forge it wanted to install, the components will now be imported.

Nick Clegg said the government could not afford the loan. Strange, that. It can afford to carry on with Labour’s policy of quantitative easing, whereby the government “prints money”, and increases its debt.

The planned total of quantitative easing planned for this year is £200 billion, enough to finance 15,000 Sheffield Forgemasters. That £200 billion is debt that the British taxpayer will have to fund at some point. And it comes on top of nearly that amount last year.

That £200 billion is going somewhere. It is going to the banks, and is virtually free money since the government is lending it to them at an interest rate of 4 per cent, scarcely (or by some measures not even) the rate of inflation.

And what are the banks doing with

this? They are primarily using the free money to fund speculation. Where they are lending money they are doing so at interest rates 3, 4 or 5 times what it costs them.

So the bankers are getting richer. The speculators are getting richer. That’s what the government means by “sharing the burden” – sharing it out among workers.

Since the Labour government started quantitative easing the stock market has boomed by around 50 per cent. Good news for shareholders. House prices have risen by 10 per cent. Good news for speculators. Bad news for first-time buyers, or anyone needing somewhere to live.

Effectively, a few hundred billion of government debt (to be carried by the working class) has been incurred to boost the wealth of the country’s rich – to the tune of £1.5 trillion (thousand billion).

Our remaining industry is being starved. The old and young must pay to swim. VAT, a tax that disproportionately hits the working class, is set to rise. All manner of savage cuts are being prepared. But the City will grow richer.

Some people think the City must be saved at any cost. Well, let them save it. For the rest of us it is a parasite. In the decade before the crisis hit, only 3 per cent of bank lending went to manufacturing industry.

Don’t expect that figure to rise. Lending by banks to companies has fallen since quantitative easing started. In fact, by early summer last year it was negative (i.e., they got more in interest than they paid out in loans), as a report by Giles Wilkes for Centre Forum showed.

We are being robbed blind, and paying for the privilege. So let’s talk about cuts: cut the banks, cut the City, cut capitalism. It’s either that, or cut our own throats.

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