

As Construction jobs disappear - How long will the recession last?

WORLD CAPITALISM is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the 1930s. In some ways it may even be worse than that because, this time, every country in the world is affected. In the US, the UK, Ireland and most other countries house prices have plummeted and are still falling; unemployment is rising, manufacturing is falling the most, along with banking and financial services. The head of Barclays Bank in the UK now forecasts that the British economy will dive between 2-4% this year, unemployment will go from 1m to nearly 3m and house prices will drop another 15% from the 15% they are already fell in 2008. Construction is in free fall. House prices and commercial rents peaked in 2007 and have plummeted since in most advanced economies.

Global economic slump

How long and how deep will the global economic slump be? The key trends in the motion of capitalism are coming together as they have seldom done before. The most important law of motion of capitalism is the one that Karl Marx identified: the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. That law is now operating in its downward phase that generally lasts 16-18 years. The rate of profit in the major G7 economies peaked in 1997: it fell sharply to 2001 and then recovered up to 2007. Now it is falling quickly. We probably won't see a final bottom until 2015, even if there is some recovery in between. But there is another important capitalist sector that in its downward phase: the prices of commodities. It has been in its downward phase since 1982 and will not bottom until 2014-18.

All these trends of capitalist development are now in their downward phase – something not experienced since the 1930s. It means that the capitalist slump may take the form of a deflationary depression. There may be a brief recovery from 2010 to 2013, as there was between 1933-36, before the capitalist economy slips back into a depression as it did in 1937. Then only world war took enabled recovery as overcapacity was destroyed and economies were put on a semi-planned war footing.

Some capitalist commentators like to think that the Great



Depression of the 1930s was finally overcome by Keynesian policies of cheap credit and public spending programmes under the Roosevelt administration in the US. But the reality was that Roosevelt did not even adopt Keynesian policies when he came into office in 1932 – the brief economic recovery that took place between 1933-36 happened without Keynesian measures. When they were applied from about 1935 onwards, they did not stop the renewed slump of 1937-8. So the current policies of zero interest rates, tax cuts and spending programmes being applied will have little or no effect. We can expect another slump some time around 2014 after this one comes to an end. So what is the solution to this capitalist madness? The only answer is a Socialist planned economy run under workers control. □

For further information visit the website www.socialist.net

If you need any advice or help in organising your workplace please contact
The Olympic Worker
in full confidentiality on 07942252280 or email
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The Olympic Worker

Don't delay: JOIN A UNION TODAY

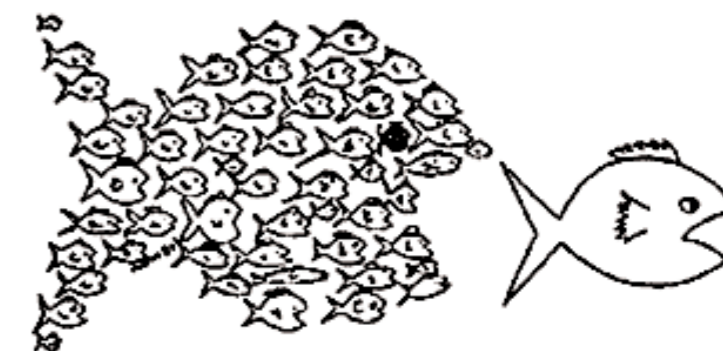
FOR OVER 200 years workers in Britain have fought to improve their working lives as well as those of their fellow workers. From Dickensian days when child labour did the work of adults 12 hours a day and were paid a pittance, if at all, a number of strikes have taken place, creating an 8 hour day with reasonable pay rates. Many workers are still on the minimum wage today unfortunately. These workers often do the dirtiest and hardest jobs of all. Over the years many trade union members were, exiled, imprisoned and died for the workers cause. Workers today must never forget these brave workers and should continue the fight today. The only way to do this is to join a union and get organised. It will cost you around £10 a month. You will get many worthwhile benefits from your union. If you are injured at work your union could get compensation for you. Imagine being of work 6 months with no wages coming in. Who will feed the kids and pay the bills? Very few building firms offer sick pay, a disgrace considering 1000's are injured and 72 workers were killed last year. Better pay is also possible providing you organise and elect your own stewards on the Olympic sites. You may need to take strike action for a few weeks or maybe less. You will reap the benefit long term. Cleaners on the underground recently were on strike and got £2 an hour extra. If these workers can do it building workers on the Olympics definitely can. Join a union. Get your work-

mates to do the same, take your bosses on - they won't give you a pay rise, not in a million years but they will make sure you work harder. Take the lead on the Olympic site, remember the workers who got you where you are today. Join a construction union now!

UCATT: 0207 622 2362

GMB: 0208 202 8272

UNITE: 0208 462 7755



ORGANISE!

Construction deaths

A CONSTRUCTION worker was killed by a concrete block tragically at a site in Essex in November. A tower crane was lifting a large concrete block around the site. Somehow it fell from the crane killing a worker below as it landed on him, killing him instantly. The site was Broomfield hospital near Chelmsford, Essex. There have been a number of crane accidents in recent years. HSE were supposed to be stopping all tower cranes being used by falcon cranes as they were deemed unsafe. Yet more talk and no action by HSE. It is now time for unions to put more pressure on these cowboy firms and organise demonstrations and even strike action on sites. Too many workers have been killed and it seems like building workers are not really thought of as important. The rank & file workers must take action if any of their fellow workers are killed, down tools immediately and not return to work until their elected safety reps have done a complete health and safety inspection of the whole site. □



Don't stand by and let one of your workmates die without a fight!
YOU could be the next victim !

Government promises 7,000 apprenticeships for construction

THE GOVERNMENT has announced that it hopes to introduce 7,000 apprenticeships for the construction industry. That sounds great, but there could be many pitfalls, such as school leavers being used as cheap labour by unscrupulous employers. I was an apprentice electrician myself, having left school at 16 in 1983.

Apprentices Abused

I was fortunate to be employed by a large firm under a properly run scheme controlled by the JIB, a recognised industry organisation. I did see some apprentices abused and given all the crap jobs to do - making tea, sweeping up, and generally used as a dogsbody. Construction unions must get involved in these new apprenticeships which are being planned, carefully monitoring the schemes and ensuring as top priority first class health and safety for youngsters in the lethal workplaces that exist on many building sites.

There is massive potential for young new recruits to get involved in unions and plenty of opportunity to educate and organise elected stewards and safety reps, which are vital on all building sites. The youth of today are the future of our soci-

ety and our workplaces. It has often been said by older site workers "would you want your children working on a building site?" Well we need more construction workers and apprenticeships have been a thing of the past in recent years. So yes, if training is carried out properly with attractive pay rates and decent conditions, then I would encourage youngsters to get a trade and join a union at an early age.



Numerous Sackings

Despite the struggles and numerous sackings I experienced in 20 years on sites, I can look back and will always remember the togetherness and comradeship in the freezing cold and the rain, heads held high knowing that we had won another victory over our gaffers. We stood shoulder to shoulder and united we always come out on top. □

Solid strike to avert redundancies at Fiddler's Ferry Power Station

65 ELECTRICIANS, all Unite members, took unofficial strike action on 17th November for two days at Fiddler's Ferry Power Station in Warrington. This was over false redundancies.

Action Worked

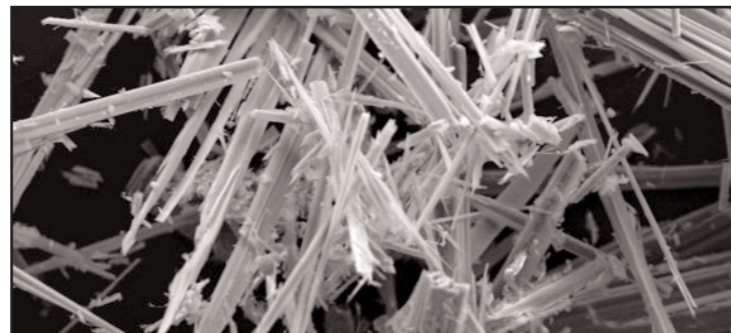
The action eventually prevented any lay-offs on the site. The electricians were working for Alstom through the agency BMS on the NAIECI Agreement. Last week BMS had informed the workers that there would be 65 redundancies as they had not been paid by Alstom.

The job still has six months to go before completion. The workers felt it was more like a sacking than redundancy. A meeting was held by the workers and a picket put on the site on 17th November. None of the other trades crossed the picket line in a magnificent show of solidarity. An offer was put to the workers whereby 45 would be taken on by another agency and the rest to stay working with BMS. This is not ideal, but at least nobody will be made redundant before Christmas.

The NAIECI Agreement is under attack by employers. The construction officers of Unite and the GMB need to take a firmer stand with the employers. In the meantime rank and file organisations at site level will have to take the fight on board. Other sites in the UK must follow the example of the Fiddler's Ferry electricians. United we stand, divided we fall!

The hidden killer

THE USE of asbestos has been illegal since 2000. It remains a hidden killer; many workers encounter it at work. Figures released by HSE show that 6 electricians, 3 plumbers and 3 chippys die every week from previous exposure to asbestos and it could be responsible for 4000 deaths a year. 5 million buildings still contain asbestos, even today. Unions have fought for compensation for injured workers for decades. Many workers have developed mesothelioma, a cancer of the linings of the lungs. Death can occur a short time after diagnosis maybe a few months. Pleural Plaques is another disease brought on by asbestos exposure. In parliament recently a decision was made to no longer allow compensation to be paid out to victims of Pleural Plaques, which is an outrage. GMB has called



to reverse this decision. The high court finally agreed to change this recently. GMB got compensation for one of its members of nearly £1 million - they are constantly pursuing claims for their members. Other unions will do the same in the coming months. How often have you been told by cowboy employers 'that wont hurt its only a bit of dust'. Refuse to work anywhere near asbestos. Your life depends on it! □

Staythorpe Power Station protest action escalates



Jerry Hicks at the Staythorpe Power Station protest

General Secretary election in Unite-Amicus



JERRY HICKS who's legal challenge forced the coming election for General Secretary in the UK's biggest union Unite-Amicus, was present at the Staythorpe protest and is supporting the call for action. He said "This situation is outrageous, Alstom, the principle contractor, is breaking established national agreements and ignoring the union by refusing to consider local workers for employment. RWE, Alstom, FMM and Montpresa are lined up against us, whilst the Labour government sits on its hands on the sidelines. The union needs to confront the employers and regain control. Organising a national campaign for industrial action is essential. The employers watch and listen to everything we say and do. If the union does little and says even less they drive the boot in harder and our situation gets worse. This is not about having no work or being laid off because of a closure. It is about who does the work and it isn't about race or prejudice but it is about exploitation of workers

AN EMERGENCY meeting of the national construction shop stewards forum took place in London on the 8th January to discuss the escalating crisis in construction following a series of protests over employment rights and also the proposed exclusion of UK workers by foreign companies on power stations and other major UK contracts. The meeting was originally called for in Newark on the 3rd December following a series of protests at the gates of Staythorpe Power Station. At the meeting shop stewards voted overwhelmingly to organise a programme of demonstrations toward targeted construction projects within the UK power generation sector. Other companies are

observing what happens next as they seek to exploit the cheap foreign labour market. It is hard enough as it is to get a job in the industry because of the black listing by the employers. It is a way of reducing their costs and attempting to break union organisation on the major projects. Rank and file members are preparing for mass disruption on projects throughout the country that refuse to recognise union national agreements. There will be organised demonstrations strikes and mass disruption. We are preparing for a battle to defend our jobs. The trigger date for conflict is around Jan 13th. □

Phil Willis, former convenor at Heathrow Terminal 5 Construction Site, who is backing Jerry for general secretary agrees " There is no better time than now, to redress the balance of power, to fight back and to say no to the practices that would rob us of our livelihoods."

and cheap labour. These are contracts that have been signed, power stations that have to be built, energy that has to be generated and therein lays our strength". On his reasons for standing for general secretary Jerry say's "Amicus members have a clear choice of 'who talks with us and for us'. It will be for our members to judge which of the candidates is best suited to carry out what they say. I am calling for the repeal of all anti-union legislation. A public building works programme. I support the election of all officers of the union and turned down a job with the union when offered on principle. I will only draw an average skilled member's wage. I will increase members democracy and with that members control over decision making and I guarantee that I will stick to my election commitments and promises." □

**For more information visit the web site
www.jerry4gs.com or call Jerry on 07817827912**