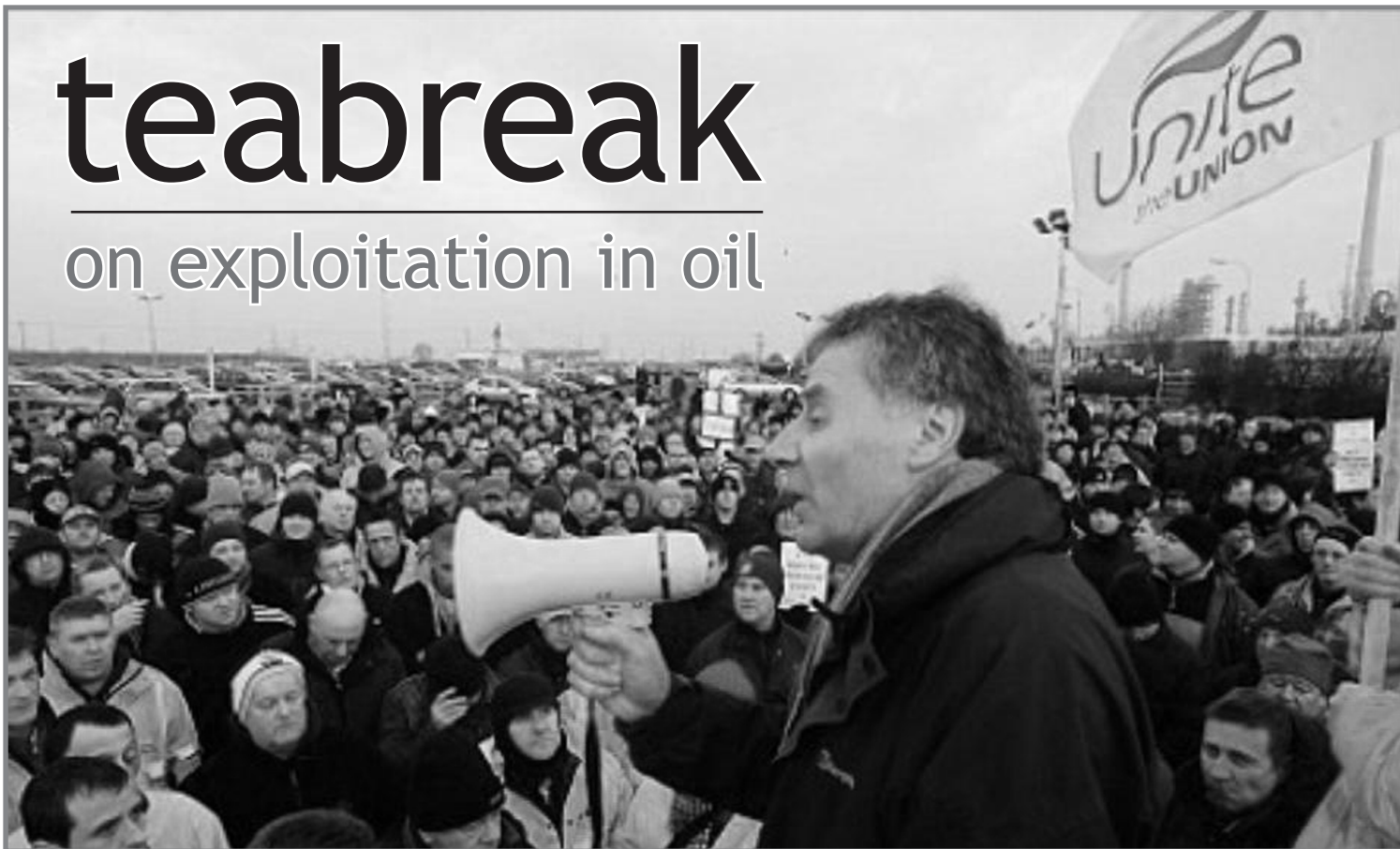


teabreak

on exploitation in oil



Standing, fighting, winning

The odds may be stacked, but our bosses are not invincible

THE recent unofficial walkouts by energy workers followed Total's offer of a new project at its Lindsey refinery to the Italian firm IREM, which brought its own workforce and refused to employ locals.

Skilled workers in the engineering and building trades are being hit hard by recession. The economy can't provide the work we need, and many are facing unemployment. Employers aren't interested in keeping us in work; they're

where the work is." The Star quoted another worker: "This is not a racist protest. I'm happy to work hand-in-hand with foreign workers, but we are not getting a look in."

The protests are about people who need work not getting it. But we shouldn't let that anger turn on other workers doing what British workers do all the time – taking work abroad to support themselves and their families.

Bosses use divisions to divide the workforce and attack pay and conditions, like like the Post Office using agency staff or privatising parts of the public sector and not others. In this case they've used national divisions. Demanding "British Jobs for British Workers" is dangerous, as it does the bosses' work of dividing us up for them. Foreign workers face the same problems we do. Nationalism doesn't offer us any solutions, only scapegoats.

Bosses try to keep profits up by slashing wages and making redundancies. The only way we can defeat them is by sticking together across grade, trade, contract type or nationality and by continuing the good work of spreading the strikes throughout the energy industry. Even further afield, if we want to survive the recession we will have to organise common action with the growing army of unemployed workers as well as those in other industries. These strikes show all of us, of whatever industry, that it's through sticking together and taking direct action that we can stop the cost of recession being dumped onto us.

"This worker solidarity is against the 'conscious blacking' of British construction workers by company bosses who refuse to recruit skilled British labour in the UK. The workers of LOR, Conoco and Easington did not take strike action against immigrant workers. Our action is rightly aimed against company bosses who attempt to play off one nationality of worker against the other and undermine the NAECI agreement."

- Keith Gibson, Lindsey Oil Refinery Strike Committee

"Bosses use divisions to cut up the workforce and attack pay and conditions."

interested in profits. Here they've used a foreign company with its own workforce.

This is down to the way the economy works, not the people who have to follow the work. This isn't lost on plenty of protesters, as many have worked abroad themselves, in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The Guardian quoted John Cummins saying: "I was laid off as a stevedore two weeks ago. I've worked in Cardiff and Barry Docks for 11 years [...] I think the whole country should go on strike as we're losing all British industry. But I've got nothing against foreign workers. I can't blame them for going

The writers/credits

"Standing, fighting, winning"

Taken from a statement by the Anarchist Federation, you can read the full article at afed.org.uk.

"What recession means for us"

By Joseph Kay, an editor of libcom.org

■ *Tea Break* is an irregular bulletin by users of libcom.org, encouraging workers to take regular breaks, talk to their workmates and take direct action to defend ourselves. To contact us email admin@libcom.org

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Views of a refinery worker on the strikes

I WORK for a contracted company in charge of maintenance at an oil refinery in South Wales. There are two oil refineries where I work and two LNG terminals plus an oil storage facility. Due to the economic crisis workers at all of these sites have been made redundant, as across the UK and even the world.

With the prospect of work coming in from new building projects like nuclear and gas-fired power stations, there was hope for workers out of work. However due to recession the fat cats want to cut costs and use the company that charges the least. This is where the problem began; workers recently made redundant were horrified when local jobs went to an Italian company using Italian and Portuguese labour.

A lot of my colleagues regularly work overseas in places like Kazakhstan, Dubai etc. When this work is offered people jump at the chance. Don't blame foreign workers - it's not their fault. It's the system: capitalism. These redundancies have nothing to do with overseas workers "taking our jobs". It's the whole greedy system that's to blame.

In the engineering industry, especially in oil and gas, the job takes you worldwide. Who can blame foreign workers, who also face threats of redundancy and unemployment, who just want to work and support their family? What happened to international worker solidarity?

The Martinez refinery in the US. Workers there have been threatening a strike over new contracts this month.



Lindsey Oil Refinery strike demands

Overwhelmingly endorsed by the mass meeting of strikers, the demands made by the strike committee are as follows:

- No victimisation of workers taking solidarity action.
- All workers in UK to be covered by NAECI Agreement.
- Union controlled registering of unemployed and locally skilled union members, with nominating rights as work becomes available.
- Government and employer investment in proper training / apprenticeships for new generation of construction workers - fight for a future for young people.
- All Immigrant labour to be unionised.
- Trade Union assistance for immigrant workers - including interpreters - and access to Trade Union advice - to promote active integrated Trade Union Members.
- Build links with construction trade unions on the continent

What recession means for us

BEHIND the headlines the plan is clear; the government and bosses want us to pay for their crisis. So how will recession affect us?

Unemployment

Unemployment is predicted to increase to as much as 3.4m by the end of next year. Already the news is full of redundancies, and it's set to get worse. As more people are made redundant, the government plan to cut unemployment benefit. Attacks are also planned on single parents' benefit and long-term sick leave.

Wage cuts

Workers at JCB factories recently voted to take a £50 a week pay cut to avoid redundancies. The company then made redundancies anyway. Wages can also be cut in less visible ways by making us work harder, faster and longer for the same pay.

Public service cuts

£35bn of government clawbacks are scheduled

from public sector spending cuts. This will mean cuts to the health service, schools, social housing, energy efficiency programmes and flood defences as well as cuts in state workers' pay.

Repossessions and evictions

The recession will hit us through a rise in home repossessions and evictions as people fall behind on mortgage repayments and rent.

So is it all doom and gloom?

It doesn't have to be! There are various things we can do:

- Network with other workers. Do you have friends or friends-of-friends who have similar problems with work? Think about ways you can take action to support one another. Some oil refinery workers have been using the website bearfacts.co.uk to communicate with other workers during the wildcats - spreading the struggle makes it stronger.
- Take collective direct action. This covers

a whole range of things but the principle is that alone we are weak, but together we can stand up for ourselves. Wildcat strikes and occupations get results! When workers were laid off in Northern Ireland recently they occupied the plant for 48 hours demanding improved redundancy terms and won.

■ Keep control of the struggle in mass meetings: don't let union full-timers or professional arbitrators take control of the struggle. Try and involve foreign workers where possible, at Langage Power Station in Devon 200 polish workers joined a wildcat walkout by contractors: united we stand, divided we fall!

■ The sympathy strikes show what we have in common with other workers and what we don't with the politicians and bosses shifting the costs of the recession onto us. We can't fight back alone, but together we have a chance.

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