

alarming fact that Britain's current government has made so many cumulative attacks on these aspects of the monarchical constitution.

Unelected political appointees have for the first time been given the legal power to command impartial officials. A new "Serious Organised Crimes Agency," ludicrously dubbed the "British FBI" though we have no federal structure, will be staffed by officers employed by the state rather than sworn to uphold the law. Large numbers of Community Support Officers, likewise state employees responsible only to their superiors, are rapidly replacing sworn constables as the basic patrolling unit of the police. The prime minister has become fond of posing among soldiers he plainly regards as his army. Meanwhile Mr. Blair's colleagues, in what may be Freudian slips, have taken to referring to him as head of state. Downing Street press conferences, with their lecterns and coats of arms, have clearly been modeled on White House practice. At the same time, the hereditary members of the House of Lords have been almost wiped out, leaving the crown exposed as the last part of the government still based upon inheritance. And the prime minister has developed a habit of seeking prominent positions at what used to be exclusively royal occasions, from the state opening of Parliament to the funerals of Princess Diana and the queen mother.

The signs are all there for those who would read them. Just when we need the crown most of all, and when we should be rallying round its besieged standard to defend it, the heir to the throne strikes a heavy blow at the foundations of the throne, and all we shall be left with in the end will be a parcel of useless "human rights." ■

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Lights Out at GE

Bloomington's jobs are going south—with taxpayer help.

By Timothy P. Carney

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA—"There was a time you couldn't find a place at the plant to park," says Joy Finley, who works at the Local 2249 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which represents the manufacturing workers at the local General Electric plant. "Folks were getting towed."

On Thursday, March 31, however, the scene is starkly different in the GE parking lot just off Curry Pike on the outskirts of Bloomington. The lot is mostly empty. Nine out of every 10 autos here are American, which contrasts with the part of town near Indiana University, where about half of the cars are Japanese. Bumper stickers range from "Bush-Cheney-Daniels" to "Kick that son of a BUSH out." More than one car's bumper declares, "Jesus is Life: the rest is just details."

Many of those leaving the first shift after 3 p.m. (they started at 6:30 a.m.) are carrying empty crock pots or casserole dishes they brought for the retirement of someone on their line. About 70 were lucky enough to take retirement the day before the layoffs came. Friday would be the last day for another 470 workers.

According to the official story, the April Fools' Day layoffs were happening because GE planned to "discontinue production of mid-line, side-by-side refrigerator models that are not competitive on cost or product features." While that is technically true, a very similar new line of refrigerators is being started up at the GE plant in Celaya, Mexico. All the workers in Bloomington understand

that their jobs are being sent south of the border. And they all point the finger at the same two targets.

"Free trade and NAFTA are the worst things that have happened to the working man," says Tracy Pritchard, who worked at GE for 10 years until he was laid off April 1. He plans to go to school and maybe become an electrician. "I'm gonna stay outta factory work—not much future there." The other culprit? "Corporate greed"—a cliché at the plant and the union hall.

Pritchard, like his coworkers, didn't know it wasn't free trade, strictly speaking, that has helped GE move their jobs to Celaya. The corporate welfare state—specifically, the Export-Import Bank of the United States—played a role.

In Celaya, a General Electric joint venture named Mabe makes appliances, including the side-by-side refrigerators that had been made in Bloomington. As part of another joint venture called Qualcore, GE built a separate plant in Celaya to supply parts for the appliances made at Mabe. That's where the U.S. taxpayers got involved.

To reduce the cost of the Qualcore factory, GE called on the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im), a federal agency. Ex-Im provided a subsidy in the form of a \$3 million loan guarantee because the new plant would include components made in California and Illinois.

At the IBEW's office right behind a pawnshop, Joe Adams sits down to talk to me. He's the local vice president, but he's getting laid off by GE on Friday, after 10 years. He tells me about when

he was first looking for work. “They told me I couldn’t get a factory job without factory experience. That didn’t make sense. What’s the experience you need?” Joe soon learned what was required. “Are you gonna be here, on time, every day? Are you experienced with the mundane? Can you stand to do the same thing again and again?”

Inside the plant, I see what Joe means. Work that an outsider might expect to be done by a machine—attaching a support bracket to a refrigerator’s evaporator, for example—is done by hand. A conveyor belt carries the evaporator up to Patty McGinn, who picks it up, attaches the supports with a few simple motions, and puts it back down. Then she does it again. And again.

Patty stands out. Most workers at the plant look considerably older than their age. But with short blonde curls and a fresh face, Patty is in fact one of the more senior employees. She isn’t getting laid off this time, but nobody here expects the plant to be around much longer.

Patty, like many at GE, met her husband at the plant. He can’t read or write, and he started here before the plant required a high-school diploma. Many of the laborers, like Patty, started at age 20 or younger. This is part of what makes the layoffs so tough. These workers make \$20 to \$24 an hour. Without training or experience, in relatively low-cost Bloomington, they earn over \$41,000 (up to \$50,000) per year, plus benefits and possibly overtime. “Where else you gonna find this sort of money?” is the common refrain.

Some of the workers see how their generous wages relate to their jobs’ southward motion. It’s conventional wisdom in Bloomington that the Mabe workers make \$2 to \$3 an hour. “We knew labor costs were getting out of hand,” says Glenn Collins, IBEW’s local president. After NAFTA, the union took

a gamble and agreed to set up a two-tier wage structure. That means new employees get paid less than more senior workers—a radical idea in a union factory.

Corporate management, however, at the same time created new projects that would allow the recent hires to jump immediately to the same wage as everyone else, wiping out any savings this new union contract would have provided. For Collins, this was just one more example of GE’s lack of intelligence when it comes to saving money in Bloomington. As he sees it, and he is not alone among the plant workers in this, manufacturing in America is doomed and has been doomed—some say since NAFTA; others think that agreement just expedited the inevitable.

Tony Smoot may be setting a record, getting laid off by GE for the third time. In 2000, when GE moved its biggest refrigerators (30 and 27 cubic feet) to Celaya, there was a round of layoffs. Some workers, including Smoot, were hired back after others retired. In 2001, in another round (as the 24- and 25-cubic-foot models went south), Smoot got the axe again. After a few months, he was back. This time he doesn’t expect to be rehired. He agrees manufacturing is dead, and he thinks George W. Bush only makes things worse. “Bush says, ‘buy American, buy American.’ Hell, go to Wal-Mart. Ain’t nothing made in America anymore,” Smoot says. “You can’t even buy an American flag that’s made in this country.”

Dennis Briscoe of Ellettsville shows up Thursday for his second-to-last day here. He began work at GE 13 years ago, after he was laid off from Otis Elevators, less than a mile down Curry Pike. Briscoe hopes to attend Ivy Tech, also just down the road, using federal funds provided by NAFTA in these situations. He will go into biotech or nursing. I ask him how he feels about both of his jobs

going to Mexico. “Hell,” he says, with the same sad smile most of these workers have this week, “if I had my own business, I’d do the same thing.”

On Friday, Jim Sips plans to work a double shift. That puts him in the plant from 6 a.m. to midnight. When I run into him, he’s sitting on a chair, watching refrigerator casings go by him, checking to see if the paint job is even. He’s wearing a Bush-Cheney inauguration t-shirt he got because he contributed to the 2004 campaign. “GE’s been good to me,” he says. Sips acknowledges that the plant will shut down entirely in the near future, but he doesn’t blame the company. Even in the face of being laid off, he sees benefits to free trade. He points to his colleagues and says, “These folks complain about everything going down to Mexico, but they shop at Wal-Mart.”

Sips also brings up a subject only the older workers will mention: America’s work ethic. It’s a subject Jeff Cain, a recent retiree, has no problem discussing with a reporter. “Americans are lazy,” he says. After visiting his wife, who still works at the plant, Cain tells me, “Everybody wants a paycheck, but nobody wants to put in eight hours.”

Collins, too, finds other culprits besides “corporate greed.” In the union offices, he tells me, “In the U.S., we’re constantly being monitored by OSHA. The EPA is on our case. ... Why take a beating from the EPA and OSHA when you can just build your stuff down in Mexico with nobody bothering you?”

Collins is keeping his job at the plant, and he’s one of the few workers I tell about the Ex-Im deal that helped build GE’s manufacturing setup in Celaya. Joe Adams is in the room, too. “Well, that’s just great,” Joe says. “My taxes are paying to ship my job to Mexico.” ■

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Doomed to Repeat It

Will the lessons of Iraq go unlearned?

By William R. Polk

ARE THERE ANY lessons to be learned from the American venture into Iraq? The great German philosopher of history Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel doubted our capacity to find out. "Peoples and governments," he wrote, "never have learned anything from history or acted on principles deduced from it." Writing about the Vietnam War, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington suggested that it would be best if policy-makers "simply blot out of their mind any recollection of this one." It seems that they did.

So, in at least some ways, the Iraq War has been proof of George Santayana's admonition that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The urgent question today is whether the Iraq War will be similarly blotted out and similarly repeated. The odds are with Professor Hegel.

Huntington's argument was based on the notion that Vietnam was unique since, as he saw it, imperialism and colonialism have "just about disappeared from world politics." That is, they were fading memories of a now irrelevant past. But is this true?

Foreign domination has faded from our memory but not from the memories of many of the peoples of Asia and Africa. Focus on Iraq, which became "independent" by treaty with Britain in 1922. Then it became "independent" by recognition of the League of Nations in 1932. But few Iraqis believe that it became really independent by either of these acts. Britain controlled the econ-

omy and maintained its military presence while it continued to rule Iraq behind a façade of governments it had appointed. It then reoccupied the country during World War II. After the war, it ruled through a proxy until he was overthrown in 1958. So was 1958 the date of independence? On the surface yes, but below the surface American and British intelligence manipulated internal forces and neighboring states to influence or dominate governments; they helped to overthrow the revolutionary government of Abdul Karim Qasim and to install the Ba'ath Party, which ultimately brought Saddam Hussein to power. Knowing what they had done and fearing that they would do so again shaped much of the policy even of Saddam Hussein.

By giving or withholding money, arms, and vital battlefield intelligence, Britain and America influenced what Saddam thought he could do. So worried was he about his American connection that, before he decided to invade Kuwait, he called in the U.S. ambassador to ask, in effect, if the invasion was fine with Washington. Only when he was assured in 1990 that the U.S. had no policy on the frontiers with Kuwait by official testimony before Congress, by government press releases, and by a face-to-face meeting with our ambassador in Baghdad did he act. Either he misread the omens or we changed them. Our ambassador later said, incredibly, that we had not anticipated that he would take all of Kuwait. When he did, we invaded, destroyed much of his army

and the Iraqi economy, and imposed upon the country UN-authorized sanctions and unauthorized no-fly zones. Finally, in 2003, we invaded again, occupied the country, and imposed upon it a government of our choice. Whatever the justification for any or all of these actions, they do not add up to independence. Even Iraqis who hated and feared Saddam always felt that they were living under a form of Western control. The simple fact is that the memories had not faded because they were based on current reality.

There are many things to be said about the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. But one thing stands out: we were (and I believe still are) ignorant of Iraqi history and culture. More pointedly, we had (and still have) no sense of how Iraqis saw their own past and their relationships with us. This ignorance has caused us, often inadvertently, to take actions that many or perhaps most Iraqis have read as imperialist. This has been true even of actions that we felt were generous, far-sighted, and constructive.

Take the provision of a constitution as an example. Constitutions are surely good. We treasure ours even when we do not always abide by it. We believe that other countries should have them because they are the bedrock of democracy. That sentiment was so widely held at the end of the First World War that the British made giving the Iraqis one a high priority. Experts were called in, phrases were debated, studies were made of the