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By John Barker

The perilous and exploitative employment of economic migrants, despite the public outcry against it, is an essential component of capitalist productivity. Concentrating on the structural insecurity of Chinese workers both in the UK and mainland China, John Barker moves from the contextless media coverage of specific deaths to the macroeconomic picture that caused them

In June of 2000, 58 Chinese people died of mass suffocation in the container of a lorry that arrived on a ferry at Dover. They died trying to enter the UK illegally. The direct cause of these deaths was the blocking of the container's air vents by the driver, a Dutchman called Perry Wacker. He is the worst of criminals; a panicker lacking the basic nerve required and, in this case, cutting the air supply for fear of being caught. The reporting of the case by large sections of the British media was either downright callous or sympathetic in abstract terms only, the horror felt from putting ourselves in the shoes of those who died proved to be too much.

In early February 2004, 19 Chinese workers who had entered the UK illegally died by drowning on the dangerous shoreline of Morecombe Bay, Lancashire sands rich in cockles. This time the reporting of what happened was more sympathetic. Once again the direct cause of their deaths was the reckless and incompetent greed of those employing them. It was reported that one of those who died, Guo Binlong, made a call on his mobile phone to his wife in the village of Zelang near Fuqing City not long before he drowned. He said, 'Maybe I'm going to die. It's a tiny mistake by my boss. He should have called us back an hour ago.'

Heartbreaking, twice over: the tiny mistake, that that's how Guo Binlong saw it, and the futility of the call. All the reporting implied that none of the 19 could read English or perhaps even speak it, and therefore would not have understood the sign up by the beach that said 'Fast rising tides and hidden channels. In emergency ring 999'. Perhaps if it had been read and understood, even as the danger became obvious, there would have been a reluctance to ring 999.

In another case involving a 40 year old Chinese man, Zhang Guo Hua, who entered the UK illegally and who died in Hartlepool after working a 24 hour shift in a plastics 'feeder' factory for Samsung, it was in no one's interests, as the reporter David Leigh put it, to make a fuss neither employers nor fellow workers. He was cremated without an inquest. And for Guo Binlong the mobile phone, one of the technological wonders of the present era of globalisation, that allowed a phone call from the darkness of Morecombe Bay, with the cold water rising, to a village in China, was useless to him. In contrast, a young female Londoner was happily saved from sinking mud on the shore of the Thames by using her phone.

The reporting of these deaths though more sympathetic, quickly identified the ruthless and criminal gangmasters as being responsible. Though they have remained largely unnamed the condemnation has been far stronger than in the case of Perry Wacker. The broadsheet papers talked of these gangsters using stolen 4-wheel drives in the same horrified tones that they portray loan sharks, as if the billions made by the 'high-street' banks belonged to a different moral universe. No, these gangsters were 'tough Scousers with torn jeans' and mixed in with them Triads and Snakeheads.

In the same period as these horrific deaths two other types of Chinese people in the UK are becoming important to its economy: students and tourists. All the students pay full overseas fees of £10,000, and in 2003 there were estimated to be 25,000 students making £250 million for British universities a fourfold increase in three years. In 2004, the estimate is of 35,000 students. The attractions for British

universities is obvious. For the students it offers the chance of a university education when places are so limited in China, and when a British degree is said to look particularly good on CVs. What is certain is that the British government is not seeking to reduce their numbers, even when some also work in the black economy to help pay their way.

In October 2003, it was reported that the EU was expected to approve a new visa regime that will give Chinese people easier access to Europe. Chinese tour groups are expected to be given 'approved destination status'. This almost automatic visa granting would have an in-built safety clause from the EU's point of view in that Chinese tour operators would be heavily punished if any of their clients failed to return to China. This does not apply to the UK which is outside the Schengen Agreement but is equally keen to receive the money generated by such tourism. This is not negligible. Since 1998 the number of Chinese overseas travellers has almost doubled to 16.6 million. That is only a fraction of its 1.3 billion population, but the prediction is for 100 million overseas travellers by 2020, making them the world's biggest travellers. The UK does not want to be left behind but is seeking watertight agreements with the Chinese government to take back failed asylum seekers and issue new papers to those who deliberately destroy them, an issue the Blair government made much of after the Morecombe Bay horror.

These numbers, and prospective numbers, are another indication of the development of a middle-class in China; middle class in its consumption possibilities that is, or what might otherwise be called a nouveau riche. A copycat nouveau riche highlighted by the recent 'BMW case'. The wife of a rich property owner deliberately ran over the wife of a peasant, Liu Zhongxia, whose tractor she claimed, had scratched a wing mirror on her BMW in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, the heart of North East China's rust-belt, mimicking the Long Island heiress who recently maimed a few in similar fashion after a nightclub entry argument. The driver, Mrs Su, who had also paid someone to take her driving test, was acquitted as no witnesses dared to turn up. That such bad behaviour and the incomes and spending power that allow it now exist is hardly surprising given the dynamic growth of its industrial economy. It can be argued that it is only through the policies of the nationalist Communist Party, determined only to allow in Western capital on its own terms (however much that might be wishful thinking) that this growth has taken place. It is equally the case that it results from the shift of so much industrial production to China from the First World, to take advantage of a low wage workforce, one which is also producing this nouveau riche. The divisions of levels of income and possibilities in China are now so great that they might be called class divisions, and so obvious that the new Communist Party leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao have referred to it and of the need to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Beyond the never-ending campaign to root out the corruption of officials and their parasitic relation to the peasantry, this sounds like wishful thinking.

There are not going to be 1.3 billion Chinese in the 'middle-class' level global consumer class. What would they be producing? Even in the 'First World' it is a bogus promise. In the case of China, with such an across-the-board global consumer class, the global environmental crisis would be obvious even to those who do not wish to see it. Instead the situation as it is, and as it is developing, is eminently suitable to the global investor class and its transnational corporations and companies. As Oscar Romero puts it with the ruthless clarity of 'Third World' analysts, what matters to them is that 'national markets become increasingly liberalised so that they can seek the thin strata with high income in the underdeveloped countries ... they do not aim to sell to the entire population, it would be sufficient for 300 million in the upper-income brackets out of the total Chinese population to become their customers, though this may create a dangerous gap between the two Chinas.' (Oscar Romero, *The Myth of Development*, Zed Books). To manage this dangerous gap, what better than a highly sophisticated one-party state which can maintain a low-wage industrial assembly class, itself privileged from an even larger and lower-waged rural class. 300 million is enough, it dwarfs the present US market.

Taken with similarly proportioned figures in India, this development is a godsend to the global investor class which, as the SE Asian 'financial crisis' showed, was faced with a problem of global overproduction. A financial analyst also trading in snappy one-liners, Ed Yardeni, talked of the world needing all the yuppies it can get. Looked at in this light, the Chinese one-party system may be the more reliable given the stunning defeat of the BJP party in India in the recent election; a party which as Arundhati Roy described so well in her essay about the Gujarat pogrom, had sought to manage the 'dangerous gap' with a mixture of neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism. However chimerical the promises of the Congress Party might be, the election did allow the poor at least to say 'No' to the gap and the way it was being managed.

The poor of Britain and Europe know the present importance of China in particular, life would be that much harder without its prices: a pair of jeans for a fiver or toys for a quid. Its coming importance was highlighted 100 years ago in J A Hobson's *Imperialism*, a book unfairly famous only for having been used and misused by Lenin.

'China seems to offer a unique opportunity to the Western business man. A population ... endowed with an extraordinary capacity of steady labour, with great intelligence and ingenuity, inured to a low standard of material comfort ... Few Europeans even profess to know the Chinese ... the only important fact upon which there is universal agreement is that the Chinese of all the "lower races" are most adaptable to purposes of industrial exploitation, yielding the largest surplus product of labour in proportion to their cost of keep.'

Western ignorance seems to have changed little: the Sinology department at Durham University is scheduled to close, and the UK government is to withdraw the small support it gave to those doing M.Phils in Chinese.

Hobson was in no position to anticipate a Communist Revolution or the developing class system of the present. He did however foresee those fears of this industrial development getting out of Western control, manifested in notions of the 'yellow peril' which crop up throughout the 20th century to cause havoc in the minds of the leftist American writers Jack London and John dos Passos. 'It is at least conceivable that China might so turn the tables upon the Western industrial nations, and, either by adopting their capital and organisers or, as is more probable, by substituting her own, might flood their markets with her cheaper manufacturers, and refusing their imports in exchange might take her payment in liens upon their capital, reversing the earlier process of investment until she gradually obtained financial control over her quondam patrons and civilisers.' Such speculation belongs elsewhere: I don't know, for example, how much Chinese capital is invested in US Treasury bonds, but presumably it figures prominently in the thinking of professional, militarised Western geopolitics. In their considerations presumably, oil figures a great deal. China's 'industrial revolution' depends on it. Last year alone its oil consumption rose by 10 percent, along with what *The Times* (11/6/04) calls the 'rampant demand' from not just China, but India and Brazil too; countries 'continuing to guzzle world supply'. Guzzle! It may well be that the spread of US military bases across the oil-producing world is a product of those considerations.

At the same time Hobson raises another possibility, that 'the pressure of working class movements in politics and industry in the West can be met by a flood of China goods, so as to keep down wages ... it is conceivable that the powerful industrial and financial classes of the West, in order better to keep the economic and political mastery ... may insist upon the free importation of yellow labour for domestic and industrial service in the West. This is a weapon which they hold in reserve, should they need to use it in order to keep the populace in safe subjection.' Hobson himself had seen the use of Chinese labour in the South African gold mines. Although, to our ears he sounds melodramatic and unwarrantably sweeping, nevertheless his considerations do overlap with yet another round of the

'Immigration Debate'. The disparity between the freedom of mobility for capital and non-freedom for labour is mentioned, if at all, and then forgotten as if these really do represent parallel worlds. Instead, the same yes-andnos go round the carousel. Yes we need some skilled workers; yes, we must rationally look at future demographics and who will be needed to do the work to pay our pensions; but at the same time watch out for bogus refugees who are really economic migrants; watch out for the illegal immigrant. But not too hard.

After the death of three Kurdish workers on a level crossing on their way to pick spring onions in the East of England, it was suddenly discovered there were 2000 Chinese in Kings Lynn as if they had never been seen before. In Kings Lynn! Their deaths were more sordid in the banality of the accident than the thriller-like narrative of Romanian ex-train workers fixing signals so that other migrants could leap onto the Eurostar at obscure spots. The reality of the immigration debate is also more sordid. While the Third World is raided for trained nurses whose training was a cost to those countries, immigration fears are regularly rehearsed. The net result is that so many immigrants live in fear, and this fear is as functional to capitalist economies in the present era as it has been in the past. Migrant workers in Fortress Europe, and especially illegally-entered migrants, are far more likely to accept wages and conditions that are essential to its needs, and which in turn have a knock-on effect on wages and working conditions generally. Racist politicians and professional opinionists have their own grisly agenda, but these are functional to capitalist economies and their household names. The focus of these opinionists on 'failed' asylum seekers who are not allowed to work and, more recently, on a 'flood' of Roma and other Eastern Europeans who can work legally as EU citizens, gives the game away. Their spotlight is not on Kings Lynn, a national blind spot. 'Policies that claim to exclude undocumented workers,' says Stephen Castle, 'may often really be about allowing them through side doors and back doors so that they can be readily exploited.' Or, as he put it some 30 years ago, commenting on the repatriation demands of Enoch Powell and other racist politicians: 'Paradoxically their value for capital lies in their very failure to achieve their declared aims.'

Inside Fortress Europe, for the UK in particular with its avowedly American-style deregulation, this process is all too visible. It is the dirty secret of the UK's economic success under New Labour. And they are proud of it, these shadow social democrats; the UK's official trade and investment website boasts of it. 'Total wage costs in the UK are among the lowest in Europe,' it says. 'In the UK employees are used to working hard for their employers. In 2001 the average hours worked a week was 45.1 for males and 40.7 for females. The EU average was 40.9. ... UK law does not oblige employers to provide a written employment contract. ... Recruitment costs in the UK is low. ... The law governing conduct of employment agencies is less restrictive in the UK. The UK has the lowest corporation tax of any major industrialised country.' Recently, Jack Straw has 'defied Europe' as the papers would have it. In a speech to the CBI, he promised that the UK would insist that the charter of fundamental rights created no 'new rights under national law, so as not to upset the balance of Britain's industrial relations policy', that is the one established by previous Conservative governments. In Britain there is nowhere for the exploited to turn and almost no employers are prosecuted for using illegal migrants.

To the extent that media coverage of the horror of Morecambe Bay went beyond fingering tough Scouser gangmasters in stolen 4-wheel drives, it focused on the power of supermarkets in the agricultural sector and their relation to those who do the harvesting a harvest which doesn't stop for a festival because the operation is non-stop, all year round. Migrant labour is up by 44 percent in the last seven years. Much of it is 'legal' via seasonal agricultural schemes, but of the 3-5000 'gangmasters' who organise this at least 1000 are illegal and give no protection to their workers. But then 'gangmasters' are in effect employment agencies and these, as New Labour like to boast, are the least restricted in the EU.

Despite Morecombe and the ensuing hand-wringing, nothing has changed. In September 2003 the House of Commons committee on the environment and food, chaired by Michael Jack MP, found that the agencies supposed to deal with 'illegal gangmasters' were making no real impact and set out the changes that would be needed. In mid-May 2004, a report by the same committee declared that the government had no clearer picture of the situation, and enforcement action against them had not increased. There had, it concluded, been 'no evidence of any change in the government's approach since last September. Indeed, in some respects, enforcement activity has diminished because of lack of resources.'

The beneficiaries of this, are the 'household' names of Tesco, Sainsbury and the rest, all profiting from this underclass. Andrew Simms describes a situation where 'Long chains of sub-contractors, commercial confidentiality and contractual obfuscation, allow household names to hide behind plausible denials ... we have evolved a system better at hiding, or distancing cause from effect.' This at a time when New Labour has never stopped talking of responsibilities in return for rights, exchange value-business. Those who died at Morecombe are believed to have moved on from Kings Lynn, in all likelihood taking a drop in pay from the vegetable picking rates of a market dominated by the 'high street' supermarkets.

The distancing of cause from consequence, the not-me-guv cry of the rich, the powerful and their portraitists, appear in all their colours in the *Teeside Evening Gazette's* report on a fire at the Woo One factory in the Sovereign Business Park, Hartlepool at the beginning of April this year. It mentioned the death of Zhang Guo Hua but only to emphasise that there was no proof of a connection between the haemorrhage that killed him and his working conditions. He had, it reported, been through the usual kind of work: cutting salads for Tesco suppliers in Sussex; fish-processing in Scotland; and packing flowers in Norfolk. Usual for whom?

The Queen had opened the nearby Samsung plant in 1996. It has a global turnover of \$33 billion. When it opened the local MP, Peter Mandelson, wrote an article in praise of the company saying: 'some have the impression that the success of the tiger economies is based on sweatshop labour. This is a false picture.' The false picture is that sweatshop labour is exclusive to the 'tiger economies'. Zhang Guo Hua worked a 24-hour shift in Hartlepool. It was his decision of course, one can hear the not-me-guv voice saying. Woo One, the company Zhang Guo Hua worked for, was a 'feeder' factory for Samsung, its practices its own, as Samsung would have it. Zhang Guo Hua spent his last 24 hours stamping the word SAMSUNG onto plastic casings either for microwave oven doors or computer monitors, on his feet throughout. When he collapsed and went to hospital it was under another name. It was only when he was dead that a friend gave Zhang's real passport. So that even though he was cremated without an Inquest, it was in his own name.

An ex-worker at Woo One said that the minimum working week was 72 hours and the minimum shift 12 hours. Its managing director, Keith Boynton, agreed that English workers were not required to work these hours, but it wasn't him guv, the Chinese workers were *technically* employed by an outfit called Thames Oriental Manpower Management with offices in New Malden Surrey close to Samsung's corporate HQ. Thames Oriental Manpower Management a name that could only have been dreamt up by its proprietor a Mr Lin, not a tough Scouser in ripped jeans but a man who had been granted asylum claiming, claiming that is, that he was a North Korean refugee. Mr Boynton of Woo One said that 'What he (Mr Lin) pays the workers is up to him.' Mr Lin, it was reported had also taken control from Woo One of the nearby three-to-a-room set of dormitories and presumably, because he is now the villain, charged what he liked.

At this time Samsung boasted of record UK factory profits through 'unit cost reduction.' To get some idea of the process whereby this might happen, two pieces of Marx's structural economic analysis come to mind. He had for one thing deconstructed the notion of productivity long before the era of productivity deals. The very notion is one which exactly distances cause from consequence, or rather, and all the more modern for that, muddies the cause. 'Productivity' smears together: the productiveness of labour, that is the improved technology which allows for greater production; intensity of labour, which is how hard people work per hour (and here much of the improved technology simply increases the intensity of labour); and the length of the working day. These latter two factors are characteristic of 'primitive accumulation', and boy was that going on in Samsung's Hartlepool circus. Marx's misnamed Equalisation of Profit Law describes the mechanism whereby this works. The surplus or profit engendered by companies like Woo One, does not all go to them; the size of Samsung, the concentration of capital involved, and its power in relation to both its suppliers and marketing, means that it takes the lion's share of what has truly been accumulated in primitive fashion by small dependent suppliers. This is not some one-off phenomenon; one study shows Toyota having some 47,000 small firms working for it in a hierarchical structure, with most of those in the lowest layer passing the surpluses of 'primitive accumulation' up the chain to transnational corporations like Toyota who benefit from that mystery called 'value-added'.

When the story emerged in *The Guardian* (13/01/04), local MP Peter Mandelson said that he had 'written to Samsung about allegations made against Woo One in this tragic case.' The question is then, did he ever receive a reply because two days afterwards Samsung announced, out of the blue it was said, that it was closing the factory involved the Wynyard in Billingham. It blamed the high level of wages in NE England and said it was relocating to Slovakia where wages stood at £1 an hour. To which address did Mr Mandelson write? Was it passed on by a Post Office re-direction instruction. Has he received a reply? It seems unlikely given that Samsung's decision can hardly have been spur of the moment, or that a meeting with Woo One would have been a priority in the two days remaining. It transpired that Woo One themselves had already started to make its own move in the direction of Slovakia, and indeed announced some three weeks later that it was to close its computer casings plant in Hartlepool. On the news of Samsung's departure, Mr Mandelson, his letter still in the post somewhere, said that the price of their product had fallen worldwide, and that was 'the reason for its closure'. Prime Minister Tony Blair said he deeply regretted the loss of jobs involved but that 'It is part of the world economy we live in.'

There is of course much truth in what he says, but there is a complacency to that same voice which talks so much of our responsibilities that grates. If wages in Slovakia are £1 an hour, in China they are likely to be fifty pence, yet there is a need felt in the 'First World' to maintain low-cost mass production within its own frontiers even while its investor class shifts production to such countries. There is for one thing a structural limit to how many lawyers, journalists, IT specialists and bankers are required even in the First World, whatever might be said about education, education, education, while at the same time an increasing reluctance to cushion the circumstances of the excluded population. For another there is a fear at the psychic level of political economy that if so much industrial production is shifted to different parts of Asia, it will somehow weaken the West, be both sign and symptom of lazy decadence. More specifically than notions of decadence, there is a need for cheap labour in the First World, within its own frontiers, 'for it means that the South cannot extract monopoly rents for its cheap labour and bad working conditions' as Robert Biel puts it. There are sweatshops in London and Los Angeles even while automatic looms are capable of weaving 760 metres of denim per minute. As Hobson suggested, and the irony stands out in neon, this First World low-cost production requires migrant workers, workers made fearful by an unscrupulous media and political class.

Migrant workers are also essential to low-cost China and its 'economic miracle'. The numbers are hard to establish, 80 million is one estimate, 94 another, of recent migrants from the Chinese countryside, many of whom are also 'illegal'. Many Chinese cities require residency permits while it is these 'peasants' who do the jobs that Beijingers, for example, won't do themselves. And, just like anywhere else, for Albanians in Greece for example, they are accused of being thieves and dirty, while also exerting a downward pressure on local wages. Should there be a shrinkage of economic growth at a global level, these Chinese migrant workers will be the first to lose their jobs. For one thing 90 percent of them work without contracts, according to Li Jianfei, a law professor at the People's University. Even the state-run Trade Union estimates that they are owed over 100 million yen in back wages, but a campaign for repayment is for those with contracts only. Much of this is in the booming construction sector, where non-paying subcontractors blame large companies underpaying them, the Law of Equalisation of Profit in crude form.

In more classical form this law is also inherent in the condition of the coal mining industry. China's increasing oil dependence is well known, but it is also the world's largest coal producer. Chinese companies are making sizeable profits on legal and illegal mining operations, but at prices to industry which mean the real rates of profit of the consuming industries, often foreign-financed, are even greater. Exerting more pressure on the industry and its highly exploited workforce is central government's demand for more output. At the same time the industry has an appalling safety record; around 7000 miners were killed in 2003. There are promises of more inspectorates and the closing of illegal mines but, in the face of this 'energy crunch', this is likely to remain rhetorical. Safety investment is far less than the announced allocation. The grim reality is that with the retrenching of state-owned industries and the accompanying loss of benefits and pensions, the unemployed and the rural poor have entered the industry in huge numbers and are willing to work for cash in appalling and unsafe conditions, often assisting coal mine owners in avoiding safety procedures to ensure continued employment, as the *China Labour Bulletin* puts it. The death of one man in Hartlepool is hardly on the same scale, but the pressures for 'not making a fuss' are similar.

The wishful thinking of the new Communist Party leadership about reversing the dynamics of inequality looks like mere cynical rhetoric since it doesn't prevent it from maintaining a hard line against any independent worker protests over pay and conditions. A strike over pay at the part Taiwanese financed Xinxiong Shoe Factory in Dongguan city in April of this year resulted in several arrests. The Ferro-Alloy strike in Liaoyang province, involving 1600 workers, resulted in long prison sentences for Yao Fuxin and Xiao; meanwhile the workers are still without retrenchment compensation. In Hubei province, six workers have been arrested and are awaiting trial on charges of 'disturbing social order' after a peaceful demonstration at the Tieshu factory; this after 15 months of peaceful campaigning to recover more than 200 million Yuan in back wages, redundancy payments, workers shares and other moneys owed them by the bankrupt factory's management.

Other workers from the Tieshu factory have been sentenced to terms up to 21 months of 're-education through labour', a punishment which bypasses the criminal justice system. We do not know the extent of prison labour in China but it too is a component holding down general wages and conditions. There is nothing to get smug about, prison labour in the UK is being organised in a much more serious manner than before. The Woolworth's type chain in the North of England, Wilkinson's, is highly dependent on it for its products. A recent piece in *The Economist* (6/5/04) goes further, saying 'Hard-working immigrants transform the prison system'. It describes how Wormwood Scrubs (where a regime of extreme and racist staff violence is still being investigated) is full of cocaine drug mules from South America, and how the prison runs production lines for airline headsets and aluminium windows. The best jobs, it says, pay £25-40 a week 'depending on a prisoner's place on the ladder of privilege (as in all prisons, inmates are paid more for the same job if they behave themselves)'. It goes on to say that 'it is serious money for a third-worlder ... so a steady stream of remittances flows from

Wormwood Scrubs to poor countries.' A grotesque conclusion might be that the poor victims of Morecombe Bay would have been better off there.

After the effective and international demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, the unity displayed there, the unity that was most unsettling to the global investor class, was quickly confronted with the sneers of professional opinionists. The many American trade unionists present, they said, had no global consciousness, they were just there to protect their jobs. Their demands for basic standards and rights for workers in the poor world were just a subtle form of protectionism, protecting their privileges. It is true that the Clinton administration would do almost anything to secure free trade deals in American interests, and also that Third World voices have been raised to say that such demands for minimum standards and conditions are aimed at cutting off the only way in which they can develop economically, that is with a monopoly on cheap labour, but it is reasonable to ask in return who and what these voices represent. The 'Third World' is not some homogeneous space and the class divisions in India and China are clear to see. Increasing inequality within countries rich and poor, is a global reality.

It is such a reality which gives us a nominally social-democratic and a nominally communist government, both spurning any effective protection of workers. Instead then, why not support those working for better wages, conditions and respect in China for example. Lawyers like Cho Li Tai and the Centre for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services at Beijing University; peasant activists like Li Changping; and most of all those imprisoned for demanding basic rights. For this to mean anything in the UK, a start would be mounting support for the Private Members Bill of Jim Sheridan MP and backed by the TGWU, for a thorough registration of 'gangmasters'. If it were to succeed it would at least remove one pillar of the government's boast of its cheap labour and lightly regulated employment agencies and go a step beyond cursory hand-wringing which was the extent of the response to the Morecombe tragedy. Six months later, in August, it was reported that rival 'gangs' of cockle-pickers had to be rescued from the same sands.

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