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WORKERS

Workers and the war

A statement from the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist–Leninist)

THE COMMENCEMENT of overt hostilities against Iraq brings centre stage the struggle against the United States imperial way. Not since the heroic struggle of the people of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s has the clash of interest between imperial aggression and sovereignty been so polarised.

It is now no longer a campaign to preserve peace but how to put these dogs of war — Bush and Blair — back in their kennels.

Our internationalist duty begins at home. Our internationalist duty means exacerbating the contradictions between the Blair government and the millions of workers appalled at such blatant aggression.

Resistance to the warmongers in every workplace, community, university and school, has to be the order of the day. The Trades

Union Congress, under rules dating back to the bloodbath of First World War, called a special meeting of the General Council to address opposition — but failed to move forward from their previous statement against war.

We must go further.

The British working class has for too long sat and contemplated the levers of power which make Britain function. The levers must be pulled and Britain's mercenary war terminated.

In imperialist war, workers have always looked to stopping such genocide by turning the war back on the warmongers. Bush and Blair have declared war on the world, and the people of the world must take that struggle to them.



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Worldwide opposition to war

WORLDWIDE OPPOSITION erupted after the outbreak of US and British hostilities against Iraq. In Jordan, a demonstration of lawyers was attacked by riot police. In the US, tens of thousands of US schoolchildren skipped school to demonstrate for "books not bombs". From Australia to New York, from Athens to Jakarta, people voiced their fury.

On the day war broke out immediate protests took place in towns and cities all over Britain, outside workplaces, schools and colleges. In London, 3000 students and children took to the streets between the Houses of Parliament and Downing Street, joined by London workers throughout the afternoon and evening. In Edinburgh, 300 young teenagers tried to occupy the castle.

Protest was everywhere. In Northampton, for example, eleven anti-war protesters, including two school students, were arrested for a sit-down protest on a main road during a demonstration on the day war started. 120 protesters of all ages marched to a rally, where they heard speeches, and then held a candlelit vigil for peace at the main police station. During the day children held a variety of protests. In nearby Daventry, year 11 students staged a peaceful protest on the playground and then returned to lessons. In Northampton about 150 pupils marched into town. Others attended the evening rally.

The first Saturday of the war saw big anti-war events and marches taking place throughout the country.

For many young people it was the first time they had taken part in any political activity. For this generation, so often criticised for being "apathetic" because they are not impressed by political parties, opposition to war has brought a huge upsurge in active involvement — real involvement, light years away from the voting in elections which the likes of Blair would like to define as political engagement. No wonder ministers and the police were shocked and worried enough to try to order them to stay in school - citizenship is part of the national curriculum in class, not action outside of it.

They were certainly not won over by the sham democracy of a parliamentary debate in which Blair faced his biggest ever rebellion from his own party, and yet comfortably won a majority for a war against a country which is no threat to us and with which we have no argument whatsoever.

The young have had an object lesson better than any teacher could have thought up — the reality of representative democracy, where our so-called representatives feel free to vote for an act of naked aggression which is overwhelmingly opposed by those they claim to represent.

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Code of practice

UNISON has brokered a Code of Practice on workforce matters in local government which will set the ground rules for starting to end the "two-tier workforce" practices in public services which are contracted out, out-sourced or privatised.

From the late 1970s services contracted out of the public sector have seen terms and conditions, wages and pensions, employment rights and trade union rights undermined or worsened.

The new Code of Practice will set ground rules to protect pensions, prevent the worsening of wages and also to stop staff being employed on the "two tier" basis.

This will slowly squeeze out cowboy contractors from the public sector, leaving an emphasis on good employment practice, quality service and "value for money".

It will not return public services to the public sector, but will at least give additional protection to those employed. Good trade union organisation in the workplace will also help to maintain this protection.

PROBATION SERVICE

More strikes

THE ONGOING DISPUTE over workloads in the Probation Service saw strike action at the end of January. NAPO members struck in Cumbria, Surrey, Teesside, North Wales, South Wales, Staffordshire, Thames Valley and Hertfordshire. The one-day strike was supplemented by a work to rule.

STEEL**Jobs slashed as debts mount**

THE 1999 SHOTGUN marriage between British Steel and the Dutch Hoogovens metals conglomerate to create Corus now moves towards bloody divorce. An estimated 3,000 British steelworkers' jobs are to be slashed as Corus's international debts take the company towards bankruptcy.

This is in addition to the 6,000 jobs lost in 2001, bringing the total to 13,000 lost jobs since 1999.

The job losses and potential collapse of Corus have nothing to do with anything British steelworkers have done. They are a direct result of Corus's management attempting a strategy of international growth, take-over and market domination that has gone spectacularly wrong.

Corus management has 'lost' the company over £2 billion in the last three years. Workers pay for this in lost jobs, loss of livelihood and closed communities. Scunthorpe (4,000), Redcar (3,000) and Port Talbot (3,000) all now face the potential of closure.

One major plant closure would meet the employer's reduction strategy. But there is nothing to stop the closures escalating. The British steel wing of Corus is highly integrated as a result of streamlining and previous closures during the last 30 years.

Previous closures have seen whole steel towns eliminated — Shotton, Corby, etc. In 1967, 268,000 workers were employed in steel manufacturing. By 2003 this had dropped to 50,000. Corus employs 25,000 workers and produces 11 out of the 13 million tonnes of steel the British market uses.

From such a dominant position in the British market — over 90% of British production, then the competency or sheer incompetency of Corus management must be questioned. The list of bizarre achievements is growing. A board chairman nicknamed 'The Butcher'; a now early-retiring chief executive nicknamed 'Dr Death' — early-retiring with a £550,000 bonus. Company assets gone from £4 billion in 1999 to £150 million in 2003. Losses last year in excess of £458 million.

The history of British steel production during the 20th century was epitomised by the indecision of government and trade unions as to a clear strategy for the industry. The inability to deliver armaments in the First World War made the argument for nationalisation and one company: British Steel. But the

Youth workers look out, and up

THE COMMUNITY AND YOUTH Workers Union (CYWU) will be holding their National Conference 3-6 from April at Rhegged, Penrith. The CYWU has been and still is at the forefront of the trade unions opposing the single currency. Among other items on the agenda are resolutions against the Euro and against the war on Iraq.

It is hoped that the CYWU will come out unanimously against the war. Many activists from CYWU attended the anti war march in London and are active in their local communities campaigning against the war.

At the conference the union will seek to consolidate the gains made at last year's conference to become more effective for its members in collective negotiations and to rebuild branch life. The union has agreed to reverse years of inward-looking equal opportunities work with outward-looking equal rights work, campaigning for improvement in members' conditions of service and against their exploitation at the workplace.

The CYWU has never had any tolerance of discrimination at work, but by creating a new campaigning committee to concentrate on real practical changes in the work-place the union is seeking to engage the majority of youth workers, community workers, learning mentors and personal advisers in meaningful work to organise every single workplace.

While having forward looking policies on a range of national and international issues, CYWU needs to ensure that it is tightly organised around the key bread and butter issues of trade unions. Two years of expert and successful casework support for members shows that the national office of the union can do the business. But what is needed now is a commitment to collective organisation on the ground, involving more and better support branch officers.

CYWU is one of the few unions in recent months not to have taken up the pay fight as the central organising issue around which unions are attractive to members. While new government initiatives and professional expectations have given CYWU much more work to do and their skills have been recognised by a range of agencies as being essential to their service delivery, the JNC rates of pay for youth and community workers have gone down sharply in value.

Most groups of workers would use this opportunity of increased demand for their labour and a recruitment and retention crisis to assert the importance of proper pay. Youth and community workers have if anything gone in the other direction. If this neglect of pay and conditions struggles continues there will be no point having a union for workers in this sector at all.

government was unwilling to grasp the implications of such a move — taking control of the steel industry effectively meant that manufacture using metal was being removed from the grip of capitalism. The result was nearly 60 years of dithering. Part-nationalisation by the Wilson government was a half-hearted measure. Thatcher, following on the failure of the 1980 national steel strike, closed great tranches of the industry, subsequently paving the way for the aberration of Corus.

OPERA**A striking chorus line...**

AT THE START of this year, 30 members of the 70 choristers making up the English National Opera (ENO) were being asked to resign to cut costs. The Board of Governors had stated that if all the choristers who are Equity members

temporarily resigned, monies would be saved for a period, after which they would all be reinstated.

Detecting a divisive tactic, ENO members refused even to consider the possibility of resignation and instead took strike action, forcing a premiere performance at London's Coliseum in mid February to be cancelled. During the evening of the cancellation, the choristers gave a marvellous free performance to a packed audience at a nearby church.

Further action was promised and the next choristers' strike was planned for the 3 April premiere of *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*. The Board of Governors began to acknowledge that they had failed to divide the choristers and on 20 March bowed to the union's demands that none of the company's chorus should be forced to resign.

"Our members are absolutely delighted about this agreement," said a spokesman for the choristers' union, Equity.



Demonstration against the war in London on 22 March. Organisers said around half a million people took to the streets of the capital, a huge protest echoed around the country in almost every town.

With support like this...

AHEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT'S White Paper on Energy the government announced a £60 million support package to the coal mining industry. This is not in fact a generous gesture, but more a sop or bribe, accessed from EU funds, which won't fool the mining communities for one second.

The government has tied the short-term survival of 4 deep mines — Maltby, South Yorkshire — 520 jobs, Harworth, Nottinghamshire — 590 jobs, Ellington, Northumberland — 430 jobs and Tower, Wales — 400 jobs, to the demise of the Selby complex. 2,000 jobs destroyed in Selby equals 2,000 saved elsewhere. For every one direct mining job lost, seven related jobs will go.

The government rejected the NUM's plan for saving Selby and has now come out with the usual trite and cosmetic assistance packages. There will be a Selby Coalfield Task Force. The great and the good will oversee regeneration. There will be money for training. There will be advisers and counselling. There will be job fairs. There will be a jobs telephone hot-line. There will be careers advice and of course redundancy money. All the actions which have been repeated after every pit closure or steel closure or textile mill shut down will be entered into and the cracks will be papered over and the whitewash lavishly applied.

UK Coal, the largest (but rapidly shrinking) deep mining coal company, estimates that only 8 deep-mine pits will survive in Britain. Without the government's assistance package they would have shut two out of the four named pits. All the above four pits may well still be shut anyway.

The government has made sympathetic noises about generating electricity from clean coal technology. Unfortunately the test bed for this was at Grimethorpe in Yorkshire, which was promptly closed when the coal industry was privatised.

On costs of production per tonne mined, the British coal industry cannot compete with subsidised foreign coal imports. Coal from South Africa, the USA and Eastern Europe will ensure that the home grown market-driven energy business will go bankrupt. The government will not worry as the international energy business players can fill any gap!

The British coal industry will soon be reduced to scavenger status — picking over the easily accessible coal from open cast or surface mining. There will be more pits to visit as museums — Beamish or Caphouse — than there will be working mines.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

APRIL

Tuesday 15 April, Lunchtime
Debate on the Euro: fringe meeting at the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Inverness.

See conference brochure for venue and exact time, or phone Alex Smith (ex MP) of Scottish Democracy Against the Euro, on 01294 275 341.

MAY

Thursday 1 May, 7.30pm
CPBML May Day Rally — "Peace, Jobs...and Power"

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Nearest tube, Holborn. All welcome. For more information, see display advertisement on back page, or

MANUFACTURING

Production falls again

INVESTMENT IN BRITAIN'S manufacturing industry fell by 18% in 2002, by 7.9% in the last three months alone, an accelerating rate of decline. As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, manufacturing investment is now just a tiny 1.3%, the lowest level since the Office for National Statistics' series on business investment started in 1965.

NORTH SEA OIL

Shell cuts back

SHELL UK, which employs nearly 1500 workers in its North Sea oil operations, has announced that it is to sack 350 of them — leading union representatives to angry protests and warning of safety being jeopardised.

Most workers in the sector are represented by Amicus, and its general secretary, Roger Lyons, raised the spectre of "a Piper Alpha disaster in the making".

The shipbuilding and engineering organiser for GMB Scotland, Jim Moohan, was "extremely concerned about the health and safety implications of this decision" and pointed out the high cost of training in the skills needed to rebuild the sector.

The major loss of confidence in the difficult conditions of the North Sea — in this case the Central Shelf oil fields — both in terms of exploration and investment, could herald preparations for oil companies to quit the area in search of richer pickings in Central Asia, or now perhaps in Iraq.

NO to euro gets regional boost

ADVERTISED AS groundbreaking, the gathering in Exeter in late February of regional opponents of the euro was businesslike and progressive. It sought to bring together representatives of all political persuasions to give them the chance to exchange views and prepare the ground for an effective coalition during a euro referendum campaign this year, in 2004 or beyond.

The introduction stressed that although already a 'people's movement', the NO campaign needed to maintain this status. It was definitely regarded as a 'cross party' coalition.

The Green Party, Liberal Democrat Party, Campaign Against a Federal Europe, New Europe, Business for Sterling, the Communist Party of Britain (M-L), and numerous trade unions and local councillors were present. One Labour MP gave his apologies, confirming the breadth of potential.

A screening of the NO campaign advertisement currently showing in cinemas throughout the country preceded the main contribution made by the Liberal Democrat MP for Torrington John Burnett.

Burnett emphasised that Britain is one nation within a Europe of independent states and that any referendum debate could involve many topics the vote would be won or lost on the economic issues.

He continued by exposing the unelected, unaccountable European Central Bank, gave examples of the ERM and 'Snake fiasco' of the 1970s as evidence that the Eurozone is not flexible in fiscal policy. He said that monetary union could only work if embedded in political union.

Contributions from the floor of the meeting were thoughtful. A member of the Fire Brigades Union said that constitutional and cultural issues were important and must be focused on during the campaign. The control of capitalism overshadowed any debate in his view, and went on to pre-suppose that membership of the euro could be more palatable than membership of the United States of America on the grounds that the EU in small instances exerts control over capital. He might have said control on behalf of capital!

The second speaker was Alan Laing (National NO Campaign/New Europe), who gave a briefing on the position of the trade unions, the Labour Party and the NO Campaign on the Referendum subject.

Forty Labour MPs could put their name to the NO Campaign, and despite attempts by the BBC to bias the debate during interviews, the pro-single currency machine is not working.

He methodically listed the trade unions and their positions. There is a website of 'manufacturing against the euro' to counteract the Amicus leadership's slavish subservience to Blair. The successor to Bill Morris at the T&G could help to place this union firmly in the NO camp.

The tabloid press, apart from the DAILY MIRROR, are allying with the NO camp, and despite questions from the floor of this meeting regarding the role of the press Laing assured the meeting that they would not hinder the NO Campaign.

Current polls put the no vote as high as 60%.

This successful first gathering could lead on to sustainable building of the 'people's movement' for Britain on Europe.

Resistance builds around the world bombs and missiles on a horrific

US deploys its weapons

Ever since 1998, Bush's oil cronies have been planning to attack Iraq, their aims oil and power, with no nonsense about threats or rights. But, more significantly, workers around the world have been resisting, and time and again we have succeeded in delaying and exposing, though not yet defeating, their war of aggression. Now that war is under way, resistance is continuing and finding new forms.

THERE IS NO THREAT of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq, but rather *to* Iraq — the USA's B52s, daisy cutter bombs, depleted uranium warheads, cruise missiles, bunker-busting bombs, cluster bombs, smart bombs, etc, which are no longer merely a threat, but raining down on the Iraqi people. These are weapons of mass destruction just as surely as the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons which the USA also possesses and may decide to use.

Where's the evidence?

Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction. As the UN weapons inspector, and director general of the International Atomic Energy Authority, Mohamed al-Baradei, told the UN on 25 January, "We have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme since its elimination in the 1990s." When he was Defense Secretary, in 1991, Dick Cheney (now Vice-President, on a \$600,000 a year retainer from Halliburton Oil) agreed, "Saddam Hussein is out of the nuclear business." Only in the past month have we been allowed to learn that General Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, who was in charge of Iraq's military industries until 1995, confirmed in 1995 that all Iraq's remaining

APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

A RESPECTED LABOUR and trade union campaigner from Grimsby found his emails to his local MP were blocked and returned to him by the House of Commons email server. He was advised this was because the content was offensive and that the server was programmed to block such terms.

What had been forwarded was the statement from the US Veterans against the Iraq War. Is this censorship to prevent MPs from hearing from their constituents? Or is it because the House of Commons "inappropriate" language filter recognised President Bush for what he is commonly referred to?

weapons of mass destruction were destroyed after the Gulf War.

The CIA, MI6 and Mossad have all stated that the threat from Iraq is low and not immediate, which is why Alistair Campbell's teenage spinners, not MI6, prepared the plagiarised 'intelligence dossier' which Colin Powell waved at the UN.

When Bush and Blair can't find the evidence, they fake it. On 4 February, Hans Blix refuted US satellite photo 'evidence' that Iraq had been moving mobile biological weapons laboratories ahead of inspections.

On 9 March, Mr al-Baradei stated that the British-provided documents 'proving' that Iraq was smuggling uranium out of Niger

ld as US and British troops invade, deploying
scale

ns of mass destruction



Photo © Andy Laithwaite (see www.stopwar.org.uk)

Instant response: demonstrating against the war in Parliament Square, London on 20 March, immediately after the first attacks.

were 'not authentic'. Now who on earth could have forged them? What credence can we put in any more 'evidence' they come up with as they begin to occupy Iraqi territory?

Meanwhile, Bush encourages Israel (currently in breach of 68 UN Resolutions) to destroy the Palestinian people, and the real terrorism of Al-Qa'ida is unchecked. Al-Qa'ida will rejoice at the attack on Iraq; it takes the heat off them, and secular Iraq is a rival pole of attraction in the Middle East. In 1991 the mujahadin, Al-Qa'ida's seedbed, sent fighters to join the US-led coalition against Iraq.

Bush and Blair's sheer blundering intransigence is wrecking both the

European Union and NATO – which is good news for workers everywhere. The idea of a common European foreign policy is laughable; President Prodi is invisible; Blair's ambition to be EU President is dead; his belief that he could win a euro referendum folly and delusion. But, more worryingly, the threatened attack on Iraq is wrecking the vitally necessary war against terrorism and generating recruits for terrorism.

Across the world, workers' and students' resistance to this utterly pointless and unprovoked war against the people of Iraq is massive beyond all precedent. The debate, the turmoil, and the resistance that should have stopped

the wars of the last century, are happening at last. In Britain and the USA school children have begun to raise a powerful voice against the war, despite attempts by the police to intimidate and by the media to discredit their efforts. They recognise that the world of the future, which belongs to them, is being damaged by this war.

In many countries, workers are raising their voices, impeding the transport of war materials, sabotaging military equipment, exposing and hounding the warmongers. Demonstrations are only a beginning.

See p8, War without law



Cruise missile being fired from US warship: \$1.3 million a missile...and on one night one thousand were sent against Iraq...

War without law

Now that war is under way, why consider the legality of it? Because if it is illegal, waging it and even winning it does not make it legal, but instead introduces anarchy in place of law in international relations. The UN permits the use of force only in the case of attack or imminent attack on a sovereign state, or if the Security Council declares a threat to peace and determines that non-military measures, such as inspections, have been inadequate.

WAS IRAQ ATTACKING, or about to attack, any other state? No. Has the Security Council declared that Iraq is a threat to peace? No.

The US and British governments are breaching Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which forbids aggression and says that peace is to be preserved if at all possible.

No UN resolution authorises this attack. Resolution 678 of 1990 authorised the use of force only for the specific purpose of restoring Kuwait's sovereignty. Resolutions 687 and 688 of 1991 did not authorise the use of force. Last year's Resolution 1441 warned only of "serious

consequences" if Iraq did not comply. The Security Council deliberately did not use the phrase 'all necessary means', which is the formula that the UN used to authorise earlier uses of force in Iraq, Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti.

By rejecting the standard formula for war, Security Council members were clearly refusing to authorise the use of force. As the GUARDIAN editorial of 17 March pointed out, Resolution 1441 superseded all previous Iraq-related resolutions, and it specifically did not authorise the use of military force. If it had, it simply would not have been passed.

If the UN Security Council, after US

threats and bribes, had passed a resolution favouring war, they would be ultra vires, because an attack would breach the UN Charter, which forbids aggression against sovereign states. Blair earlier tried unsuccessfully to change the Charter to allow preventive attacks on humanitarian grounds, but as he failed, such attacks are still illegal.

UN secretary general Kofi Annan pointed out on March 10 that military action against Iraq without a second resolution would be illegal: "If the US and others were to go outside the Security Council and take military action it would not be in conformity with the UN Charter."

The Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith, for the British government, stated, "All that resolution 1441 requires is reporting to and discussion by the Security Council of Iraq's failures, but not an express further decision to authorise force."

The Security Council has received the UN inspection team's reports; it has had the discussions. Chapter 7 authorises only the Security Council, not an individual state or states, to discuss and decide whether to authorise force, and the Security Council has not decided to authorise the use of force. Lord Goldsmith's own statement destroys his key contention, that 1441 contributes to the British government's having the "authority to use force against Iraq".

He claimed that a combination of the Resolutions justifies the use of force, but

HEALTHCARE, NOT WARFARE

On the 20th of March staff and students from Middlesex University and University College London joint campus at Archway in North London met at lunchtime to make a huge peace banner. Suddenly they heard car horns tooting loudly and realised that staff of the Whittington Hospital across the road had also walked out carrying home made banners and placards demanding that car drivers "Honk for Peace".

The two impromptu demonstrations then merged on Highgate Hill, and were manned by rolling shifts of University and hospital staff till early afternoon. Patients and hospital visitors joined the protest by adding their names and handprints to the giant anti-war banner.

this is to admit that in reality, none of them does.

Without the active support of all the veto-holding members of the Security

Council, the attack is illegal. Three of the five veto-holding members of the Security Council, France, Russia and China, oppose the proposed use of force and would have vetoed the US-British resolution, as is their right under UN charter article 27. Blair's assertion that in some circumstances a veto becomes unreasonable was plainly opportunistic and self-interested and has no basis in international law. Security Council members refused to back an attack, despite threats, bribes and insults. The British government earlier tried to claim that a 'moral majority' of members backed their resolution for war; when that ploy failed, they simply refused to accept that the majority rejected war.

Illegal, say majority

The overwhelming majority of international lawyers believe that the proposed war is illegal. The International Commission of Jurists accused Bush and Blair of planning an 'illegal invasion', and stated that without a clear UN mandate, any war would be a flagrant violation of the UN Charter's prohibition of the use of force. The International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms said there is "no precedent in international law for use of force as a preventive measure, when there has been no actual or imminent attack by the offending state."

Even those who favour a war have to admit that the proposed attack is illegal. THE MAIL ON SUNDAY of 16 March editorialised that the proposed war would be "an action that is, awkwardly, a clear breach of the UN Charter". The DAILY TELEGRAPH editorial of 18 March said, "The pro-war party cannot conclusively prove that previous UN resolutions justify their position."

Aggression

The British government's policy is one of illegal aggression. War is, as we all know, a continuation of politics by other means. When a policy of aggression is wrong in theory, it is also wrong in practice. Doing it does not make it right. It is wrong to start such a war, wrong to fight it, and



SOME LESSONS IN CITIZENSHIP

HUNDREDS of school students across the cities and towns of Britain, including Leeds, Liverpool, Cambridge, Sheffield, Birmingham and London, have been striking and demonstrating against the government's pro-war stance (above: school students from Coventry demonstrate on 19 March after walking out of classes). For the first time since the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, young people of Britain, supposedly "depoliticised" by the thuggery of Thatcherism and the dead hand of Blair, clearly showed that the tradition of rebellion is far from dead. Using the technology of the 21st century — email, mobile phones, texting — the protests have been organised and coordinated across Britain catching the police, school authorities and Downing Street by surprise.

wrong to win it. It is right only to oppose this war, to work to stop it as soon as possible, just as we stopped the Suez aggression in 1956.

This war is illegal, unjust, imprudent and unnecessary. Blair earlier claimed that his strategy was "the best, indeed the only, way of avoiding war". We knew and said all along that this was a lie, that in reality he was working to help Bush to start a war of aggression. He now stands revealed as Bush's jackal.

We are sitting on coal reserves that could last us for 800 years, danger of running out of energy...

Who turned the lights out?

IMAGINE A WORLD with no electricity, a defrosting freezer, a home with no warmth, a television with no picture, the streets dark and unwelcoming, the closed pub, gym or cinema, not even being able to brew a cup of tea. This could be Britain sooner than you think!

The storms of October 2002 which swept across much of Britain, the collapse of Britain's third largest electricity producer TXU in the same month and the insolvency of British Electric have all brought the electricity supply industry into sharp focus. While some will put the chaos down to acts of God, the finger of blame should really be directed at the privatisation mania of the last century and the current government's lack of a coherent energy policy for this country.

In 1999 the Electricity Supply Trade Union Council noted, "In reality, the distribution companies have already absorbed price cuts of 33% and shed 40% of their labour...Customer service will decline but worse, the security of the system, its robustness under pressure, will decline also." This warning is now coming true.

Inept

The October storm clearly demonstrated the inability of the distribution businesses to deal with a situation which will become a regular occurrence in this country if predictions about global warming are correct. After all, the storm could have been much worse. A combination of inept management, an incoherent regulatory framework and skilled labour shortages all contributed to the subsequent problems.

Since privatisation the skills base of the electricity supply industry has been drastically cut. Since 1989 the work force has been cut by 60%, the costs being borne by the pension funds of the workers. Much of the initial phase was due to the industry wanting to trim costs. Recently, regulatory factors have led to more damaging cuts.

For example, Ofgem — the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets — sets benchmarking levels for the distribution businesses. One of these is tied to a measurement based on operating

expenditure against customer base (which fails to take account of the needs of businesses or customers!) The result is further reductions in staffing levels. There were 280 job cuts in December alone at the Midlands based Aquila, resulting in a deterioration in levels of service.

'The energy needs of Britain in the 21st century cannot be left to multinationals, the market and a weak regulator...'

Another problem is the increasing age profile of skilled workers in the supply industry. Graduates no longer view the industry as one with career prospects, following the redundancies in skilled engineering in the 1990s. The lack of skilled staff has left the system very vulnerable.

After the October storm all the distribution businesses attempted to use the same contractors to supplement labour. The contractors were unable to supply the demand, so French workers were drafted in from the south of France, as the workers in northern France were

also having to deal with the storm. No one bothered to tell them to bring their equipment and tools and some who did assist were criticised for unsafe working practices and competency levels far below that of Britain. The reduced work force also means a reduced level of maintenance and a subsequent increase in failure rates in equipment like small light conductors, especially in storm conditions.

Privatisation means that distribution has now been separated from supply. Call centre staff can no longer be diverted from account queries to deal with emergencies. The recent BPI investigation into the storms highlighted this as an area of concern for Ofgem to address. This is ironic, as the situation was caused by Ofgem in the first place, so there is little confidence in their ability to put it right.

In the past, meter readers, with their vast local knowledge, used to collect storm damage information. This was used to guide workers from outside the locality to problems in the supply. They have now been prevented by the regulator from assisting distribution businesses in times of crisis.

If these were the only problems facing the industry, the situation would be severe enough but the generation side is suffering also. Powergen are currently closing Drakelow and High Marnham power stations, Killingholme and Grain are being mothballed and rumours abound throughout the industry about which

Some suggestions for an energy policy

- to increase support for research and development into carbon free and carbon sequestration technologies
- to reinstate the R&D into clean coal, abandoned at privatisation
- to strengthen the skills base of the industry
- to maintain security of supply by planning and developing new nuclear power stations
- to curtail the dash to gas, with its insecurity of supply and its high contribution to carbon emissions
- to develop a balanced approach to energy supply based on renewables, coal, nuclear and gas
- to adjust the focus of the regulator to take account of the needs of the

and yet we are in

station is to be next for the axe.

No new coal-fired plants have been built since the 1970s. Instead gas-fired plants have replaced them. This means Britain has to rely on imports which travel along a single pipeline from Russia and Iran, hardly the most secure energy supply sources, and doubly worse when one thinks of the amount of coal Britain still has in reserve (800 years worth) and the jobs that could have been preserved for generations but for the "dash for gas". In addition, the CO₂ emissions of gas plants will severely damage the ability of Britain to meet its obligations under the Kyoto agreement.

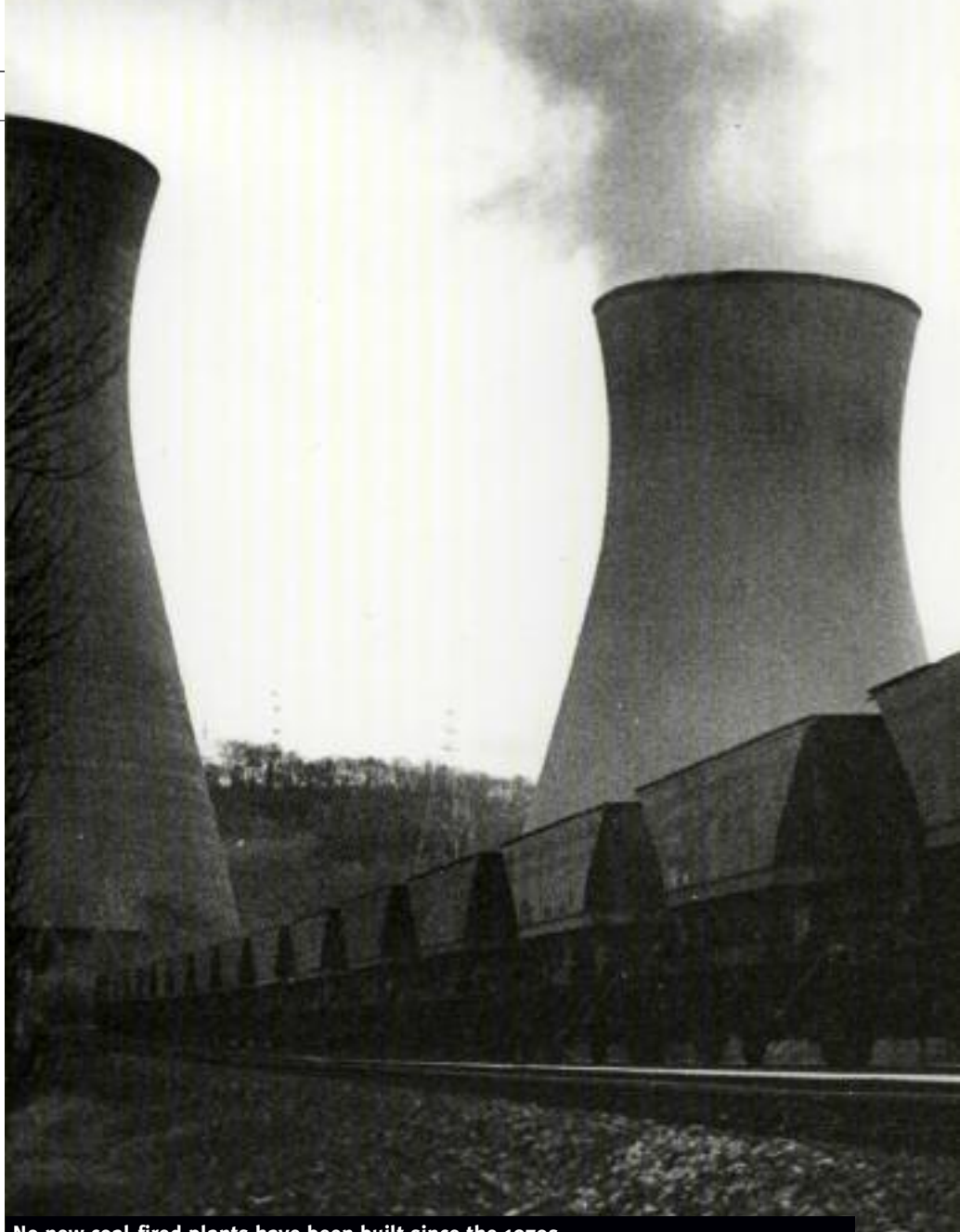
There is a myth perpetuated by the regulator and the government that there is 25% overcapacity in generation. This is a myth that really needs nailing. Overcapacity entirely depends on the day, the time and the month when the measurement is taken. It does not take many generation units to be out of action for this figure to be drastically reduced. When this is taken together with the closure and mothballing of power stations the nightmare scenario of power cuts across Britain comes ever closer.

Financial problems

The industry is also facing financial problems. BE's financial position is precarious to say the least and there is still no guarantee that the government will bail them out with sufficient money or even that the EU will permit them to do so.

The driving force for the woes of the generation side of electricity is the price. Since 1995 the regulatory price reviews have resulted in a 50% reduction in prices. All generator companies are struggling to make any sort of profit from the sale of electricity. It is simply too costly to produce and the profit that can be made is too small or non-existent.

While no one purchasing electricity wishes to pay over the odds there is a thin line between a good price for the customer and a good price for the industry, which needs sufficient profits for investment in skills, plant and equipment.



No new coal-fired plants have been built since the 1970s.

Unfortunately the fixation with price by government and regulator is failing both those working in the industry and consumers.

The naive belief is often advanced that if the price of electricity were raised this would safeguard the industry. If it were only this simple! The root of all the problems affecting the industry is the market itself. Electricity is not a commodity that can be easily traded; it cannot be stored and kept for a rainy day. It is not a commodity that is the preserve of the few, but a vital utility for the country as a whole. It should not be left to the City to dictate Britain's energy needs.

Traders employed by the generating companies are speculating on the price of electricity for months to come. One of the reasons that TXU failed was that the traders bet on the wrong horse. No one really believed that electricity prices could fall so low, so TXU were left with a number of contracts that they could no longer

afford to service.

Many in the industry have smug smiles at the demise of TXU but what they have failed to understand is that they could be next in the firing line if they get caught in the casino culture of energy trading.

The recent White Paper on Energy puts "liberalised and competitive markets at the cornerstone of energy policy". The energy needs of Britain in the 21st century cannot be left to multinationals, the market and a weak regulator.

An ideological shift by government is highly unlikely but nevertheless urgent remedial action needs to be put in place now to right the wrongs of the last 20 years. We need a balanced energy policy that is based on the current and future needs of Britain, and we also need secure and diverse sources.

Unless action is taken soon, then the question, "Who turned the lights out?" will be on the lips of the whole country.

Conference will decide whether to take the biggest step forward in pay structure for 55 years

Unison healthcare faces crucial decision

UNISON's Healthcare Service Group Conference in Harrogate on 7-9 April, has a crunch decision to make. Often debates at conferences such as this have no immediate impact — in fact, many would argue that the distance of many debates from reality is one of the worst things about trades union conferences in general.

But this year things will be different. A genuine challenge has been laid down to the conference by UNISON's negotiators, and real leadership must be shown by conference delegates. The issue is that most central trades union issue — pay. Delegates have an opportunity to recommend or reject the biggest change in health service pay structure in the 55-year history of the NHS. It is a responsibility they cannot shirk.

One of the many objectives of UNISON as the largest trade union in the health service, which covers all grades of staff except doctors, was to overhaul the creaking national pay bargaining system known as the Whitley Council.

Whitley had been applied to pay in the health service since it began in 1948 and served well as a national negotiating mechanism. National pay bargaining was hard won and is precious to health workers. Unions fought hard to defend it against Thatcherite destructive attempts to introduce local pay bargaining.

Coordination

But the existence of some 14 separate negotiating bodies (Functional Councils) was a hindrance to coordinated pay bargaining and a hindrance to unions being able to make the best use of the industrial relations muscle of members.

A simplified and streamlined negotiating structure also suited the NHS agenda of the government elected in 1997 and so discussions quickly began over how pay in the NHS could be improved, and genuinely modernised. These negotiations might have begun quickly but they have taken the best part of five years to produce a proposed agreement.

This is hardly surprising given the

scale of the task. The process has become known as the 'Agenda for Change' (see Box, opposite). The proposals and whether or not to recommend them to UNISON members in a ballot, will be placed before the UNISON Health Conference in Harrogate. They deserve serious consideration.

The main difficulty facing the UNISON Health Conference, and one it must face squarely, is the question of those members who do not gain directly from these proposals. The usual suspects on the fringes of the union have predictably attacked what they consider to be a sell-out of our members. Even before final details were known, the proposals were being rubbished as a stab in the back whereby ten per cent of our members would lose out financially.

Opposition

Many of the people opposed in principle to the agreement have been making much of the proportion of members — said by many to be 10% or even more — who will "lose out". UNISON, and indeed the other unions must tackle this issue.

To begin with, the record must be set straight. Members will not lose out as a result of these proposals — there will be sections of the membership who will not immediately gain and it is true that the job evaluation exercise results in some members' jobs effectively being downgraded in comparison to others.

But a Protection Agreement has been negotiated as part of this proposed agreement that will ensure that no one will lose out immediately. Existing pay will be protected and then replaced with what is known as "mark time" protection where pay increases will not kick in until the member's new grade catches up with their protected grade.

This is not an entirely satisfactory arrangement, but no pay deal ever gives a hundred per cent of what is sought — no pay claim is 100% effective. Our job will be to ensure that the pay and grading claims are submitted during the period during which pay and conditions are



'The existence of some 14 separate negotiating bodies hindered unions from making the best use of the industrial muscle'

protected to ensure that in the long term no one at all loses out as a result of the introduction of Agenda for Change. Those whose posts might be downgraded will gain from the other elements of the package; possibly shorter hours, increased London Allowance where applicable, more annual leave, and so on.

The worst that can be said of this agreement is that 10% of members do not immediately gain — a tacit acceptance that over 90% will. This is a breakthrough the likes of which has not been seen by this generation of negotiators. But it will take a brave trade union leadership to secure acceptance. It is, in the words of one organiser, like trying to get people



familiar only with doggerel to seamlessly transfer to an appreciation of Shakespeare.

Already the Royal Colleges of Nursing and of Midwives and AMICUS have agreed to recommend this agreement to their members. UNISON's Service Group Executive on 7 March took what Dave Prentis, the union's General Secretary, called a "mature decision", in deciding a two-stage ballot process.

The first will be to agree to let 'early implementers' go ahead to pilot the proposals to iron out any difficulties health workers identify, together with acceptance of the pay offer. The second stage will be a further ballot on the proposals as a whole in 2004.

Failure of the UNISON Health Group Conference to endorse this decision would mean that leadership in this crucial area of pay and conditions would move away from the largest trade union in the field. This would be a huge set back not just for UNISON, but for all health unions.

It is always crucial that the largest union takes its responsibility seriously and does not snipe from the sidelines. UNISON has played a major part in the negotiating

The Agenda for Change

- Reinstatement of national pay bargaining across the NHS. Many NHS trusts used the period of local pay bargaining imposed by the Tories to break away from national pay and conditions and set up local pay scales. The Agenda for Change proposals will give members the ability to rejoin national pay and conditions.
- To achieve a substantial breakthrough in pay in areas historically lagging behind other sections of the NHS. In particular, ambulance workers and those categories of health workers who regularly work unsociable hours (defined as between 7pm and 7am) will receive substantial pay increases through these proposals.
- The working week will be reduced for many thousands in the NHS who work more than 37.5 hours. Such a reduction for a very substantial proportion of Britain's workforce is a huge breakthrough in the traditional working class aspiration to continually reduce working hours. It is no surprise that it is in the manual and ambulance sections that most hours are worked as standard, and that these areas will gain most from this agreement.
- For the first time ever a proper job evaluation exercise has taken place that has examined every job within the NHS and given it a properly evaluated grade. This means that many groups of staff, for example, medical secretaries and ambulance technicians and paramedics will for the first time get proper recognition in terms of pay for the skills they bring to the NHS.
- Pay in London and other high cost areas is to be addressed directly by introducing a new maximum payment for Inner London of £5,000, the minimum of £3,000, considerably more than the existing payments. This will be a substantial increase and go some way to addressing the continuing concerns over London Weighting; indeed, this envisages a maximum payment £1000 more than the current London Weighting claims. Flexibility has been retained to negotiate separately on recruitment and retention premiums that will enable workers in other high cost areas to negotiate additional pay supplements.
- The whole package would be underpinned by a 10% pay rise over three years. This, as any health worker will tell you, is not enough. But it continues the trend of pay rises in excess of the Retail Price Index and consolidates the platform upon which future pay claims must be based.

of this deal and most of its members benefit directly and swiftly. The UNISON Health Conference has the opportunity not to be brow-beaten by the doom-shriekers who will have us believe that this is a betrayal of their birthright.

Failure to ensure the acceptance of these new proposals in a ballot of all members would face the health service with the risk of having local pay bargaining imposed. Instead of the

biggest single step forward in 50 years, we would have to salvage a defensive rear guard battle from the wreckage to get these proposals adopted separately in over 1,000 different NHS employers.

This is a real test of the maturity of UNISON as a trade union in the National Health Service. On the eve of UNISON's 10th birthday, the best way to mark it would be by this breakthrough for its health members.

Workers who have been saving for their pensions for years now money has evaporated, and face further years of work. What has

Whatever happened to the rich old pension

A LABOUR MINISTER in the 1940s described money as “a meaningless symbol”. He provided an easy target for the Tories and was the subject of a number of cartoons. Of course, money is not meaningless, but that comment poses a more profound question – “What exactly does money mean?”

Money is certainly a symbol, something

WORKERS AT DEFENCE contractor BAE Systems have taken on the company in a fight over pension entitlements. They threatened strike action over proposals to increase pension contributions. The Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU) believes assurances now made by BAE help to ensure the pension scheme's future. But it will not completely lift the threat of industrial action.

BAE has a shortfall in the funding of its pension schemes, and in February of this year announced proposals to correct that. Workers felt that were being asked to pay the price of “contribution holidays” by the company during the 1990s, when the stock market was buoyant.

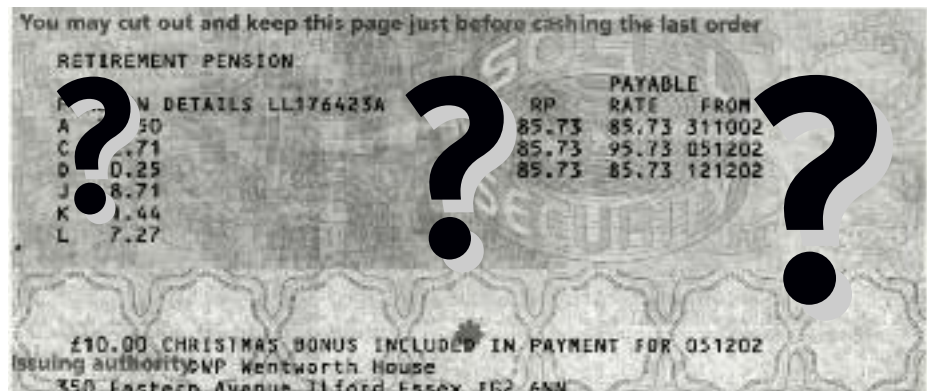
TGWU members were angry about being asked to increase contributions by as much as £20 a week just to keep the existing final salary scheme. In the face of threatened action, BAE has now told its 55,000 UK workers that the present pension scheme is staying. The company has significantly increased the proportion of the £2 billion deficit it is making up. And it has promised to reduce contribution rates if the scheme returns to surplus. The union believes the company could go further; it is continuing to negotiate and members are watching developments closely.

Tony Blair and other proponents of the Euro would like us to forget. When an inhabitant of Liechtenstein buys a loaf of bread with Swiss francs, it is symbolic. Despite its nominal political independence the Principality is economically and financially under Swiss control. Its nominal independence is a matter of convenience. The analogy with the Euro is clear.

What about the value of money? Was that what the minister was referring to? During the high inflation of the 1960s and 1970s many workers found that money put

pension schemes. During their working lives they have seen bank and building society accounts lose real value during years of high inflation, but year after year they were assured that company pension schemes were booming. Things were so good that employers, but not workers, could take a “contribution holiday”.

Now in the past year or so, those pension savings have evaporated in terms of providing a standard of living above subsistence levels. It is small wonder there is panic. Individual workers can do little but



aside for a rainy day had lost much of its value. In the 1940s and 1950s we had been told to save. Firstly, it was for the war effort, then to help rebuild a shattered Britain. The real reason was to take money out of circulation, to reduce demand and avoid inflation.

Forty or fifty years ago few people borrowed money for mortgages; hire purchase (borrowing to buy consumer goods) was difficult to get and expensive, and of course credit cards were unheard of. The government kept its grip on cash flow with very high taxation. Income tax at 47% was the standard rate in wartime Britain. Postwar governments told us we must “export or die”. They ensured that British workers did not have the money to purchase the goods we produced.

Many workers retiring today began saving for their old age through company

try to solve their own problems. Often they see themselves working till 70 or older so as to supplement their state pensions and what is left of their occupational pension.

The government and the so-called opposition waffle on about people saving more for their old age. They hint or even say quite clearly that in future “the country” will not be able to keep the elderly. Mass euthanasia could be an option. What nonsense!

Look back to the postwar era. The government wanted to reduce the cash in circulation to avoid inflation and promote exports. It used a number of methods; high taxation; restrictions on credit; national insurance; national savings and pension contributions being amongst them. The last three were supposed to give the “savers” some future benefit, but they were too far ahead for any government to worry about.

find that their
s happened?

ner?

Today the situation is quite different. Firstly, the British government, acting supposedly on behalf of our own capitalist class, is no longer in charge. Transnational finance capital, using the EU as its local agent, calls the shots. Their requirements are quite different. They need an economy that can be milked dry. Their tools are financial institutions and other transnational corporations, particularly in service areas. They want us to borrow, borrow, borrow. We are told almost daily that the economy depends not on what we make but on what we spend.

Despite their words of sympathy the government is not at all worried that people have lost their occupational pensions. Nor is it really serious about encouraging people to save for their old age; even they recognise it is a scam.

There is only one kind of pension scheme that makes any sense. It is one that so far no government has dared to interfere with. It is one that recognises the true nature of provision for the older generation who have worked throughout their lives and who should now be funded by the current generation of workers.

The ideal pension scheme is one that is funded out of current annual revenues raised from surplus value in the production process, and budgeted on an annual basis in accordance with people's needs in retirement. Advance funding is not necessary as this only leads to speculation on the Stock Exchange and this is not in workers' interests.

For such a revolutionary approach to be adopted, we would need to regain control of our economy. The European Bank would be appalled by the idea of what it would regard as a massive public sector deficit caused by pension disbursement.

In the short term, while longer-term aims are being discussed, pensioners and workers alike must unite to defend what we have. This includes the national insurance pension scheme (warts and all), existing public sector schemes and every other

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via 'faith' schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

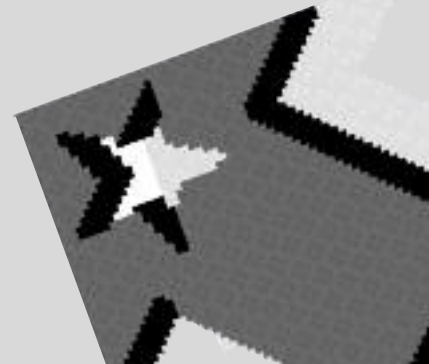
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Peace, jobs... ...and power

01.05.2003

May Day is International Labour Day — solidarity across all nations. Join with the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) to celebrate May Day and build that solidarity on 1 May 2003.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 — nearest tube Holborn. 7.30pm start. All welcome

There is but one superpower. No power on earth can stop it other than itself.

That superpower is the working people — workers and peasants of the world. US bombs may kill and maim but they cannot stop the ideas of progress pounding out across the globe. We must make war on and defeat the warmongers.

US and British imperial interests are bringing the world to the brink of unimaginable disaster — whether over war in the Middle East or the fostering of a staggering burden of poverty, debt and hunger worldwide. Or the denial to millions of the right to education, health, sanitation and housing.

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Working people want peace to build a civilised world where they can live in harmony. Working people want jobs so as to generate an ever improving quality of life for themselves and their children.

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May Day

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