

# WORKERS

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## WARMONGERS AND TERRORISTS



Budget day blues

03



NO to the EU!

06



Disunity among teachers

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# WORKERS

## “ First thoughts

WHEN THE bombs went off in Madrid last month, the Spanish government claimed that the modus operandi bore the imprint of ETA, a desperate and ultimately failed lie whose aim was to avoid to electoral backlash. Later, commentators found evidence of al-Qaeda involvement. There was much talk about kinds of explosive, and so on. But the real evidence linking 11 September with Madrid was there for all to see: they were both attacks on workers.

In the twin towers it was workers in the workplace; in Madrid, on the way to work. Those who commit these fascist acts make lofty claims about attacking imperialism, but they prefer to kill workers instead. In neither attack was there any warning, but then the object was to kill as many workers as possible, of whatever national

origin. That is the fascist way.

Bush and Blair claimed that their attack would make the world safer, but it hasn't. Iraq is not safer, nor is Spain. If Blair thinks that Britain is safer, why is he hiring another thousand spooks and increasing his attacks on our civil liberties? And why did Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens proclaim last month that a terror attack on London is "inevitable"?

A war against terrorism? If only! And we will wait in vain for one from Blair and Bush. Removing them from power must be part of our working class war on terror, but it is only a part. The terrorists and those who supply them live among us: it is for all of us to remain vigilant and to expose these fascists.

## Second opinion

WHEN THE Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith, gave Blair two sheets of A4, claiming that the invasion of Iraq was legal, Blair did not let the Cabinet discuss this summary or see the full advice. He won't let us see it either, falsely claiming that 'Governments never' publish the Attorney-General's advice.

In fact, previous governments have done so, when it served their purpose. We are supposedly

governed by law, but Blair forbids us to know what the law says! When the Ombudsman asked, as she is legally entitled, to see the document, the government refused.

Not only is Blair breaking British law, he broke international law by bugging the UN Secretary-General. Blair has besmirched our national honour. If he himself had any honour, he would resign at once.

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## Budget day blues

GORDON BROWN announced civil service job and funding cuts in his budget statement on 17 March. In return he wants to use the savings for front line services. Unions representing the workers affected were not impressed.

By 2007/08 Brown expects to save £20 billion, and to cut over 40,000 jobs. These are mainly in the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) and a new department created from the merger of Customs & Excise and Inland Revenue.

Further cuts will emerge later this year, once the government completes its spending review for the next three years. The targeted savings are in addition to 2.5% annual "efficiency" savings already in place. These have recently been used to justify part of the annual increase in civil service pay.

The government's idea of consultation was to tell the unions on the morning of the announcement. The tone from ministers was deliberately insulting, as if delivering government services was nothing to do with the workers involved. But those workers and their unions should not have been surprised.

Blair and Brown are as keen as the Tories to attack civil service "inefficiency" and "bureaucracy". The budget announcement was based on reports already widely publicised, even if the unions did not know the details. DWP had already announced some of their job cuts and the Treasury has been making aggressive noises about future pay and costs for months.

Brown also wants to move 20,000 jobs from London and southeast England. These are supposedly hard-to-fill and expensive "back-office" posts destined for low-cost and needy areas. Brown said nothing about plans to devolve central government to the regions and to blur the lines between central and local government. But that is what is happening at the behest of the European Union. The budget is one more step along that road.

Compulsory redundancy is not ruled out; this government would push through its plans if re-elected. The unions have a hard job up to the general election, with their own members and other workers. They have to acknowledge that all isn't well with the civil service, but efficiency reviews like this aren't the answer.

### INDIA

#### Striking against strike ban

OVER 50 MILLION workers in India supported a one-day general strike on 24 February, called by five trade union federations and congresses. The action came in response to the attempt by India's Supreme Court to outlaw the right to strike in protest against the government's economic policies, following a strike in Tamil Nadu where the state government sacked 176,000 workers, then forced them to sign no-strike pledges as a condition of returning to work.

Steel, rail, aviation, banking and insurance industries were all severely disrupted. Strikers ranged from coal miners to public sector workers and from banking and financial workers to plantation workers. In many states the stoppage was total, with government employees and teachers also striking. Calcutta was at a standstill, with no public transport at all.

### BRITAIN

#### Another record deficit

BRITAIN'S DEFICIT in the trade of goods for January was a new record, at £5.6 billion. Exports dropped by £1.44 billion, 9%, and imports rose. Manufacturing output rose, but only by a miserly 0.2%. Over the last three months, the total deficit has been £14 billion, another record.

Twenty years ago, a deficit of £5.6 billion would have been considered bad for a whole year. But then Thatcher always said that trade deficits didn't matter: the Blair government clearly takes the same view.

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](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)

**MG ROVER****Payoffs, promises and debts**

FOUR MEN, the Phoenix Consortium, who bought MG Rover for £10 from BMW in 2000, 'saving' over 6,500 jobs in the West Midlands, are revealed through the company accounts to have received over £31 million in salaries, share options and bonuses from the network of companies associated with Phoenix. It is also revealed that BMW has assisted the consortium with nearly £1 billion in interest-free loans and asset transfers. Certain loans are not due to be re-paid until 2049, 50 years after being set up.

However, MG Rover's market share has continued to fall from an original high of 25% to less than 4% of the UK market. World-wide sales have also dropped by nearly 50% from 240,000 in 1999 to just over 127,000 in 2003.

MG Rover's promises about a return to profitability have now been deferred until 2005. In 2002 losses of £95 million were recorded. If the losses continue during 2004, then the future of MG Rover will once more be back in the firing line.

The government could not or would not assist Rover in 2000 due to EU regulations. If MG Rover falters during 2004 then closure looms during 2005, but the Phoenix Four have already made their millions, which will nicely cushion any redundancy.

**SECURITY****Kidnapped by the state**

THE GOVERNMENT is holding 14 people in Belmarsh and other high-security prisons solely on 'evidence' obtained under duress from those held illegally in the US camps at Guantanamo Bay.

Confessions made under torture are not valid in British law, despite the government's claims. The 14 have been detained without charge or trial, six of them for more than two years. In effect, the government has kidnapped them.

The US government has now released five British citizens whom it had kidnapped and held hostage at Guantanamo Bay for two years. Four British citizens are still being illegally held captive, with no protest by the Blair government. US forces have subjected all their captives to torture and cruel and degrading treatment.

US actions at Guantanamo Bay have made it now nearly impossible to try any of the captives fairly, whether they are terrorists or not. In this — as in so much else — Bush and Blair have made us less, not more, secure.

# Nursery nurses walk out

5,000 UNISON nursery nurses in the 32 Scottish local authorities have been on all-out strike since 1 March, fighting to obtain proper pay recognition for their skills and role in children's education and development. WORKERS interviewed Margaret Ferris and Les McCulloch, two stewards who visited the Midlands to raise support for their strike.

**How did your fight develop to the current stage of all-out strike?**

**Margaret Ferris (MF):** Nursery nurses' pay has not been reviewed for 16 years, yet the nature of our duties has changed greatly in the last few years without any change in pay. The employers wanted us to wait until the Single Status Job Evaluation was carried out, but that had already been delayed and it was clear that it would take much longer to implement. We therefore put simultaneous claims by all UNISON branches to all 32 Scottish local authorities.

**How did the employers react?**

**Les McCulloch (LM):** The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) said it was a Scotland-wide issue and set up a technical working group to look at the claim.

**MF:** This group had no involvement from UNISON. When it reported you could see why.

**What was their conclusion?**

**MF:** For a very small increase in pay they expected us to work longer.

**LM:** At present our pay ranges from £10,000 for the least qualified to £13,800 for top qualified and experienced nursery nurses. They proposed that the top salary would go up to £14,400 at the top, but for that they wanted 2.5 hours extra a week and the yearly cover to change from 39 to 52 weeks.

**How did nursery nurses react?**

**MF:** UNISON rejected the report and balloted our members on industrial action.

**LM:** The action selected was one- and two-day strikes and a boycott of additional duties.

**MF:** It was well supported by members and the public, specially the parents.

**LM:** Even though it was very inconvenient for them and affected their children, they understood that properly paid nursery nurses are vital for the service.

**MF:** The employers did not move. They thought they would make us lose heart.

**What happened next?**

**MF:** More and more members came to the conclusion that we had to escalate the action.

**LM:** When the vote for indefinite strike action was taken, 81% voted in favour on a 70% ballot return.

**What is your claim?**

**MF:** Pay to increase from £10,000 to £13,800 at the bottom and from £13,800 to £18,000 at the top.

**LM:** The career structure is: basic grade, senior, Deputy Officer in charge, Head of Centre.

**How do nursery teachers fit into this?**

**MF:** None, as the Children's Act in Scotland repealed the requirement for nursery teachers in education nurseries. This was strongly opposed by the teachers' unions.

**LM:** At the same time [our] duties have increased. Now we are expected to teach phonics, take part in assessment meetings with other professionals and much more.

**How did you get your collective strength?**

**MF:** We set up Nursery Nurse Working Groups all over Scotland and built the organisation and contacts from there.

**Do you have any links with nursery nurses in the rest of Britain?**

**LM:** We used to have, particularly in the NALGO period, but they have diminished since the creation of UNISON.

**MF:** We would all benefit if an All Britain Nursery Nurses Organisation in UNISON were restored and active.

Contact Joe Di Paola, Scottish Organiser, for ways you can help, including donations, on 0870 7777 006 or e-mail on [j.dipaola@unison.co.uk](mailto:j.dipaola@unison.co.uk)

# Power prices rise, without end

ELECTRICITY PRICES are to rise by a minimum of £5 per man, woman and child year on year, without an end date. The price increase is to pay for the maintenance of the national grid. To stand still in maintenance terms will cost over £350 million for central London alone.

Similarly water prices are to rise by a minimum of 30% during the next five years. Again the argument is that it will cost £20 billion to meet investment, upgrades, EU directives and carry out essential work ignored since the privatisation of the service.

Both electricity and water industries were hit by windfall taxes in the late 1990s because of the obscene profits being made. Subsequently, regulation of prices reduced the two industries from being cash-creators to being cash-strapped. Mergers within the utility industries have resulted in multinational concentration and monopoly, with all effective national control being moved to the US or German companies. Having bled the industries of billions during the last 15 years, the multinationals are now intent on bleeding the consumers directly.



Photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

The picket at Poplar Jobcentre, East London, where PCS Civil Servants are striking over pay. Now the government is threatening massive job loss as well — see story, p3.

## MINING

### A delivery for the government

FOUR YORKSHIRE miners delivered sacks of coal to the Department of Trade and Industry in a symbolic protest over the government's indifference to the demise of the coal industry. The coal represented

Britain's reserves, which are being left sterile as the pits are closed. A sack covered in 'blood' represented the millions of tonnes of foreign coal still being imported, killing the industry.

The sacks of coal were left for the British Museum to display — a stark reminder of the death knell of Britain's coal industry.

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### APRIL

Monday 12 April

"Seeing the wood, not just the trees"

Organised by the editorial board of Education for Tomorrow. 6.00pm, following the end of NUT Conference session. Hewitt Suite, Grants Hotel, Swan Road, Harrogate. Bar available. How can teacher unions, parents and governors establish our own unified agenda for education?

#### MAY

Saturday 1 May

CPBML May Day Meeting and Celebration: For Peace and Independence, No to War and Capitalism!

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

British workers expect, need and demand basic class rights. The right to work and create in Britain. The right to health, education and housing. The right to sovereignty and control over our island, the right to non-interference by anyone in our internal affairs.

None of this can be achieved without peace and independence. None of this can be achieved if Capitalism continues to rule. May Day — International Workers' Day — must see the chains broken and a re-assertion of our class demands.

## NURSING HOME

### Stay of execution

THE UNISON campaign to keep the St. Andrews Nurses' Home in Newham, London, open (see February WORKERS) has resulted in a partial stay of execution. The home will remain open for a further three months, the nurses will not be evicted during their exams and staff will be relocated.

The closure is linked to PFI proposals for the local hospital. Figures unearthed by UNISON indicate that the real 'saving' arising from closure will not be the £500,000 claimed by the Trust but more likely to be less than £10,000. If the PFI contractors do not intend starting work on the site until around 2006, what is the obscene rush for closure? Evicting 24 student nurses seems small fry in this issue.

## The BBC and its independence

A NEW DIRECTOR General of the BBC is about to be appointed, and we expect to learn who it will be early in April. The way this vacancy arose shows the need to defend those qualities of the BBC which earn it the hatred and contempt of governments such as that of Blair.

Andrew Gilligan's report in the BBC Today Programme of 29 May 2003 made uncomfortable listening for Blair, alleging his misuse of security information in order to produce dossiers making a case for war against Iraq. The Blair government set out to track down the person who had made this allegation, eventually identified Dr David Kelly, and proceeded to treat him in such a way as to lead to his suicide.

Blair's hatred and contempt for the BBC was demonstrated most clearly in the series of events which followed the death of David Kelly. Remember how he set up the Hutton Enquiry in such a way as to avoid any questions about the legality of the war, exonerate himself and blame the BBC for allowing these allegations to be broadcast. He must have known how Hutton would see things. Yet the BBC and indeed almost everyone seemed to think the Hutton Enquiry would be impartial, despite its terms of reference.

### Hutton

When Hutton was published condemning the BBC, the BBC governors were tested and found wanting. The Chairman of the Board of Governors, Gavyn Davies, resigned. Director General Greg Dyke supposed that his offer of resignation would be dismissed by the Board and he would be able to carry on the fight of defending the broadcast of the Gilligan programme, which after all was a valid portrayal of the facts of the case. But the governors were cowards in the face of government hostility, and accepted Dyke's resignation. Considerable numbers of BBC staff walked out of Broadcasting House and demonstrated against the dismissal of a Director General they had come to respect.

Although the BBC is supposed to be an independent public service, the government appoints the Chairman of the Board of Governors, who in turn, with other members of the Board, selects the Director General. In other words Blair, who obviously does not want the BBC to continue as an independent organisation serving the British public who fund it, has the right to choose the person who has the main responsibility for how the BBC is run. Furthermore, in under two years' time the charter of the BBC will be up for renewal and there is no doubt that Blair will try to use the opportunity for under-the-counter privatisation of the BBC, as he has done with other public services.

On the bright side one can mention the support in its present form the BBC has received as one of the most respected news broadcasters in the world and the condemnation of Blair's attack via the Hutton Enquiry and any other plans he has for making the BBC as servile to New Labour as he is to Bush.

And the British people are more prepared to trust the journalist standards of the BBC than the tainted word of this government.

## With the euro-elections on the horizon, where now for Britain?

# NO to the EU!

THE EUROPEAN UNION and Blair want further liberalisation of goods, services, labour and capital markets. Their Holy Trinity is free movement of goods, capital and labour, but the greatest of these is capital.

It all sounds a bit vague and remote from our lives as workers. But we must scrutinise everything the EU and Blair get up to: both have already taken us to the cleaners on a number of occasions and are now planning even bigger theft.

Blair has welcomed the EU's proposed new code for services, which it defines widely, covering many industries too. This code was devised by the European Services Network, a lobby that represents 50 firms like Goldman Sachs, Barclays and HSBC Holdings. It aims to liberalise the services market, worth \$1.2 trillion a year.

The EU demands that all its trading 'partners' across the world end all restrictions on foreign ownership, all controls over foreign accounting firms and advertisers, and all rules over repatriating profits. They aim to end all national control of key industries and services like water, energy, sewerage, telecommunications, postal services and financial services. This is a direct attack on the sovereignty and national economies of all the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and threatens our ability to trade freely with them.

The Commission has ruled that governments must end their golden shares in former nationalised industries, such as the British Airports Authority, British Airways, utilities like the National Grid, and defence and engineering companies.

### National control

The all-too-small amount of national control given by golden shares breaks the EU's rules on the free movement of capital. Getting rid of golden shares drastically reduces nations' ability to defend these national industries against hostile foreign takeover. The Blair government welcomed the ruling. Blair also welcomed the EU's new code for company mergers, which imposed a single European market for financial services, making mergers and closures easier. It also reduces firms' ability to fend off hostile takeovers.

The EU's planned enlargement is scheduled to cost one trillion euros. To pay for this, the EU wants more of our money: it wants to end our £2 billion a year rebate. EU enlargement means that people from the ten new accession states will be able to work legally here from 1 May. The Blair government favours this uncontrolled immigration, this "free movement of labour", which will without doubt drive down our wages and conditions. Every other EU member, except Ireland, is putting some controls on this inflow.

The EU has many more schemes for us:

- It wants to end all national vetoes and opt-outs, especially Britain's opt-out from Economic and Monetary Union; we could be forced to join the euro.
- It wants the Stability and Growth Pact — which delivers neither stability nor growth — to be strengthened. The Pact is splitting the EU: the European Commission is taking France and Germany to court because of what it deems their excessive spending.
- It wants greater control over member nations' budgets, to control how we tax and what we spend it on.
- It wants to have its own budget, paid for by its own taxes, paid by us.
- The Commission wants state funding of EU-wide political parties; they



want us to pay for pro-EU parties that we do not support and that oppose our interests. The 'Party of the European Left' and 'Respect: the unity coalition' deserve no more support than the right-wing European People's Party: they all want to get on the EU gravy train.

- It wants to end all Made in Britain labels. All goods produced by EU member nations must in future be labelled Made in the EU.

To force through its agenda, the EU wants to impose a new Constitution. This, despite government claims, is not a Treaty, an agreement negotiated between independent states. The proposed EU Constitution purports to legalise the creation of the single new centralised European state, to end the separate independent existence of its member states.

Further, a fixed constitution is reactionary in essence. Under the USA's written constitution, the Supreme Court can only make its judgements by harking back to the Founding Fathers' presumed intentions, and to presumptions of what they would have thought if they had to face today's new circumstances. 1776's standards of thought determine judgements for 2004 and for ever. How reactionary is that?

So far the EU has not been able to agree a constitution, partly because it is so unnatural to force together independent, sovereign nations, and partly because of the huge scale of popular opposition.

But to get its way, the EU is still breaking up states' internal democratic structures to make them conform to the shape of the proposed new state. For Britain, this means imposing an unnecessary tier of regional government, devolution, a subordinate legal system and an emasculated local government. These changes are EU-driven, not democratically driven, though taking advantage of some people's misdirected aspirations for local democracy.

### Parliament?

What is parliament doing about all this? Can we rely on it to defend our sovereignty? No. Ever since we joined the EEC, parliament has failed to defend its own powers against European institutions. It will happily sell our interests and committing suicide as an independent legislature, creating powerless sinecures for its members. But remember — we only ever lent it its powers. On Britain's sovereignty, the last word belongs to the British nation. If parliament betrays, we the people must make sovereign decisions on

our own behalf to save Britain.

What are we doing about the EU's unprecedented attack on our democracy and sovereignty? We have increasingly opposed the EU in our trade unions and in the country at large: every poll has shown at least a 2-to-1 opposition to the EU and all its works. But it is too little — our position is being undermined by the daily exercise of EU powers and government preparations for regionalisation, entry into the euro, etc. If our response remains passive, the EU and its quislings will get their way.

For a start, we must ensure that the Euro-elections on 10 June see the lowest turnout in history. To vote for any of the candidates standing in the Euro-elections is to accept the legitimacy of those elections. This is why the government has been so desperate to impose all-postal votes in four regions despite opposition from the independent Electoral Commission.

- Don't vote — register our opposition to the EU!
- We must ensure that our trade unions uphold British sovereignty and oppose membership of the euro.
- The demand for referendums on the euro and the Constitution must continue, so that we can say YES to Britain, NO to the EU.

The Easter teacher union conferences provide an opportunity to be rectifying the strategic disaster of disunity. Or they could allow u

## When you're in a pit...

REMEMBER THE 'gladiator' scene in Monty Python's "Life of Brian" in which a nervous Brian approaches a small group of revolutionaries to ask hesitantly, "Are you the Judean Popular Front?"

"F\*\*\* off!" comes the indignant reply from their Leader, "We're the Popular Front of Judea!"

Now 'fast-forward' to the 21st Century in Britain, with the three main teachers' unions about to meet separately at their National Conferences and with their policies, activities and organisations apparently more seriously divided than ever.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) has for some months publicly attacked its fellow teacher TUC affiliates as "government unions" and latterly as perpetrators of "betrayal". The NASUWT has recently responded with a

communication to all its members asking "Has The NUT gone NUTs?" and has followed this up with an instruction to all their full-time and lay officers and officials to withdraw from all joint working with the NUT. References in their material suggest that the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) shares their view, and may be about to say so publicly.

### Origin

The origin of this disunity lies in a government trap set to undermine the vigorous joint union campaign on teacher workload. The government successfully divided the unions (as previously analysed in this magazine) and hijacked the workload campaign, in order to pursue their "workforce remodelling" agenda... the planned substitution of

teaching assistants for teachers.

The NUT spotted the hijack, and refused to sign up. What they didn't spot — or at least didn't oppose — was the government 'divide and rule' tactic... though it couldn't have been clearer if Schools Minister Milliband had been physically carrying a wedge and mallet. The NUT executive should have done everything possible to re-establish unity with the support of the TUC — but in fact began a high profile campaign of attack, not primarily on the government, not simply on misguided policies of the other unions, but on the other unions per se.

The NUT's view is that the workload reduction measures secured in "The Agreement" between the other unions and government were won at "a price too high" — that is, the undermining of teacher professionalism. This view has





begin the task of  
to dig the pit deeper...

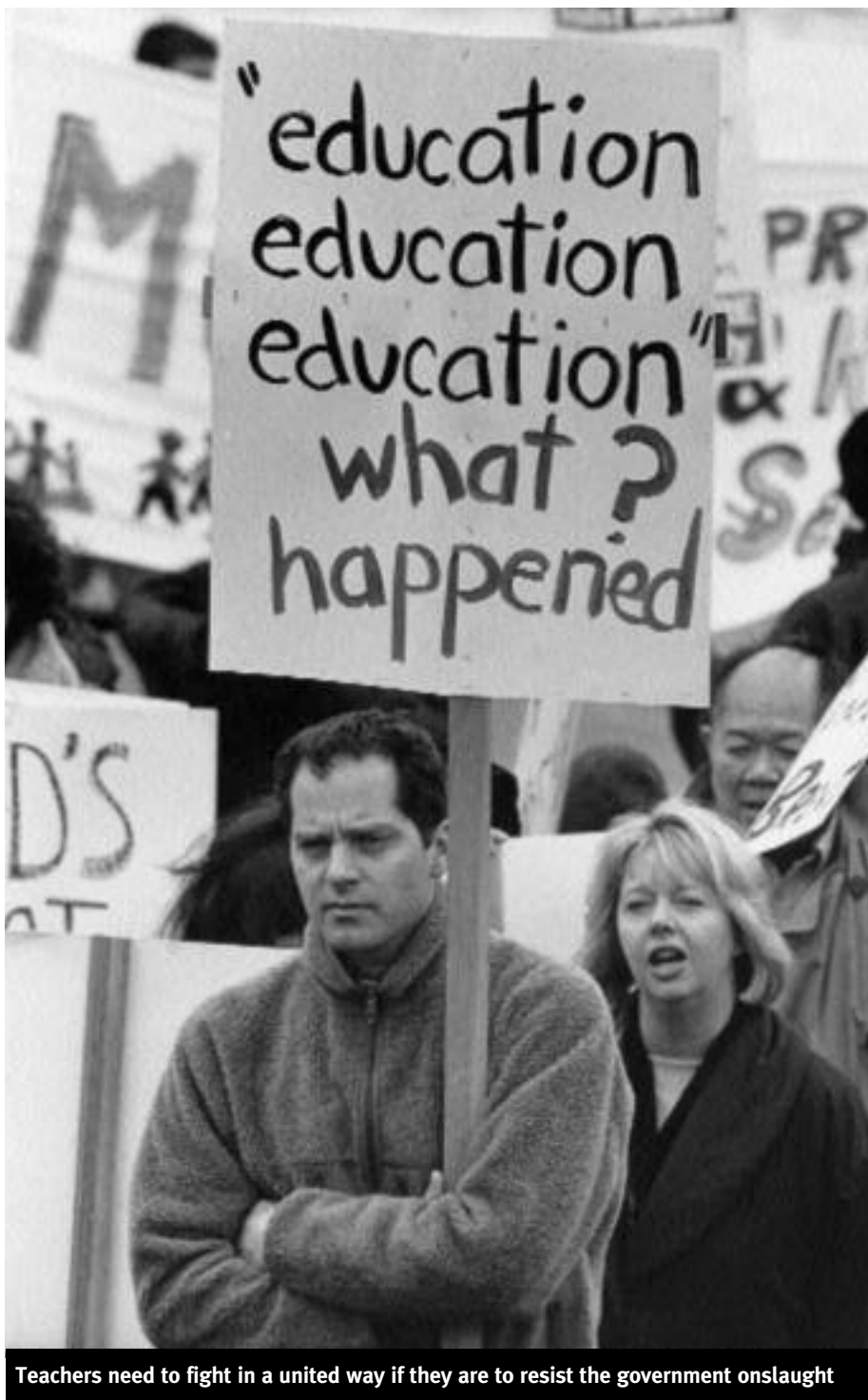
**'The origin of this disunity lies in a government trap set to undermine the vigorous joint union campaign on teacher workload...'**

been validated by subsequent developments, which include the DfES "confidential" Blue Skies document suggesting that schools now need only one qualified teacher — the head teacher. A more recent proposal is that a "downsized" DfES could ship unwanted civil servants into schools as teaching assistants so that "good teachers are able to teach very large classes." The view of the other unions remains that the workload reduction measures in "The Agreement" — now contractual for teachers — were the priority, and that any threat to teacher professionalism can be dealt with through local implementation negotiations, and on a school-by-school basis.

### Differences

These differences in perception and analysis are almost inevitable for as long as there is more than one union for teachers. They illustrate the point that organisational disunity leads to policy disunity or to bland compromise — both of which lead to weakness. However, the government has ruthlessly manipulated these differences — and those in the three teacher unions who oppose professional unity have been delighted to dance to their tune.

Recent developments on teachers' pay have made matters worse. The government, keen to hammer the wedge home all the way, invited all teacher unions to discuss proposals on incremental pay progression and performance related pay. However, they



**Teachers need to fight in a united way if they are to resist the government onslaught**

laid two preconditions for participation in the talks — acceptance in principle of performance related pay, and acceptance that there would be a limit on the number of teachers able to progress to the top of the scale. The NUT was bound to refuse to accept these divisive preconditions, and the government knew it. So the talks went ahead without the NUT.

### Outcome

The outcome of the talks allowed pay progression for just about all eligible

teachers between two points on the Upper Pay Spine — a real success for the participating unions. But it also provided for the abolition of the top points on the spine, and their replacement with a new "Excellent Teacher" scale — available to only 20% of eligible teachers! This was immediately condemned by the NUT as a "betrayal", holding up the other unions as the guilty parties. The NASUWT responded to this accusation of treachery

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with its “NUTs!” allegation — a blistering attack on the “posturing” policies and inadequate organisation of the NUT.

So where does all this leave us as a profession, and as a section of workers? It leaves us divided and weak in the face of a determined government. This weakness has been most immediately demonstrated in the failure of the NUT to secure a ballot for action against the professionally despised SATs — members not being prepared to take such action without the involvement of all unions.

### **Pay freeze**

Further, there has been no campaign to oppose a two-and-a-half year pay freeze at a time of continuing teacher shortages. The divisions between the unions rule out a united pay campaign, and nothing else would have any chance of success. Thus disunity leads to acquiescence.

In the face of this weakness, the unions can only turn on each other in membership war. This Easter’s teacher union conferences should be about the development of policy and action to pursue it. But all the participants, including those opposed to unity, will know that policies will remain on paper for as long as teachers are not unified in pursuing them.

### **Attack**

The strange thing is that if it were, say, firefighters or railway workers going into their conference season so divided and under such attack from government, we would all know that they would stand very little chance of overcoming the attacks, and even less chance of turning their own policies into realities. Disunity would clearly be identified as weakness. Yet some, in fact many, teachers — including those of the self-professed factional ‘left’ — regard teacher unions continuing to compete for membership in a positive light!

**‘Each will rally, cheer and give standing ovations. It will provide great copy for the media, but teachers as a profession and as a section of workers will be the weaker...’**

They will celebrate it at their various conferences. The NUT will be in Dunkirk spirit, backs to the wall, death before dishonour, in “no surrender” mode. The other unions will castigate the NUT for publicly breaking ranks, will declare them posturing ‘nuts’ and will seek to have them ostracised as pariahs in the union movement.

Each will rally, cheer and give standing ovations. It will provide great copy for the media, but teachers as a profession and as a section of workers will be the weaker.

### **Unconcerned?**

In fact it is the failure of many teacher ‘activists’ to recognise themselves as workers that leaves many of them relatively unconcerned about, or even welcoming of, disunity. They see teacher unionism not primarily as a collective expression of the views and priorities of a section of workers, but more as competing pseudo-political parties seeking to represent teachers, and between which teachers make choices.

Thus the imperative is not unity, but to have the best support for members, the best policy over the others — thus attracting the most members, and therefore the coveted prize of being ‘the largest teacher organisation’. But that’s all they will be able to do — divided in this manner we won’t be able to see any of our ‘best policies’ become realities — they will remain wish lists.

Without teacher unity, the

government and employers will continue to call the tune. It’s an interesting fact that this is taken as read in just about every school staff room up and down the country, where teachers know the value of a collective voice, and want to work as one. The confusion only really exists among the self-professed ‘activists’.

### **Unions and political parties**

Trade unions are not political parties competing for individual and group affiliation and support. They are defensive organisations of workers, and need to represent the collective view of workers in their particular area.

Beyond defence, trade unions need to see the wood for the trees, and through listening to members discern the nature of the problems, threats, opportunities and challenges facing them, and formulate strategies and tactics for dealing with them.

The aim of a union is to represent workers’ views, not to formulate a view and then try to sell it to workers alongside other competing unions in a parody of the capitalist market. The clue to success is in the name: “trade” (type of work) and “union” (collective organisation)!

### **Chance**

The Easter teacher union conferences are a chance for us to unite — but instead they could provide an opportunity to dig the pit started for us by the government just a little bit deeper, convincing ourselves that it’s a nice pit to live in — and a better one than everyone else’s!

Remember the final scene of “Life of Brian”. When the Judean Popular Front — the best equipped, most determined, most organised section of the splintered movement against the Romans — turned up to the scene of Brian’s crucifixion? The most they could offer by way of resistance was group suicide... dramatic but not very effective.

Acting together, teacher trade unionists can manage considerably more than that. Let’s see what the conferences result in...

## The Bush–Blair invasion of Iraq is not the first time British imperialism has tried to control that country...

# Britain's first occupation of Iraq

INVENTING IRAQ: THE FAILURE OF NATION BUILDING AND A HISTORY DENIED, by Toby Dodge, Hurst & Company, 2003, hardback, xix, 260 pages, ISBN 1-85065-728-9, £22

THIS SCHOLARLY and fascinating book studies a previous occupation of Iraq which the occupiers claimed would change Iraq into a democracy. British forces occupied Iraq at the end of World War One and stayed until 1932, in one of the dying Empire's last efforts at reforming another society.

To maintain their forcible occupation, successive British governments resorted to a network of self-serving misconceptions. They fooled themselves into believing, and wanted everybody else to believe, that they could impose an uncorrupt and democratic society by ruling through a combination of compliant tribal sheikhs and RAF bombing; that they could rule a unified Iraq by dividing its people into 'good' Kurds and 'bad' Sunnis and Shia; that the majority of Iraqis wanted British rule; that a democratic Iraq would freely choose a pro-British government rather than a pro-Iraqi government; that the discovery of oil did not affect their decision to reject any 'premature' loosening of control; that their desire to keep control was selfless, unconnected to the Empire's demands for Iraq's oil and for airbases; that the continuing violence was part of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, not a response to the occupation itself; and that withdrawal would lead to anarchy.

### Misconceptions

All these misconceptions Blair now resurrects, in a pitiable parody of a rerun of empire. His liberal chatter about reform is nothing but a cover for the US and British ruling classes' grab for oil and cheap labour.

The occupation of Iraq was always about oil, in 1918 as now. After the 1918 armistice with Turkey, British forces had gone on to seize Mosul and its surrounding area, which, as everybody knew, was the centre of huge potential oil supplies. Foreign Secretary George

Nathaniel Curzon lied to the 1923 Lausanne Conference, which discussed Mosul's fate, about "the exact amount of influence, and that is nil, which has been exercised in respect of oil on the attitude which I have ventured to take up on the question of Mosul." He knew all about the oil reserves and had not forgotten Churchill's urgent advice that the British state needed to control Iraq's oil to fuel the Royal Navy.

Last century, the forms of the British Empire's control of Iraq shifted from annexation, to a League of Nations mandate, to a treaty of alliance, then to an advisory role, and finally to withdrawal. But the British working class was not fooled, either by the lies or by the imposed shifts in constitutional arrangements. Dodge writes of "the long-running public hostility of British public opinion towards maintaining an interest in Iraq". As even Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India from 1917 to 1922, observed, "I should myself not be prepared to submit to foreign administration even if it assured me 'good government and prosperity'."

### Hostility

The British working class's hostility to imperialism helped Labour to win the 1929 general election, but, unsurprisingly, Labour in government failed to do what the nation wanted — get out of Iraq straight away.

The occupation dragged on: the occupier imposed a British-backed monarchy, a British-style Parliament, a British-officered army, a British-style civil service staffed at the top by British civil servants. And as soon as the British left, the whole house of cards came tumbling down. All the hundreds of British soldiers' lives, all the tens of millions of British taxpayers' money, wasted, and for what?

Now Blair wants to repeat this whole wasteful, destructive and futile cycle. He denies the power and validity of nationalism; he opposes a nation's legitimate, democratic desire for sovereignty and self-determination. He castigates nationalism — British workers'

nationalism just as much as Iraqi nationalism — as old-fashioned and reactionary, but what could be more reactionary than an illegal war of aggression followed by a doomed attempt at empire? Just as free labour markets result in modern forms of slavery, so Blair's liberal internationalism results in repeated military interventions. Will we let ourselves be dragged along behind Blair's fantasies? Have we not moved beyond the lessons of the 1920s?

The liberal effort to rebuild another country is not noble but difficult; it is immoral because innately undemocratic, and it is bound to fail. Only the people of a country can rebuild it. Outside interference delays the solution and worsens the problem.

What are Iraq's prospects? Dodge sums up, "Post-Cold War military interventions into failed or rogue states with the overt aim of reforming their political systems ... have been uniformly unsuccessful." In fact, all the US's interventions throughout the world, from the 19th century invasions of Mexico to the more recent wave of attacks on Haiti, Somalia and Kosovo, have given rise not to democracies but to dictatorships — Duvalier in Haiti, Somoza in Nicaragua, Batista in Cuba, Pinochet in Chile, Diem in South Vietnam, etc., etc. (The only exception is post-1945 Japan, an advanced industrialised country, where US intervention led to conservative one-party rule for three decades.)

The occupation of Iraq will certainly fail, and British troops will have to leave. If they are to stay until violence ends, they will be there until the end of time. They are there, hostage to both the US forces and the vagaries of war.

The Pentagon's approach has already failed, and General Garner has been retired. Rule by exiles has also failed; rule by US-style caucuses has been proposed by Bush, and rejected by the Iraqi people. The US state says that it wants democracy for Iraq, yet when Iraqis propose that Iraqis who win power in democratic elections should rule Iraq, the occupiers reject this.

March 2004 saw the overthrow of two national leaders: one by the working class; the other in a coup d'état instigated by the US and

## A tale of two leaders

JOSE MARIA AZNAR, the Prime Minister of Spain, was described as an ultra nationalist in the mould of General Franco. Like Israel's Ariel Sharon, Aznar had used George Bush's "you're either with us or with the terrorists" (i.e. in Spain, ETA) to stifle opposition and place himself at the heart of the Blair/Bush conspiracy against Iraq. But he had also placed himself as the US henchman in Spanish-speaking Latin America and in particular Cuba. Aznar made common cause with the Miami-based Cuban counter revolutionaries, ensuring Spanish government funding for various organisations such as the Union Liberal Cubana. This had been set up by a CIA trained terrorist Carlos Alberto Montaner and whose treasurer, Ariel Gutierrez, has just been jailed for five years for organising the largest bank fraud in the history of Puerto Rico. Aznar became the US's agent in the undermining of Cuba and also determined the EU's so-called 'common position' on Cuba. Because the EU does not permit individual nations to have independent policies on Cuba, such

controversial policies are determined by the EU member with the most negative position — in this case Spain. It was Spain that, after March 2003, drove the EU position on Cuba to its most hostile in history. Aznar also tried to make hostile interventions in Venezuela, Argentina and any other Latin American nation trying to assert its independence.

### Advocate of expansion

Aznar became the advocate of the EU's imperial expansion eastwards with particular emphasis on Poland and the need to make the EU a solid US puppet. He delivered the 'new Europe' to Blair and Bush in the run up to the war as a means of undermining the French and German opposition to the invasion of Iraq. He also hosted the 'Council of War' with Bush and Blair on the Spanish island in the Azores when the invasion was announced.

Aznar's removal must serve as a warning to Blair. Nothing is forever. The Spanish working class, whilst overwhelmingly opposed to Aznar's support for the invasion of Iraq, could

smell a rat when he tried immediately to blame the terrorist bombing in Madrid on ETA. There was no contradiction between the millions of Spanish workers demonstrating against the murder of 200 working class Madrilenos by fascist religious zealots, and then seizing the opportunity to rid themselves of their leader, who was the most subservient to the US since Franco.

Across the world, Jean Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically elected President of Haiti, had been struggling against small numbers of armed terrorists who had brutalised the central town of Gonaives, effectively cutting the country in two. They were known as the Cannibal Army, paraded the US flag, and were able to murder and terrorise local people and police, because Aristide had had to abolish the army after it had overthrown him previously in a coup. The remnants of this army, led by convicted death squad leaders and kitted out by the US, crossed the border from the Dominican Republic to take control of the north. They threatened a bloodbath in the capital, Port-au-Prince, if the President did not quit.

### Against all odds

Aristide had struggled against all the odds to improve the life of the Haitian poor who lived in the most atrocious conditions. He rejected many of the neo-liberal demands of the IMF and World Bank, and concentrated on improving health care and education. He tried to regenerate the Haitian sugar industry. But most importantly, he stood for the Haitians lifting themselves out of poverty without becoming dependent on the former colonial powers of France and the US. France had always resented the fact it had been thrown out of Haiti two hundred years ago and had imposed huge financial penalties on Haiti for the privilege of normalised relations. The US refused to recognise this rebellious ex-French colony so close to home until they occupied it for nineteen years. More recently, the US imposed economic sanctions on the already impoverished country.

Both former colonial or occupation



Photo: Workers

A country united against terror and war: outside the Town Hall, Barcelona, after the bombing that devastated commuter trains in Madrid.

his country's  
and France...

powers called for Aristide to resign, claiming his election was fraudulent, a claim rejected by international election monitors and only parroted by the former ruling elite who boycotted the election. CARICOM, representing all Caribbean nations, called for UN intervention to uphold the Haitian Constitution and President, a call ignored by the US and France. The US sent marines to Port-au-Prince allegedly to protect the US Embassy, but in reality their role was to kidnap Aristides and send him as far away as possible, to the Central African Republic. US and French troops then landed in Port-au-Prince, only retrospectively endorsed by the UN Security Council. The US then wheeled out a Haitian exile living in luxury in Miami and installed him as Prime Minister.

### Hospital closed

One of the first acts of the French troops was to close the main state hospital in the capital, which was being manned and operated mainly by the Cuban Medical Brigade. Unlike the other aid agencies and the US Peace Corps who made a dash for the airport to get out of the country as the capital was threatened, the Cuban Medical Brigade stayed at their posts and continued to treat both sides in the violence.

After the closure of the main hospital, they set up a makeshift hospital in a canteen and continued with their work, removing bullets and saving lives, keeping true to their strict neutrality in Haiti. Cuban Medical Brigades in the rest of the country continued normally with their work.

In the makeshift hospital in Port-au-Prince, the Cubans have been joined by the International Red Cross and the Pan American Health Organisation, and provide the only functioning hospital in the capital flying both the Cuban and Red Cross flags.

It's interesting to note how former colonial powers, Spain in Latin America and Cuba, and France and the US in the case of Haiti, can't bear to see progress and development in nations asserting their independence.

An unlikely hero, Steve Thoburn became Britain's most famous greengrocer...

## The metric martyr lives on

AT THE UNTIMELY age of 39, Steve Thoburn, Britain's most famous greengrocer, has died. Together with Neil Herron, a fishmonger also from Sunderland, he became known as a Metric Martyr after standing up for customers' rights to buy their fruit, vegetables and fish in pounds and ounces if they so wished after EU regulations only permitted produce to be sold in kilograms.

### Exposed

Steve was charged and prosecuted under the Metric Regulations for selling a pound of bananas. What was exposed in the court case and subsequent appeals highlighted the fact that laws made in Brussels now had supremacy over British law. His case was rejected by the European Court of Human Rights a few weeks ago, but Steve vowed to continue the fight, declaring we may not beat the government but we will win in the court of the people.

An unlikely hero, Steve became well known locally, nationally and internationally because of his conviction. He was joined by other traders from London, Cornwall and Surrey to fight the EU Regulations. The campaign was funded entirely by the public. The British Weights and Measures Association paid tribute to Steve saying Steve Thoburn is indeed a martyr and should be recognised as a national hero. It is damnable that he dies a criminal owing to these totalitarian regulations.

### Spirit

His spirit of resistance lives on in Neil Herron, the Sunderland fishmonger, who joined his campaign following the seizure of three sets of scales by police officers and Trading Standards Officers in July 2000. They went on to create Metric Martyrs, Steve was voted Man of the Year in an ITV poll and the two won European Campaigners of the Year Award in 2002.

How appropriate then that Neil Herron should now be fronting up the NO Campaign against the Northern Regional Assembly or Euro Region. Both issues relate to the whole question of the EU

dictating British law and constitutional affairs. The campaign has got off to a flying start, and has exposed a conspiracy between local government and UNISON officials to create a YES campaign, both acting outside their electors' mandate.

Local authorities in the north had already set up an unelected Northern Regional Assembly with the arrogance of assuming there would be no opposition to it. Its role would be to campaign for the real thing and carve up the plum jobs that may be available. But Herron proved that the local authorities were acting ultra vires in spending public money on the body. They therefore registered it as a private company to limit the liability of those spending this money.

Herron then questioned the fact that the new company and the Campaign for English Regions, set up nationally for the YES campaign, both had their registered address at UNISON's Regional Office in Newcastle. He also questioned why UNISON was giving money to the CFER which was then passed on to the new company of which the UNISON Regional Secretary was a Director and Company Secretary. She was also Vice Chair of the unelected Northern Regional Assembly but has since quietly resigned.

### Funding

The YES campaign had tried to register with Companies House, two names for their formal campaign organisation, which would claim government funding to campaign for a yes vote in the coming referendum in October 2004. However, when they tried, they discovered that Herron had already registered two identical names and they therefore could not use them.

Herron continues to run what he calls a Peoples' Campaign against the Euro Region, much to the annoyance of the Tory party who feel left out and desperately want to organise what they call a campaign based on local business. Perhaps if they had started by selling bananas in pounds and ounces like Steve Thoburn, they might have earned the respect that the NO campaign now has in the region.

# A century ago Joseph Rowntree and his son Seebohm set up the foundation. It and the poverty it analyses are still flourishing in

## The roots of poverty

THE JOSEPH ROWNTREE trusts are currently celebrating their centenary year. Joseph and his son Seebohm represented a turning point by recognising that the causes of poverty did not lie with the poor themselves, but in factors related to employment.

Rowntree was a Quaker chocolate manufacturer who believed that to deal with poverty, one must understand it. At 14 he had visited Ireland with his father and witnessed the horrors of the potato famine.

His cocoa factory, built in York in 1891, was run on enlightened employment policies and his workers had one of the first occupational pension schemes. Rowntree became rich and in 1904 set up three trusts, one of which was to administer his model village, New Earswick in York.

Rowntree was no socialist, but his “memorandum” makes interesting reading and gives an accurate insight into his opinions about the Victorian attitudes which still prevailed at the turn of the

century (and arguably exist today).

He wrote, “The soup kitchen in York never has difficulty in obtaining adequate financial aid, but an enquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would enlist little support.” And he criticised the power of “selfish and unscrupulous wealth which influences public opinion largely through the press”, and also suggested that the nationalisation of land and taxation of land values be examined.

### ‘Undeserving’ poor

Victorian ideas about poverty influenced the treatment of the poor, who were still often blamed for bringing poverty onto themselves. In the later part of the nineteenth century both the Local Government Board and the Charity Organisation Society shared the view that the “undeserving” poor should go to the dreaded workhouse, whilst the “deserving” poor could be given handouts to get them back on their feet.

But these ideas were challenged by the work of Charles Booth and Seebohm

Rowntree. Their surveys in London and York revealed that most poverty was caused by problems relating to employment — irregularity of work and low wages. Rowntree calculated the minimum income necessary for a family of 5 to exist at “mere physical efficiency” was 21s 8d. But this sum didn’t allow for entertainment, fares, sick club or trade union subscriptions, pocket money or new clothes. He accepted working people should have more than just the basics, craving relaxation and recreation just as he did.

Rowntree’s conclusions influenced the policies of the new Labour Party at the beginning of the 20th century. However, it was the Liberals who brought in a package of social reforms before the First World War. They were concerned about national efficiency and the poor health and education of the workforce compared to our competitors, the USA and Germany. But more importantly, leading politicians such as Lloyd George saw a need for a political response to poverty to save the



Dockers' children, London, in the early part of the 20th century

## ir pioneering Britain today...

Liberals from the potential threat of the Labour Party and the unions — too late, as it turned out.

The subsequent reforms, termed by some as the beginning of the welfare state, provided amongst other things pensions for the over-70s, minimum wages for miners and various “sweated” trades, and permissive legislation on school meals. The major plank of the reforms was the new National Insurance Act which provided limited medical and unemployment insurance, funded by contributions by the State, employer and employee.

This act was opposed by employers and employees alike. Workers objected to their wages being cut and Labour MP George Lansbury predicted tax riots, saying “...this bill....does not touch any root cause at all, either in sickness or unemployment”.

### Leading funder

Today the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is still a leading funder of social research and development work in Britain. Their latest report, commissioned from five leading think tanks and called “Overcoming Disadvantage”, suggests action on a range of fronts, including housing, education, raising the minimum wage and tax credits, with better focused funding and some redistributive taxation — but not much!

While poverty levels may fluctuate, the reality is that 22% of our population (125 million) still live below the poverty line. Some 3.8 million are children, 2.2 million are pensioners and 6.6 million are working-age adults — 3.5 million of whom are in work. At the turn of the century Booth found 31% in poverty in London and Rowntree found 28% in York. The truth is that the leading cause of poverty is still capitalism, and the welfare state is at best ameliorative, and only as strong and effective as the ability of the working class to defend it. To rid ourselves of poverty we still need to tackle the root of the problem.

THE JOSEPH ROWNTREE ANTHOLOGY, Sessions of York, 1997, ISBN 1850721955

# 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

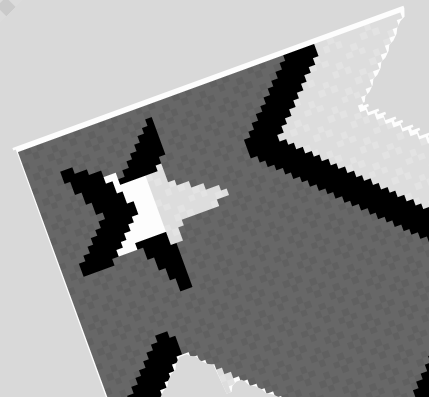
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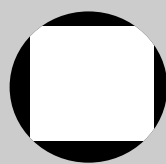
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# WORKERS



## FOR PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE!

### May Day Meeting and Celebration 2004

Join with the Communist Party of Britain  
(Marxist-Leninist) to celebrate May Day and  
re-assert our class demands on 1 May 2004.

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

All welcome

May Day

01.05.2004

Public meeting

## NO TO WAR AND CAPITALISM!

**FINANCIAL APPEAL:** June 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the death of Reg Birch, founding Chairman of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). In commemoration of Reg's life, the first political life of this engineer and communist is to be published.

Drawing upon speeches, articles, previous unpublished photographs and family reminiscences this will be a major

contribution to the history of working class struggle during the 20th century.

WORKERS is inviting its readers to assist in this major publishing event by making a donation to the Reg Birch book. Cheques/donations should be made payable to WORKERS, and sent to WORKERS, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. All donations are welcome.

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