

WORKERS

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WELCOME TO THE WATER MARKET



Lecturers on the picket line

04



Pensions and the future of public service

06



The rise and rise of state power

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WORKERS

“ Rewriting history

THE DEATH of Slobodan Milosevic has occasioned a massive rewriting of history. Suppression of the truth is the rule.

Forgotten is the destruction by the United States and the European Union of a country that asserted its independence. Unlike the other countries of Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia refused to join NATO and the European Community. So the United States ended aid and credits, and its creature the International Monetary Fund imposed privatisation and debt collection, cutting wages, gross national product and jobs.

Forgotten is the destabilisation, again by the United States and the European Community of Yugoslavia. The European Community declared it “illegal” for the Yugoslav government to use its army to hold the country together, as was its legal right and duty. The EC then rushed to illegally recognise Croatia and Slovenia as “independent” states.

Forgotten is NATO’s demand that Yugoslavia accept occupation by NATO forces. As a US official said, “We intentionally set the bar too high for the Serbs to comply. They need some bombing, and that’s what they are going to get.”

Forgotten is NATO’s illegal assault on Yugoslavia, which killed thousands of people, destroying factories, hospitals and schools. The aggressor states created a ‘court’ which at the height of this assault issued its indictment against Milosevic.

Ignored is the fact that the War Trials Tribunal breached its own rules: in 2004, it imposed defence counsel on Milosevic, despite the rule that defendants have the right to defend themselves.

Ignored is the fact that in the four years of the trial, not one witness testified that Milosevic ordered war crimes.

Forgotten is the German Foreign Ministry’s denial of any genocide by Yugoslav forces: “Explicit political persecution based on Albanian ethnicity cannot be established in Kosovo,” the German ministry acknowledged. “The operations of the security forces were not directed against the Kosovo Albanians as an ethnic group, but instead against military opponents and their real or presumed supporters.”

Ignored is the fact that less than three weeks before his death, the court rejected Milosevic’s request to be transferred to a heart clinic.

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Unemployment shoots up

THE LATEST unemployment figures show the sharpest rise in people out of work – however defined – since 1992. In February, an extra 14,400 people were added to the government's restrictive definition of unemployment, those receiving unemployment benefit. That took the total to 919,700. By the government's other measure, the Labour Force Survey, the figure shot up by 37,000 to 1.53 million, or 5% of the workforce. As ever, jobs in manufacturing continue to be destroyed at a rapid rate: 98,000 in the past year.

The government is quick to accept the Labour Force Survey. Yet the real number of those eligible for work but receiving benefits of some kind, even if not unemployment benefit, is 5.2 million – 14% of the workforce.

Blair is trying an old Tory trick but with less success. The Tories changed their method of calculation 32 times between 1979 and 1997, each time omitting certain groups from the statistics, such as young people under the age of 17, the over 55s and the long-term unemployed.

Workers know that the real figures are much higher. There are workers who have looked for months and given up hope, only to be removed from the register.

One of the largest statistical fiddles is the use of incapacity benefit to mask unemployment. Many of the 2.72 million people receiving the benefit want to work, but they find barriers from employers, who can find cheaper "healthy" workers elsewhere.

Another big statistical lie can be found in Blair's pronouncement that there are now more people in employment. He does not know how many workers there are. He also wants to ignore those who have to take on extra part-time work just to make ends meet.

This government is hoping to cover up the fact that it has no idea how many economic migrants there are in Britain. But it does know that this import of cheap labour is driving down wages and undermining the ability of trade unions to defend workers' jobs and conditions.

The government's argument that we need migrant labour when in reality 1 in 7 workers are unemployed cannot be justified. And unemployment is costing the country £136 billion a year.

Blair's vision of a 21st century is to similar a worker's nightmare from the 19th century – everywhere casualisation of labour, low wages, migration of labour, threats from unbridled capital and relentless attacks on the trade union movement.

We expect government sources to put a spin on data. But we need to be clearer. All statistics are lies from anyone in power in a capitalist government.

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

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Trained, but no jobs

ALMOST HALF the physiotherapy graduates of 2004 had not attained jobs by the end of 2005, according to a survey reported in the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THERAPY AND REHABILITATION* and carried out by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists. It showed that 25% had jobs by June, and still only 53% had employment by the start of 2006. By June 90% had applied for jobs as junior physiotherapists, and most of the rest intended to apply over the summer months.

Are too many physiotherapists being trained? Not at all. It is official policy to increase the number of physios from 15,600 in 2000 to 24,800 by 2009, and to reduce waiting lists for physiotherapy services to 18 weeks. But with NHS trusts being made to cut back on spending the crisis is set to get worse – and the 2005 graduates are applying for jobs now.

EDUCATION

No thanks to God

NORTHCLIFFE School in Conisbrough, South Yorkshire has good cause for celebration, having come out of "special measures". Targeted to become one of the new academies in 2004 and destined to fall under the aegis of religious fundamentalists, the school and its community fought to remain a council-maintained school providing a modern, British secular curriculum.

Using slogans such as "Teach us, don't preach us", the school's supporters fought off Blair's mates. Now they've shown they can improve without the need for intervention from on high.

EUROTRASH**The latest from Brussels****'Confidence' trick**

FRENCH PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac wants "to help restore the confidence of the French people in the EU" after they, and the Netherlands, rejected the EU constitution last year by creating an EU President and foreign minister, a European border guard and an EU energy policy. All were in the rejected Constitution!

What's a little legal weakness?

THE EU energy green paper, published in March, includes plans for the Commission to negotiate energy policy for member states in future. The Commission insists that national choices have "an impact on the energy security of their neighbours".

Commission president Jose Barroso admits there is no legal basis for a European energy strategy, designed to liberalise the energy market, but insists that political will and sense of urgency are more important than legal weakness.

'Democratic' to ignore votes

A SURVEY of European politicians, business leaders, NGOs, journalists and senior officials showed broad support for implementing the EU Constitution's core institutional elements – despite rejection by voters in France and Holland – without further public approval; 70% said to do so would not be "undemocratic".

Speaking at the London School of Economics in February Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French President and chief drafter of the EU Constitution, said people voted No out of an "error of judgement" and "ignorance" and that using referendums to ratify the Constitution was a "mistake" that needed to be "corrected".

Direct taxation from Brussels?

TAX COMMISSIONER Laszlo Kovacs wants a special tax to fund the EU budget. He argued that funding the EU budget through taxation "would offer a better solution to the financing of the EU...because the focus would no longer be on the contribution of member states but on what kind of EU policies should be financed." Kovacs acknowledged that tax harmonisation would be controversial, complaining that "tax sovereignty is treated in some member states as a kind of sacred cow."



Photo: Workers

7 March: lecturers from both Leeds universities through the Parkinson steps at the University of Leeds in a joint rally as part of their fight for pay.

Lecturers on the picket line

THE ONE-DAY strike by university lecturers on 7 March was of particular significance in Leeds as members of the AUT and Natfhe picketed their respective universities in the city and then came together for a joint rally. It was the first day of a concerted campaign by both unions to secure a decent pay rate for jobs that are becoming increasingly demanding and stressful.

Both the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University were effectively shut down, with very little activity in either institution. Students either stayed away or did not cross picket lines when they realised their classes would not be taking place. Workers in administration and catering, whose unions were not involved in the dispute, came out to the pickets with messages of support, hot drinks and scones on a bitterly cold, wet day.

At lunchtime the Natfhe members at Leeds Metropolitan University gathered outside their city campus and marched up the hill to join their AUT colleagues at Leeds University for a rally. Speakers from both unions praised their colleagues for braving the poor weather and the wrath of their employers. They also thanked the students who came along to support them. Contributors recognised that, although their classes had been disrupted on the strike day and the forthcoming sanctions on assessments would begin to bite, in the long term, the quality of higher education would be further eroded if pay rates slipped further behind the private sector and other parts of the public sector from which university lecturers need to be recruited. The pay of those training lawyers, doctors and now even nurses and school teachers continues to fall behind the people they educate.

Two significant things have come out of the campaign so far in Leeds. The first is a surge in applications to join both unions, which is mirrored nationally. During the rally the management at Leeds Met was "thanked" for sending an intimidatory letter to staff, which seemed to spark a further wave of recruitment to Natfhe. The other significant event was the symbolic nature of the march and rally, which saw the two unions come together and work in harmony, ahead of their planned merger on 1 June this year. Both of these are lasting victories already won in this campaign.

• See also "Academics fight for pay", page 6.

EDUCATION**Blair has his bill, but...**

BLAIR'S SUCCESS in getting his Education Bill through its second reading with the help of Tory votes has at least achieved two positive outcomes.

Firstly, 52 principled Labour MPs voted against, which can only accelerate Blair's decline. And the vote has concentrated the minds of the teaching unions.

The NUT analysed how the White Paper would emasculate the power of local authorities to create good local schools, relying instead on businesses and religious sects. But the unions' main strategy was to call on members to write to their MPs to vote against the Bill – a low-level activity that failed. The campaign will need to galvanise members who have yet to understand the nature of this deliberate attack on the school system, on wages and conditions, and on the unions themselves.

NHS**Another plum for privatisation**

AFTER SNEAKING through the privatisation of oxygen supplies to patients at Christmas 2005 (which only became newsworthy when patients started dying in February), the government has now announced its privatisation proposals for NHS Logistics, which supplies the NHS, stocking over 42,000 products and fulfilling over 30 million orders a year.

Its services are tailor-made for hospital

and NHS delivery. In 2005 it generated over £3 million for the NHS. It is run on a non-profit basis and is a model of excellence in supply, use of IT for on-line ordering and delivery, management and staff partnership. It employs 1,400 workers in five strategic depots covering England.

Now the service is to be market-tested, privatised and handed over to DHL, a private delivery and transport company. Why? Because it is successful and is seen as a morsel which nobody will notice being swallowed up in the bigger picture of the wrecking of the NHS.

Motor firms march East

THE TRANSFER of vehicle production from the US, Western Europe and the UK to Eastern Europe and Asia seems set to accelerate. As much as the "free movement of labour" from Eastern Europe into Western Europe and specifically the UK is about driving down wages here, the transfer of production to the East is about exploiting cheap labour, production and raw materials there.

Peugeot's Coventry plant, with 2,200 jobs, is under threat, as the old 206 model is in direct competition with a brand new plant in Slovakia building the new 207 model. The Vauxhall Ellesmere Port Plant, with 2,900 jobs, is now under threat from cheap labour and new production in East Germany. Wages are estimated to be 80% lower in new plants in Russia, Poland and Turkey. There are no trade unions, no pensions, no health and safety and no limits to productivity, working hours or rapacious work practices.

General Motors is axing 12,000 jobs in Europe and 30,000 in the US, and now looking to Korea, Thailand, Mexico and China. Toyota wants to relocate to the Czech Republic, Russia and Turkey. Volkswagen is axing 20,000 German jobs and relocating to Slovakia. Mercedes is losing 12,000 jobs but remaining put for the time being. Hyundai and Kai are relocating to Czech and Slovakia plants. Ford are shedding 30,000 US jobs and are shifting production to Russia. Just as US militarists use the term military "footprint" to justify intervention across the world, the vehicle manufacturers now refer to their economic footprint to justify their march across the world in the pursuit of profit.

YOUTH SERVICE**Fighting the Liverpool cuts**

LIVERPOOL YOUTH workers in the Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU), supported by Unison, the NUT and T&G, livened up the city centre on 11 March with a march led off by a 30 piece Samba band. The march was joined by CYWU members from all over the country and by parents and young people.

They were drawing attention to the disastrous effects that would result from the council's proposals to remove national terms and conditions. Some members would lose up to £9,000 a year and even more off pensions, and the service would end the link to professional qualifications enshrined in the national agreement. Already, workers have been harassed to accept new posts.

Speakers at the rally described Liverpool as one of the worst council employers in the country. The chief executive, worried at the prospect of

worsening pension provision, has already jumped ship, enjoying a massive golden handshake while Liverpool remains one of the low wage areas of Europe.

The CYWU's General Secretary said the union was not just going to win this struggle but restore national terms and conditions to other Merseyside authorities where the same managers now wreaking havoc in Liverpool had done damage before.

The council's actions have been one of the best recruiters to CYWU for many years. Despite a small workforce, 50 members regularly attend branch meetings, and all members are playing their part in organising different elements of the struggle which includes collective grievances, lobbying and a ballot for strike action.

The branch has grown, is much more conscious of workers' issues and is thriving and united. It has seen members refuse to cross other unions' picket lines and has been among the first to support other CYWU branches in struggle.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MAY**

Monday 1 May, London

May Day March – Assemble Clerkenwell Green 12pm, move off to Trafalgar Square 1pm for rally at 2.30pm.

This year's march has been designated by the TUC as a national march against anti-trade union laws.

Monday 1 May, London

CPBML May Day Rally and Celebration, 7.30pm.

Celebrate May Day with the CPBML. Speeches, refreshments. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube, Holborn. See notice, p16.

Saturday 13 May, Edinburgh

CPBML May Day Celebration, 2pm.

The Counting House, West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh. With music and song from Carlos Arredondo and Eddie McGuire.

SCIENCE**Marching for progress⁴**

THE "PRO TEST" demonstration that took place in Oxford last month gave supporters of scientific advance a chance to voice their opinions publicly and defend research into the causes and cures of cancer, heart disease, and other killer diseases. Hundreds of people were involved in the march which was the first of its kind. Banners and placards proclaimed "Animal testing saves lives."

There was a small counter-demonstration of anti-vivisectionists at odds to point out that animals do suffer during experiments. But animal activists have made it their task to inflict suffering on laboratory workers.

Meanwhile, school science is under attack. In April 2005 Patricia Hewitt, backed by Blair, pledged to improve all secondary school science laboratories. The figure promised before the election was £75,000 per school. Now, under pressure from the Association of School and College Leaders, the government has admitted that the promise of this new money has not and is unlikely to materialise. A representative of the Institute of Physics commented, "Modern, well-equipped school science laboratories are essential if pupils are to be inspired by practical work and see science as a modern relevant subject."

Academics fight for pay

ON 7 MARCH members of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT) went on strike as an opening salvo of a national campaign to improve the pay of lecturing staff in higher education. At universities across England and Wales most classes were cancelled as the action took effect and picket lines were put up.

Salaries for research staff start at £13,274 and for lecturers at £24,352. Higher education salaries have now fallen significantly behind other areas of the public sector, let alone areas of the private sector where the knowledge base of, for example, a law lecturer or an occupational health and safety lecturer might also be needed. For over 20 years vice chancellors have pleaded poverty and have relied on the fact that staff have accepted minimal pay rises without complaint. Indeed in 2004 Blair noted "the shortfall of teaching funding has badly hit the salaries of academic staff, which have shown practically no increase in real terms over two decades".

The claim

The current claim is designed to "catch up" on what has happened in the past 20 years. The joint unions have submitted a claim for a three-year period. The first stage of the claim is a rise by August 2006 equal to the average public sector rise + 4% – followed by similar average public sector rises + 3% in 2007 and 2008.

Another part of the background to the claim is the huge rise in productivity that has accompanied the slump in wages over the past three decades. Thirty years ago there were nine students to every university teacher; now there are 21, as against an average of one teacher for every 17 pupils in our schools. At one time "going to university" was synonymous with the tutorial. Now the typical environment is more likely to be the large lecture, as even those staff who contribute to the 1:21 ratio may be involved in a range of non-teaching activities to bring in other income to the university.

Another critical factor is the top-up fees, which begin this September. The vice chancellors (VCs) lobbied hard for top-up fees. Crucially they exploited low academic salaries as a way of convincing doubtful MPs. Alan Johnson, then Minister for Education, assured MPs: "University vice-chancellors tell us that in general, at least a third of that money will be put back into the salaries and conditions of the staff.

That will make an enormous contribution to tackling a very serious deep seated problem".

Now that top-up fees are upon us the VCs have publicly tried to deny they ever made a pledge to plough back fees into salaries and conditions of staff. But a student journalist on the University of London Union newspaper has a transcript of a meeting attended by Alan Johnson where he confirmed that he was given that assurance by none other than Universities UK, the VCs' body which calls itself the "essential voice of all UK universities".

The VCs would also prefer less talk about their own pay. In recent years their pay has risen extraordinarily and unlike any previous trend in university history. They have had an average pay rise of 25% with many receiving "top ups" just before retirement to boost their pension. Thirty-three VCs are now paid more than the prime minister's official salary, and 18 are paid over £200,000.

The next stage

The one-day strike on 7 March was only the beginning. All union members are now involved in action "short of strike", or ASOS, which began on 8 March, involving:

- Working strictly to contract
- A boycott of all Quality Assurance Agency Audit
- A boycott of student assessments including marking, attendance at exam boards and invigilation.

Students will sit examinations and hand in assessments and will get informal feedback on their work so that they are able to learn and progress. However, as there will be no grade input, the formal process including graduation will be affected unless the dispute is resolved.

The vote in the ballot for the so-called ASOS was even greater than for the strike itself. However, managers in some universities such as Leeds Metropolitan University (see page 4) have reacted in a typically intimidatory fashion, sending out letters to all academic staff saying they will dock pay by 30% for every day that ASOS is carried out. The unions are set to immediately challenge this in the courts. Unless the universities can show exactly how much of each lecturer's time is spent on the ASOS activities it would be illegal for them to deduct a nominal amount. Also, this action is largely reversible and management would have to pay back any deductions before marks are released, should a decent pay offer be accepted in the future.

The employers want to unions. They want a b from happening...

Pensions and t

THE STRUGGLE is on to protect the local government pension scheme. On average 82% of members voting in the ballot for industrial action have supported action, with 28 March set to be a strike day. The significance has been recognised by the membership of the national trade unions with members in the scheme which have campaigned successfully for the vote. This must be the first step to defending pension schemes.

Some specialist unions like the Association of Educational Psychologists held their first ever national strike ballot on this issue and recorded a 77% yes vote. Everyone has their role to play in this dispute, with smaller unions taking their place and often leadership alongside the large unions. The struggle is far more important than any individual union or negotiator.

But no union should underestimate the work that will need to be done to engage members in the action. A national coordinating strike committee of all unions has been formed, called the Joint Union Strike Team (JUST), and this is to be replicated at a local level. Joint publicity material is being produced, and joint activities planned. The unions are determined to maintain the unity shown so far and are putting the struggle before any vested interests. Some new relationships will and should be sustained for the future round of the struggle. The unity should be developed not just for this struggle but also for other fights on the Private Finance Initiative, against cuts and to protect services. The employers act as one, so should the movement.

Negotiators

The parallel approaches of firm negotiations, campaigning and sound preparations for action have been under constant discussion among the negotiating team. Even if the dispute incredibly reaches a settlement by the time you read this, the unity achieved between the unions concerned has been a significant development. European Union-led assaults on the level of pensions, as frequently analysed in WORKERS, lie behind a significant new attack on the gains of the past and the prospects for the future.

to use a fight over pensions to break the power of public service...
big set-piece battle. We will have to box clever to prevent this...

The future of publ



Marching against pensions, last year...before the election. The fight now has to be protracted, and guerrilla.

The general attack on pensions whether in industry or public services represents the depth of capitalism's decline and the great difficulty it poses for tactics in opposition. Government, representing capitalism, does not care about the future of workers. It is abandoning us, along with Britain.

Tactics deployed so far by the negotiators in this dispute have of necessity been varied. Above all, they have had to take account of the fact that a two-tier system such as that accepted by the Public Services Forum, imposing worse pensions on new recruits, is unacceptable to the members. This time, any settlement will have to be put to the membership first before acceptance.

The threats of legal action and

attainment of expensive legal opinion have been used to complement threats of industrial action not as alternatives. They recognise that industrial action is only part of the tactics that unions will need to use in order to stave off these attacks and more in the future.

The unions have argued it out together to unite, while successfully dividing the employers. Minister has been divided against minister, the Local Government Association divided from its members as employers' organisations in Scotland and Wales have supported the union side along with the larger local authorities like Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, Merseyside and others. The government is using the EU directives supposedly against age discrimination to

attack pensions, claiming that the EU directives on age discrimination demand an end to the 85 year rule (that workers with 25 years' service can retire at 60 on a full pension). But the very concept of a pension is obviously based on age.

Employers

The buck stops with the government, which through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister can make the final decision. So this is a big argument with government. It stands isolated in trying to reduce the value of pensions generally. Its obsequious response to EU directives to slash pensions has been willingly

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made. The Department for Work and Pensions' document on pensions testifies to this (see below for web reference). The plan is to push the retirement age up and up. More like the Department for No Work and No Pensions.

The employers are looking for a fight, with the aim of breaking the power of public service unions. The attack already carried out through picking off and privatising individual services such as parking and catering, leaving us weaker, is to be pushed to its logical conclusion over this issue. They want a big set-piece battle. We will have to box clever to prevent this from happening.

Actuarial reports commissioned by the union side have blown a crater in the government's technical and financial arguments. There should be no truck with arguments that our pension scheme is in deficit because we are living longer, or that we need to be careful because workers in the private sector are much worse off than those in the public services. The unions have taken on the employers on some of their own ground to defeat their positions. Literally tens of thousands of different employers have become embroiled in this outside local government and the unions are using this.

Workers

Workers who voted to act have recognised that there must be a fight. The struggle is about not allowing a halt to the momentum that has been created

'Now workers in their workplaces need to meet to determine tactics locally. The question is, how do we hurt the employer with minimum damage to ourselves?'

around the pensions question. Capitalism is saying in future, work longer, and harder, pay more into your pension and earn less at the end. In many areas it is abandoning pension schemes completely, not just going on holiday but emigrating. Trade unions collectively are making a first small step towards saying that enough is enough. The challenge is not just to stave off these attacks but to keep the pressure on to make up the ground lost.

Now workers need to meet in their workplaces to determine tactics locally. The question is, how do we hurt the employer with minimum damage to ourselves? The day of action is a good start, but what next? Where are we strong, where are they weak? This might differ from workplace to workplace. For instance, councils are gearing up to collect next year's council tax. Council finance departments handle millions of pounds of money. Council mail workers are needed to ensure council tax demands go out on time. Maintenance workers are needed to

keep buildings open.

The fight will need to be guerrilla, protracted. We need to be in it for the long haul, to divide the employers, gain ground inch by inch, and win new allies and troops for the next rounds.

A national strike committee has been formed and preparations have been made for a national levy. The intention is that no one single union is going to sustain its members while others cannot and thus create divisions.

Without securing and improving current arrangements there is no hope for the future. Unions have revealed that there is ample money (our deferred wages) in the government kitty to improve the scheme for the future. Employers and government prefer employers' pension holidays and a general level of reduction in the scheme, with a view to eventual abandonment of the notion of any retirement age with a pension.

They are not satisfied with the pensions holidays they previously enjoyed, they now want the workers to pay for the shortfall. Our class should not pay for the greed of the employers in the past. Capitalism is giving up on British workers. The only possible future will be the one we fight for now.

- **The government document "United Kingdom National Strategy Report on Adequate and Sustainable Pensions" can be found at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/resourcecentre/policy_strategy/80278-NSR_Pensions.pdf.**

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In the name of fighting terrorism, successive governments have been ramping up their war against the working class...

The rise and rise of state power



The miners' strike 1984: the first postwar widespread use of police power to enforce bans on freedom of movement and association.

EVER SINCE the Labour government's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1976, successive governments have increased their power over us in the name of fighting terrorism. These emergency measures have facilitated torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trials and loss of liberties.

The 2000 Terrorism Act's broad definition of terrorism has become the standard for all anti-terrorism laws in Britain. It defines terrorism as the use or threat of action where the action is designed to influence the government or advance a political, religious or ideological cause. Under this law, peaceful protesters have been stopped, searched and items have been seized from them.

After the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, Blair passed a series of new laws, even though Britain already had some of the toughest "anti-terrorism" laws in Europe. The implementation of these laws has led to serious abuses of civil liberties. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, British authorities can order indefinite deprivation of liberty without charge or trial on the basis of secret intelligence – and this power applies to British and foreign nationals alike.

After the July bombings in London Blair said, "Let no one be in any doubt. The rules of the game are changing." He then outlined yet more measures that threaten civil liberties, the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. These include the new Terrorism Bill currently before Parliament. Some of its most sweeping and vague provisions, if enacted, would undermine the rights to attack the government, to association, to liberty and to a fair trial.

Iraq

The Blair government has allowed abuses to be committed by British officials and armed forces personnel abroad, including in Iraq. In November 2004, government representatives claimed that certain provisions of the UN Convention against Torture could not be applied to British operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee concluded in March 2005 that "some British personnel have committed grave violations of human rights of persons held in detention facilities in Iraq".

The Blair government is also breaching international and British law by interning without charge or trial some 14,000 people (as of November 2005) in Iraq.

Even after months of internment, government forces hold internees without providing them or their legal counsel with adequate information to enable them to refute the evidence being used to continue their internment.

Jack Straw said on 11 November 2004, "There are certainly circumstances where we may get intelligence from a liaison partner where we know, not least through our own Human Rights monitoring, that their practices are well below the line. But you never get intelligence which says, 'here is intelligence and by the way we conducted this under torture' ... It does not follow that if it is extracted under torture, it is automatically untrue." Straw's statement is evidence that government connives in torture; it is also an attempt to justify the practice of torture.

In December 2005, the Blair government lost its legal battle to reverse the total ban on the admissibility in judicial proceedings of information obtained through torture. Seven Law Lords unanimously confirmed that such evidence is inadmissible. Lord Bingham of Cornhill, the Senior Law Lord, stated, "The principles of the common law, standing

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alone, in my opinion compel the exclusion of third party torture evidence as unreliable, unfair, offensive to ordinary standards of humanity and decency and incompatible with the principles which should animate a tribunal seeking to administer justice.”

In January 2002, White House counsel Alberto Gonzalez (now Attorney General) urged a “new paradigm” of interrogation, claiming that the war on terror “renders obsolete” the “strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners” required by the Geneva Conventions. (Blair echoed this when he said, “The rules of the game are changing.”). Home Secretary Charles Clarke has said that the government would not be constrained by international conventions or by the way the judiciary interpreted them.

In August 2002, the US Justice Department issued a secret memo authorising the CIA to inflict pain and suffering on detainees up to the level of “organ failure”. It claimed that under “necessity” the President could override all laws, national and international, prohibiting torture.

As a result, so far eight detainees suspected of terrorist activities have been

tortured to death in American custody.

Rendition

Under international law, states are obliged to prohibit ‘rendition’, the transfer of an individual to another state where that person faces a real risk of serious rights violations, including enforced ‘disappearances’, torture or other ill-treatment, prolonged arbitrary detention and denial of their right to a fair trial. Rendition is itself illegal, because it entails kidnap, arbitrary arrest, detention and unlawful transfer without due process of law. States are obliged to prevent, criminalise, investigate and punish all of those acts, including conspiring in them, or aiding and abetting them.

Rendition is a key element in the US state’s global system of concentration camps, which is designed to detain people free from any legal restriction or judicial oversight. All of the victims of rendition who have been interviewed have also been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Prolonged incommunicado detention in secret locations itself amounts to torture.

MI6 officers have taken advantage of the legal limbo and coercive detention conditions in Guantanamo Bay, at Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, in prisons in Iraq, and at other undisclosed locations where people are held in US custody, to conduct or witness over 2,000 interviews. Such interrogations have taken place without respect for the rights of the detainees. MI6 officers have taken part in, witnessed and condoned the interrogation under duress of British suspects and others in US custody and the custody of other countries.

The Blair government is undermining the absolute international prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment by sending foreign nationals suspected of terrorist activities to places where there is a real risk that they would be subjected to serious human rights violations. It is negotiating bilateral agreements (“diplomatic assurances” known as Memorandums of Understanding) with governments in countries where the practice of torture and other ill-treatment is routine.

‘This government’s pretences of democracy and accountability are crumbling, as its policy of abandoning Britain becomes ever more apparent....’

However, the UN General Assembly has made clear that such “diplomatic assurances do not release states from their obligations under international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law”. Manfred Nowak, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, stated, “Diplomatic assurances, which attempt to erode the absolute prohibition on torture in the context of counter-terrorism measures ... are not legally binding and undermine existing obligations of States to prohibit torture, are ineffective and unreliable in ensuring the protection of returned persons, and therefore shall not be resorted to by States.”

In February 2006, the government was trying to persuade the European Court of Human Rights to reconsider its ruling that



the prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment includes an absolute ban on sending a person to a country where there is a real risk that they would be subject to such treatment.

On 23 February 2006 Blair said, "People devote the most extraordinary amount of time in trying to say that the Americans, on rendition, are basically deporting people, or returning people to countries for torture – and people spend very little time in actually looking at what the threat is that we face and America faces, from terrorism and how we have to deal with it."

Inquiries Act 2005

Notwithstanding strong criticism, parliament voted to adopt the Inquiries Bill on 7 April 2005, the last possible day before it was dissolved pending the general election. The Inquiries Act 2005 enables the executive to control inquiries, blocking public scrutiny of state actions.

The government decides the inquiry's terms of reference. It appoints and can dismiss members of the inquiry. It can exclude the public from the inquiry, and impose restrictions on attendance by witnesses, on production of evidence, and on public disclosure of this evidence. It decides whether to publish the inquiry's final report, and whether to omit any evidence from the report "in the public interest".

Lord Saville of Newdigate, the chair of the Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, expressed the view that the act "makes a very serious inroad into the independence of any inquiry; and is likely to damage or destroy public confidence in the inquiry and its findings".

In April 2003, the then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir John Stevens, delivered his long-awaited report into collusion in Northern Ireland, only a short summary of which was published. It confirmed widespread collusion between state agents and loyalist paramilitaries, including state agents being involved in murder, such as the killing of the lawyer Patrick Finucane. It also confirmed the existence of the British Army's secret intelligence unit known as the Force Research Unit, which had actively colluded

Yes, Minister?

THE BLAIR GOVERNMENT is proposing a Bill that would allow ministers to change any act of parliament, and allow EU measures to be introduced automatically, without parliamentary process.

The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill 2005-06 is designed to extend the scope of the powers available to ministers to amend, repeal or replace any law and to reduce parliament's scrutiny of this process. The government has said that it would not use this procedure to take 'highly political measures, such as amendments to terrorism law or the Parliament Act', although there is no such commitment in the bill.

Under its earlier Regulatory Reform Act, of 2001, the government can amend laws by delegated rather than primary legislation. The government acknowledged then that this Act was 'constitutionally ground breaking'. But this new bill goes much further.

Lord Holme, the chairman of the Constitution Committee in the House of Lords, has expressed the committee's worries about this bill: "we are concerned by the potential of the bill's proposals, if enacted, markedly to alter the respective and long-established roles of ministers and parliament in the legislative process. This is because Part 1 of the bill seeks to confer unprecedentedly wide powers on ministers to make Orders to amend, repeal and replace any legislation (and to grant powers in respect of rules of the common law in relation to Law Commission recommendations), with only a very restricted role for Parliament in the process. The reforms thus have the potential to be so far reaching that especial consideration will need to be given by the Committee to the risk of inadvertent and ill considered constitutional change."

The Regulatory Reform Committee says that the bill "has the potential to be the most constitutionally significant bill that has been brought before Parliament for some years". In everyday parlance, this bill would allow Blair and his court to rule by edict, to assume absolute power. The bill would also make it easier to update EU regulations. Part 3 of the bill brings forward measures that were in the European Union Bill 2005-06 (now shelved) to allow technical amendments to EU law to come into effect automatically in Britain, without the need to amend domestic regulations made to implement the original EU law. Also, the bill would allow the government to use many different forms of delegated legislation to implement EU measures: at present it can only use regulations to do so.

This government's pretences of democracy and accountability are crumbling, as its policy of abandoning Britain becomes ever more apparent.

with loyalist paramilitaries in targeting people, including Finucane, for assassination.

Free speech

The Terrorism Bill permits the proscription of any organisation whose activities include the "glorification, exaltation or celebration of the commission, preparation or instigation (whether in the past, in the future or generally) of acts of terrorism or are carried out in a manner that ensures that the organisation is associated with statements glorifying, exalting or celebrating the commission, preparation or instigation of such acts".

It also criminalises "indirect incitement" to violence. It is already, rightly, a crime to call, "Kill the Jews/Muslims/Christians". But what would count as "indirect incitement"?

We have a right to free speech, which includes the right to express insulting or offensive opinions. This is a legal right, not a moral one. It is no crime in this country to deny the holocaust, to decry homosexuality, to insult a person's religious or other opinions, to support the Palestinian people's right to resist the illegal Israeli occupation or to oppose Blair's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The European Union has achieved stage one of its plan for Britain from us and concentrate it in its hands in Brussels...

Welcome to the global water market (and y

THEY SAY it's not raining enough, and that we need meters. But what Britain really needs is something entirely different: a National Water Grid, to get rainfall from the wetter West to the drier East. And we need to keep control away from Brussels.

With a grid, there would be no water shortages. The Major government aborted this idea when it privatised our water industry, dividing England and Wales between 24, mainly French, companies. Water is only in short supply because the companies won't transfer water from where it is available to where it is to be consumed. If oil can be pumped from the middle of the North Sea, refined and piped to every part of the country, we could do something far simpler with water. Workers in the industry could make and lay the pipes, build the aqueducts, build reservoirs and pump water.

Water quality is generally excellent. In 2002, the water companies carried out 2.9 million tests on drinking water: 99.87% met all British and EU standards. So we do not need the EU Water Framework Directive. This is the most substantial piece of EU water legislation yet, and it sets up, for the first time, a Common Implementation Strategy (CIS), to "help Member States to implement the Directive". As the EU says, "There remains a need to maintain a common strategic approach and work together throughout the Member States." It is designed to let the EU gain control over the provision of water across the member nations.

A huge amount of water is lost due to decaying infrastructure. We lose a quarter of our water supply before it ever reaches our taps. The water companies order spot repairs when they need to replace the pipes. Yorkshire Water no longer provides figures for leaks, claiming they can be "misleading". Thames Water, the biggest water company, has the worst leakage rate, compared with supply, at 33% in 2002/03. In 2003/04, it lost 915 million litres a day, in 2004/05, 884 million. It loses as much through its 100-year-old pipes as Leeds uses in a year. Heavier vehicles cause more damage to pipes, so the EU directive allowing heavier lorries is responsible for much of the leakage.

'The World Bank estimates the global market for water at \$1 trillion annually...'

Thames Water aims to ban its eight million users from using hosepipes from 3 April, the first such ban for 15 years. Government schemes, aided and abetted by local authorities such as Kent County Council, for 200,000 new homes in the south-east of England would only worsen matters.

At Bittany Hill in North London, a burst water pipe has been pumping water onto the road every day since Christmas. Thames Water says that it is Three Valleys Water's responsibility; Three Valleys says it is Thames Water's responsibility.

The government has recently for the first time given a water company, Folkestone and Dover Water, powers to make the installation of water meters compulsory. But metering is expensive, unnecessary and unfair – the poor and sick would bear the brunt. Rationing by price rarely works in the interests of those on lower incomes. Low-income households could face unaffordable bills. Already, the average British water bill is 12% higher this year than last, and one in five households is in debt to their water company. It is not household users that use most water.

Build the technology

The Blair government characteristically says that we have to train armed forces to tackle international conflicts over water, for example in the Middle East and between India and China. But Britain should instead be helping to prevent such conflicts by developing peaceful water-treatment technologies for use at home and abroad.

The universal provision of adequate water and sanitation is a basic human necessity. More than a billion people lack access to clean water, 2.4 billion lack access to decent sanitation. In the naturally dry areas of the world there is technology that can produce drinking



Water treatment works, Walthamstow: London's v

water from sea water. For example, a membrane desalination plant was recently commissioned in Ashkelon, which should be able to produce 15% of Israel's domestic water needs. But this expensive method, which places even more pressure on the environment, should not be necessary in a wet place like Britain.

Cash from water?

The World Bank estimates the global market for water at \$1 trillion annually. Companies are scrambling to seize and profit from publicly run water systems all over the world. Three water companies are among the world's 100 largest corporations – Vivendi Universal, the RWE Group, and Suez. Suez operates in 130 countries and Vivendi in 90. They have a 70% monopoly control over the world's existing water service markets. In 2000, RWE, from Germany, bought Thames Water. Bechtel, the US-based construction giant, and Edison, an Italian water and electricity company, owns the International Water Co. which partners with United Utilities, one of Britain's main private water companies.

in's water – privatisation. Now it wants to take all control away you thought it was a basic right...)

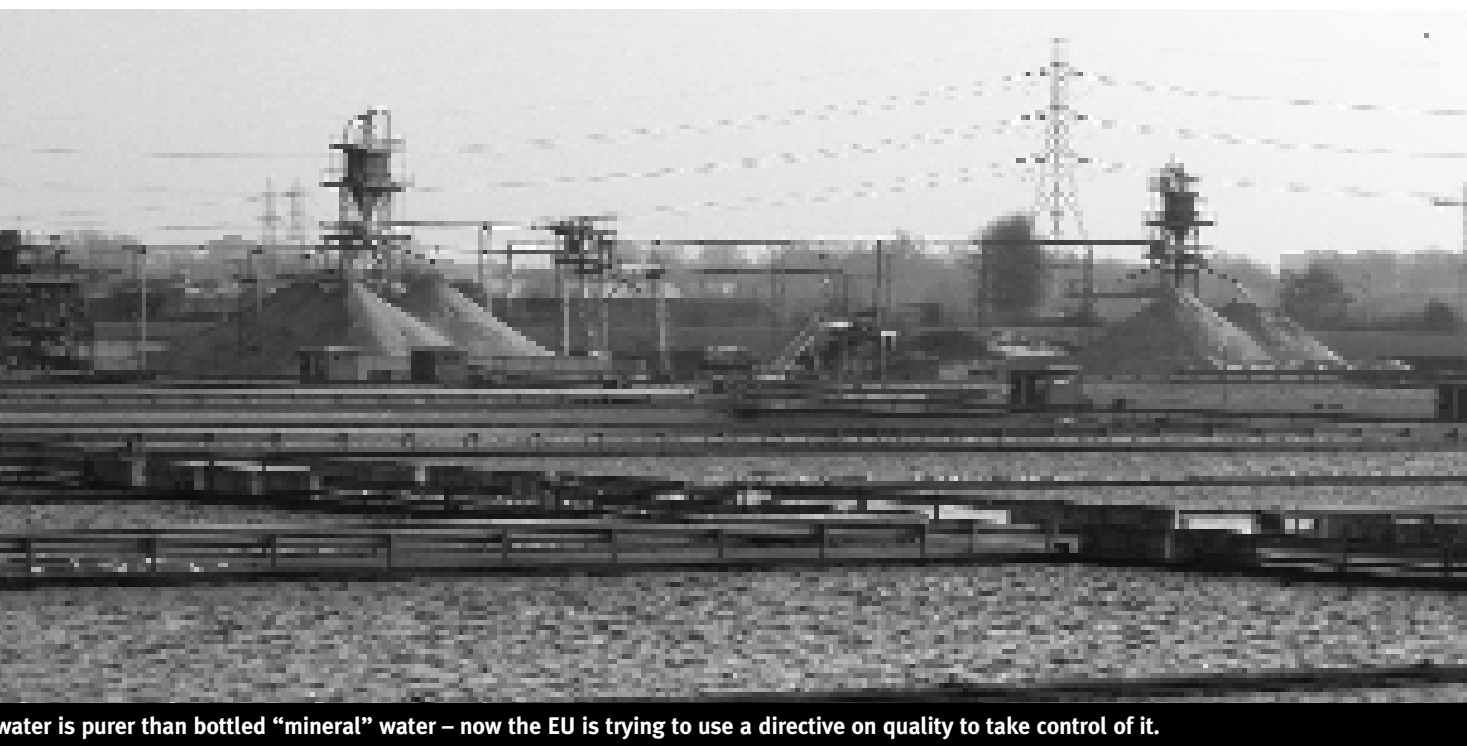


Photo: Workers

water is purer than bottled “mineral” water – now the EU is trying to use a directive on quality to take control of it.

Since the early 1990s, privatisation of water supply and sanitation has been introduced into a number of countries. Multilateral agencies have been a major driver: they put money into influencing national policies through promotion and advice, but mostly into channelling aid and investment finance to recipient countries. They promote a one-size-fits-all model, irrespective of its adverse effects on sustainable water development.

The International Monetary Fund, for example, imposes conditions relating to water privatisation and cost recovery on the poorest and most debt-ridden countries, such as Angola, Honduras, Nicaragua, Niger, Panama, Rwanda, Senegal and Yemen.

In December 2001 the inter-governmental International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn declared that “Private sector participation should not be imposed on developing countries as a conditionality for funding.” Yet the World Bank’s Private Sector Development Strategy of 2002 shows that it will continue forcing countries to privatise through using

“policy-based lending” – a euphemism for conditionality.

The Blair government is using taxpayers’ money to enforce the privatisation of water and sanitation across the world. It has spent millions of pounds of aid money to fund privatisation consultants to advise developing countries to hand management of their water to foreign companies (usually from Britain or France). These consultants include specialists, such as Halcrow, management consultants like Adam Smith International, and big accountancy firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers. Aid is then provided only if the consultant’s privatisation scheme is accepted.

The Blair government likes to claim that it has no ideology and simply wants to do “what works”. Yet all the evidence shows that these privatisations are a disaster for the working class and only a success for the capitalists. Profits, directors’ remuneration and prices have all soared, but capitalists won’t invest in extending networks, they ‘cherry pick’ the most profitable customers and services,

they rely on government hand-outs and they avoid markets perceived as risky or unprofitable. As with food and energy, the Blair government is abandoning all responsibility for the basics of civilisation.

Public good

Community management models, workers’ cooperatives, public–public partnerships (PUPs) and more traditional public utilities are all working well across the world, enhancing sustainable development. For instance, Porto Alegre’s (the largest city in southern Brazil) municipal water company DMAE achieves a positive developmental impact through democratic management with public participation. They have expanded water supply and sewerage systems in order to increase population coverage, expanded sewage treatment in order to reduce water pollution and public health hazards, and provided better service.

The public sector provides more than 90% of domestic water and waste water services worldwide and should continue to do so.

A key book exposes how the large corporations are partnering with the World Health Organization in order to safeguard, and boost, their profits...

Who is running the WHO?

NOT MANY PEOPLE will have heard of Yves Beigbeder. In 2004 he wrote a remarkable book, *INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH: PATIENTS' RIGHTS VERSUS THE PROTECTION OF PATENTS*.

What was perhaps most remarkable about it (apart from its price at £47.50!) is how someone who worked for many years as senior international civil servant was prepared to write with such candour on the workings of the international health services.

Even more remarkable in today's world is his description of how capitalism and its principal agents, in the form of the American government and the usual suspects elsewhere in the world, have over the past 15 years systematically eradicated all structures which sought to deal cooperatively with international health problems. A review of the book in the *HEALTH SERVICES JOURNAL* (March 2004) observed, "When we all look back on the era of George W. Bush, 'Big Dog' Diplomacy by coercion and the most powerful corporations bribing, lying and cheating their way towards global domination, this book will help explain how they seduced, corrupted and finally deluded the agencies of the United Nations."

The book deals with structures, the UN, in particular its agency the World Health Organization and other international outfits like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. It also deals with health programmes such as breast feeding, polio and HIV.

Along the way many frightening facts are revealed. For example, "since 1979, the US has been recouping its entire



contribution to smallpox eradication every 26 days" (p101). Throughout this period the American government has been withdrawing more financially from its contribution to the eradication of smallpox, than it had ever put in.

For Beigbeder, transnational corporations fall into three main groups: those representing drug interests (Big Pharma), international agriculture corporations (Big Farmer), and weapons manufacturers (Big Armer).

The future of the United Nations in all this is crucial. As the organisation established by and representing the victorious powers in the war against fascism, including at the time the Soviet Union, its position now is especially

important. The UN is the main channel through which small nations and the poorest people in the world have any opportunity to influence international policy. The World Health Organization has a key role to play. It was established in 1948 as a special agency of the UN, and in 1974 the United Nations General Assembly (which of course represents overwhelmingly the poorest countries in the world and in 1974 had far more revolutionary politics in it than now) established an Intergovernmental Commission on Trans National Corporations (UNCTC). The general assembly did this as it was increasingly concerned by the transnational corporations' commercial practices, political pressures and corruption.

Also in 1974, a multifaceted control programme of tropical disease (onchocerciasis) was launched in West Africa, and became the most successful and sustained partnership between the World Health Organization and external collaborators. In 1977 WHO launched "Health For All", seeking to address health needs on a global and sustainable basis. In 1978, the Alma Ata Declaration provided a public health agenda based on

Bring out your badges

Do you have any old labour movement and political badges in odd containers and drawers? Put them to good use and send them to the CPBML – we'll sell them at labour movement events during the year to raise money for the Party. Please send them to:

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a model of global health.

Following America's dream come true, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the demise of these international arrangements was rapid. In 1992, the UNCTC was wound down. In 1993, the United Nations resolved to use the power of "the market" and "active collaboration" with the International Chamber of Commerce. This replaced public health initiatives by sovereign governments grouped together under the World Health Organisation.

Global compact

In 1999, Kofi Annan of the United Nations and Adnan Kassar of the International Chamber of Commerce, laid the foundations for the "Global Compact". Also in 1999, the "Alliance for a Corporate-free United Nations" began as a backlash against these developments, seeking to expose what it called the poor human rights and environmental records of these corporations.

In the year 2000, the UN Global Compact together with private corporations was launched by Kofi Annan without the endorsement of either UN member states, or the support of the non-governmental agencies. This was a kind of "public/private partnership" on an international scale, using the good offices of the United Nations World Health Organization as a cover.

In the next few years we will see whether the availability, cost and effectiveness of vaccinations, for example, benefit from an Alliance which in reality now means that transnational corporations (Big Pharma) are running the World Health Organization.

A fascinating read, extensive in its coverage and with its crippling high price, definitely worth approaching the public library to purchase to make it more widely accessible.

International Public Health: Patients' Rights versus the Protection of Patents, by Yves Beigbender, £47.50, is published by Ashgate, ISBN:0754636216.

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

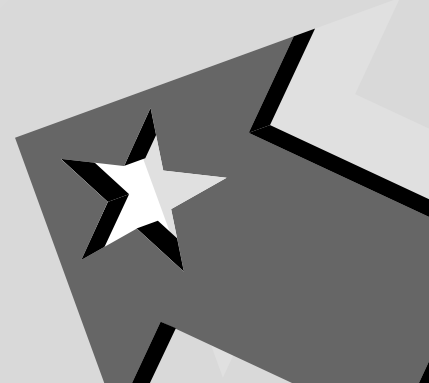
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