

WORKERS

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APRIL 2007 £1

50 YEARS TOO LONG:
THE EU'S INGLORIOUS
ANNIVERSARY



SOLD DOWN THE RIVER: SAFETY ON THE THAMES



Doctors furious at jobs chaos

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'The stars in the sky' – Cuba's health workers

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WORKERS

“An inglorious anniversary

FIFTY YEARS AGO six European countries came together and signed the Treaty of Rome, creating the European Union's forerunner, the EEC. This shoddy anniversary went, thankfully, almost unremarked in Britain. Even the TUC, often the cheerleader for Europhiles, stayed silent.

Not so the European TUC, whose general secretary is none other than the former TUC general secretary John Monks. It used the opportunity to call for progress on the dead-duck European Constitution, without which, it said, the "European project" might stall. Well, it's nice to know that the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, has a loyal ally somewhere.

Time, then, to think about what this European project is. It is to create a continent fit for capitalism. One where goods and capital can move freely across borders, destroying industries and asset-stripping nations. One where workers are free to move across borders to act as cheap labour. One where the nation states of Europe, through which all the progress achieved by the working classes of Europe has been made, are destroyed.

What is worth a celebration, though, is that half a century into the European Union, they are still a long way off their dream of a European super state. With the constitution

rejected in France and the Netherlands, and the government unable even to go to a referendum in Britain, that state has stalled.

Beware, though, the attempts being made to get "the project" moving again. Germany's Merkel, taking advantage of her country's sixmonth presidency" of the European Union, is actively pushing the idea of a new treaty that incorporates all the key ideas of the constitution but which can simply be signed by heads of state. No more referendums, then.

We can also celebrate our non-inclusion in the euro. Despite all the warnings of gloom and doom and the threat of being left behind, Britain is still without this financial shackle. In fact, being left behind is increasingly recognised around Europe as the right place to be. Polls in Germany show that most regret losing the mark and joining the euro – not, of course, that they ever had a chance to vote on it.

That we have managed to keep out of the euro is no thanks to the trade union movement, which by and large has been a cheerleader for this denial of British independence. Workers have opposed it, but allowed their own organisations to support it. Such tolerance must end. Out of the European Union now!



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The latest from Brussels

EU attack on job security

THE EUROPEAN UNION is gearing up for massive changes in the way workers across its member states are employed – those that are employed, of course: unemployment in the Eurozone, for example, is running at 7.4 per cent. The changes are foreshadowed in a Green Paper, "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century", which was launched in autumn 2006. Consultation on the Green Paper ended on 31 March, and the European Commission will now decide how to take its ideas forward into law. The consultation is part of the EU's Social Agenda 2005-2010 and dovetails with several other Commission initiatives on the wider topic of flexicurity, one of the big new European buzzwords.

The Commission is due to issue a communication on what it calls "flexicurity" in June. Some inkling of the kind of proposals we will see is given by the history of the Green Paper. It was originally entitled "Adapting labour law to ensure flexibility and security for all", but employers didn't like to see the word "security" in black and white. Instead, we have this idea of flexicurity, which – if it means anything – is bound up with the idea that job security is an old-fashioned concept.

The European employers' federation Business Europe believes that "people feel secure because it is relatively easy to find a job rather than because they are safeguarded by employment legislation. Labour law reforms must therefore focus on facilitating the creation of new jobs as opposed to trying to preserve existing ones." In other words, job security is not about feeling that your job is secure. In fact, in the strange world of ideas that employers inhabit, job insecurity is the basis of job security. The Green Paper asserts, "The focus is mainly on the personal scope of labour law rather than on issues of collective labour law." It claims, "Overly protective terms and conditions can deter employers from hiring during economic upturns." Aah. It all becomes clear.

And so the report concludes, "The recent Employment in Europe 2006 report refers to findings that stringent employment protection legislation tends to reduce the dynamism of the labour market, worsening the prospects of women, youths and older workers. The report underlines that deregulation 'at the margin', while keeping stringent rules for regular contracts largely intact, tends to favour the development of segmented labour markets with a negative impact on productivity. It also stresses that workers feel better protected by a support system in case of unemployment than by employment protection legislation. Well-designed unemployment benefit systems, coordinated with active labour market policies seem to perform better as an insurance against labour market risks."

Expect more upside-down thinking in the Commission's June communication.

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

IRAQ**Literacy slumps post-invasion**

EDUCATIONAL LEVELS, essential to modern civilised life, have plummeted in Iraq since the 2003 invasion. In just four years, the number of adults who can read and write has dropped from 90 to 68 per cent, according to reports presented in March at a Unesco conference in Dohar.

Many school buildings are either destroyed by bombs or occupied by militias, with around 3000 schools in southern or central Iraq looted or in ruins. Children are being kept at home because of the dangers of being out in the streets. Just 30 per cent of children attend school now, compared to 75 per cent in 2005-6. Female literacy has been particularly hard hit, slipping to just 48 per cent.

So much for the billions of dollars poured into the "reconstruction effort". Dr Qutub Khan, a Unesco educationalist in Iraq, said: "We have no buildings, no teachers, no resources, and minimal budgets. . . . Children have seen teachers and friends killed in the classroom."

AFGHANISTAN**NATO's bloodbath**

NATO AIR STRIKES in Afghanistan last year are estimated to have killed between 2,000 and 3,000 civilians. The US launched 2,527 air strikes, dropping 987 bombs and firing 146,000 cannon rounds. The RAF used 500 bombs and rockets in September alone.

The war on Iraq has so far cost the USA \$400 billion, and is now costing \$2 billion a week. Its estimated final cost is \$2 trillion.

EUOTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Fifty years too long

POLITICIANS ACROSS Europe are still trying to think of ways to present the discredited EU constitution in a different light.

Giuliano Amato, Italian Interior Minister, wants to "change the name, but not the substance" of the constitution. He said the "good thing about not calling it a constitution is that no one can ask for a referendum on it".

French presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy has reaffirmed his commitment to bringing back the constitution as a "simplified treaty". He says the abolition of national vetoes over EU decisions is essential because one or two member states should not be able to stop the EU advancing.

Spanish Europe Minister Alberto Navarro criticised the Polish and Czech governments for opposing the return of the constitution. Navarro pointed out that they are getting "billions" of euros in EU subsidies; appearing to suggest that they should be more grateful.

Angela Merkel, Germany's Chancellor, is campaigning to have a slimmed-down constitution agreed by EU governments – within a year and without recourse to national referendums. EU leaders, Blair included, have agreed to drop the word "constitution" from the text – deciding to speak only of "reform".

The figures that don't add up

THE GOVERNMENT claims that the migrants from new EU member states are all young, single people who do not claim benefits. Home Office figures don't bear that out. Since April 2004, 579,000 migrants from eastern Europe have registered to work here. This number excludes the self-employed or anyone not registered on the Workers' Registration Scheme. 70,000 of these migrants are now claiming benefits, at a cost of £77 million a year.

Almost two years after enlargement, Britain is still receiving an estimated 20,000 workers per month from new EU member states; Poles, Lithuanians and Slovaks top the migrant table. The last three months of 2006 saw a 23 per cent increase in the number of registrations over the same period in 2005. There has also been a rise in the number of families migrating – one in seven of those officially registered is now a dependent.



Doctors in Glasgow protest against the chaos of the new appointments system.

Photo: Workers

Doctors' fury at jobs chaos

LATE LAST month junior doctor representatives and their consultant colleagues walked out of talks with the government about the disastrous online application system the government had imposed to supposedly make appointment to specialist posts "more equal".

The junior doctors and their senior colleagues described the system as "complete chaos" with thousands of expensively trained junior doctors unplaced and without even an opportunity to be interviewed. On Saturday 17 March 12,000 doctors and their families and supporters had marched from the Royal College of Physicians to the Royal College of Surgeons via central London. A similar march took place in Glasgow (see photo, above). No one could remember a time when the medical profession had united in quite this way to mark their collective disgust at a government initiative.

The chaos around medical staffing is mirrored in other areas with a whole range of therapists and nurses finding it impossible to gain employment at a time when services are struggling to treat patients. The Commons Health select committee has described the whole of NHS workforce planning a "disastrous failure" and criticised the government for its "boom and bust" approach, accusing ministers of trying to "micromanage" a process that it does not understand. Other health workers should take a lead from the doctors and act to regain control of employment practices in their own profession.

CHILDREN

Worse off in Britain

A NEW United Nations Children's Fund report, Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries (Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2007) found that Britain and the USA are the worst places to grow up while northern European countries are the best.

American and British youngsters have a more troublesome childhood than their European counterparts. They are poorer, get on worse with their parents and take more risks. In comparison with children living in the other countries studied, those growing up in the USA and Britain have the lowest quality of life.

Despite being among the richest, Britain and the USA occupied the last two places in the list of 21 economically advanced countries, with the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark taking the top three slots.

The findings suggest that national wealth does not correspond directly to quality of childhood: the Czech Republic, for example, outranked richer countries like the USA, Japan or Germany.

"The United Kingdom and the United States find themselves in the bottom third of the rankings for five of the six dimensions reviewed," Unicef said in its summary. Britain got the lowest overall score and ranked worst in family and peer relationships – measured by single-parent rates and the frequency of family meals – and behaviours and risks.

POWER**British firms off shortlist**

NO BRITISH COMPANY has been short listed for the decommissioning and decontamination work associated with the ten Magnox nuclear sites.

All the listed companies are US – Jacobs, Fluor, CH2M Hill and EnergySolutions.

Whoever is awarded the work will be in pole position for contracts initially for about ten years. But the consequences will be far-reaching.

No decommissioning has been attempted on this scale before, and the work programme expected to run for

several decades and be worth hundreds of millions in profit.

The exclusion of British companies will ensure that British expertise declines and that US interests will dominate future nuclear work, probably world wide.

It is like the battle in the 1970s and 1980s over nuclear design – between the pressurised water reactors (PWRs) designed by the US against the British-designed advanced gas-cooled reactors (AGRs). The Thatcher government of the day went with the US design, and severely undermined British skills, expertise and design.

The government will now move forward with its nuclear power privatisation programme timetabled for 2009.

Seventeen pence, that's all

WHOOPEE! The national minimum wage has gone up by 17p per hour for an adult (over 21 years) to £5.52p, with 15p for 18-21 year olds and 10p for 16-17 year olds. The government has refused to include 21-year-olds as adults on the basis that they are more closely aligned to 20-year-olds rather than "older" people. Odd, that: most 20-year-olds become 21 years old en route to getting 'older'. It is, of course, complete bunkum from Trade and Industry Secretary Alistair Darling: you can go and fight and die in the armed forces at 16 years old and even vote at 18 years old (with the government – desperate to boost the numbers of people voting – suggesting that the voting age should be lowered to 16 years).

Evidence produced by the trade unions to the Low Pay Commission indicates that a minimum rate of at least £6.75p is required if any real inroads into poverty in Britain are to be made. This rise of less than 3 per cent will not go a long way to helping workers on the minimum wage cope with increased travel costs – 6.3 per cent in London and the South East; gas bills – 107 per cent during the past three years; electricity bills – 63 per cent in the past three years; water bills – 12 per cent in the last two years but with agreed increases of 20 per cent in the next two years and council tax up an average of 4.5 per cent this year.

The government makes a great deal of its campaign to enforce the minimum wage, especially for migrant workers, and quickly points out the scandal before the minimum wage become law in 1999 of wage rates as low as £1.30 per hour for cleaners or £2.25 per hour for security staff.

Those rates were a disgrace then, and the trick of the employers now is to hide behind the government and its minimum wage in order to avoid paying a wage workers need to live on. It is estimated that over a million workers are on the minimum wage. At the other extreme, 4,000 individuals shared over £9 billion in Christmas bonuses from the City last December.

Meanwhile, Gordon Brown's budget abolition of the 10p starting rate for tax means that someone on the new national minimum wage and working 35 hours a week will be £2 worse off a week, making the increase in the minimum wage even more derisive.

MINING**Money above ground**

WITH FOUR deep coal mines still in production, how long before UK Coal drops the Coal for UK Estate Agency after inheriting 50,000 acres of land following the privatisation of British Coal?

Its profit margins now rely on land sales and new house building, 14,000 planned nationally, 900 on the site of the

Prince of Wales colliery in Pontefract.

With the value of the land portfolio up by 25 per cent from 2006, UK Coal just gets wealthier by sitting and doing very little.

The site of Cortonwood Colliery, whose closure triggered the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, now boasts "daisy-fresh" stylish apartments, a private retirement village and a lake for canoeists and small boat owners, and is valued at £60 million by the Anglo-Dutch and London estate agents. No wonder UK Coal is excited by land.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****APRIL**

Friday 30 March to Saturday 14 April, The Marble Hall, Trades Union Congress, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS.

A better world is possible

A photographic exhibition by Tyneside photographer Ailie Hodgson depicting the work of Cuban doctors in Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela. An inspiring collection of photographs. Free.

Tuesday 17 April, The Iron Horse, 115 West Nile Street, Glasgow, 12.30pm.

EU Threat to Labour Law

Fringe meeting for the STUC conference, with Bob Crow (RMT) and Ian Davidson MP, chaired by Eddie McGuire (Musicians' Union). Organised by Scottish Campaign Against Euro Federalism.

MAY

Tuesday 1 May, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, 7.30pm.

Workers for Britain – Britain for Workers: Out of the EU now!

May Day celebration organised by CPBML/WORKERS magazine. All welcome. Refreshments available.

Saturday 5 May, Upstairs, The Counting House, 38 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DD, 2pm.

Workers for Britain – Britain for Workers: Out of the EU now!

May Day celebration organised by CPBML/WORKERS magazine. All welcome. Music and refreshments available.

Saturday 12 May, Golden Lion Hotel, Lower Briggate, Leeds, 12.30pm.

A better world is possible

Photographic exhibition by Tyneside photographer Ailie Hodgson (see above), with discussion about the significance of Cuba for Britain.

ID CARDS**Thousands oppose photo laws**

DOCUMENTARY makers, journalists and the general public have picked up on a government proposal to outlaw photography in public places unless "proper" ID cards are displayed or prior authorisation granted. So far over 56,000 people have signed a Downing Street e-mail petition against these proposals.

WORKERS ARE constantly told that it doesn't matter what legislation is proposed by the EU because – subsidiarity in the ghastly jargon – member states have the right to uphold their own social laws. The way it works is this: a Directive (which has legal force) is passed to a member state for implementation in that country after parliamentary scrutiny and amendment (where a state already has laws providing for higher standards than in the EU politicians call this “gold-plating”). That should be the end of that, but governments have to send amended legislation back to the EU – in fact to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) – for permission to implement. And if the law still protects the national interest, it is rejected as contravening the Treaty of Rome.

Although many Labour MPs and trade unions have tried to reassure members that, thanks to their efforts, the Services Directive is no longer a threat, and although governments have until November 2007 to tell the ECJ how they will apply it nationally, this is precisely what will happen with the Services Directive and associated directives purporting to uphold professional standards. The ECJ will rule, on behalf of employers.

Surrender

Some governments have already surrendered in the face of pressure from the ECJ to remove all protection for citizens. In Italy in March 2007 tourist guides demonstrated and marched through Rome in protest against the deregulation of their profession by the Italian government. They said it was the death of their profession and a sad day for tourists, who could no longer be guaranteed a qualified guide.

Deregulation was of course welcomed by the employers' body, the European Tour Operators Association, citing London as one of the places where there is a “flourishing local guiding scene within a deregulated market”. London guides know better, and on the contrary are seeking enhanced protection for their profession. At European level, too, the tourist guides of 25 countries (largely unregulated) are campaigning for Europe-wide protection.

A photographic exhibition at the TUC in London thousands of Cuban health professionals in

‘The stars in the sky’

Salud International's Phil Lenton tells the story behind the photographic exhibition being shown at the TUC between 30 March and 14 April, and in Leeds on 12 May.

IT WAS DECEMBER 2003 and we had been invited by the Cuban Health Workers Union to travel to Haiti to see the work of the Cuban doctors at work in that country. At that time, Cuba could publicly claim that around 4,000 Cuban doctors and health professionals, all trade union members, were working in 50 poor countries providing free health care. (Privately we were told that there were an additional 12,000 at this time in Venezuela.)

This was a huge programme by any stretch of the imagination, but soon to be dwarfed by the almost superhuman efforts made by this Caribbean island besieged for 40 years by its northern neighbour.

The situation in Haiti itself was grim and dangerous. US backed forces were trying to overthrow the elected government of President Aristides, and our Cuban hosts told us it was not safe to venture onto the streets. Most striking was the level of poverty in this, the world's poorest country outside of Africa.

The Cubans declared that they did not take sides in the near civil war in the country, regarding it as an internal Haitian affair. The Haitians on both sides treated the Cubans with absolute love and respect. President Aristides described them as being “the stars in the sky”.

However, the 650 mainly young doctors and support workers showed a heroic commitment to improve the health of the Haitian working class who, they told us, had been neglected since they first arrived as slaves.

Their work as doctors, always in the poorest areas, started with house visits to assess health risks to family members, organising local ‘circles’ to work together to tackle health problems. So elderly circles would organise exercise or change diet to eliminate high levels of salt in their staple porridge, young people would learn about hygiene or sexually transmitted

‘It was obvious that Cuban doctors were unique in their revolutionary professionalism. Yet the world knew nothing about this’

diseases, and pregnant women about how to ensure a safe delivery and the health of their child. The Cubans would organise work to improve sanitation and build latrines in a country where raw sewage often flowed through the streets.

Because of the lack of medicines, they often used herbal medicines and taught the Haitians how to grow and use them. They also staffed the emergency unit at hospitals and undertook a range of surgery including neurosurgery, providing the only neurosurgeon in the country. Infant and maternal mortality rates were dramatically reduced where there were Cuban doctors.

Free medical training

Hundreds of young Haitians were receiving free medical training by Cuban teachers in both Cuba and Haiti so that they could replace the Cuban doctors. It was obvious that no other country could do what the Cubans were doing: their doctors were unique in their revolutionary professionalism. Yet the world knew nothing about this (other than the poor of Latin America and Africa!). So we knew we had to make a record of their work.

With the agreement of the Cuban Health Workers Union, we took a photographer, Ailie Hodgson, to Honduras next to record the story of the Cuban Medical Brigade in that country.

In Honduras, the Cuban doctors were in the most inaccessible areas, often alone or with a Cuban trained Honduran nurse. Again, the respect for the Cubans was everywhere. Many of the families had sons or daughters studying in Havana who

London documents the extraordinary role being played by in Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela. This is how it came about...



Photo: Cuban Medical Brigade

Cuban doctors in Gonaives, Haiti: class solidarity in action

would return as fully qualified doctors. It was difficult to encapsulate this in photography. Yet along with the pictures from Haiti, we were beginning to tell the story.

The Cubans then suggested that if we really wanted to see and photograph what was possible, we should go to Venezuela. There, a modern free health service was

being built by Cuba, with some 24,000 Cuban doctors and state of the art medical equipment in brand new "diagnostic centres", in reality ultra modern cottage hospitals with intensive care and A&E facilities. With Venezuelan doctors being trained both in Cuba and in Venezuela by Cubans, we were told that eventually Venezuela would significantly exceed its

requirement for doctors so that it, alongside Cuba, could provide 100,000 doctors to provide free health care across the American continent and Africa.

At the time of Hurricane Katrina, Cuba created overnight the Henry Reeves Medical Brigade and offered to send 1,500 doctors to New Orleans. This was refused by the US government. This same brigade received disaster training and was sent to Pakistan after the earthquake, and stayed there for many months, and then to Indonesia to tend to the victims of another earthquake. Cuba now has more than 31,000 doctors in 70 countries.

In Cuba itself, 8,000 young people from 24 countries were studying free of charge at the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana. On graduation, they would return to their home countries to replace the Cuban doctors. In Santiago de Cuba, there were another 6,000 young people from English and French speaking countries in Africa and the Caribbean. These numbers were additional to those being trained by Cubans in their own countries.

Just when the sheer scale of this project began to overwhelm us, there was Operation Miracle, a vast project designed to restore sight to 250,000 low income patients from Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the referral centre is in Havana, this surgery is being undertaken across the whole of Cuba in the second phase of a joint Cuban Venezuelan project. The third stage is seeing surgical units set up and staff trained by Cubans in home countries and the fourth stage will see this project extended to Africa.

We have tried to tell this story in pictures but there is more to tell. How does the Cuban health system cope with more than half its doctors working on such missions? And plans are in hand to photograph a Brigade in Africa. This really is a story of the working class looking after its own, of heroism, selflessness and solidarity. As the Cuban Minister of Health recently said – "It's all a matter of class."

• For details of the exhibition, see **What's On, page 5.**

A Workers reader recounts what it is like to be part of the NHS's new style of communicating with the public...

No such thing as a free lunch

AFTER PARTICIPATING in a Mori survey about NHS services in London, I was a bit surprised to receive a phone call asking me to participate in an all-day all-expenses-paid forum on the same subject, lunch and refreshments included. Having already expressed my views, I was puzzled. The caller explained that the purpose was to further discuss what the future of health services in London should be. It seemed wise to check what they were up to! Maybe I could find out why they were proposing to close or downgrade the local hospital.

Opinion leaders

The NHS has employed a company called Opinion Leaders to conduct these events, of which there were two, at the end of February for north London and early March for south of the Thames.

It was rather sloppily organised. The promised letter with details of the event never arrived. We arrived at 9, about a hundred of us, and stood in a smoky hotel lobby for an hour while the organisers got the room ready. A large number of people had not been allocated tables, but eventually we were seated, about ten to a table.

Finally the forum got under way, well over an hour late. It opened rather innocently, with an introduction about the need for change in the NHS to improve Londoners' health, followed by open-ended questions about our positive and negative experiences of the NHS.

But it soon became apparent that the "facilitator" on each table was there not

just to chair the discussion but to persuade us, quite nicely, to fill in some blanks on his computer screen.

Participants wished to be very specific about improvements needed to health care, such as hygiene in hospitals, better communication between members of the health team, and between them and patients, better training of NHS staff, better conditions of work, etc. Plenty of us were glad to get a lot off our chests, not worry too much about what the facilitator said, and then go off and have a lovely lunch at the expense of the NHS.

After lunch the Opinion Leaders really got down to business. Opinion leaders turned out to be a fairly good description of it. We were to be not so much consulted as led, by Professor Ara Darzi, who clearly has a plan. Due to progress in medical treatments, he reckons we now need structural change in the NHS: local community hospitals and health centres containing both GPs and specialists, and a few specialist centres for specific conditions requiring urgent treatment (like strokes and heart attacks).

Brave new world

Fair enough, perhaps – he's the expert. But then the crux of his argument: our present hospitals won't do; we must start afresh! So we were given a glimpse of a brave new world through a video showing a brand-new health centre in Tooting and a brand-new community hospital in Park Royal, with inspiring architecture.

Plenty of us liked the look of these swish new buildings, but wondered where

the money would come from? Who would own them and where would they be fitted into our neighbourhoods? Then one elderly lady said, "Of course you can have a fine building but still wait too long to get an appointment. And a fine building soon gets dirty if not cleaned properly." Someone else then observed, "The new PFI hospital in Romford already has 3 wards closed due to MRSA."

Not for discussion

These points were not up for discussion. Our table raised the question: "Wouldn't it be better to clean up and remodel what we have, to make it serve the new functions?" No, the old buildings just weren't good enough, according to Professor Darzi.

One cheeky fellow wondered if Professor Darzi was working for an architect or developer, as well as the NHS. How much had he paid for that Hermes belt he was wearing!

None of this, of course, will show up in the "consultation" report. We had to vote on a number of carefully framed questions. We were required to say in each case whether we agreed the proposed changes would bring improvement. And, while opinion was very divided, more people were prepared to agree. Many of us went away feeling we had simply been used, to "prove" there was public support for the destruction of our hospitals. We were sold a pig in a poke.

And there is no such thing as a free lunch.

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EU CONSTITUTION**
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MAY DAY MEETINGS

WORKERS FOR BRITAIN –

BRITAIN FOR WORKERS!

OUT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION!

LONDON

Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm

Speakers and refreshments

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,

London WC1R 4RL (nearest tube: Holborn)

EDINBURGH

Saturday 5 May, 2pm

Speakers, music and refreshments

Upstairs meeting room

The Counting House, 38 West Nicolson St

Edinburgh EH8 9DD

All welcome

The clarity of British workers has made it impossible for Britain to join the euro and for the EU Constitution to be put to the vote here with any hope of a Yes. Yet the EU juggernaut rolls on.

As it celebrates its 50th anniversary, it continues with its original dream, first promoted by Hitler, Mussolini and Mosley, then funded by US imperialism, of one capitalist Europe as a bulwark against the working class and socialism. Hence the division and fragmentation of nation states, the promotion of capitalism rampant against the interests of the working class, the obliteration of national industries and privatisation of all public services, the attempted absorbing of every nation of Europe into the EU.

Their aim is that Britain, under EU directive and the willing collaboration of both Labour and Tory governments during the last 50 years, is to be regionalised and separated. The promotion of Scottish separatism – 50% of Britain's land mass with less than 10% of Britain's population – is the attempted break up of modern day Britain. The fragmentation by devolution into 'four nations', sub-divided into regions, is solely about shattering the unified British working class and its trade unions. Of the four, only Ireland is truly a separate nation.

Devolution leads to separatism and sectarian divide. This in turn leads to annexation as the EU redraws the boundaries. The mythical nation of 'Europe' replaces nation states and thousands of years of history. Community, industry, culture, common purpose, class interest are to be replaced with the free movement of capital, of trade, of goods, of people. The EU sees workers being shipped around in their hundreds of thousands to ensure a bottomless reservoir of cheap labour to be used to cut wages, destroy trade unions and progress.

The CPBML is for the unity of British workers, national independence and sovereignty. We support all workers in all nation states of Europe against the capitalist European Union. We recognise that every working class must fight for its own national independence. We are WORKERS for Britain and Britain for WORKERS – Out of the European Union!

We invite you to attend our forthcoming May Day meetings – London and Edinburgh – for one unified national working class.

From the surrender by parliament of national control follows loss of professionalism, standards and pay. And if MPs bothered to see

Sold down the river: the attack on skill and



The Thames: a dangerous river that requires skill and experience from those who work on it.

THAMES WATERMEN and Lightermen (now known collectively as boatmasters) are among many groups of workers under attack from the EU Services Directive. In every case the underlying issue is loss of sovereignty. From the surrender by parliament of national control follows loss of local control, jobs, health and safety, qualifications, skills, professionalism, standards and pay.

The Marchioness disaster on the Thames in 1989 illustrates what is at stake. It resulted in the loss of fifty-one young lives, and the Clarke report that followed gave an unequivocal account of the dangers of the Thames, making 44 recommendations, with the result that the five-year watermen's apprenticeships were upgraded. As well as stringent

medical tests, they included mandatory college courses (held at the North West Kent College's sea school at Denton) with qualifications based on intimate local knowledge and experience of the complexities of the Tidal Thames (the 67 miles below Teddington).

450 years of history

Around 60 young people apply each year. They often (but not exclusively) used to come from families of watermen going back 450 years, and had to be certified by five separate masters as being able to manage a variety of craft under different conditions. They also underwent continuous assessment to demonstrate their understanding of Thames bridges and moorings, its powerful currents and

twice-daily 8-metre tides, as well as the weather and the frequently erratic behaviour of private vessels. They learned respect for the river and for each other and, says watermen's leader Alex Hickman, they understood the limitations of each other's craft. Not any longer.

On 1 January this year, despite a public outcry, including Livery Company and trade union (T&GWU, RMT) campaigns throughout 2006, the government's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) introduced a new nationally applicable generic Boatmaster Licence, reducing the training time on inland waterways to two years, to "harmonise" with the EU (Directive 96/50/EC).

In fact the Directive states "national navigable waterways not linked to the

of local control, jobs, health and safety, qualifications, skills, how, they just need to look out of their own windows...

Standards on the Thames

navigable network of another Member State are not subject to international competition and it is therefore not necessary to make compulsory on those waterways the common provisions for the granting of boatmasters' certificates...".

So even though the directive allows for higher standards on the Thames and other tidal rivers, this servile government decided to remove the requirement for college-based training, making it easier for less safe visiting European craft to enter British waterways. The legislation was hurried through over the Christmas period, during which time the relevant computer crashed, and there was no opportunity to register objections.

Regulations relaxed

Exams were reduced from four (practical, oral and written) to a less rigorous all-in-one exam; Thames-specific knowledge was reduced in scope (Woolwich to Putney only), and qualifying service time (QST) to acquire it cut from two years to six months. In addition, the regulations have been relaxed so that any European "believed" to be competent by the boatmaster in charge, is now permitted to navigate. That, says the RMT, means that a vessel the size of the dredger *Bowbelle* (80 metres) which cut across the bows of the *Marchioness*, could be navigated unsupervised by a 16-year-old who has not even undergone tests to detect poor eyesight, colour blindness, epilepsy, or other medical conditions.

The European Transport Workers Federation provides a telling comparison with the Rhine, where a person has to be at least 21 years old, with a total minimum of six years' training and work experience. The German government has not downgraded that qualification, even though the Rhine runs through different countries, and there is less passenger traffic. An exception is likewise made for the Danube, and was fought for by the Austrian government.

The new UK licence does require holders to be certified in fire fighting, first aid, and personal survival, and this has been welcomed. But it destroys the

'The legislation was hurried through over the Christmas period, during which time the relevant computer crashed, and there was no opportunity to register objections...'

profession of watermen and lightermen by introducing a low basic standard with optional endorsements to suit different types of operator or employer.

Around half of Thames watermen already hold a large-passenger-vessel (250 passengers) endorsement, which includes passenger management. Pressing for a raising of standards rather than a reduction, the RMT argue that the age requirement for endorsements should be 21 years, and 24 for large passenger vessels.

The union wants a higher-standard basic licence and endorsements guaranteeing a structured approach to the acquiring of knowledge and skills. This, they say, "will lead to an ethos that ensures that maturity and experience are valued attributes in what can be an extremely dangerous working environment" (2006 Submission to the MCA).

In 2001 the Port of London Authority (PLA) commissioned the Baxter Eadie study into training on the Tidal Thames. This stated: "There should be no reduction in the classroom time. Indeed, this may need to increase..." The study also observed that a decrease in college shore-based courses and a move to 'hands on time' would result in too narrow a training, with boatmasters failing to develop a 'professional ethos'. Maturity and experience should be demonstrated before taking on more responsible operations on the Thames. At the time, Baxter Eadie further commented that the

PLA were proposing to extend the licensing area to the "seaward limit". Local knowledge would therefore extend to the whole of the Tidal Thames.

The PLA revisited the issue of training in 2002 and a second Baxter Eadie study identified around 500 different skills, which would be impossible to examine in a single test. The study also pointed out that, whereas for larger seagoing vessels and tankers, international (IMO) standards of training certification and watchkeeping (STCW) apply, these are not applicable inshore.

In fact the STCW only covers 41 per cent of the skills required for the Thames and only 3 per cent of those identified cover local knowledge. All the more reason, says the RMT, why an additional upgraded Boatmaster Licence is needed on all UK inland waterways.

Ignored

In the event however, the PLA ignored Baxter Eadie and carried out a limited risk assessment, which was contested by many parties in subsequent discussions. This gave government the excuse they were looking for since at least 2001 to play poodle to the EU with British waterways.

Lightermen engaged in freight and towing operations are also covered by PLA byelaws. The qualifying time for towing was 9 years, now reduced to 30 months. Guidelines for levels of experience for motor barge skippers were 5 years, now also reduced to 30 months. But many tugs and workboats remain unregulated under the new Licence. A single tug can tow three barges. Each barge can carry up to 600 tonnes of freight, so total capacity is up to 2,000 tonnes. Waterman Alex Hickman urged government to envisage the boatmanship required for such a vessel negotiating a 5-knot tide in difficult waters under a series of bridges.

The RMT is calling for a "Qualified Boatmaster on the Bridge", rather than just in command, at all times the vessel is

Continued on page 12



Continued from page 11

being navigated. The union also wants to see an extension of the Licence to commercial fishing vessels entering Britain's inland rivers and lakes, and a number of other improvements: an increase in the qualifying time to be extended to those operating on Britain's lakes; a "transparent and auditable" minimum QST (rather than at MCA examiners' discretion); a progressive licence to be introduced based on tonnage; the introduction of a towing endorsement for tugs; the development of competency standards for crew (in addition to new standards for boatmasters); and for the UK Domestic Safety Management Code (now statutory for passenger vessels) to be extended to other commercial vessels on inland waterways, with rigorous enforcement.

On 10 January, however, despite this mountain of evidence and expert advice – as with so many working-class causes down the years – the watermen's case fetched up once again on the treacherous reef of parliament.

A glance at Hansard shows that the debate that day attracted an uncommonly large audience who had done their homework and were united in opposition to the legislation. Of course a few shamelessly opportunist MPs exploited the tragedy of the Marchioness to draw attention to themselves and their party with the usual time-wasting interruptions to the flow of the main speaker, and there was much needless repetition. With time running out, Transport Secretary Stephen Ladyman, who had been rebuked for his ignorant and disparaging reference to the boatmasters as a "cosy club", with suggestions of a medieval closed shop,

made a statement which showed explicitly that the EU and big business were calling the tune.

He cited a series of consultations, especially with powerful vested interests such as Associated British Ports, the UK Major Ports Group, the PLA and the MCA – all arms of government – but omitted to mention the concerns of the many smaller specialist users of inland waterways consulted at the time. The new training standards were, he said, an improvement on the original EU minimum! He had clearly taken those proposals as his base line, rather than existing Thames criteria.

Terrified of criticism

Ladyman was terrified that he would be criticised in Europe: "We...will have to defend it to some of our colleagues in Europe, because it will look to them as though we are gold-plating the proposals to restrict them." He simply could not see that there was any reduction in safety standards. He was right, and everyone else, including relatives of the Marchioness victims, was wrong.

Ladyman was insistent that no test of local knowledge was necessary downstream of the Thames Barrier. Yet that area below Woolwich is where 95 per cent of the 56 million tonnes of annual cargo is handled, and where yachts use the estuary, with its shifting sandbanks and sunken vessels.

There has been a gradual revitalisation of Thames traffic in recent years, with increasing freight tonnage and an increase in passenger numbers of 44 per cent since 1999. Commuter use leapt up by an astonishing 80 per cent in just the last year. The six hundred boatmasters on the Thames alone account for more than the total number in the rest

of Britain. There are now warnings that passenger vessels might be restricted to the stretch between Westminster and Tower piers, and would be unable to respond to a repeat of 7 July 2005, when they helped evacuate 100,000 people from central London to Canary Wharf. Not to mention the 2012 Olympics and their hoped-for legacy, with increased river traffic before, during, and after the Games, including on such tributaries as the River Lea.

A Marchioness mother added her voice to union and backbench demands: "There is absolutely no logic, rhyme or reason for a Labour government to renege on the improvements in safety on the Thames...It took our campaign 17 years to get a multi-agency emergency exercise to take place on the Thames, but if these changes are not stopped we could be seeing the real thing all too soon". Like that mother, many people are unable to fathom the government's motives. But dig a little deeper, and it makes perfect sense to an unelected power – the EU – hell-bent on erasing national boundaries, and for a UK government that has long since abandoned any attempt at ruling in the national interest.

A further investigation by the Transport Select Committee will be concluded shortly. The Company of Watermen & Lightermen, the RMT and the T&GWU hope that the passion and support aroused by their campaign will have persuaded the government to re-establish training criteria to British standards in the interest of public safety. If not, they will have no alternative but to step up their struggle, in particular for recognition of the importance of local knowledge, college training, and experience.

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Will Podmore

The Indian revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. Ninety years later, India won its freedom...

1857: not a mutiny, but a fight for independence

ONE HUNDRED-and-fifty years ago, the people of India fought for their national sovereignty and for independence from the British Empire.

The revolt was called a “mutiny”, to define it as illegitimate. But it was the foreign rule that was illegitimate, because it denied India democracy and self-rule. As G. B. Malleson, Adjutant-General of the Bengal Army and the revolt’s first historian, wrote, what was “at first apparently a military mutiny ... speedily changed its character and became a national insurrection.” Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs all played a full part.

Despotic

The Raj was a despotic regime dependent on military power. General Henry Rawlinson, India’s Commander-in-Chief, said in 1920, “You may say what you like about not holding India by the sword, but you have held it by the sword for 100 years and when you give up the sword you will be turned out. You must keep the sword ready to hand and in case of trouble or rebellion use it relentlessly. Montagu calls it terrorism, so it is and in

dealing with natives of all classes you have to use terrorism whether you like it or not.”

In 1793, the Empire’s rulers had imposed a ‘Permanent Settlement’ on India which privatised the land and dispossessed the peasants. The Empire took 50-60% of the peasants’ income in tax, more than the Mughal Emperors had taken, forcing the peasants into debt and then to sell their land. India’s wealth was pillaged and her agriculture starved, in order to rack up profit and rent. The profits went to British investors, the rents to the Empire’s allies, the landlords and princes.

The Empire’s rule was vicious. Governor-General Lord Dalhousie wrote in 1855, “torture in one shape or other is practised by the lower subordinates in every British province.”

Charles Ball, a historian of the revolt, wrote, “in Bengal an amount of suffering and debasement existed which probably was not equalled and certainly not exceeded, in the slave-states of America.” The Report of the Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture

at Madras, 1855, admitted “the general existence of torture for revenue purposes”. Torture was also normal police practice.

The revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. A British officer’s wife justified killing all rebels, “Serve you right for killing our poor women and children who had never injured you.” As if every single rebel was personally responsible for the very worst atrocities. Marx noted of Britain’s newspapers, “while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigour, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated.”

Vengeance

A British officer said, “We hold court-martials on horseback, and every nigger we meet with we either string up or shoot.” Sir John Kaye wrote, “mothers and women and children ... fell miserable victims to the first swoop of English vengeance.”

In a five-week rampage, Brigadier James Neill’s Madras Fusiliers hanged every person they caught, some 6,000 people. Sir George Campbell wrote, “Neill did things almost worse than massacre, putting to death with deliberate torture in a way that has never been proved against the natives.”

Major Renaud of the Madras Fusiliers “was rather inclined to hang all black creation.” A recent historian writes, “volunteer hanging parties were roaming the Benares area with one gentleman executioner boasting of the ‘artistic manner’ in which he had strung up his victims in ‘the form of a figure of eight’.” Major Anson of the 9th Lancers admitted that in Fatehgarh, “There were fourteen men hung, or rather tortured to death (some of them), in the town here yesterday afternoon.” On one occasion, British officers stood and watched while their Sikh soldiers slowly burnt a prisoner to death. At Peshawar, 785 captives were executed. At Lahore, Frederick Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner of the Punjab,



Imperialist imagery: a contemporary imagined scene of sepoys dividing up loot

bloody as its ence

ordered 500 unarmed soldiers, the entire 26th Native Infantry, to be killed. At Basaund, British forces killed all 180 adult males. The Magistrate of Meerut justified the massacre – “A severe example was essential and the slightest mawkish pusillanimity in such a cause would have spread the flame of revolt throughout the district.”

‘Drunk with plunder’

The sacking of Delhi, Jhansi and Lucknow was barbaric: THE TIMES described the British soldiers as “drunk with plunder”.

Although the revolt was defeated, it did overthrow the East India Company’s rule and its regime of robbery and corruption; the Company was wound up in 1874. After suppressing the revolt, India’s British rulers used the old tactic of divide and rule to crush India’s strivings for democracy and self-rule. The British state promoted Muslim separatism and set up separate electorates, a sure way to tear people apart politically.

In the Punjab, the British won over the Sikhs by reminding them of the injuries and insults they had suffered under the Mughal Emperors. Sir Henry Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Oudh, spread false rumours that Muslim rebels had desecrated Hindu temples.

Justification for continued rule

The Empire then used the revolt’s failure to justify continued rule. If Indians could not revolt successfully, they could not rule themselves. Besides, as an MP said, “if we were to leave...we should leave it to anarchy.”

A century later, Winston Churchill said in Cabinet in 1940 that the Hindu-Moslem division had long been “a bulwark of British rule in India”. THE TIMES agreed: “The divisions exist and British rule is certain as long as they do.” John Colville reported that in Cabinet, “Winston rejoiced in the quarrel which had broken out afresh between Hindus and Moslems, said he hoped it would remain bitter and bloody.”

After the revolt, the Indian people continued to oppose foreign rule, winning their independence in 1947.

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.

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Back to Front – A worse and wider war

‘We still have the same warmonger Blair and the same gutless and witless Labour Party in power, and Brown is just another shade of Blair...’

THE US GOVERNMENT has refused diplomacy by rejecting the Baker-Hamilton Report on Iraq with its limited, compromised and conditional approach to preventing a worse and wider war. The US occupation of Iraq is the cause of all Iraq’s present problems, and nothing can be settled until the occupying forces leave.

And yet Washington is again rejecting diplomacy when it refuses to rule out attacking Iran. It has rejected the International Atomic Energy Authority’s proposed cooling-off “timeout”. Bush says that the US will kill any Iranians that it decides are targeting US forces. He has sent a second aircraft carrier and supporting ships to the Persian Gulf to threaten Iran. He has ordered USAF and Navy planes to patrol the Iran-Iraq border more aggressively.

The US government has accused the (Shia) Iranian government of supplying bombs to the (Sunni) Iraqi resistance, which is fairly implausible. They know that nobody believes their intelligence assessments after their discredited claims about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction, so no senior member of the US administration put the case publicly against Iran. The three officials who addressed correspondents from around the world in a Baghdad briefing room spoke on condition of anonymity and all cameras and recording devices were banned.

Even these officials could not make a direct link to Iran: “The officials said such an assertion was an inference based on general intelligence assessments,” reported the New York Times. The officials offered no evidence to support their charge that “the highest levels of the Iranian government” had authorised

smuggling these weapons into Iraq for use against American forces.

But warmongers don’t want evidence; they want war. For instance, James Woolsey, a former director of the CIA, says, “Only fear will re-establish respect for the United States.”

Yet respect for the United States (and Britain) has been plummeting around the world since the invasion of Iraq. Particularly in Iraq, if the results of the BBC poll there are anything to go by.

The poll indicates that only 6 per cent strongly support the presence of “Coalition” forces in their country; that 76 per cent think they are doing a bad job. Iraqis’ perception of all aspects of daily life – water, schools, local government – is that they are getting worse and worse. Things are so bad that 30 per cent of the population wants to leave, and half of those say they are making preparations to do so.

More than three-quarters don’t want an Islamic state, but if the occupation lasts that is what they might end up with.

This is what Bush and Blair have created in Iraq. No wonder that over half the population supports attacks on British and American soldiers (even if, somewhat oddly, only 35 per cent want them to leave now).

Four years on from the invasion, are we going to permit another fiasco in Iran? We still have the same warmonger Blair and the same gutless and witless Labour Party in power, and Brown is just another shade of Blair.

The defence of Britain’s interests and the resistance to war cannot be left to our corrupt parliament. It must be taken up outside, in the unions and the workplaces, and where we live. All else leads to war.

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