

WORKERS

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WORKERS

“Ashes to ashes

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY can sometimes seem an abstract concept. But what does it really mean? If Britain's ash trees could talk, they would give a clear reply. For the ash trees of Britain, abandonment of national sovereignty could mean extinction.

As long ago as 15 September 2009 the Horticultural Trades Association, concerned about the spread of ash dieback from imported trees, a threat it compared with Dutch elm disease, wrote to the Forestry Commission asking for a ban on ash imports. The response, dated 26 October, was as pathetic a piece of hand-wringing impotence as you are likely to see from any government. It's there in full on the Horticultural Trade Association's website.

The Forestry Commission claimed that the fungus behind the disease was present in Britain. "That fact alone precludes us from initiating an emergency response under the EU Plant Health Directive (and we would also fall foul of our international obligations under the WTO)."

It even ruled out a Pest Risk Analysis, on the basis that a European body had concluded that "a PRA is no longer relevant".

The letter ends: "I am sorry this is not the response you had hoped for but I hope you understand how our hands are tied. All I can recommend for the moment is that the industry

carefully considers where it sources its planting material and monitors its purchases for signs of ill health."

The attitude is plain: Britain's ash trees, for centuries an iconic component of the British countryside, can rot just so long as the European Union and the World Trade Organization are not offended. The market is more important than our countryside. Obligations to the EU and the WTO matter more than our environment.

Worse, our governments, Labour and Coalition, are infected with the idea that any kind of action to stand up for the interests of Britain is likely to run counter to their own (and the EU's) policies. Their default mode is not to ask what is good for the country, but what is right by the treaties they have signed. "Our hands are tied," they say, again and again.

Finally, after more and more cases of ash dieback had been found in Britain – and after front-page news stories – the government acted, though with cowardly caution. In August it assessed whether there was a case for a Pest Risk Analysis, before daring to actually carry out the analysis. Finally it introduced legislation allowing a ban on imported ash trees, which came into effect on 29 October. That may be too late for the ash trees. Time will tell. ■



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Ford Transits go to Turkey

FORD ANNOUNCED at the end of October that it was closing its Transit plant in Southampton next July with the loss of 500 jobs, a further 1,000 to go elsewhere in Britain. This marks the end of vehicle production by Ford in Britain, which began in 1911 with a Model T assembly plant in Trafford Park, Manchester (the first planned industrial estate in the world).

About 16,800 new Transits were registered in Britain in 2011. The number is down about 20 per cent this year. All will be imported in future. And over 50 per cent of the Southampton production was exported. The workers there had been told not long ago that there would be investment in a new product.

Nigel Farage, MEP for Hampshire, revealed that the EU has granted Ford an £80 million loan to boost its Kocaeli plant in Turkey, where Southampton's Transit production will be moved. The EU also gave Ford a preferential interest rate at 2 per cent. British workers are subsidising the loss of jobs here as Britain is a net contributor to the EU budget. Wages in Turkey are much lower than in Britain, averaging about £4 an hour. So Ford gains three times over.

At the same time, Ford announced the closure of the Genk plant in Belgium, with the loss of 4,300 jobs. Over 20,000 people rallied in the town on the site of a former coal mine. Britt Thijs, the 9-year-old daughter of one of the Genk workers, said from the stage, "I am not only concerned about the future of Ford employees but also about my future. Will I still get the chance to study further? Will I still get a chance at a job?" Unlikely, Britt, unless we get out of the EU. ■



Photo: Philip Lange/Shutterstock.com

ECONOMY**Forecasts downgraded**

THE NATIONAL Institute for Economic and Social Research has downgraded its growth forecast for 2012 from 1.3 per cent to 1.1 per cent – and to just 0.8 per cent for 2013. It noted business investment was "shockingly low", 14 per cent down from before the recession. It says the economy will be in "depression" (defined as a period of less than potential growth, normally about 2.5 per cent a year) for at least a further two years.

This makes it the longest such period since the 1920s. The Bank of England has also cut its growth estimate for next year to just 1 per cent, with inflation higher than had been expected. ■

TRADE**Britain's declining share**

BRITAIN'S SHARE of world trade was 4.4 per cent in 2000; by 2010, it was 2.7 per cent and is now 2.3 per cent. Exports have grown more slowly than those of almost any other developed country. From 2000 to 2010, Britain's total balance of payments deficit was £296 billion; the deficit in trade of goods was £740 billion. The situation is worsening: this year's second quarter deficit was £20 billion. These huge deficits are financed largely by vast net sales of portfolio assets, the rest by borrowing.

In 1980, 23 per cent of our GDP came from manufacturing. By 1995 this had fallen to 18 per cent and by 2012 to 12 per cent. Japan and Germany still derive more than 20 per cent of their GDP from manufacturing, while Korea has 25 per cent and China more than 30 per cent. ■

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

One cut that's needed

THE GOVERNMENT was defeated in the Commons on 31 October as 53 Conservative backbench MPs voted with Labour MPs. They passed a non-binding amendment calling for a "real terms cut" in the next long-term EU budget. Britain gave the EU £7 billion last year; this will rise to £9.4 billion by 2014-15.

Let us out!

TWO POLLS in November show Britain would vote to leave the EU if given the choice. A YouGov poll found that 49 per cent of British voters would vote to leave the EU, 28 per cent of people would vote to stay in, with 17 per cent undecided (5 per cent wouldn't vote at all). The Opinium/OBSERVER poll reported that 56 per cent would vote to leave, 30 per cent to stay and 14 per cent unsure.

Goodbye, and thanks for the bailout

GREEK TAXPAYERS have bailed out private creditors, who in return have sent 22 billion euros out of the country in the last three years. 400 Greeks have bought expensive London properties. Some 30 billion euros, an amount equal to 15 per cent of Greece's GDP, escapes tax every year. 2,000 rich Greeks have illegal Swiss bank accounts, including former ministers and officials from the finance ministry.

More impoverishment

THE EU imposed a new 13.8 billion euro "austerity" (poverty) package on Greece. These EU policies will force Greece's debt up to 189 per cent of output in the name of cutting the deficit. The Democratic Left supported the government in the vote on the new budget. The two main Greek unions have launched another general strike against the budget. Greece has held 20 general strikes so far, with no progress.

Bring on the debt

DEBT-TO-GDP ratios will be higher in 2013 in all EU members, except Ireland. Ireland's bad loans are 44 per cent of all outstanding bank loans, the highest level in any banking crisis in history. Planned cuts from 2011 to 2014 will destroy 10 per cent of GDP in Greece and Portugal and 8 per cent in Ireland. The governments of Britain, France, Italy and Spain are aiming for 5-6 per cent cuts. ■



Photo: Workers

15 November: Unite banners at the Crossrail site at Tottenham Court Road highlight the sacking of construction staff for joining the union. It's the latest in a series of "flashmob" protests, civil disobedience and pickets since the end of August against union-busting on the Crossrail project in London by BFK (Bam-Ferrovial-Kiers) in particular, and against the blacklisting of construction workers in general. The dispute began when a shop steward working for subcontractor EIS was banned from the Westbourne Park site and a health and safety rep was transferred after raising serious health and safety concerns. Shortly after, BFK cancelled the EIS contract resulting in the dismissal of the Unite members.

Southampton cuts loom

SOUTHAMPTON CITY Council staff have been told that up to 8 per cent of the directly employed workforce will be redundant. Some services – the Youth Service, "Our House" children's home and Archaeology – are facing complete closure. Others, such as Parks, Street Sweeping, Libraries, Waste Services, Children's Services, face considerable losses.

The threat result from the government's reduction in funding of £23 million for the year 2013/14, part of the "deficit reduction policy" aimed at reducing the number of people working in the public sector.

Unite's convenor says the situation has been made much worse by the previous Tory council. It spent £100 million on capital projects and committed the council to funding the Arts Complex as well as Sea City Museum, with the interest paid out of the annual budget. It froze Council Tax, reducing the ability to raise revenue, and spent the council's reserves in the runup to the 2012 elections. The convenor added: "We have already had a three-year pay freeze, a two-year increment freeze and two years of a pay cut, which will not be fully restored for everybody until 2015. We have paid enough for a crisis we did not cause."

Unite SCC branch also opposes the Labour council administration's proposal to refuse to set a budget, which would lead to their removal from office and the installation of government-appointed commissioners, who would implement worse cuts. Unite and Unison will be organising a public protest on the job cuts and will also consider balloting members for a one-day strike, to coincide with the budget-setting council meeting. ■

EDUCATION

Victory at Village

TEACHERS at Village Infants School in Dagenham in Essex, a local authority community school, have won their fight against incorporation into an amalgamated school with William Ford Junior. William Ford is a Voluntary Aided Church of England school, so the move would have meant a change of status to a religious school for Village, as well as a change of employer from the Local Authority to the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Substantial opposition to the move was built across teachers, parents and governors from both schools, with nearly 700 signing a petition against it. In July, NUT members at Village staged three days of strike action. The NUT rep at Village, Yolanda Cattle, said they had been reluctant to close the school but "by going on strike we realised we

were fighting to save a community school for local children, so we had to continue".

In the face of such opposition, the governors at William Ford voted against the proposal. The council has withdrawn the decision to amalgamate. ■

STOKE

Borrowing...then cutting

A BBC4 show, THE YEAR THE TOWN HALL SHRANK, shown on 1 November, looked at how Stoke-on-Trent Council is cutting £36 million from its annual budget, and facing further cuts of £50 million over the next two years. To meet government targets, the council is closing old people's homes, children's centres, swimming pools and libraries. The programme did not mention that the council is at the same time borrowing £59 million to fund its proposed new £40 million HQ and other projects. ■

TAKEOVERS**A nation for sale?**

FOREIGN TAKEOVERS of British companies are continuing at a rapid pace. Pearson has agreed a deal to merge its Penguin Books with rival Random House. Random House is owned by German firm Bertelsmann, which will own 53 per cent of the merged company.

In the foods sector Premier Foods is selling its Branston range of pickles and sauces to Japan's Mizkan including a factory in Bury St Edmunds. In June it sold its vinegars business to the same firm. In

May China's Bright Food bought a 60 per cent controlling stake in Northants-based family firm Weetabix which also owns Alpen & Ready Brek. The company is valued at £1.2 billion.

Sovereign wealth fund China Investment Corporation (CIC) has 10 per cent stake of Heathrow Airport Holdings, the Spanish firm that owns Heathrow, Stansted, Southampton, Glasgow and Aberdeen airports. CIC, set up to invest some of China's foreign exchange reserves, bought 8.9 per cent of Thames Water in January. Meanwhile, Qatar Holdings' bid for 20 per cent of Heathrow Airport Holdings is awaiting EU approval. ■

Greece carries on shrinking

WITH ITS economy strangled, Greece saw its deficit grow more last year than originally forecast – up to 9.4 per cent of output in 2011 against an earlier estimate of 9.1 per cent. The economy is now forecast to shrink by 4.5 per cent in 2013, not 4.2 per cent as thought before. And the decline is accelerating. Output fell by 7.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011, greater than the 6.3 per cent decline registered for the second quarter of 2012 (again, compared with 2011). Government borrowing is expected to rise from 4.2 per cent to 5.2 per cent of GDP, with a total debt of 189 per cent of annual output, up from 179 per cent.

The Greek economy has shrunk by 22 per cent since 2008. The 2013 rise in government spending will be wholly due to the increased interest payments on existing debt. Germany has confirmed its opposition to the write off of any debts and says that Greece must accept further measures if it wants to stay in the euro. The next round of cuts, the EU's price for a further loan of 31.5 billion euros (£25.3 billion) and an extension of deficit-reducing targets, amounts to 13.5 billion euros, with more privatisation of public services, increasing the retirement age, further cuts to pensions, salary cuts for public sector workers and cuts in notice periods for redundancies and redundancy pay.

Prime Minister Samaras, while admitting the cuts were "unfair", promised they would be the "very last", something Greeks have heard before. Syriza, the left parliamentary coalition, warned that Greeks will not be able to afford necessities this winter. Cracks are appearing in the government, with one of the governing coalition partners, the Democratic Left, refusing to support the new measures and many PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) MPs also rebelling. The imposed measures eventually scraped through with a majority of just three while tens of thousands protested outside the parliament building.

There were also rallies across Greece. A 48-hour general strike affected both the private and public sectors. Transport systems were shut down in advance, including trains, ferries and international flights, with schools shut and hospitals only open for emergencies.

Greece has to negotiate for emergency funds from money markets should there be problems with the EU loans – thus driving the country even further into debt. Cyprus, already reduced to junk credit status and with its close links to Greece, is also discussing a further bailout from the EU. ■

UNIVERSITIES**Looking overseas**

A WORKING group of the Higher Education Commission, chaired by Graham Spittle, IBM's chief technology officer, has concluded that British universities are failing to produce the postgraduates we need and that the system is being used mainly to attract overseas students.

The group accuses universities of

neglecting students from here and going for overseas applicants who pay higher fees. Overseas postgraduate students have increased by 200 per cent since 1999, against 18 per cent for British students.

The report says Britain has become the "education outsourcing capital of the world", and predicts more British firms will recruit more from overseas or even relocate. Within Europe and its environs only Andorra and Kazakhstan have a poorer record. ■

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****February**

Tuesday 12 February, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Subject of meeting to be announced

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. Details to follow in the January issue of WORKERS.

TRANSPORT**Back to toll booths?**

TRAVEL IN London is slower now than in 1912, with the volume of traffic at unprecedented levels. London's growing population and its public transport systems bursting at the seams give rise to a nice little earner to justify making us pay for the freedom to move around.

The "consultation" exercise around a further river crossing in London has begun. Should there be another bridge or another ferry linking East to South East London? A bridge was first mooted under Ken Livingstone's mayoral period and then sabotaged by Tories and Green politicians. A new ferry would sink the existing Woolwich Ferry which Greenwich Council, the Royal Borough, has a statutory obligation to provide free.



So a new toll bridge or a new charging ferry? Whichever way you look at it, the travelling public are going to be made to pay. A new toll bridge has given rise to Transport for London insisting on charging at the existing Blackwall Tunnel so as to ensure, in their ludicrous argument, that a fair balance of travel occurs between a free ride and a toll booth.

Similarly, central government wants to extend toll charges to all motorways and major highways. In fact, what they want is the technology installed so that every car is centrally registered for electronic payment or pre-pay arrangements, as already exist in London and other cities with congestion charge areas.

Toll booths and turnpikes were destroyed in the 17th and 18th century as this shackle on mobility was rejected by the workers of Britain. We must reject this latter-day attempt to privatise the roads and pavements beneath our feet. ■

How can the idea of the 'living wage' be a winning philosophy, beyond the agreement of employers?

If you want to improve your pay, you have to

NOVEMBER HAS seen much debate about pay: fair pay; living wage pay; national minimum wage; pay freeze; breaking the pay freeze; employer/director pay; bankers' bonuses. You could substitute 2012 for 1912 or 1812: the same arguments and positions of employers and workers remain fundamentally the same at any time during the past two hundred years.

November launched the "Living wage campaign week", fronted by the Labour Party and Unison. The hourly living wage in London was lifted from £8.30p to £8.55p. Outside of London the figure is £7.45p an hour.

The whole philosophy behind the living wage is that it gives just enough to workers to lift them out of the poverty trap, and lift the basic wage rate above the state national minimum wage for adults (which is £6.19p). A fine philosophy – but how can it be a winning philosophy, based as it is on charitable statisticians and the voluntary agreement of employers?

The number of workers covered by the London Living Wage is still only 11,500, after the original launching of the campaign in 2005. Two hundred companies are involved in the scheme, which allows them to be accredited by the Living Wage Foundation.

Boris Johnson, Tory Mayor of London, announced the uplift in the living wage, yet no Tory council in Britain subscribes to it. The company KPMG subscribes to it but only to try and detract from the obscenity of billions in bonuses paid out to bankers in London's banking centre of Canary Wharf, where the company is sited.

The living wage is the benchmark for the Tory press "campaign" to address unemployment among tens of thousands of Londoners aged between 18 and 25 years – a propaganda exercise which has seen fewer than a thousand "employment opportunities", as distinct from permanent jobs, created.

There is no bargaining around the living wage. Trade union campaigning and organising is reduced to the Oliver Twist begging bowl approach – "Please, sir, can we have some more?" – and to "community" pressure groups, religious

"The trade unions have no role to play if they have surrendered pay bargaining..."

organisations, do-gooders, everybody without a clear class analysis and understanding that we are workers, we create wealth, we fight for our share.

The living wage recognises out of ignorance and accident what every Marxist economist has always argued: that capitalism will pay the minimum to keep its wage slaves alive and capable of purchasing the necessities of everyday life. No worker is going to get fat on the living wage. The analysis of workers' incomes on the national minimum wage or living wage rates is largely related to their second, third, fourth jobs. Poverty and desperation. Five million workers are paid less than the living wage in Britain – 1 in 6 of the workforce.

Danger

There are twin dangers with the trade unions having only a one-size-fits-all approach to wage demands. Either this establishes wage rates as a minimum (the national minimum rate for just about all, rather than the minimum as a safety net for disorganised or badly organised workers). Or it creates a phoney higher living wage rate, caught between a minimum and a slightly higher ceiling.

Worse, it leads to the undercutting of established national wage rates and agreements. The trade unions have no role to play if they have surrendered pay bargaining. Every company which signs up to the living wage will say to its low-paid workforce, "Why pay union subscriptions when we will look after you and save you that weekly or monthly subscription as part of your pittance wages?"

The Labour Party's commitment to a living wage or fair pay born of cynicism: essentially, they do not want pay fights or disruption. The do-gooder charitable mind-

set of "we will dole out the pittance you can survive on" has permeated social democratic thinking since the Labour Party was founded. Workers' acceptance that it is better for someone else to hand out the benefits rather than fight for them ourselves, has become ingrained.

Unless we challenge this acceptance, what future do trade unions have? If the combination of workers is not about collectively struggling for improvements in pay and terms and conditions, then what is it for?

What's fair?

Fair pay as opposed to unfair pay? In the past 12 months there has been an average increase of 49 per cent in the pay of directors of FTSE 100 companies, according to Incomes Data Services. Workers in the public sector, more than 6 million, have seen wage freezes, wage cuts, and downgrading or restructuring which have cut wages and the ability to earn. The Office for National Statistics estimates that national income per head has fallen by 13 per cent since 2008.

The difference between employers' takings and workers' wages widens with every passing day. And yet we still witter about a "fair day's wage for a fair day's work". All the heart-rending arguments about fair pay, low pay, living wage pay and so on and the patronising attitude towards the "little folk" and winning over the employers to fairness, decency and reasonableness – all these miss the point as to how this section of the class is organised.

Why are the trade unions either marginalised around these issues or chasing the coat tails of organisations importing US community-style organising, such as the Movement for Change, campaigns which are not about class organisation but pressure group and religion-driven campaigning? So instead of low pay campaigns, why not an older traditional simple solution – join the union and fight for wages.

Is the campaign for fair pay or living wages going to break the pay freeze in the public sector? The unions can claim a

based as it is on charitable statisticians and the voluntary

to fight for it



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.andrew-wiard.info

King's Cross, London, 2 November: RMT cleaners at train operator East Coast's subcontractor ISS on strike for a living wage, and also contracts of employment, sick pay, pensions and overtime.

victory if they can lift 200,000 NHS workers who are on Band One under Agenda for Change to the living wage. But analysis of wage rates in London indicates that no health worker – other than in a minority of private contractors – earns less than £8.55p. Any claims of campaign success are no more than smoke and mirrors.

Uninvolved

Large sections of the public sector workforce are not involved in the issue of wages. They may earn more, they may be privatised, they may see the employer breaking away from national agreements and trying to move to localised or regional bargaining as epitomised in local

authorities across Britain or in NHS employer cartels such as in the South West, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West.

It is correct for the trade unions to campaign to break the pay freeze in health for the past two years, in local government for the past three years, longer in the fire service, ditto in the Civil Service. But here has been rhetoric and stunts, and shadow boxing as opposed to hard discussions in the workplace about what can be done.

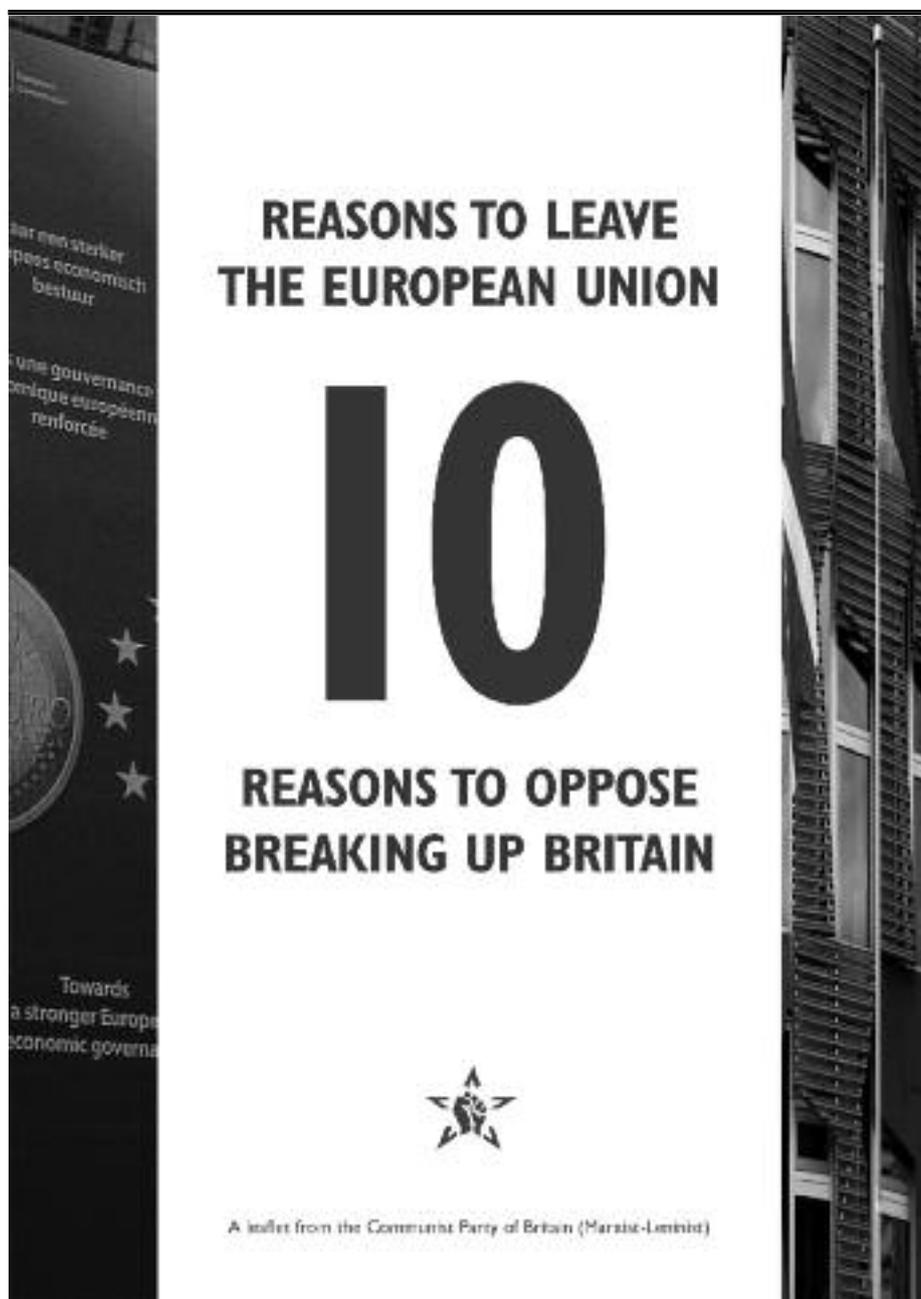
How seriously can certain public sector unions be taken when “tweet marathons” are organised to tweet to the world how poor our pay is and how badly we are done to? No wonder ministers can sneer

about public sector workers being paid to do nothing other than whinge.

Surveys indicate that workers are desperate to keep their jobs; terms and conditions and wages are being sacrificed to preserve employment. This is an old conundrum: when under attack we retreat, but in that retreat we retain organisation, we recruit new members to take the fight forward when we can. And we learn the lessons.

That is not happening at the present. Wage claims are lodged for substantial increases and the employer responds: yes, by all means they'll talk about increases,

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A NEW LEAFLET from the Communist Party spells out the links between membership of the EU and the drive to devolution. It provides sharp, reasoned argument why both are bad for Britain and bad for British workers.

Copies are available on request. Please send a self-addressed A4 envelope (with large stamp), to CPBML, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB.

BADGE OFFER – Out of the EU now!

CONTINUE the resistance to the European Union with a new campaigning badge – the new “Out EU now!” badge (actual size 1.5 inches).

The badge is available now from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB, price £1 each including postage or £3 for 5 including postage.

Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.

A circular badge with a white border and a black background. Inside the circle, the text "Out of EU now!" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The words "Out of" are on the top line, "EU" is on the middle line, and "now!" is on the bottom line.

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but at our cost. They’ll make us pay for them by attacking sickness schemes, national agreements, various allowances and anything else they think they can get away with.

Using collective organised strength, we have over decades driven forward and secured benefits and wages. Now we are under the most sustained attack, aimed at fragmenting the workforce, individualising every job and splintering every workplace, undermining everything which historically has given us strength, collectivity, cohesion, identity.

Key questions

So if we are to develop a pay strategy we should look at key questions: Where is our army – our organised unionised workplaces? How can we maximise involvement of our army? How to fight on different fronts and with different levels of understanding at the same time? Are the trade unions going to be able to rise and develop a strategy involving multiple employers, myriad workplaces, conflicting demands and aggressive employers backed by the most reactionary government in recent years all at the same time, all now?

Or will it be tick-box exercises, one-size-fits-all, pedestrian and let’s wait until the next (neoliberal) Labour government is returned on policies of fairness, decency, pro-business and us knowing our place? Or are we going to do something else?

To fight locally means our organisation in the workplace has to be paramount. It means that union density and what is understood by being a member has to change. Membership comes with responsibility and commitment, not just an insurance policy or user mentality. If you want fairness and respect in the workplace then get organised to win them.

AS WORKERS has detailed on many occasions, the fight for wages is a fight for power in the workplace, a fight for class organisation and dignity. No one gave it to us in the past, no one is going to give it to us now or tomorrow. It’s up to us to take it. ■

If we are to save the NHS we need collectively to regain the kind of confidence which was crucial to the establishment of the service in the dark days of the Second World War...

The NHS: its life in our hands



NHS staff must take responsibility for the service. Theatre staff at St George's Hospital, London, show the spirit needed.

ANDREW LANSLEY, recently deposed as Secretary of State for Health, said that he wanted to be remembered as the last Health Secretary. What on earth did he mean? That he would remain in post until the last syllable of recorded time? That his successors would be so entirely forgettable that no-one would remember them? That they'd have faces only recognisable by dogs? Presumably, using the tortured logic of free marketeers, what he was trying to say was that no SoS should have any influence in how the Service is run. That it should be run by those who know, "clinicians", and not by "command and control" mechanisms which frighten the life out of the bourgeois. In practice, this means that the service should be run by that hallowed modern deity, The Market.

Well, we're about to find out just how forgettable Lansley is. He's gone. And while it would be easy to say, "they're all the same, it doesn't matter a jot which creepy politician is SoS", that would be a mistake.

Lansley didn't want to go. Reason enough in itself to rejoice. A less articulate yet more arrogant buffoon has not been seen in that office for a generation. Cameron didn't want him to go. A cause for even more rejoicing. Just about anything that puts that oleaginous ruling class twit's nose out of joint is to be welcomed. Those wanting to destroy the NHS didn't want him to go. The private companies infecting the Service like a bacillus didn't want him to go.

Need we go on? That he's been

replaced by an equally objectionable jumped up worm with a name that James Naughtie on Radio 4 had so much trouble with is only to be expected from this shower of no-hopers masquerading as a government. We must set as an objective that we'll see him off too.

So, given that Lansley didn't jump, why was he pushed? The time had come to make a sacrifice. A ritual blood-letting. A scapegoat had to be found who would carry the historic can when the NHS, our so-called "national treasure" finally falls apart.

When that begins to happen we'll see why he was pushed. "It was all Lansley's

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doing” will be the cry from the yellow press. Murdoch will need someone to blame when the election comes round and the electorate worries for its health. Politicians who survive scandal for long enough all get sacrificed in the end if they become an electoral liability. Lansley was a vote-loser.

Lansley’s so-called reforms are the most reviled, complicated and disastrous in the history of British healthcare. They dwarf what can be seen with the benefit of hindsight as the uncharacteristically meagre tinkering of Thatcher, and even the traitorous Trojan horses dragged into the service by Blair. Let’s have a look at what’s going on, and at some of what he’s proposed.

The Health & Social Care Act is a monstrosity. It is longer than the Act which established the service in 1948, and is qualitatively more dangerous than all other Health Acts put together. Why? Because it proclaims the triumph of capitalism. It

“This is new-style NHS warfare. It is not pretty and will not be governed by gentlemanly agreements...”

gives our wonderful service to those whose priority is to make money. It destroys planning. It introduces fragmentation.

Crucially, it weakens the authority of those who work in the service, under the pretence of doing the opposite. It will be seen to be a king-size rivet in the coffin of the NHS. If we allow it.

The creators of the wonderful Olympic opening ceremony knew just how dangerous these developments are. They took the brave step of highlighting the significance of the NHS to Britain, and thereby to the world. In order to give more clarity to their vision of the NHS they used Great Ormond Street, one of the world’s

leading children’s hospitals, as a focus. That very same Great Ormond Street could now be used as a small, a very small example of just how insidious is the drive to destruction.

The H&SC Act requires all trusts to become foundation trusts. But the invention of this creature, the foundation trust, can’t be laid at the door of Lansley. It was the brainchild, if that’s not an oxymoron, of the despicable ex-trotskyite Labour minister Milburn after he was taken to see a couple of similar institutions while on holiday in Spain.

Two heads, same beast

In a great example of the Tory and Labour parties being but two heads of the same beast, Lansley has now made it virtually a criminal offence for a trust not to become a foundation trust. And, unsurprisingly, a hospital’s attitude towards money comes right at the top of the list of what it needs to become a foundation trust. “Financial prudence” is key to the foundation trust application process (actually the very notion of a trust “applying” to become a foundation trust is like a prisoner on death row agitating for the use of lethal injections in preference to the electric chair). Every single step to make money must be used, and must be shown to be used, if a trust is to become a foundation trust.

So at Great Ormond Street, world-class medical procedures in dealing with the most difficult-to-treat cases (although many of these patients are often sent to equally world class but less well-known institutions such as the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital) are not enough. Pioneering research and staff development count for little. What’s necessary is to show that if something can be done more cheaply, then it will be.

So the hospital’s IT department, run as an integral part of the hospital since there was information technology, is to be flogged off to a company no one has heard of but which can do it more cheaply. Allegedly. Perhaps this will be the kind of “cheap” seen in the railways, where far more is spent from the public purse on

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain’s new series of London public meetings began on 27 September, with further meetings on 15 November, 12 February and 11 June; all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, and start at 7.30 pm. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings are advertised in What’s On, see page 5.

M The theme of the next meeting, on Tuesday 12 February, will be announced in the next edition of WORKERS. Details of further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party’s annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2013, Wednesday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings elsewhere in the country.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

subsidising the profits of private companies than ever was spent on subsidising railways when rail was state-run.

And, as a precursor of what is to come, a completely different attitude towards unions is also a requirement of Lansley's reforms. Not that it says that anywhere in the Act. In fact the same fluffy "partnership" tripe is trundled out by this bunch as was by the last. But in order to bring about the changes necessary then the attitude must change. Unions must be sidelined, or taken on.

At Great Ormond Street there was no consultation with the relevant union, Unison, on the proposed privatisation of IT. Consultation is required under the recognition agreement between the unions and the employers – but that is cause solely for a call to re-write the agreement. The agreement has been ignored.

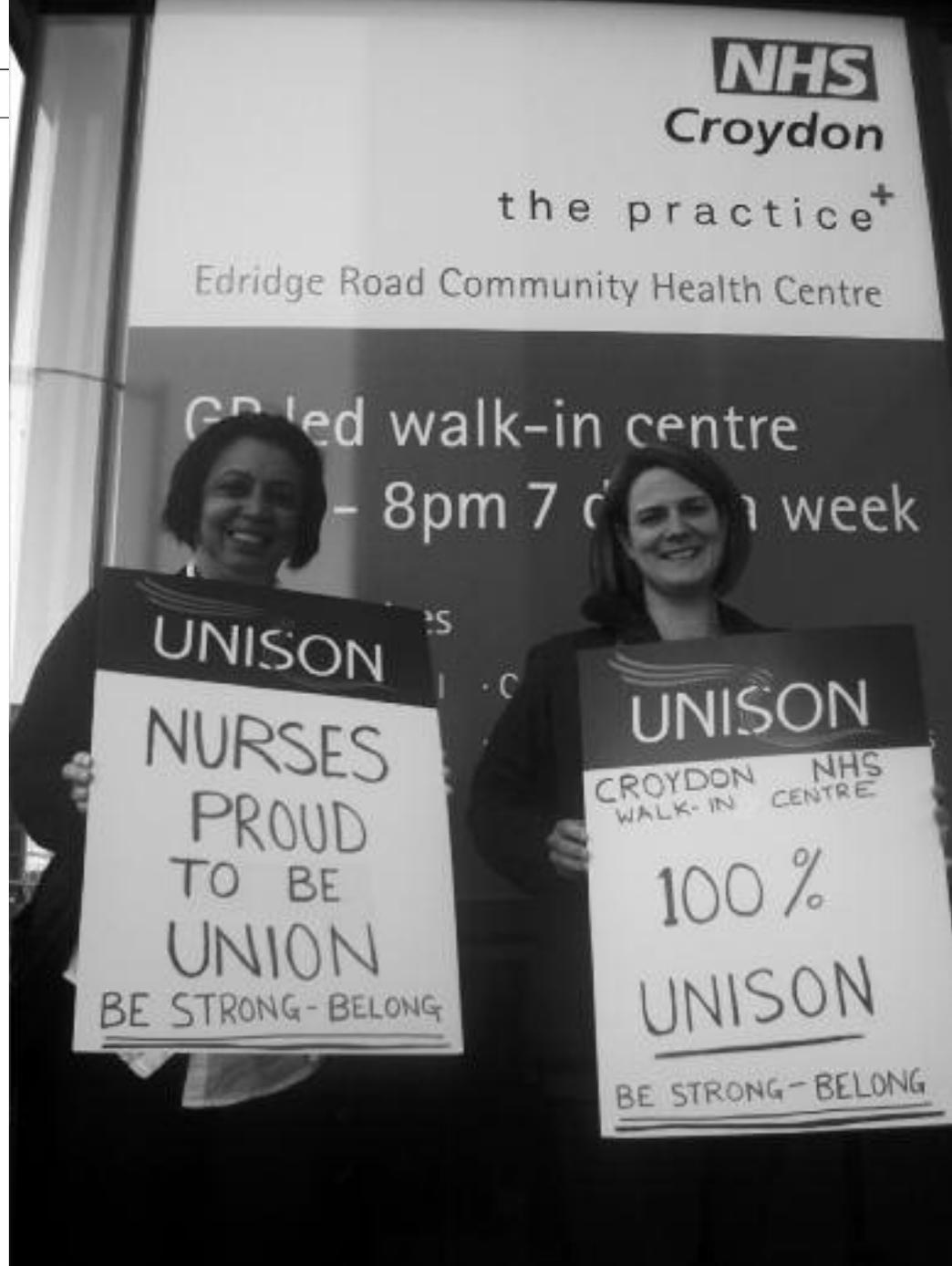
A dispute has been lodged, and ignored. That Unison has responded by ensuring 100 per cent membership in a department hitherto a minority shop is an achievement, and against the odds. But now these new union members must be challenged to do more, to fight.

New way of fighting

This is new-style NHS warfare. It is not pretty and will not be governed by gentlemanly agreements. It will be a trial of strength. And British workers don't like that. They'd rather that the better argument – always ours – should prevail, that there will be a fair arbiter somewhere who will come to our aid and decide in our favour.

There is a craving for an ACAS, or recourse to a benevolent law which does not exist – or to a Labour party which will sort it out in Parliament. It is the inner desire that led our ancestors to dream up Robin Hood. Someone to ride to our rescue. Well, there comes a time when we've all got to grow up and shed our illusions. And the illusion that there's someone out there who will help us is the greatest illusion there is. We will have to do it ourselves.

And if that is true of one small



department in but one hospital, how much more true is it throughout the NHS, and indeed throughout Britain as a whole?

So a re-think is required. Our enemy has had just such a re-think, and came up with the Health & Social Care Act. It also came up with the so-called "recession", shorthand for lifting the hand that holds the whip in the air and threatening us with a beating.

We need to match that re-think, and outstrip it. We need collectively to regain the kind of confidence which was crucial to the establishment of the service in the dark days of the Second World War.

We CAN run the Service ourselves; we always have. We do not need legions of financial rather than medical consultants costing more than a grand a day to invent a language only they can understand. We do not need foundation trusts, clinical commissioning groups, a Commissioning Board, a National Trust Development

Agency, Public Health England, Clinical Senates, Commissioning Support Units, uncle Tom Cobley and all.

There is deep disquiet in the Service. There are some who are leaving because they cannot stomach the "direction of travel".

That attitude must be rooted out. It is more dangerous than anything Lansley could ever come up with. If we desert the field we are lost. The service would be lost and our health would exist only as a source of profit.

In war those who betray, who turn their coats, are more dangerous than the enemy. The job of those active in Unions is to create confidence, not sow despair. It is to find new ways of attacking the enemy, not being content to defend. It is our job to remove every politician who threatens the NHS, and ultimately to remove the system that allows such forgettable politicians to exist. ■

The use of sanctions by one power against another to achieve purposes which they are being applied in the Persian Gulf by the US, the

Economic sanctions – just another way of war

SOME 2,400 YEARS ago Athens declared a trade embargo against neighbouring Megara, which was allied to the enemy of Athens – Corinth. After 27 years of embargo and eventual war, Athens was humiliated as Megara and Corinth were triumphant in their dispute.

The trend was set. Most international sanctions have, throughout history, been the precursor to war. But the type of sanctions we are witnessing today being used to wage a form of war have their origins in the aftermath of the First World War.

US President Woodrow Wilson saw sanctions as an alternative to the slaughter on the battlefields of France, and a good deal cheaper. The US was to have nothing to do with the new League of Nations but would use sanctions and embargoes as a weapon instead of political or military engagement. He said that they needed to be “crafted” into a “deadly force”.

Nonetheless, such sanctions, as a tool of enforcing the wishes of the European victors, were built into the constitution of the League of Nations. Germany itself was under sanctions as the loser of the war, with strict limitations on its military development. The Saar industrial belt was forcibly demilitarised and punitive reparations were imposed.

After Hitler came to power and began to ignore these sanctions, it became clear that the victors had no intention of enforcing them. And when Mussolini’s fascist Italy began bombing Abyssinia, as Ethiopia was then, the League of Nations huffed and puffed but proved unwilling or unable to impose any sanctions on Italy. The US, using its Neutrality Act, banned ships from Italy and Ethiopia from using US ports. This hit Italy, as Ethiopia was landlocked and had no shipping lines.

The only other sanctions imposed in the 1930s were on the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War. Despite the fact the Republic was the democratically elected government that was being overthrown by some of its own military, led by the fascist Franco, both the US and League of Nations put in place an arms embargo on both sides. This was while Germany, in breach of



1973: Chilean workers march showing support for President Allende. The US instituted sanctions

its obligations not to rearm, was pouring weapons into the hands of the Franco forces along with Italy. The US later began to put its own trade sanctions on Japan in 1939 as that country began to threaten US interests in the Pacific.

After the Second World War the victors, including the USSR, created the United Nations. Again, sanctions as a tool for enforcing the will of the Security Council were built into its charter. They were seldom and weakly used before 1990 because the Soviet Union was a member of the Security Council with the power of veto.

But the US, with its economy intact, was in an ideal position to use unilateral sanctions against the USSR – and in 1948 that’s exactly what it did. In 1951 it tried to tighten those sanctions by refusing to aid any country that traded with the USSR in “strategic goods”, including oil.

The US also used economic sanctions against the Chilean government of Salvador Allende, elected in September 1970. Declassified records show a decision to

move to sanctions to “bring him down” as early as 6 November 1970. Eventually, a US-backed coup did the job.

South Africa

There were, though, some agreed UN sanctions. The UN called for all member states to cease the sale and shipments of arms to South Africa. This became mandatory in 1977, and in 1984 the new South African Constitution was declared null and void. There were US/EU/Commonwealth sanctions on South Africa from 1985 to 1991. But the real forces that destroyed apartheid in South Africa were those organised workers inside the country and the Cuban, Angolan, SWAPO and ANC forces that broke the back of the South African army at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1989. The sanctions were ineffective and mainly to assuage domestic public opinion, as were the sanctions on Ian Smith’s Rhodesia.

The big sanctions in the post-Second World War world were taken unilaterally,

Political objectives is not new. But the manner and intensity with EU, Australia, NATO and its despot allies certainly is....

aging war



against Chile before supporting a bloody coup.

outside the UN, again by the USA. In April 1961, the US launched a military attack on its revolutionary neighbour Cuba, using Cuban exiles. It was the latest in US military interventions in the Caribbean and Central and Latin America, but it was a humiliating failure. And so it was in October 1962 after the Soviet Union had promised to defend Cuba, that the US unilaterally imposed a blockade of the island. This took sanctions to a new level. Nothing was to be allowed in and nothing was to be allowed out.

The missile standoff between the US on the one hand and the USSR and Cuba on the other was resolved with a promise that the US would not attack Cuba. But the US transformed its blockade of Cuba into the most severe economic, financial and political embargo in history that continues to this day. Its sugar was boycotted, no food, medicines, machinery, spare parts or oil products could be sold by US companies to Cuba, its airspace was closed to Cuba, Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States at the demand of the US,

and no ship entering a Cuban port could visit a US port for six months.

This was just the beginning. The US was to hone its skills at turning sanctions into a vicious weapon of war.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Socialist bloc (Cuba's main trading partners), the US tightened the screw, introducing laws that made the sanctions extra-territorial. If, say, a Finnish company wanted to sell a piece of medical equipment to Cuba, and if that equipment had any part or software that was US-made or US-licensed, it was banned from doing so under threat of sanctions against that company and any of its subsidiaries. If a foreign company traded with Cuba and had a US-based subsidiary, sanctions would be applied against both the company and the subsidiary.

Banks were targeted to cut off Cuba's ability to use the world banking system controlled by the mighty US Dollar. US-funded Radio Martí beamed anti-Cuban propaganda into Cuba, and any Cuban who could make it to US soil was automatically granted US citizenship. In 2004, Bush set up the Committee to Assist a Free Cuba with a \$60 million budget to provide assistance to Cuban "dissidents", with communication equipment and money and a plan to appoint a US Governor of Cuba and round up all Communist Party and trade union activists before a massive privatisation programme.

This type of super sanction wasn't confined to Cuba. In 1979, Iranians overthrew the Shah, who had been put in place by the US and Britain when those countries organised a coup to get rid of the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadegh. US hostages were taken by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the USA tried to put a blockade around Iran similar to the one imposed on Cuba.

Not working

That didn't work, and Iran was still sticking up two fingers at the US. So in a new twist of outsourcing war, the US encouraged its allies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States to raise a \$60 billion war chest to fund a war against Iran by Iraq. When that war ended

in a bloody stalemate, a desperate and bankrupt Iraq invaded Kuwait. The US mustered a "coalition of the willing" to oust Iraq from Kuwait in a war that did not cost the US one dollar. The mother of all UN sanctions (the USSR had by now collapsed and Russia was doing the US's bidding) was then imposed on Iraq from 1991 until the Anglo-US invasion of 2003. It is estimated that 500,000 Iraqi children died from the effect of those sanctions and the depleted uranium left by US bombing.

Still trying to "contain" Iran, which by now was developing its own nuclear energy programme, the US ramped up sanctions against Iran using the UN, EU, NATO, Australia and the Gulf despots, and threatened any country or company that did not comply with its wishes. This is the situation we have today. The US has tried to stifle Iranian oil exports and destroy its Central Bank. It has dire extra-territorial trade sanctions on Iran and along with Israel uses cyber warfare, drones and assassination squads inside Iran. It is fighting a proxy war against Iran in Syria and will use Israel to fight a proxy war against Iran itself.

But these sanctions are often counterproductive. For example, the arms embargo against South Africa led to that country developing its own arms industry. Pakistan went nuclear as a result of sanctions. Thousands of fleeing Haitians were washed up dead on US beaches due to US sanctions on that country.

Sanctioned countries tend to cooperate with each other, hence relations between Iran and Venezuela and Cuba or, say, between Belarus and Iran and Syria. Although US sanctions have cost Cuba \$60 billion and caused huge suffering, Cuba is about to hold the Presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Nations (CELAC), while Iran now holds the Presidency of the Non Aligned Movement. And of course there are always China and Russia with whom to trade.

Last month the UN General Assembly voted 188-3 against the US blockade of Cuba. The rest of the world is saying No to the use of sanctions, recognising it as just another way of waging war. ■

This month, a new book that to put the case for devolution but unintentionally, how ridiculous the idea is. Plus how the West lost Afghanistan...

The bankruptcy of devolutionary thought

A NATION AGAIN: WHY INDEPENDENCE WILL BE GOOD FOR SCOTLAND (AND ENGLAND TOO), edited by Paul Henderson Scott, foreword by Alex Salmond, paperback, 127 pages, ISBN 1-908373-25-3, Luath Press Ltd., Edinburgh, 2012, £7.99.

THIS BOOK tries to put the case for breaking up Britain. The six contributors are Paul Henderson Scott, a past Vice-President of the SNP, journalist Harry Reid, Stephen Maxwell, the SNP's National Press Officer from 1973 to 1978, Tom Nairn, who spent most of his academic life in Australia, Neil Kay, a professor of economics, and businesswoman Betty Davies.

Paul Scott tries to show how the Union has always held Scotland back, yet cites the novelist Walter Scott, who wrote that after Union, Scotland "increased her prosperity in a ratio more than five times greater than that of her more fortunate and richer sister." Hardly a colony then!

Stephen Maxwell points out that Scotland has none of the institutions it would need to be economically independent: "no Scottish political party, not even the SNP, has shown any interest in rebuilding an independent Scottish banking system." He continues, "On current policies if political nationalism makes further progress Scotland could be the only European country in the modern age to approach independence without any nationally owned banks." It also lacks local savings banks, public pension-backed regional banks specialising in infrastructure development, mutual banks and a bond-issuing agency for public infrastructure.

Maxwell cites SNP publicist Gerry Hassan who embraces neo-liberalism. Hassan claims that social democracy is "in tatters and retreat across the Western world" and concludes, "Scotland cannot buck this development."

Nairn shows the quality of his judgement when he grotesquely likens Nick Clegg to Albert Schweitzer. Nairn used to claim to be a Marxist. Has he forgotten that Marx's great call was not, "Workers of all countries, divide and split"?

Scott argues that Scotland "needs" to be in the EU. Scott, like Maxwell and Kay,



The Scottish Parliament in Horse Wynd, Edinburgh

points to Norway as a model, but Norway of course is not in the EU. Kay rightly praises Norway's use of an oil fund to invest in industry. But with Scotland in the EU, the EU would control the oil and the funds.

The SNP's policy aim of "independence within the EU" is like calling for progress within capitalism. "Independence within the EU" would be no escape from Thatcherism. Present British government policies follow EU orders (largely drafted by British officials). "Independence" for Scotland would mean Thatcherism from Brussels.

AFGHANISTAN: HOW THE WEST LOST ITS WAY, by Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, hardback, 303 pages, ISBN 978-0-300-15457-3, Yale University Press, 2011, £19.99.

TIM BIRD, a lecturer in defence studies at King's College London, and Alex Marshall, a lecturer in history at the University of Glasgow, have produced a thorough, scholarly and fair-minded study of NATO's

disastrous war in Afghanistan.

The initial aim of the war was to disrupt Al-Qaeda – which was achieved by 2001. NATO's war should have ended then, they conclude. This success did not require building a democratic state or a working economy in Afghanistan – neither of which could be achieved.

NATO's nation-building was doomed from the start. As the authors note, "political and economic liberalization in practice generated destabilizing side effects in war-shattered states, which then actually perpetuated instability." Further, "the reconstruction effort during this period was underfunded, corruption-riddled and disorganized ..." In 2006 the education minister in the province of Uruzgan was himself illiterate.

The later war was also bound to fail. This was largely because NATO perceived threats everywhere from "a list that included an individual (bin Laden), a group (Al Qaeda), a tactic (terrorism), hostile governments, neutral governments, and a

ends up showing,
ost its way in



state of mind.” The British 2005 decision to put troops into Helmand was taken casually, without the army top brass even knowing about it.

Extending the war to Pakistan was also a disaster. 6 million people have been displaced from its Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North West Frontier Province. 7,354 civilians have been killed. In 2009 alone, 3,300 Pakistani civilians were killed, more than in Afghanistan, 2,412. The Brookings Institution estimates that drone attacks kill ten civilians for every militant killed.

The authors sum up, “NATO’s decade of strategic engagement in the region had, paradoxically, become notable not only for reinforcing Pakistan’s traditional strategic mindset, but also for escalating violence and instability.”

NATO used counter-insurgency, a military approach, when Afghanistan and Pakistan were clearly problems without a military solution, problems that only the Afghan and Pakistani peoples could solve. ■

P PRODUCTION FOR USE

More from our series on aspects
of Marxist thinking

Human beings have always had an insatiable desire to make objects that make life easier, more tolerable or more fulfilling. Today, such products are presented in the form of commodities and exchanged via capitalist markets. As we have become used to markets, we can easily delude ourselves into imagining that things have always been arranged as they are now.

Yet, in the past, things were different. The impulse to produce things stemmed mostly from the need to satisfy immediate wants. Objects were manufactured because they were necessary, useful or pleasant. They had a use value, goods being normally intended for family or tribe. And barter developed for goods you weren’t able to make yourself but wished to have. Though the chief reason for manufacture in early human society was to enhance prospects of survival by producing vital items such as clothing, tools, cooking utensils and weapons, a delight in crafting decorative items always coexisted.

Over millennia production for exchange emerged, grew, and gradually swept aside the overriding concern of production for use. Increasingly, goods assumed a different character, as commodities for sale and exchange on the market. But the rise of capitalism brought a marked change. Labour itself was made into a commodity, and the process of commodity exchange interwove itself as the exploitative link connecting the whole system of capitalism.

While workers invest their labour producing an object, it remains the employer’s personal property; the object has been turned into merchandise. The purpose of production for capitalists is never the use value of the objects made but their potential exchange value, in which surplus value and profit are created.

Though production of use values is a natural condition of human existence and constitutes the true substance of wealth creation, capitalism sabotages this and turns everything into a commodity – if we let it. Nowadays it is not only manufactured products that are commoditised but also essential infrastructure and services on which we depend: railways, transport, power generation, education and health (even the prospect of prisons and policing) are transformed into commodities, into desperate opportunities for the generation of exchange value and profit, rather than kept as use values vital for the smooth running of greater society.

Even worse, finance capitalism seems happy not to make or provide anything, content to commoditise money and debt and endlessly speculate, a foolhardy approach that ends in bubbles and crashes.

Despite its apparent supremacy, production for exchange will not last forever and will eventually be consigned to the museum of memory. Production for use, however, is unlikely to happen without a fight. Those in whose interest the current system operates can be expected to resist the introduction of a society of workers, combining together to produce an abundance of goods necessary to ensure all needs are fully met.

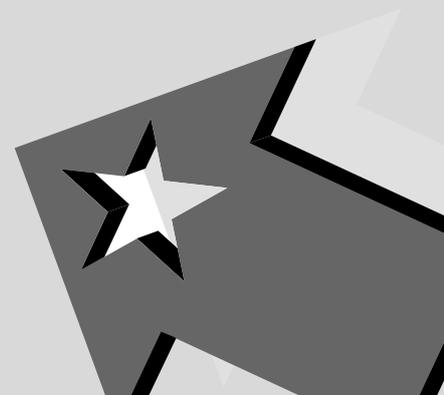
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Back to Front – Panic and power

‘The chaos caused by governments committed to European Union directives dictating British energy policy...’

THE NOVEMBER edition of WORKERS described the energy crisis facing Britain as “an energy investment strike produced by greedy monopolies, stupid governments, abdication of responsibility and lack of planning.” In an attempt to buy its way out of crisis the government has now announced a £20 billion nuclear power construction programme with a consortium led by Hitachi, a Japanese company.

In 2008 the construction programme had been touted at almost half that, some £11 billion. Hitachi will be guaranteed a fixed rate of return, estimated at double the present wholesale power price for at least 20 years after construction ends and the stations are commissioned.

It takes at least ten years to build a new power station, so as in PFI deals the Hitachi consortium will have a licence to print money for years to come. Probably more in the case of Hitachi, since the Advanced Boiling Water Reactor technology it uses is not yet approved for use in Britain – and the assessment process can take up to four years.

If it takes ten years to build a power station, how will that assist the predicted generating capacity gap of 2015? It won't – hence the government's dash for gas generation as a short term hugely profitable alternative.

Where will these jobs be created? Mainly abroad, with Britain acting solely as a construction site bolting together an imported, finished kit. A similar parallel is to be found in the construction of wind farm turbines, mainly constructed in Denmark and Germany, with one British

manufacturer, Vestas Blades on the Isle of Wight, closing in 2009.

A further example of the energy investment strike can be seen in Shell and Esso's decision to establish eight new wells in the North Sea oil and gas fields to increase gas production by 5 per cent and oil by 35,000 barrels a day by 2015. Why an investment strike? Because the decision has only been taken after the government retreated over tax regulations, and the tax breaks will fund the project.

The whole business around new nuclear construction, which is necessary and long overdue, is tainted with last-minute panic decision-making, epitomised by politicians of all parties having sat on their hands for the past ten years.

The chaos caused by governments committed to European Union directives that dictate British energy policy has led to the disease of wind turbines spreading willy nilly across Britain's landscape. This is all in the name of meeting phoney carbon emission reductions by 2027, and the policy will unravel as power cuts loom during 2015 and onwards.

Further importing of gas will bridge the gap, but it will be expensive to consumers and hugely profitable to the energy multinationals. Yet again, proof that there is no national energy plan, no self-sufficiency in energy and no security of supply. All these three points flow from the lack of national sovereignty over energy and the absence of control over basic rights such as access to light and heat. ■

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