

# WORKERS

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LIFE & SOUL

THE MAKING OF A  
MODERN VILLAGE

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## TRANSPORT: A CHANCE FOR CHANGE

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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# WORKERS

## “ First thoughts

THE MOST eloquent comment on the government's extraordinary plans to involve the private sector even more in health and let hospitals opt out of the NHS was also the saddest: the emergence of news of botched aftercare that led to the death of a mother after a routine caesarean operation in the “elite” — and private — Portland Hospital in London.

The government says the private sector is successful, but how do they know? As the widowed father has said, NHS hospitals have to publish their performance statistics for all to see, but not the private sector. Of course, we all know what the private sector means by success: profit. Our article on privatised education in Bradford (page 9) shows how just one termE can create so much havoc.

If there is anything good to come out of the current mess, it is that the government is vulnerable. It has run out of what few ideas it had, and its members are arguing among themselves...over rail, over the euro, over anything.

Blair seems determined to construct a career outside Britain, but he's having trouble. Bush seems to have forgotten all

about him, the European Commission takes little notice, and the Afghans are obviously finding it difficult to take lessons in “nation building” from a prime minister who seems determined to dismantle his own nation.

Meanwhile, Blair, struggling to explain the lack of progress over transport, told parliament that this was because for the first few years the government's priority was education. As if a government could only have one priority! If that was the case, then why are we paying for so many ministers?

Disunity, dissension, lack of confidence: all provide opportunities for workers to pursue their own agenda. That is what rail workers are doing, fighting guerrilla style all over the country while calling for the return of national pay bargaining. As the article on Transport for London on page 12 of this issue shows, now is a good time to reclaim some the unity and control that we have lost.

Strength and weakness are not all in the mind, but they have their roots there. Despite its massive majority, our government is weak. What better time for us to find our strength?

”



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# Strike against sectarianism

RESPONDING TO THE CALL of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, issued on Tuesday 14 January, tens of thousands of workers covering all manner of workplaces in Northern Ireland struck at lunch-time on Friday 17 January for two hours.

The call to action follows the recent escalation of sectarian violence, especially in North Belfast. This includes the murder of 20-year-old Danny McColgan, a young postal worker, and the subsequent strike by his colleagues against the paramilitaries and their rejection of the peace process.

The strike took place across the whole province and the community divide. There have also been sectarian death threats against all Catholic teachers, school cleaners and school meals staff in North and West Belfast by paramilitary loyalist thugs, as well as the sectarian intimidation of school children and staff at the Holy Cross School, Belfast, although these have now been withdrawn.

In many cases strikers took the rest of the working day off as well, to join rallies and demonstrations, often with the open support of their employers. The rally in Belfast attracted over 20,000 people despite the pouring rain.

The area around the City Hall was a packed sea of people and umbrellas. Platform speakers were drawn from all communities as well as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and representatives from the Postal Workers. Marches from hospitals, schools and factories swelled the numbers, producing one of the largest political rallying cries against sectarianism seen in years.

A common resolution was read out at the rallies in Belfast, Cookstown, Enniskillen, Derry, Omagh, Newry and Strabane. It expressed an utter rejection of sectarianism and violence, bigotry and intimidation.

The Belfast rally was attended by both Martin McGuinness and David Trimble, along with other Sinn Fein and Unionist politicians who did not stand together in groups but sprinkled themselves throughout the crowd. Schoolchildren turned out from local schools, with one boy commenting, "You have to make a stand, don't you, at some stage. Our parents did it for civil rights — it's time for us to do our part, to speak out against it."

The response of the trade unions and the working class has been magnificent. The message is clear — enough is enough!

## THATCHER

### The homeless statue

AN EIGHT-FOOT HIGH, two ton, £50,000 marble statue of Thatcher plus handbag, is homeless. This obscene monstrosity will eventually be lodged in the House of Commons but not until five years after Thatcher's death. Many London exhibition centres, including the National Portrait Gallery, have refused to display the statue. It has been politely described as "too domineering".

The proposal to place it in the entrance foyer of the new MPs' offices, Portcullis House, was rejected on safety grounds. It would need £50,000 to strengthen the floor and prevent the aberration plummeting down onto the Jubilee Line — or Hell if it got up momentum! The statue was commissioned secretly by an anonymous donor. That being the case it should be kept anonymous, secret, in the dark or preferably ground down for pebble-dash.

## EURO

### Currency spurs price hikes

IRELAND'S LARGEST circulation daily, the Irish Independent, featured a front-page article two weeks after the launch of the euro on how the new currency was leading to price rises.

The article quoted the Consumer Association of Ireland, which has been monitoring prices since 1 January. "Consumers are being ripped off in the changeover to the euro," it revealed. "In some cases prices have shot up by as much as 10%," the article continued. Traders first raised prices, then rounded up prices when they converted to euros.

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

**INDUSTRY****Closures hit Isle of Wight**

THE ISLE OF WIGHT'S biggest industrial employer, GKN Westland, announced closures just before Christmas. The Columbine Yard, the main site in East Cowes, is to close and the present 1,500 workforce would drop to 850 within a year.

GKN is an enterprise dating back to 1910, when A V Roe & Co was established. The names have changed – Saunders Roe (1928), the British Hovercraft Corporation, Westland.

But the Columbine Yard has always been the centre of engineering excellence, joined latterly by Falcon Yard and the Osborne site. In the 1970s 2,500 people worked there, and the figure was still 1,800 a year ago.

Speculation is rife that the land occupied by Columbine, which faces across the water to the yachting centre of Cowes, will be a site for waterfront homes at fancy prices. It is fuelled by the fact that the Falcon Yard is the only one to have had significant investment in recent years.

The East Cowes factories are at the hub of British civil aviation. Management claims that the reason for the massive job cuts is the cancellation of British Aerospace's regional jet programme and the reduction of the 2002 delivery requirements for the European Airbus by a quarter.

They forecast increased Airbus work in 2003, but claim that Falcon Yard will be able to cope with this.

GKN's European Chief Executive, Marcus Bryson, claims, "East Cowes will continue as a centre of excellence for engineering composites, structural assemblies and systems integration for GKN Aerospace Services."

But Brian Gearing, the union convenor, says, "They have sold our jobs down river, kicking us in the teeth in repayment for turning the situation around at East Cowes and sending work abroad where it can be done more cheaply.

"It seems that East Cowes has borne the brunt. Apart from 150 jobs being lost in the US, the rest of this country and Germany remain untouched.

"There was a fall off in our work as result of September 11," continued Gearing, "but we have utilised our skills to make all sort of things on the site for many years from hovercraft to washing machines to preserve the ability to recover. Now it seems those skills and the new generation of apprentices that are learning them will be lost."



**Miners: still being punished for daring to fight for their industry**

**MINERS****The pensions scandal**

MORE INFORMATION on the state of miners' pension funds has come to light following the decision to award £4 million in compensation to hundreds of miners unfairly sacked during the 1984-1985 strike.

It appears that the Treasury creams off 50% of any surpluses in the pension funds of miners, managers and administrative workers. Since privatisation, they have netted £5 billion — about £1 billion in 2000 alone. The justification given is that the benefits are linked to inflation (in practice, the unreliable Retail Prices Index).

The pension schemes have been closed to new entrants since privatisation. Attempts to either increase benefits paid to pensioners and their dependents, or to invest the surpluses back into the shattered coal-mining communities have had little or no response from the government.

## Lecturers strike to defend jobs

UNIVERSITY LECTURERS at Middlesex University were on strike again on Monday 21 January, fighting against compulsory redundancies being imposed on lecturing staff. The number of compulsory redundancies now stands as 9.8 — down fractionally on the number the university initially wanted to sack.

This time the action took the form of a half-day strike so that all staff could attend a mass meeting to discuss future action. A week before Christmas, staff who were in the subject groups targeted for redundancy were told that in the week beginning 7 January they would all be assessed against four criteria: teaching, research, administration and "flexibility", then ranked — and those who scored lowest would be identified for redundancy unless "other opportunities" emerged before the end of the academic year.

Nearly 60 staff had to spend their Christmas break compiling evidence to justify their existence. Most staff have now had their "assessment", which they were informed was "not an interview" although there were six interviewers on the panel! Meanwhile they were expected to teach, run examinations and mark student work as usual.

The meeting was also addressed by a UNISON steward — administrative staff, who fought off a redundancy threat in 2001 but who are now getting prepared to fight another attack following the merger of two of the university schools.

**AEROSPACE****Firms attempt job cuts**

NEARLY 3,000 JOBS are under threat as high tech aerospace companies AgustaWestland (GKN) and Airbus cut back production with the mantra 'post 11 September' as their justification.

These follow the 4,000 redundancies announced by Rolls Royce and 1,950 previously announced by GKN. Job losses will impact on Weston-super-Mare, Yeovil, Broughton, Derby, Bristol and in partner factories in France.

The job losses are among high tech skilled workers in defence and civil aviation and partly reflect the 25% reduction in civil aviation flights and the completion of Ministry of Defence contracts for helicopters.

The trade unions have rejected a fatalistic response and instead of rushing for the fool's gold of redundancy pay, they are seeking to preserve jobs and skills.

The options the unions are putting forward include reduced working weeks and shortened working years, rotated lay-offs, mothballing of production and stopping overtime.

**MEDIA****Journalists strike over pay**

AS WORKERS went to press, journalists on a series of Bradford-based titles were planning strike action after rejecting an offer of 2.5% from the employer, Newsquest.

The dispute marks a new level in the renaissance of the National Union of Journalists as it recovers from the devastating decade of the 1990s, which saw it derecognised in office after office, particularly in newspapers and magazines in England.

The planned walkouts — three in January — follow a vote of more than 80% for strike action in a ballot held

before Christmas. The action was confirmed at a well-attended chapel (office branch) meeting on 7 January.

Wages for newspaper journalists are “scandalously low”, says the NUJ. With a seemingly endless supply of aspiring journalists, the employers have been using the absence of union organisation to depress wages. Graduates start on as little as £10,500 a year, and most newly qualified senior journalists (with professional qualifications and at least two years experience) earn less than trainee managers at McDonalds on their first day at work.

• Cheques (made out to “Newsquest Bradford NUJ Chapel”) and messages of support should be sent to the NUJ, 22 Swan Street, Manchester M4 5JQ.

**WHAT'S ON****Coming soon****FEBRUARY****Saturday 9 February**

Defend Council Housing national conference, Birmingham. £12.50 trade unionists, £5 tenants. For details, see [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)

**Thursday 28 February**

Let London Live! Public meeting organised by the CPBML. Unless workers rebuild London, it will be rebuilt in the image of capitalism. All welcome to discuss this, the euro threat to London, and other capital issues. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. 7.30pm.

# Has anyone see manufacture?

A NEW COUNTRYWIDE survey by Business Strategies (the economic analysts) has shown that more jobs have been created in Northampton in the last 10 years than any other town or city in the East Midlands. In fact Northampton and Grantham are the only two districts in the region to achieve growth in employee numbers. Leicester and Nottingham for example both saw a fall of about 21,000 employees.

The Chamber of Commerce puts the new 14,200 new jobs down to Northampton's undoubtedly good central position and road links. The new jobs have nearly all been created in transport, communications, retail, warehousing and distribution. For example, this week Safeways have announced 300 new jobs will be created for a store expansion in Rushden.

But these jobs must be set against the loss of core manufacturing in the area, which includes the decline of the boot and shoe industry and losses of major employers such as Express Lifts and British Timken.

In the last few weeks the makers of the famous Doc Martens boots, R. Griggs, has announced it is cutting 70 support and managerial staff at its head office. In Corby 20 jobs in plastics are going. Wellingborough United Distribution (formerly United Carriers) is losing 124 staff locally and 1000 across the country.

Ultimately many services are dependent on manufacture, and will have an uncertain future if manufacture continues to decline in this country.

**TRANSPORT****ScotRail drivers join struggle**

WITH THE DISPUTE at Caledonian MacBrayne Clyde ferries resolved in late December, it was the turn of ScotRail drivers to enforce a ban on working overtime and rest days.

In the first case the rail union RMT achieved most of its demands (in the face of a hostile media). The strike — by crews and pier workers — went a long way towards the goal of parity between seagoing workers and those working between the islands and the mainland.

Parity is also an issue at ScotRail, owned by National Express, the biggest British rail operator. RMT and ASLEF drivers want to bring pay to the levels of other privatised companies. Redundancies have also created driver shortages. This, combined with the chaos of private contractors, is bringing safety issues to the fore.

**HEALTH****Staying in the NHS**

HEALTH WORKERS in UNISON have accepted proposals for a pilot scheme which keeps staff who are at risk of transfer to PFI private contractors within the NHS.

The “Retention of Employment Model” will apply to three hospitals where the support workers, including porters, caterers and domestics, were facing a fight against privatisation under the PFI scheme. The UNISON branches at Havering, Stoke Mandeville and Queen Mary's Roehampton, voted to participate in the pilot scheme and their decision was

endorsed by UNISON's National Health Executive.

The scheme has some significant flaws, not least that it does not include all staff at risk of transfer. Clerical staff, switchboard operators, IT workers and working supervisors are currently excluded.

But the deal will cover 85% of the lowest paid workers in the service and will ensure that they continue to be employed by the NHS, receive national pay rates and conditions of service and can remain in the NHS pension scheme. The scheme will also apply to new starters in these staff groups.

Although the workers will remain NHS employees, they will be effectively managed by the PFI contractors, within the policies of their NHS employer, and

UNISON has more negotiating to do to determine the practical details of this approach. Pressure is still being put on health ministers and managers to include all staff in the scheme.

UNISON has recognised that this scheme offers protection to the majority of the most vulnerable workers in the NHS, and the deal can be seen as a significant victory for a campaign waged at all levels of the union, using research and political pressure as well as industrial action.

UNISON remains fundamentally opposed to PFI and is continuing its fight against all aspects of public sector privatisation in its “Positively Public” campaign.

**Kashmir: bitter legacy of the Raj**

**KASHMIR** continues to be one of the world's trouble spots. Wars have been fought over it in 1947-49 (when 200,000 Muslims were killed and 400,000 driven into exile), in 1965, 1971, 1990 (when 25,000 people were killed) and most recently in May 1999 (when 300 people were killed). In the past 50 years, 70,000 people have been killed in this conflict.

As the British Empire crumbled after the end of the Second World War, it started to split its Indian possession. In 1947 it was agreed that two successor Dominions should be formed, India and Pakistan. Under these agreements, the 600 individual states would accede either to India or Pakistan according to the religion professed by the majority of the population in each state.

There were disputes in only a few states. The state of Junagadh had a Muslim ruler and a population 80% Hindu: he announced that Junagadh had acceded to Pakistan. India at once occupied the state and administered a plebiscite, in which the majority voted to join India. Two other disputed states, Hyderabad and Jodhpur, joined India on the grounds that they had a Hindu majority. 599 states out of 600 acceded to India or Pakistan in accordance with the agreed procedure.

**90,000 troops**

Kashmir had a Muslim majority of 78%, so it should have acceded to Pakistan. But Maharaja Sir Hari Singh, Kashmir's Hindu ruler, chose to accede to India, and India at once accepted his decision and sent 90,000 regular troops into Kashmir to enforce it. Kashmir's four million people were decreed to be part of India, with no attempt to ascertain their wishes or to respect their right to self-determination.

The Indian government has repeatedly promised to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir, but it has never actually held one. UN Resolutions have continually called on India to hold a plebiscite but India has constantly refused.

On 17 January 1952, the Soviet Union expressed support for Kashmir's right to determine its own future, stating that the matter "can be resolved successfully only by giving the people of Kashmir an opportunity to decide the question of Kashmir's constitutional status by themselves, without outside interference."

**We have heard enough about Gordon  
currency is about a great deal more t**

**The real euro test**

IS JOINING THE EURO just an economic, technical decision? Or are profound questions of democracy and sovereignty involved? Blair has claimed that no constitutional or political problems arise. As far as he is concerned, it is just an economic matter, and if he says that we meet the five tests, then we should decide to enter. But we have a more significant test in mind — would entering the euro destroy our democracy and sovereignty?

Sovereignty is fundamental to democracy, because losing economic sovereignty to the European Central Bank, or to international capital markets, means that people are robbed of the possibility of having their democratic choices on economic policy implemented. The EU claims to be democratic, but doesn't democracy mean reflecting people's wishes, that society goes the way that people want it to go? Isn't democracy the quite extraordinary idea that what the majority of the people want to happen should and will happen? So although Jacques Santer said, "There will be monetary union and Britain will be a member", the decision on whether we join is for us, not him.

**Disillusion**

The current disillusion with politics results from the way in which our rulers have emptied our present system of democratic content. Capitalist governments are not responsive to public opinion; they are not governed by democracy. Nor do they seek policy solutions that produce the best possible outcome; they do not govern in the interests of society but in the interests of capital. The 'parliamentary democracy' structure of power prevents real democracy; it was designed to prevent, not enable, the people to rule: it always produces turnabout despotisms by party leaders. This system delivered 22 years of Thatcherism, whether a minority of people voted for it or the majority voted against it: it does not deserve, or get, popular support. The proportion of people who believed that 'the system works well' fell from 48% in 1973 to 33% in 1991 to only 22% in 1995.

What would popular rule mean? Recent research into social attitudes shows that most of us want to keep the pound. Most of us want import controls to protect our economy. Most of us believe that Britain, not the EU, should decide our policies on taxes, our immigration policies, our defence policies, our rights at work, and the level of agricultural production. Most of us want to keep passport controls between EU countries, and most of us want to keep Britain united and oppose separatism. We want to control the money markets (some who support the euro do so in the fond hope that the euro would control these markets). And we want to live in a society based on full employment, a society that aims to raise living standards.

**The block on democracy**

But the EU blocks all these. The EU does not allow us democracy or sovereignty. To the extent that they exist at all, democratic political cultures in Europe's nations today are closely tied to and dependent upon the nation-states. The real danger, seldom discussed, is that sudden movements towards European political integration would further weaken our democratic constraints on market forces.

As the Labour MP and Minister Douglas Jay wrote years ago, "if you ... join supranational (as opposed to international) institutions, you involve yourself in an inescapable dilemma. If the supranational authority responsible for decision and for legislation is not accountable to, and representative of, the people so governed, then you are in breach of the

# Brown's five economic tests. But the single European than economics...



most fundamental of democratic principles: that people should not be coerced by laws or decisions made by a body which they had no part, even indirect, in selecting. On the other hand, so far as you make the legislative authority elected by, and responsible to, an electorate outside your own country, then you so far cease to be an independent sovereign state. With a supranational authority, that dilemma is inexorable. With an international body, it does not arise. That was, and is, the kernel of the political choice confronting the UK by the EC in its present form as designed by Monnet and his followers."

The euro is the biggest move towards a single EU state, and the biggest threat to our democracy and sovereignty. Blair has said that the decision whether or not to enter the euro is 'the most important question facing Britain today'. Indeed it is: Britain's democracy, workers' power to decide what goes on in our country, is at stake in this decision. We must oppose those who would dissolve Britain into a

European state.

Some members of the government have convinced themselves, if nobody else, that experience will prove to the British people that joining the euro will be a good idea. They hope that by the time the Swedes have their referendum in May 2003, we will have decided that the euro works.

The government's five tests — economic convergence, flexibility, inward investment, financial services, and economic growth with more jobs — do not mention manufacturing. The eurofanatic Ken Jackson, of the new union 'Amicus' (created by the merger of the AEEU and MSF), dropped engineering from the union's name, a hint of British engineering's prospects under the euro.

### Ploy

The tests are meant to sound objective and trustworthy; they are in fact just a fig leaf, a ploy to con us into thinking that the euro would be good for us. But we know that the euro will not make one

train run on time; it will not keep one hospital in the NHS; it will not keep one factory open.

The government says that it will make an assessment of the tests by June 2003. Some ministers say the tests will just be a part of the government's overall assessment of whether joining will be good for us. As Robin Cook said, the referendum decision would be 'political and economic'. Others say that the tests are the only criterion, and that if we do not meet them, then the government will not recommend entry. As a Treasury spokesman said, "There can only be a referendum if there's a government recommendation to join. There'll only be a recommendation to join if the five tests are met. If not, there won't be a referendum." Gordon Brown has repeatedly stressed that the Treasury must conclude that there is a 'clear and unambiguous' case for joining the euro before he will recommend British entry. He

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has also said that political considerations “such as Britain’s position in Europe” will play no part in his deliberations.

But the Treasury official in charge of assessment, Gus O’Donnell, has said, “Economics can never be clear and unambiguous. Ultimately, it will be a political decision.” He also derided the current system, under which the 12 eurozone finance ministers try to coordinate domestic agendas with monetary policy set by the European Central Bank. His comments explode the government’s claim that the tests are genuine, objective preconditions, which will provide reassurance that joining the euro would be economically prudent. The Bank of England is also unhappy about the arrangements for running the eurozone economies. Sir Eddie George recently said that he was not convinced that the “one size fits all” policy would work.

Bill Morris,  
General  
Secretary of  
the

TGWU,  
warned  
the labour  
movement  
faced the danger

of “a headlong rush into the single currency, bringing huge cuts in public spending and public service at a time of slowing economic growth” (OBSERVER, 10 June 2001).

On 3 July 2001, Morris said that our joining the euro should not depend on our passing the five tests, but also on the EU’s achieving more transparency and democracy in its institutions, including the European Central Bank and the European Parliament — two tests even more difficult to pass!

## **‘Charles Clarke, Chairman of the Labour Party, said the government should take Britain into the euro even if it brings no positive economic benefits’**

Early in January, Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, and Peter Hain, the Europe Minister, emphasised how tough the tests were, and attacked the idea of rushing headlong into the euro. Straw said that “when the referendum takes place in part depends on when we are satisfied — if we are satisfied — that the five economic tests are themselves satisfied.” Then Hain suggested joining the euro was inevitable for Britain, saying that he doubted whether we could have a ‘parallel currency economy’. (Perhaps he doesn’t believe that the Canadian dollar can coexist with the US dollar; perhaps he knows nothing of the Swiss franc.)

### **The prime reason**

The prime reason for euro entry has always been political not economic.

Charles Clarke, Chairman of the Labour Party, said the government should take Britain into the euro even if it brings no positive economic benefits. And as Prodi has said, “There is no escape hatch for countries wanting to leave EMU after having joined, even if they subsequently found that it was not compatible with their economies...It’s a definitive marriage, you cannot leave the eurozone once you’re in.” Prodi also told us we would have to rejoin the ERM for two years!

Government confusion reflects their divided mind: is the priority to stay in power, or to get us into the euro whatever the cost? Does Blair want to be Britain’s Prime Minister, or has he other more global jobs in mind? Certainly he seems none too keen to address any of the many problems that he was elected to

solve - industrial decline, transport, health, and education.

The European Commission’s July 2001 Eurobarometer report on British attitudes to the EU showed that that almost two-thirds of us believed that joining the euro would end our national independence, and 60% did not trust the EU to protect Britain’s interests. Only 2.1% of those polled said that they felt very well informed about the currency; 17.7% said that they felt well informed. The total of 19.8% who felt either well informed or very well informed had supposedly fallen by more than eight percentage points since April’s report!

### **Prejudice?**

The report’s author, Dr Denis Balsom, concluded that people’s opinions about the euro were based on “prejudice and the innate conservatism of British public opinion”, an opinion which was not of course based on prejudice! We say that these conclusions showed a deep understanding of the euro, not prejudice.

The pressure on British workers to change their minds will increase considerably. British membership of the euro matters desperately to Brussels, which wants to see the weakening of working class power in Britain the loss of sterling would inevitably entail.

Our refusal to embrace the euro has put the government in a quandary: how can they convince us to love the euro? With polls showing how unpopular the euro still is, the whole Labour Party must be very tempted to drop the whole idea. Why not steal the Tories’ only popular policy? It would be a nice change from stealing their unpopular policies!

Our class is successfully stopping Britain from joining the euro. We must keep on forcing the government to delay the referendum: as long as we are not in the euro, we are winning. We must get all our trade unions to make their voices heard in upholding democracy and sovereignty and opposing euro entry. The working class must decide to rule society itself, and not be ruled by anyone else any more.



A look at an educational experiment in Bradford reveals that behind all the froth of the private sector there lies...well, nothing at all...

## The emperor's new clothes



Learning languages — but the only language some of the companies running education understand is the language of profit

TWENTY MONTHS AGO, Bradford Local Education Authority was indicted in its Ofsted report as "...failing its children miserably." Poor leadership, political and professional, across the whole authority over many years was cited as the major reason for the failure. The DFEE (now DfES) swept in demanding far-reaching changes.

A sequence of events was set in train leading to the day-to-day running of education now residing with a private company, Serco-QAA, in a 10-year, £360 million contract. The council's role has been reduced to monitoring the contract, much as the privatised utilities have their regulator. 'Off-Ed' would be an appropriate designation.

Though there have been examples of such educational privatisation in other parts of the country, the Bradford experiment is the biggest of its kind to date, and its progress is being scrutinised by many both inside and outside

education.

Since this is the first school term with Serco in the driving seat, there has been little immediate impact at the chalk face, but support and administrative staff already have grave concerns.

One thousand staff in various education offices and outposts were transferred from council to Serco employment by Christmas, and negotiations between the unions and Serco are foundering on the precise nature of the terms and conditions.

### Portents

Portents are not good — Serco's unwillingness to divulge its plans beyond the minimum the law requires suggests at best a new low in collective bargaining, and at worst the icy blast of short term contracts, flexible work patterns etc.

This heavy-handed approach has already been felt at Flockton House, the main education office, where workers are

now required to share desks. Serco announced this 'hot desking' plan as a morale boosting initiative and at a stroke achieved the opposite.

Doubtless Serco envisages a new breed of education support personnel, armed with mobile phone and laptop, working from their car seat on a hard shoulder. Open-plan offices are to be the next improvement, and from there it is but a small step to no office at all.

To understand how a company like Serco with its industrial heritage (it was formed when RCA merged with General Electric in 1987) comes to be running an education authority, requires an appreciation of what has been happening to the whole British economy over many years. On the one hand is the relentless onslaught on industry which has driven so many manufacturing enterprises either out of existence or to greener pastures in the

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# The not-so-hidden costs of privatisation

JUST UNDER TWO YEARS ago, current Education Secretary Estelle Morris, then schools minister, announced the government's hope and intention to increase the role of private companies in the running of state education.

There had already been an element of involvement, with private companies taking over the management of a handful of authorities which had demonstrably failed to provide an adequate school service. It is important to recognise this as being the case, for it goes a long way in explaining why there has been little resistance from organised workers and parental bodies to these incursions. Morris signalled that the scope of the interventions would be broadened and the scale stepped up.

Her initial comments indicate that the government had a clear ideological thrust and strategy. After two years, is it quite so clear?

There are now 17 companies on the government's approved contractors list. Some seem to exist in name only, some have acquired only small-scale contracts whilst a handful appear to be of some stature. Even these, however, have limited scale and scope to their activities within the education sector.

Some education authorities have done the government's bidding and

willingly hived off parts of their operations to private consultants. Bradford, for example, teamed up with Serco (their biggest contract) after a damning Ofsted report which no-one could gainsay. Leeds, while justifiably rejecting much of Ofsted's criticisms, has joined with Capita and is now taking a more hard-nosed approach to school closure.

Some councils have "outsourced" specific aspects of the management of their education services. These have usually involved specialised services such as property management and payroll.

## Billions

In all, the market for private services now stands at about £2 billion but this includes contracts that run for a number of years such as CEA in Islington and Bradford/Serco and Leeds/Capita. It also does not take account of the penalty clauses coming into play.

These are usually connected in some way to improving student exam results and the private sector is often having little success in driving these results up. CEA were "fined" in Islington because of poor GCSE scores and Serco have presided over Bradford's continuing plummet at all levels.

Early days, but it does lead one to suspect that privatisation is not a panacea for our ills. Reading government pronouncements carefully leads one to believe that they are not over-convinced, either. Blair never talks of "improvement" through private involvement — only of efficiency. Morris rejects the continuing role of education authorities but wants them to remain as partners with private companies.

What it smacks of is desperation. The government knows it cannot really afford to fund its much-vaunted commitment to education. It knows that as it turns its back on industry so it must walk away from the schools which are both funded by industrial wealth-production and which, in turn, gave rise to the need for the most literate workers in the world.

Most of the bigger companies climbing on board the gravy train are staffed by former local government officials with sometimes considerable know-how who, given the right conditions, probably could do a good job. But there is only short-termism in these "virtual companies" — even in those that are subsidiaries of multi-nationals. They are certainly not in local education management for the long-haul and there has been no great rush from big "players" to get into the game.

## The companies who think (rightly) that there is more profit to be

### Serco

Serco is a strange beast. Born of RCA in 1926 to manage cinemas it went on to build Fylingdales early warning station in the 1950s and missiles in the 1980s. It has lately moved into facilities management as an alternative to investing in manufacture. It has the contract to run Bradford's schools and is not having much success at present. It does not appear to have much in the

way of permanent education management staff, relying on "parachuting" in "loan" stars on short-term contracts. Does not bode well for Bradford.

### CEA

Rapidly growing into a serious challenger to Nord Anglia as the front runner in the overall education market. CEA has the contract for overseeing the Teacher Threshold evaluations and

performance pay as well as running Islington. Founded by the bloke who invented local management of schools in Cambridgeshire, it is another "virtual" company staffed by a core of permanent workers and a series of sub-contractors. Now probably the largest Ofsted contractor and influential at the DfES as it does number people with education pedigree. Recently became a subsidiary of Mott MacDonald

*Continued from page 9*

service sector. And at the same time we have seen the stealthy dismantling of local education authorities (LEAs).

At one time LEAs were the sole provider of essential school services, and there was scarcely a toehold for private interlopers. Now, financing for services is channelled directly to schools which, in turn, are encouraged to buy the services they want (or can afford), from wherever.

Enter firms like Serco, offering inspection and advisory services, training, financial management, information technology etc, formerly gratis as far as schools were concerned via the LEA, now with a price and available from a variety of sellers.

### Enter the market place

In the name of devolving authority and power to individual schools, successive governments have reduced the role of the LEA to that of an educational vending machine and thus created a marketplace in education.

As is the norm in such companies, they have taken onto their books some celebrated and successful education 'faces' — recently retired Directors of Education from all points of the compass being frequently available. And of course they can make the right, reassuring noises when unions, governors, parents ask how a private company can run education. But the faces are generally there for cosmetic

## 'The government has created a tool for leveraging itself away from its responsibilities'

reasons, a short-term expedient to bridge the credibility gap.

A glance at Serco's recent history is revealing (see below). Its principal business is providing management services to government. It has a varied portfolio including defence, transport, local government, health, the penal system. Having failed to win the National Air Traffic Control contract, it was given the contract for the Highways Agencies National Traffic Control centre. Earlier this year, Serco became part of a government project calling on local authorities to "...develop innovative ways of working with the private sector and other partner organisations".

It appears the government has created a tool for leveraging itself away from its responsibilities. Where LEAs were a conduit for taxpayers' money back into schools and therefore an inter-face between government and education, regimes such as Serco in Bradford are now a buffer, an insulating layer.

It was telling, at a recent meeting for school governors, that when Serco

representatives were asked what they were going to do about the chronic teacher shortage in Bradford, they had nothing to offer but government platitudes.

In a recent interview, Serco's Director of Operations (interim), when asked what new ideas the company had for dealing with the problem of low attainment of pupils, responded "...we are not going to come in with gimmicks — that's not the way of improving education services."

### Targets

Well, anyone can tell you how not to improve services, the trick is how to improve them. Aside from setting targets, Serco's ambition in the field of service improvement appears to be confined to hooking in new money from outside sources, and latching onto the widespread but nonetheless sharp practice of manipulating the curriculum to include more vocational type qualifications, so that schools leap up the exam league tables by, for example, counting a pupil's GNVQ pass as equivalent to four GCSEs.

On a positive note, the arrival of Serco has compelled those who work in education in Bradford to question just what kind of service they really want. There is a dawning realisation that if there is to be change, then it will be teachers, supported by governors, who will have to deliver it. The next logical step is for schools collectively to assert for themselves what changes they want.

## found in education than elsewhere (experience not required)

Engineering, which spends more time on running schools in the USA than in engineering.

### Nord Anglia

Described by Unison as being probably the most entrepreneurial of all the major companies, Nord Anglia has grown from running a couple of language schools to running schools privately and Ofsted inspections in a big way. The company would appear to

be a mover behind the scenes in the government's attempts to break up national agreements so that individual school management can become profitable.

### Capita

Now in partnership with the LEA in running Education Leeds, overseeing England's second-largest education system as well as Leeds United. Has made a big thrust into schools through

the acquisition of SIMS, the standard administration system now in use in English schools.

### WS Atkins

Previously an engineering systems company, WS Atkins has now branched out into systems management and property management and consultancy. Heavily into PFI projects and sees a chance of this growing in school building.

**Transport for London can be a focus for Londoners to rebuild and shape a transport system to serve their needs — and the needs of Britain as a whole...**

## **Transport in London — a chance for change**

THE CREATION of TfL (Transport for London) in July 2000 gave the capital a body with unprecedented statutory responsibility for the whole door-to-door journey, across all modes of transport. The Underground is due to be transferred to TfL in March/April 2002, after the best way of financing it has been settled — and given the government's present vulnerability on the issue, it may yet be settled in

London's favour.

As part of a democratically accountable London government, TfL provides a focus for Londoners to begin to rebuild and shape a transport system to serve their needs, and the needs of Britain as a whole. Chaired by the mayor, it allows Londoners to take part through their unions and trade councils (the south-east region of the TUC has a seat on the board), passenger groups,

boroughs, and other organisations.

The importance of this should not be underestimated; but even trade unionists can be slow to recognise an opportunity, allowing decisions to be taken over their heads.

Stagecoach drivers in the Transport & General Workers Union now realised that, had they demanded to be involved at an earlier planning and design stage, when the positioning of disability ramps at the rear of buses was being discussed, they and their passengers could have been spared much frustration and rage.

When as many as 40% of the ramps failed to work, drivers considered refusing to take the buses out, but eventually agreed to keep on working. The result of continuing to operate faulty buses was that the passengers became even angrier, and defects will now take longer to put right.

This case also illustrates the need for conductors. Without their assistance, the driver, boxed into the cab, has little control when things go wrong. One-man buses are now almost universal, and TfL is promoting cashless buses and smartcards. True, this is safer for drivers, and speeds up journeys. The reality is that having to pay wages to conductors or guards reduces company profits.

But conductors on the central London hop-on hop-off Routemasters, retained by popular demand, can lead by example. Unofficially, TfL regards them as superfluous, which any passenger in need of a steadying hand will deny. Those conductors who still do the job with pride can make themselves indispensable. This has to be said, not out of nostalgia for cheery cockney conductors, but on grounds of public safety and assistance, and jobs.

The transport union RMT has taken industrial action to uphold the safety role of guards on trains. Terrorist threats

**'Even trade unionists can be slow to recognise an opportunity, allowing decisions be taken over their heads'**

**PUBLIC MEETING — ALL WELCOME**

**Let London Live!**

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1  
Thursday 28 February, 7.30 pm**

Organised by the CPBML. Unless workers rebuild London, it will be rebuilt in the image of capitalism. All welcome to discuss this, the euro threat to London, and other capital issues.

Nearest tube: Holborn

have highlighted the necessity to maximise security on the London Tube and commuter rail system, for which TfL is responsible. Londoners have also had experience of attempts to blow up buses and coaches in the course of their work. There is no shortage of contemporary issues on which workers can take an active stand, and no shortage of jobs that need to be done.

Yet with people queuing up to find work, we are told there is a 'shortage' of train and bus drivers. This is something that TfL and the unions are looking at together. The reasons for driver shortage appear to differ from industry to industry, but the common cause is private profit.

With the privatisation of the railways, there were wholesale redundancies among train drivers, and loss of skills as services were slashed. In the bus industry, the process of deregulation and competitive tendering, rather than privatisation as such, depressed wages to the point where a job on the buses lost its attraction. The basic wage differential between tube and bus workers is now as much as £13,000. Even so, bus companies refused to take the hint, and tried to recruit from abroad, quite literally providing French drivers with a busman's holiday. EU proposals to force the tendering out of contracts every five years (directive 91/440) are the latest threat.

TfL has taken some important initiatives. First, introducing the principle of London weighting for bus drivers. Then, drawing up new contracts with bus companies which boost drivers' pay and deliver a more reliable service. In the past, companies were rewarded according to mileage, with no penalty for unpunctuality, and no incentives.

According to these new contracts, passengers are not expected to wait more than an average of three minutes at bus stops. Companies receive full payment for average waits of up to six minutes — but if they can reduce this to 5.5 minutes they gain an extra 15%, and so on. Theoretically, this could result in up to £2 million more a year to the



**Rush hour in the capital: with prices up yet again this January and services deteriorating, Londoners must look to themselves to improve matters.**

companies, and up to £100 per month in bonus to drivers.

### Speedier

A speedier service is partly being achieved on some routes by increasing the number of inspectors (or "route controllers" as they now prefer to be known) by 15%. Technology also plays a part — some traffic lights can recognise when a bus is late, and give priority.

As with any measures to increase productivity under capitalism, there is a trade-off between the strain of working harder, and the attraction of incentives to comply. It is not yet clear what conclusions London bus drivers will come to about their new conditions of work. Under socialism, such exploitation would not exist. Transport workers would run their services answerable only

to the public they serve. Efficiency would be a matter of pride, not coercion.

Neither TfL in its management role, nor for that matter trade unions, have the power to eliminate exploitation. Only true socialism — that is, the elimination of capitalism — can do that. But trade unionists can ensure that, in any arena in which they are active, the focus is on socialism — not what passes for socialism, capitalism in disguise.

Socialist thinking involves recognising the limitations of reform. So it is with reservations that the transport unions should consider TfL's 'socialist' idea for a Land Value Tax.

The idea is that the excess wealth, or profit, which accrues to private land holdings as a result of public investment, such as the Jubilee Line Extension of the Underground, CrossRail,

## A history of housing in a Cambridgeshire village shows the transition from rural slums to unaffordable price tags...

# The making of a modern village

LINTON IS A SMALL VILLAGE of about 5,000 people, 8 miles south of Cambridge. In many ways, it is typical of the modern British village, as a recent book by the Linton & District Historical Society — *HOUSING IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES* — shows. It starts and ends with housing.

The last 30 years of the 19th century saw widespread poverty, the collapse of agricultural production, widespread emigration from Cambridgeshire and its villages.

It was cheaper (for capitalists) to bring grain from the USA and frozen meat from New Zealand and Australia than produce it at home. Strikes and lock-outs in Cambridge-shire and Suffolk occurred, resulting in the formation of the National Agricultural Labourers Union in 1872, now part of the TGWU. Continued cheaper imports saw thousands of acres put out of production followed by extensive unemployment. Rural Cambridgeshire was depressed and stagnating. Farming practices were archaic and uncompetitive, even railway tariffs penalised the farmer, carcasses from Canada being transported cheaper than home produced hams. The price of land collapsed.

As a study of a rural village, this booklet indicates that effectively no new housing as such was built during a 50-year period — 1851 to 1901. Sub-division was the norm within already tiny dwellings: the creation of rural slums. Overcrowding, “nuisances”, insanitary conditions, the fear of cholera, typhus and disease being identified in one local government or parliamentary report after another. This is not the industrial North of Leeds and Manchester but rural England. As late as 1903 the District Council

Medical Officer writes of, “the older cottages are barely fit for human habitation and cottages are occupied by large and increasing families become overcrowded.”

Absentee landlords, epitomised in such titles as “Captain Ruck-Keene, Lord of the Manors of Great and Little Linton or Pembroke College, Cambridge, Lords of the Barham estate,” did not build houses — presumably there was no profit in it.

A public enquiry into housing in 1904,

1940 no new housing was built, unless initiated from public authorities or funded by charitable organisations such as The Independent Order of Oddfellows — an interesting throwback to early trade union burial clubs, friendly and hardship societies.

Attempts to improve the quality of housing meant preventing widespread fraud and dangerous building practices. What would be deemed by modern Tories (and Labour) as unnecessary red-tape and

bureaucracy were in fact lessons learnt from attempting to curb unscrupulous builders and unsatisfactory conditions.

But still in the 1930s the village lacked mains electricity, gas or water. Drinking water came from wells and pumps. Cess and privy pits dealt with sewage. Nightsoil contractor was a recognised occupation. Household waste was dumped locally, not



Linton, Cambridgeshire, circa 1911. (From *HOUSING IN LINTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE*, Burlington Press, Cambridge)

where “the working classes” could attend and give their views, were disappointed — no one came. The silence was put down to the “harsh treatment” landlords and employers meted out to anyone expressing dissatisfaction with housing conditions.

Further reports follow from medical officers, parish and district councils, again parliamentary inquiries. The Cambridge colleges get lambasted by the “good, great and do-gooders” to do something about appalling housing conditions on their estates. Pembroke College failed to respond for at least two years.

The reality was that between 1900 and

collected.

The 1930 Housing Act again tried to lift quality and sanitation. A series of demolition orders follow, literally taking down the worst slums, with new housing for the residents. Access to central government funding, whose refusal for over 40 years had prevented public authorities from addressing the housing question, began to ease.

From 1940 to 1954, the sorry saga continues. Further council reports, more housing inspectors and medical officers scathing of conditions — the urgent need of repairs, overcrowding, poor sanitation, the lack of building materials, a shortage

# WHERE'S THE PARTY?

of thatch and thatchers.

The Cambridgeshire Federation of Women's Institutes campaigned over housing conditions in the villages. The British Legion campaigned in the mid-1950s over poor housing available to ex-servicemen and women even though the war was over by nearly 10 years.

Piped water begins to appear in the early 1950s but the full extension of water and electricity provision is not completed until the 1980s. Mains gas still not available to every house or street. Council refuse collection commences in the early 1950s — a service taken for granted now and now seen as a source of profit ripe for tendering.

## Thatcher's assault

The establishment of the NHS took away the friendly societies locus, shifting more clout to local authorities. Public housing and improvement took major steps forward during the latter part of the 20th century, transforming a once depressed village, until fragmented by the Thatcherite assault on public housing stock in the 1980s.

Linton in the 21st century now sees house prices rivalling London, as the village becomes a dormitory for many working and travelling further afield. London is 50 miles away. As London distorts the economy, work and transport structures of the South East, Cambridge parallels the distortion in East Anglia - the Silicon Fen et al.

New housing developments in a 20-mile radius around Cambridge will see 45,000 new houses built for sale and profit during the next 15 years. At least two new "villages" are planned. The irony is that many young people can no longer afford to live in the village being priced out of the wretched "market". So full circle: from rural slums and appalling housing conditions to unaffordable price tags.

If you want to be a player in the political game, not a spectator, the politics of cynicism is not enough. But thinking about the mountain of work and the changes in attitude that will be needed to transform Britain is overwhelming if you are on your own. That's why British workers need their own political party, this party, to generate the ideas and effort to bring the changes we need.

## Who are we?

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist was founded in 1968 by Reg Birch and other leading engineers. They identified that there were only two classes in Britain and that only workers could make the change that was needed. Birch pulled together a diverse crew, of workers, and turned them into a party with a difference.

In 1971, the Party's second Congress produced a piece of completely new communist thinking for Britain called THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND ITS PARTY. We call this our Party programme and it remains as fresh and important for today as it was then. You can find it on our website, [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk).

Dozens of political parties formed in the 1960s and 70s have come and gone, while the CPBML is alive, well, and welcoming new recruits. One reason for its success has been that every CPBML member must be a thinker and a do-er. There are no paid officials.

The party is made up of working people like you, who are helped by their participation in it to develop as leaders and earn the respect of fellow workers. The party vows never to put itself above the class which created it, but to serve the interests of the class.

Those who join us know we are in for a long haul, and most of our members stay for good. We leave it to the political Moonies to grab anyone, exploit them and spit them out. We don't tolerate zealots on the one hand or armchair generals on the other. What about you? If you are interested, get in touch. In the long run, the only thing harder than being a communist is not being one.

## How to get in touch

\* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet WHERE'S THE PARTY. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

- Subscribe to WORKERS, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. You can ask to be put in touch by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

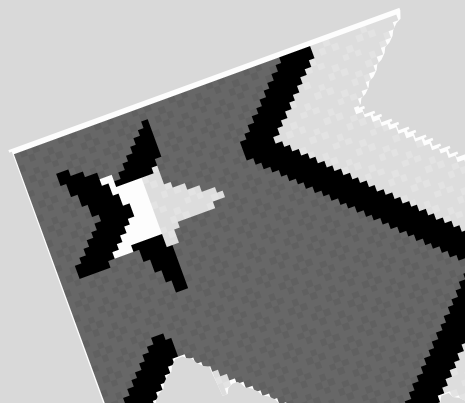
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# Back to Front – Acting responsibly

**“Responsibility is what Marx described as the difference between a ‘class in itself’ and a ‘class for itself’. Are we simply to be workers, treated as Capital wishes?”**

THE TRANSITION from childhood to adulthood is marked by a single decisive qualitative feature — the acquisition of responsibility. That is the rite of passage. That responsibility is acquired whether or not it is exercised; its possession is an objective fact only diminished by impairment of mental function.

The loss of childhood innocence is the acquisition of adult responsibility. Just as the law holds people individually responsible, so we can hold people collectively responsible, both for their action and for their inaction.

Responsibility rests with us whether we want it or not, whether we exercise it or not. In order fully to mature, of course, we do need to exercise our responsibility. It is what Marx described as the difference between a “class in itself”, and a “class for itself”. Are we simply to be workers, treated as Capital wishes? Permanent victims suffering always at the hands of the school playground bully? Or are we to exercise the responsibility for our lives and our futures?

Unless we believe that our class is subject to collective mental impairment then we must understand that the refusal to exercise responsibility is a deliberate act.

There is no escape, just as we can't help growing older. Either we act consciously, in accordance with our class interest, or we consciously let others act in our name. Either way, we

must accept responsibility for the outcome.

We here can blame no-one else for the continuation of capitalism in Britain. And although the British and other countries' working classes can be blamed for their lack of assistance, no-one but the Soviet working class can be blamed for its relinquishing of power. For it was undefeated. Undefeated both by the greatest aggressive force ever assembled, Hitler Germany, or by the equally barbaric clerical-fascist forces of darkness in Afghanistan.

Neither was it defeated by the ‘superior economic might’ of the USA. It simply stopped fighting. It left the field. Not in 1989 when it left Afghanistan, but in 1956 when it turned from revolution.

Only now can we see what the world without the Soviet Union is really like. The Soviet Union was a force for peace not because it was pacifist, but because it was against the cause of war, against reaction.

We will not have peace by refusing to fight. We will have peace by hitting those who would hit us. That is how the Soviet Union survived for seventy years. That is the lesson of the Soviet Union — hit harder. If you stop hitting harder you'll eventually stop hitting. That's what happened when Stalin died, they stopped hitting harder. And if you stop hitting they'll kill you.

We in Britain have the responsibility, without power. We must look to exercise both.

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