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FIREFIGHTERS AND MODERNISATION

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

First thoughts

WAR OVER IRAQ is not inevitable. Britain's involvement in war against Iraq or anywhere else in the world will only come about if we, the British working class, do not act to prevent it.

It has to be more than "protesting to survive". At every conscious level we must be saying to Blair, "No War". This must translate into the ballot box, into demonstrations, to the families of combatants, to the refusal to move the weapons of war.

The action of ASLEF drivers in Scotland who have refused to drive weapons trains must be emulated. Britain must be re-occupied by the British people. It is time to do away with those who would serve the USA or European Union, who would send British soldier to die abroad, or allow the US to use Britain as a base for its "Son of Star Wars" ambitions.

Picket Whitehall, picket the army bases, picket the docks. Throughout the length and breadth of Britain the warmongers must be faced down and put back in their kennels.

The critical issue over Iraq is not Saddam

Hussein or greed for oil or dreams of world domination by pygmies in the White House but whether the genuine superpower in the world — the working class — says, "No War". No power on earth can resist a united working class.

We, the Communist Party, are for national sovereignty, self-determination and independence. We are for workers internationally determining their own destiny without interference or threat from the USA, EU, UN, NATO, IMF or any one else.

We need workers nationalism — determining the future of those who live and work in their own lands for their own interests — and workers internationalism to save the future of the world and defeat the vested interests of the multinationals and the proponents of reaction and fundamentalism.

If only we recognised our strength, we would realise that the only reason war has not yet begun is that we even in our current state have been too powerful to permit it.

No to War, Yes to the Future!



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They call this assistance?

WITH A WONDERFUL display of his characteristic perverse logic, Charles Clarke, the education secretary, is trying to "close the circle" on teachers by insisting that their pay bill must be maintained at current low levels in order to meet the costs of "school workforce remodelling" — that is, the progressive recruitment of classroom assistants to substitute for the missing qualified teachers the education service cannot recruit.

As 2002 ended, the teacher unions were looking forward to a breakthrough in their campaign against huge workloads and consequent teacher shortages. The government finally looked ready to concede that teachers needed time to plan, prepare and assess children's work, that they should be called upon less to cover for absent colleagues, and that they should not be spending their time on administrative and clerical tasks.

But then in January the government made these concessions dependent on the teacher unions signing up to a deal which would allow classroom assistants with no degree or professional teacher training to take control of whole classes, and which would allow schools to further cut costs by "doubling up" teaching groups to number between 50 and 60 children.

Every teaching union expressed deep-seated concerns about the effects on the future of teaching — and on standards of education. They fear a widening "two-tier" system, as schools focusing on "academic pathways" seek to maintain their qualified workforce, while others, encouraged to provide the government's proposed "vocational pathways", allow classes to be led more and more by classroom assistants.

And yet the majority of the teacher unions signed up to the deal in order to obtain the budget promised for workload reduction. Only the National Union of Teachers, the largest, refused to sign. It identified the source of the government's position as the "modernisation agenda", bringing deregulation, deskilling and fragmentation to the whole public sector.

Before the ink was dry on the "Agreement" — heralded by the government as a historic breakthrough — the blustering figure of Clarke sought to push home his advantage. Disabusing the signatory unions of their illusion that they had won extra money for workload reduction, Clarke instructed the "independent" School Teachers Pay Review Body that increases should be pegged at 2.5% a year for the next four years to "make the reforms affordable".

The teacher unions will have to find a way to reunite around a spirited defence of their jobs, skills and pay — or the profession is likely to find itself not only being dismembered, but having to pay for the process to be carried out.

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

HOLIDAYS

No time for Christmas

THE TUC has analysed government figures to show that nearly a million people had to go to work on Christmas Day last year — and one-and-a-half million on New Year's Day.

Over three million employees would not have received holiday pay if they took off either of these days. This is the result of employers taking advantage of the provision in the UK Working Time Directive allowing them to count bank holidays as part of the four weeks minimum paid leave.

The TUC is calling for three improvements to workers' conditions of service: three new bank holidays to bring Britain up to the EU average; a statutory right to be paid to take bank holidays off; and for those who do have to work on bank holidays, a choice between being paid double time, or normal time plus a paid day's holiday in lieu.

CULTURE

Retrial in Thatcher statue case

THE CASE against a theatre producer accused of causing criminal damage by decapitating the £150,000 statue of Margaret Thatcher in July 2002 has gone to retrial. The jury could not decide if Mr Kelleher's defence of "artistic expression" as a "lawful excuse" for the decapitation was acceptable.

Reading between the lines it is obvious that the decapitation was as acceptable as Marie Antoinette's was. One being real, one being symbolic.

PROBATION SERVICE**Action over workloads**

AS WORKERS went to press, probation staff in England and Wales were due to take action over excessive workloads, after a ballot result on 6 January released by NAPO, the probation and family court staff union. The action starts with a one-day strike on 29 January, followed by staff working to contracted hours only.

The ballot followed years of protracted negotiations over excessive workloads — in the probation service these have increased by 50% over the past decade, while staff levels have risen by just 10%.

To add fuel to the fire, it was been revealed that out of promised 'new' money (£70 million), only between £3 and £8 million would actually be available to front line services. Vacancies would not be filled and new staff trainees will not be taken on. Staff turnover is now running at 15%.

Nearly half of the 'new' money will go on servicing the privatisation and contracting out of services. The first major privatisation has been catering and cleaning services in hostels. Though the contract has been running for less than two months the probation service is being inundated with complaints and examples of deteriorating service.

ISLE OF WIGHT**Housing shortage**

THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD saw the annual news reports about the plight of the homeless. They featured the valiant efforts of well-meaning people to provide food and shelter for one day, or maybe even until Twelfth Night.

Only rarely is it also the occasion for a local authority to admit some of the reasons behind the personal tragedies, as they are presented. For example the Isle of Wight Council published the figures showing around 3,500 applicants for all types of housing, of whom "registered homeless" numbered "at least" 350. And yet the figures also showed that the number housed each year is only around 500. Isle of Wight Council owns no houses itself, all having been sold to Housing Associations.

To register as homeless you must pass stringent tests. Most people would regard many of the 3,500 on the housing lists as effectively homeless, whatever temporary shelter they have. So, in reality, virtually the only way of acquiring a Housing Association home is to become homeless for a while!

**'People's Summit' in Denmark**

TASC — Trade Unions Against the Single Currency — was represented along with other British NO campaigners at a "people's summit" in Copenhagen in December. The summit provided an alternative to the official European Union summit in the Danish capital, which welcomed the application of 10 new countries to join the EU. Many industrial unions took part, including some from Norway and from Sweden, which is gearing up for a referendum on the single currency in 2003.

Danish workers have already had a successful fight to keep the kroner. Now they face an avalanche of workplace regulations and directives emanating from the European Commission. They see these as interfering with democratic policy-making in their unions, and designed to intensify competition between workers. Time and again, the Commission is castigated for taking up Thatcher's discredited monetarist notions.

Among the Danish trade union speakers were transport and automotive workers, dockers, brewers, printers, metalworkers and workers from several building trades. It was a gathering refreshingly free of politicians, and largely free from academics and lawyers (something the British TUC has yet to learn).

With the discussion centering on EU enlargement, concerns were widespread. They included the right to work, collective bargaining, work standards and training, outsourcing and privatisation in the name of modernisation, the ban on the closed shop (leading to non-union and foreign labour), unemployment benefit cuts, health and safety, pensions, immigration policy, and accusations of xenophobia. Even the most fundamental rights of trade union association were felt to be potentially under threat.

There was a genuine attempt at an objective assessment of union strengths and weaknesses in an EU context. But the conference was short on positive strategies for defending sovereignty industry by industry. And although Danish democracy was repeatedly pronounced to be under attack, the need for the Danes to engage with their own government was barely mentioned.

The following day, trade unionists joined the broad Danish people's coalition on a march through Copenhagen in protest at EU intervention (above, transport workers on the demonstration). Some remembered that the fight to retain the Danish currency and economic control is far from over. Politicians are likely to stage a re-run of the referendum to try to get the Danes to change their minds.

GERMANY**...and it just gets worse**

IN A GRAPHIC indication of the effects of the euro, the German economy grew last year by a miserly 0.2%. In the last three months of the year, it actually shrank by 0.1%.

More than four million workers are out of work, even on the official figures, and

the numbers are still rising.

Investment in plant and machinery fell by 8%. Germany's budget deficit was 3.7% of its Gross Domestic Product, well above the 3% limit imposed by the stability and growth pact.

If the euro is so good, how come the German economy is doing so badly? No wonder Blair is terrified of calling the referendum that he so desperately wants to win!

EDUCATION**Anti-SATs campaign lifts off**

A CAMPAIGN AGAINST primary school SATs — the national testing of 7 and 11-year-olds to provide league tables of schools and local education authorities — is gathering pace in England. Wales has already done away with tests at 7, and teachers' own assessments show that levels of literacy and numeracy have risen.

Scottish children do not have to sit these US-inspired tests, which cause stress for the children and are distorting the curriculum because of the pressure placed on schools by government to meet their targets.

Now teachers in England are keen to see the oppressive and divisive tests abolished. The National Union of Teachers

surveyed a random sample of members last summer and found that over 87% were in favour of the union balloting on a boycott of the SATs at 7 and 11.

Parents and teachers at a school which comes near the top of the primary league tables, Greetland School in Halifax, have backed the campaign. Head teacher Margaret Earnshaw invited staff to sign a petition against the tests as "a symbol of everything that is currently wrong with the education of our children".

The very favourable response from staff and parents who work at the school is leading to an attempt to involve other parents, and the next school newsletter will ask for their support.

Now other teacher unions will be invited to join the NUT in furthering the campaign, possibly building to action against the tests this summer.

Consultants reject contract

A KEY PART of the Labour government's plan to improve the National Health Service involves changing doctors' contracts. General practitioners have accepted these changes, but consultants are strongly opposed. This is not necessarily in patients' interests.

The new consultant contract contained much good for NHS patients. It divided opinion, though. A ballot of 45,000 consultants resulted in 62.5% against change. This inflicted an embarrassing defeat on the BMA, which had worked on and approved the new contract. It believed all parties would win from its introduction.

Dr Peter Hawker, Chairman of the British Medical Association's consultants committee, resigned following overwhelming rejection of the new contract. There is a major task ahead to address concerns and rebuild unity.

The main proposal was to increase basic salaries by up to 24% in return for more flexibility of working hours, and less time for private practice. Consultants did not want to be stripped of their professional freedom, maintenance of which was in the interest of patients. Obviously focus on political targets — waiting lists and waiting times — might prejudice treatment of more serious cases. There is an issue here, that doctors, not politicians, are best placed to decide clinical priorities.

The new contract also mitigated opportunities for practice in the private sector. This seems to be the main dispute. With private practice, there must be conflicts of interest. People who are not prepared to relinquish a degree of independence for a good deal (an average 15% pay rise, with associated and positive pension benefits) may be paragons of social virtue. Or they may have concerns about greater and financial, personal opportunity consequences.

AEROSPACE**BAe not British?**

GEOFF HOON, Minister of Defence has deemed BAe (formerly British Aerospace Systems) not to be a "British" company. This means they will get no preferential treatment in terms of contracts from the government.

BAe has its head office in Hampshire, still part of Britain. The government holds a 'golden' share option. The company employs over 50,000 people in Britain and

traces its development of the arms trade back over 500 years.

But to Hoon it is not a British company. As a representative of a government that wishes it was on a par with a US state or EU province, perhaps he can be excused for confusion over sovereignty! What he cannot be excused for is his crass abandonment of a company at the cutting edge of British manufacture, research and skill, or the complicity of this government in further undermining Britain's manufacturing base. Time to go, Geoff — wherever anyone will have you.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****FEBRUARY**

Saturday 15 February, 12.30 pm

Stop the War National Coalition Demonstration

Assemble 12 noon at Embankment, London (nearest tube Embankment). Jointly organised by the Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Muslim Association of Britain. Details from www.stopwar.org.uk, email office@stopwar.org.uk, or call 07951 235 915.

Tuesday 18 February, 7.30pm

Public debate: European Union, the Resistible Rise of a Superstate

Organised by Scottish Campaign against Euro Federalism. Speakers include Michael Connarty MP, Alex Smith (ex MEP). Chair, Eddie McGuire (Musicians Union). Renfield St Stephens Centre, Bath Street, Glasgow. For more information, contact Alex Smith on 01294 275 341.

Friday 28 February

Meeting: No to the Euro, South West Regional Centre Left Gathering

A groundbreaking event for the region, Imperial Hotel, Exeter. For more

ARCHAEOLOGY**Victory for dig**

DEVELOPERS have been stopped from repeating a crime committed in the mid-19th century when the Midland Railway Company put a line through the middle of Camley Street Cemetery, St Pancras, London, desecrating 40,000 graves in the process.

This time it was the Channel Tunnel Rail Link desecrating the same cemetery. They ordered off the archaeologists and brought in the bulldozers.

Their climbdown came after the intervention of Simon Thurley, chief executive of English Heritage, who said: "There will be many people alive who have relatives buried here. The archaeologists were excavating these remains with respect, as they are required to do. Now, instead, the company will be... loading the soil, bones, bits of coffin and name plates into what they call a muck-away truck."

Excavation now continues at the cemetery.

A class act

CLASS WRITER: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM ASH, by Doug Nicholls, published by Bread Books, PO Box 1806, Coventry CV6 1YJ, 2002, paperback, 174 pages, ISBN 0-9542112-1-9, £7.99.

THIS BOOK, written by Doug Nicholls, general secretary of the Community and Youth Workers Union, is a path-breaking introduction to the novels of Bill Ash.

Bill was born in 1917 in Texas; in 1939 he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force to fight the Nazis. Later he worked as the drama script editor at the BBC, and adapted many novels into radio plays. He was an active trade unionist, becoming President of the Writers' Guild. As well as the 13 novels, he has written books of history and philosophy. He edited *THE WORKER* for 20 years.

His first 6 novels, set abroad, give great insight into the national liberation struggles against colonialism. After 1968, he based his next seven novels in Britain. But *MY FIST IS FREE*, written in the years 1968-70 "was the first to demonstrate the great powerhouse of ideas and productivity that was the manual industrial section of organised labour. His work captures the immense power of this section of the class."

Nicholls has useful chapters explaining the Marxist concepts that Ash uses, the two-class line, the absolute decline of capitalism, and workers' nationalism, based on the absolute identity of national and working class interests. He writes, "We can understand the dialectic of Ash's novels in relation to their depiction of the coming to class consciousness of...workers and the working out of this increased consciousness within history. It is history becoming class consciousness, not history and class consciousness as if divided." This penultimate clause is a touch idealistic; better, "it is a history of a class becoming conscious of its interests".

Nicholls cites Brecht —

"It is the simple thing
So hard to achieve."

He then writes, "Ash's fiction, by exploring how history and class relations shape our perceptions and interactions, impels us to be convinced in the simple thing that the dynamics of exploitation, man against man, are wrong and can be replaced."

These are outstanding novels of ideas, based on dialogue, the debate and exchange of mind in the battle of ideas. Ash's work promotes the dignity, and necessity, of political struggle. Nicholls concludes that we should "reclaim the works of working class writers like Ash who make a genuinely new art out of values and perceptions engraved in every fibre of their very generous beings".

The proposed Bush/Blair attack on Iraq the world. In order to achieve this, it a

Iraq: this is a war that we

BLAIR'S BIZARRE New Year's prophecy from Egypt warned of great dangers to come. He should know, since he has put us in most of them. The greatest danger of war is due to Bush and Blair threatening an unnecessary and unjust attack on Iraq, taking the focus off the danger from Al-Qa'ida terrorism.

As General Sir Michael Rose, who commanded British forces in Bosnia, wrote in the *DAILY MAIL* on 9 January, "As far as the war against terrorism is concerned, an invasion of Iraq is likely to be a hindrance. There is no evidence linking Saddam with terrorist organisations currently targeting the West." He summed up, "We can't ask troops to die for this cause."

The proposed Bush/Blair attack on Iraq is not against terrorism but for oil. US client states — Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait — together hold 43.5% of world oil reserves. If the USA seized control of Iraq and its 10.7%, it would control over half.

The USA is also trying to seize control of Venezuela, which has 6.9% of world oil reserves, and is the USA's No. 1 foreign supplier. US-backed opposition forces there have launched 'a general strike', actually a lockout, to try to overthrow the democratically elected President Chavez, who wants his country to control its main asset. Opposition spokesman Timoteo Zambrano visited the State Department for 'discussions' in mid-January.

Promoting war

Blair is pursuing dual-purpose diplomacy, talking peace while promoting war. He pretends that he is using the UN to try to contain the US hawks, while actually using the UN to try to overcome resistance to the planned attack. He claims that only by backing Bush can Britain assist the Middle East peace process, end world hunger and uphold the Kyoto agreement — war means peace, development and a better environment!

Blair claims, as Neville Chamberlain did in the 1930s, that his strategy is "the best, indeed the only, way of avoiding war". So if Bush does attack Iraq, it would be a disaster for Blair. His critics, who have said all along that he was helping Bush to start a war, would be proven right. His mantle of peacemaker would vanish, and he would stand revealed as Bush's jackal.

Blair may have won a wildly unrepresentative 85% of Parliamentary votes for war on 25 November, but this shows only how out of touch and irrelevant Parliament is. The great majority of the British people oppose his planned attack.

Blair claims that Iraq has refused to disarm and is hiding its weapons. But as UN inspector Scott Ritter pointed out, the UN inspection teams destroyed all Iraq's nuclear weapons capability. Jacques Baute, head of the UN nuclear inspection team, confirmed last November, "until now there is not a single event that is related to an amount of nuclear material that would be of significance for a weapon. We don't have a single example".

Any remaining chemical and biological agents have by now decayed into useless sludge. As *THE INDEPENDENT* noted on 1 January, "Alarm is growing in London and Washington because the work by inspectors has failed to pick up any prohibited weapons activity." No weapons, no casus belli...and lucky that the ricin was found in Wood Green, not in Baghdad!

When the Democratic People's Republic of Korea responds to Bush's threats (and to the danger posed by the dozens of US nuclear weapons held in South Korea) by telling the UN inspectors to go and withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the USA says, rightly, that this is not a threat to peace. So how can Iraq be a threat?

UN Resolution 1441 nowhere authorises an attack on Iraq. But Bush and Blair may well break the Resolution by deciding to attack. In 1998, Resolution

q is not against terrorism but for power. The US wishes to rule
also wants oil...

e can stop



The war machine: an F/A-18C Hornet about to launch from the deck of the USS Enterprise to bomb Iraq on in December 1998, during Operation Desert Fox.

'No weapons, no casus belli...and lucky that the ricin was found in Wood Green, not in Baghdad!...'

1154 said that it was up to the Security Council to decide what to do about any alleged Iraqi non-compliance with UN weapons inspectors.

But in December 1998, Clinton and Blair decided, without consulting the Security Council, to bomb Iraq. Nor did earlier Resolutions authorise any attacks: nothing in Resolution 688 even hints at the use of armed force.

With the tragic demise of the Soviet Union, the US and British governments think that they can get away, unopposed, with any lawless aggressions. So the British government is canvassing what it

calls the Kosovo option, that is, attacking Iraq without any UN authorisation. (They could more accurately have called it the Czechoslovakian option, following in Hitler's footsteps.)

Bush, too, says he can attack Iraq without UN authorisation. White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card said, "The United Nations can meet and discuss, but we don't need their permission."

Arrogance

Their arrogance shows that they intend to act outside the UN, against international law. This is the lynch 'law' of the old South, and the Labour government — almost alone of the world's governments — endorses it.

But the Security Council is itself subject to the UN Charter, which forbids the use of force against a sovereign state. If it passed a Resolution allowing an attack on Iraq, it would be acting ultra vires. The General Assembly, representing

How do you prove that something doesn't exist?

PRESIDENT BUSH claims that the onus is on Iraq to prove that it has no weapons of mass destruction, but, on the contrary, UN Resolution 1441 stated that the onus was on the UN inspection team to prove that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction.

If the UN weapons inspectors find any weapons in Iraq, Bush and Blair want to attack Iraq. When the inspectors don't find any weapons, Bush and Blair claim that this proves that Iraq is hiding its weapons, and they still want to attack Iraq.

So, according to Bush and Blair, lack of evidence proves guilt, just as much as finding evidence would. They are assuming guilt — in the name of upholding international law! Makes Alice's Red Queen look positively rational.

In September 1950 President Harry Truman said, "We do not believe in aggressive or preventive war. Such war is the weapon of dictators, not of free democratic countries like the United States." Just so — yet Bush and Blair are planning an aggressive, 'preventive' war against Iraq, ignoring Truman's wise counsel.

Blair may have won a hugely unrepresentative 85% of Parliamentary votes for war on 25 November, but only a minority, 39%, of the British people support his planned attack. Remember what happened to a previous Prime Minister named Anthony when he tried to start a war in the Middle East.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

the peoples of the world, must make its voice heard in opposing this illegal aggression.

Warmonger Blair has made it perfectly clear that he would attack Iraq even if there is no evidence that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, even if there is no new UN Resolution 'authorising' the war, and even if China, Russia or France vetoed such a UN Resolution. But even if the UN inspectors find evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, if the UN passes a new Resolution 'authorising' the war, and if China, Russia or France do not veto such a UN Resolution, it would still be wrong to support this planned war of aggression against a sovereign state.

Although aggression without a UN sanction would be clearly illegal (as the attack on Kosovo was), aggression with

UN sanction is still illegal: any number of new UN Resolutions could not legitimise an attack on Iraq. In 1950 the UN 'authorised' the US/British attack on Korea, but this did not make this atrocious, genocidal war of aggression a just war.

We the British working class have a special responsibility. We can stop Blair from backing Bush — and removing Bush's key ally would stop his war.

Protests

We have stopped wars before: look what we did in 1956 to a previous Prime Minister named Anthony when he tried to start a war in the Middle East. Anthony Eden claimed that Egypt's President Nasser threatened our national survival, so he plotted with the French and Israeli governments to attack Egypt. But the British people opposed the war: the country rang with protests. A vast

demonstration filled Trafalgar Square, Whitehall and Westminster, penning the Cabinet in 10 Downing Street for several hours. Eden had a nervous breakdown and resigned. The invasion was aborted. Britain survived; Eden did not.

Warring abroad

Just like Thatcher, Blair is warring against Britain by warring abroad. Like Thatcher, Blair is an enemy of the British people. The Treasury estimates that war against Iraq would cost Britain £4 billion, to be stolen from health, education and transport; the US estimates it will cost them £128 billion. Capitalism in absolute decline destroys nations. We want that money invested in a thriving Britain, industrial, educated and healthy. We don't want a future driven by cannibal war; we don't want a gun culture. We have to act to stop Blair from destroying Britain and Iraq.

American workers organise against the war



15-16 December 2002: Americans Against the War holding a 24hr vigil and fast outside the US Embassy in London

On Saturday 11 January, more than 100 American trade union leaders gathered in Chicago to found US Labor Against the War. Between them these leaders represent more than 2 million members. The meeting heard that many other organisations were gathering strength against the war. The meeting recognised that Bush has a dual agenda – war on the world abroad and war on workers at home.

The meeting passed a strong resolution which included the following points:-

- the principal victims of any military action in Iraq will be the children of Iraqi workers;
- we have no quarrel with the ordinary working class men, women and children of Iraq, or any other country;
- the billions of dollars spent to stage and execute this war are being taken away from our schools, hospitals, housing and Social Security
- the war is a pretext for attacks on labor, civil, immigrant and human rights at home;
- Bush's drive for war serves as a cover and distraction for the sinking economy, corporate corruption and layoffs;
- military action is predicted actually to increase the likelihood of retaliatory terrorist acts;
- there is no convincing link between Iraq and Al Qa'ida or the attacks on 11 September, and neither the Bush administration nor the UN inspections have demonstrated that Iraq poses a real threat to Americans;
- U.S. military action against Iraq threatens the peaceful resolution of disputes among states, jeopardizing the safety and security of the entire world, including Americans.

A new book brings back to life the daily battles which convulsed Britain in the mid 1980s...

The miners' strike — day by day

FOR SOME the 1984-1985 Great Miners Strike is a footnote in history. To many in Yorkshire it is as fresh as though yesterday, a barely healed wound. The recently published *THE MINERS STRIKE – DAY BY DAY* by Arthur Wakefield and edited by Brian Elliott, a pictorial diary of the strike, brings the daily battles which convulsed Britain in the mid-1980s to life with a vengeance.

Arthur Wakefield worked in the Yorkshire coalfield from leaving school at 14 years old in 1942. His diaries (6 ledgers and 3 photographic albums) of the strike, picketing or collecting support funds nearly every day during those 361 momentous days, re-focus the mind on why the defence of industry and community were so vital for Britain's industrial future.

Industrial tour

Wakefield's diaries read as an industrial tour of the now destroyed coalfields of Britain. His picketing duties took him into the Nottingham, Midlands and Yorkshire coalfields. Day in day out maintaining the union's principled stand against tiny handfuls of scabs, surrounded by massed riot police from every police force in Britain.

His diary tells objectively of the clashes that took place at every hour of the day and night at pit gates and villages. He is restrained in describing the almost military occupation of numerous Yorkshire mining villages, the siege conditions people had to endure, the arrests, the abuse and aggression from police — especially the Metropolitan Force and the unbridled loosing of the 'cavalry' — specialists in bludgeoning

and riding pickets down.

Wakefield's photographs of "Bloody Monday" 18 June 1984 — the Battle of Orgreave Coking Plant — show the true story of that industrial clash. Orgreave is now clearly seen as a trap set by the police to allow the exercise of mounted

battlefield that ranged from High Court class action to sequester the NUM's funds, to the divide-and-conquer tactic of allowing the Nottingham coalfield to break away from the national union and scab again.

Also covered is the failure of NACODS, the colliery overseers' and deputies' union, to honour their strike decision. And how the long laid plans of Nicholas Ridley, now long dead Tory MP, ensured record coal stocks at the power stations, a fleet of scab self-employed lorry drivers and provocation, to ensure the miners entered a strike in spring.

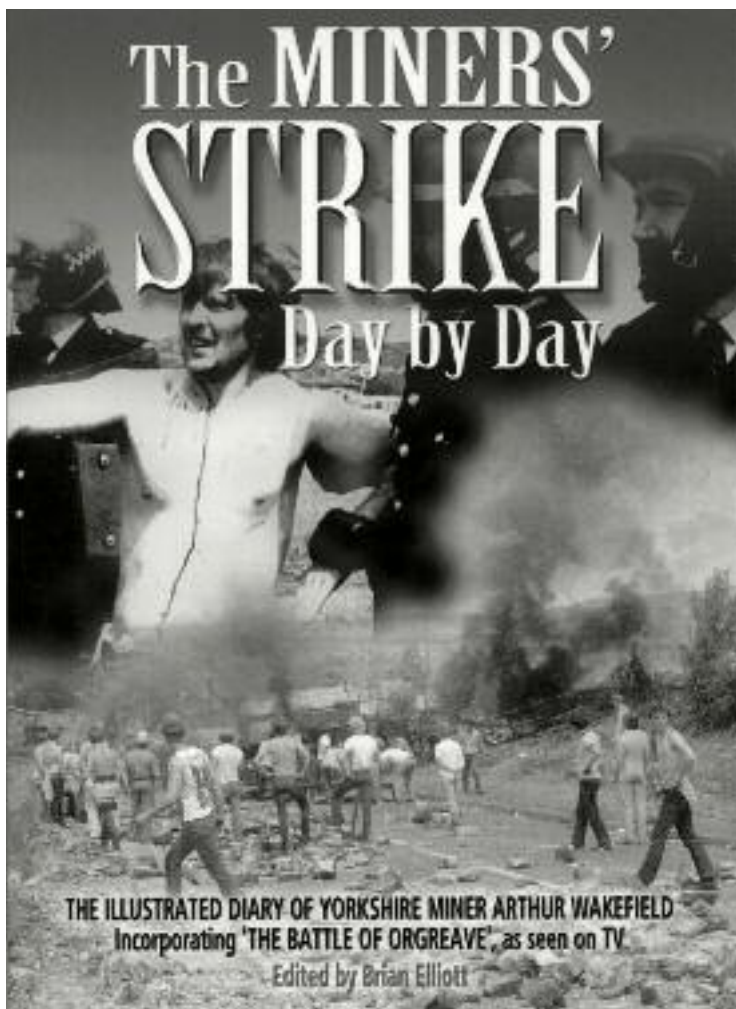
Guerrilla war

It covers, too, the industrial guerrilla war ranging across the country — pickets at pits, ports, power stations, motorway roadblocks. And the immense support generated from the Women's Support Groups initially in the coalfields but later being embraced across the country with twinning arrangements of workplaces and localities.

When the strike was officially called off on Sunday 3 March 1985, Frickley pit remained out for a further seven days — rather than cross a remaining Kent NUM Area picket line seeking the reinstatement of all sacked and victimised miners.

The pits may have been closed. Cortonwood, the pit closure which sparked the strike — "The Alamo" — has been erased and built over, but the scars as shown by Arthur's diaries are just beneath the surface.

THE MINERS' STRIKE – DAY BY DAY, by Arthur Wakefield, Wharncliffe Books, 47, Church Street, Barnsley, S70 2BR. £9.99 + £2.50 p&p.



police, riot squads, snatch squads and the judiciary to be brought against the NUM.

The book covers the agony of those 12 months: the pickets killed — David Jones and Joe Green; the tragedy of the killed coal picker — Paul Womersley — 14 years old. It describes the political

To listen to the government, you would think that firefighters have the opposite is true...

The truth behind fire modernisation

Photo: Chris Croome (chris.croome.net)



On the picket line in Sheffield during the strikes last November.

AS THE FIREFIGHTERS' dispute has developed there has been much talk of 'modernisation' from the government. Firefighters, the Fire Brigades Union, their employers and the public and the press have entered this debate.

But behind all the noise, a full examination of the facts and the history of the fire service shows that the government, faced with the difficulty of a pay claim and the need to make good years of running down the public services, has tried to divert attention by championing the need to 'modernise' the fire service as a cover to find the finance for pay increases from cuts in the service.

To do this, it has used two tools.

First, it has suppressed reports by the Audit Commission and the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council that show that a great deal of modernising has in fact taken place. And secondly, it commissioned the Bain Report, which it presented as independent.

New vision?

The Bain Report, entitled "The future of the Fire Service; reducing risk, saving lives" appeared in its final version on 16 December 2002. It pretends to put forward a new vision in which resources are better distributed according to risk, and the workforce is better trained to deal with all likely incidents such as

chemical spillages or traffic accidents, not just fires. It puts more effort into prevention and community fire safety and it calls for more family-friendly working patterns and a more diverse and representative workforce.

But in fact it totally misunderstands and misuses risk analysis to justify job cuts and presents as its own vision what is in fact work by the fire service employers, workforce and union, developed and implemented over many years.

Everyone involved in risk analysis, and this includes all workplace safety representatives, is familiar with the fundamental equation of risk

d been holding back progress. In fact,

assessment:

RISK = LIKELIHOOD OF HAZARD X
CONSEQUENCES OF HAZARD

Bain and government spokesmen completely ignore this fundamental. To justify cuts in fire cover at night they produce reams of tables and figures that show there are fewer calls at night than during the day, but they completely ignore the fact that the public is three times as likely to suffer injury or death during the night compared with the day. Indeed half of all deaths in domestic fires occur between 10pm and 8am, the period during which they want to reduce fire cover. The number of rescues by the fire service is four times as great between midnight and 6am as it is in the morning, from 6am to noon.

The real reason for the proposal to cut fire cover becomes clear when their proposals on overtime are examined. What they want to promote is a culture of continuous overtime working by firefighters so that with a smaller workforce the cover is maintained or increased and earnings by firefighters are boosted by overtime.

This is put forward while claiming to promote 'family-friendly' working patterns. The hypocrisy of the report is staggering.

The greatest evidence of the real agenda of the government and Bain comes from the information they have suppressed.

When it comes to dealing with the risk of fire and other incidents, two factors have been found to be critical: the speed of the response and the number of firefighters put to deal with the incident, termed "the weight of the attack".

The siting of the existing fire stations is not some historical accident. A great deal of thought has been put into where they should be, and the number of firefighters required on shifts. These are termed "Standards of Fire Cover".

For example, for the highest risk area, termed 'A' risk, the response required is 3 fire engines with full crews, with the first 2 engines arriving at the

'The public is three times as likely to suffer injury or death during the night compared with the day...'

incident inside 5 minutes and the third within 8 minutes.

At the lowest risk area, 'D', the response required is 1 fire engine arriving within 20 minutes.

The existing standards are based on a calculation against Property Type. There has been questioning among firefighters and many other experts whether there might today be better methods of arriving at the fire standards, based on the ability to save life instead of focusing on protecting property.

Campaigning

After much campaigning, the government agreed to the request of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) to review the 1985 Standards of Fire Cover and commissioned a funded research project into speed of response and weight of attack standards currently operated.

Called "Review of Standards of Emergency Cover", it reflected the role of the fire service in covering not just fire but all rescue incidents. The preliminary findings of this research made to CFBAC in 2002 showed that £1.6 billion should be invested in the Fire Service and 85% of the brigades would need to double in size to effect a life-based response. The FBU contributed and supported the initiative. The government has suppressed publication of the final report, which was expected by autumn 2002. 'Bain', which makes much play of 'risk' does not even mention the report or the existence of the CFBAC.

As to the ability to deal with incidents other than fires, the fact is that

a fifth of all incidents and rescues dealt with by the fire service are non-fire incidents, they include road traffic accidents, water flooding, chemical spills, lift releases, rescues from buildings, animal rescues and many others.

Firefighters have continuously developed their skills, adapting to new needs by the simple but effective method of using periods between emergency action to train and develop new operating procedures. In addition the FBU and fire service employers have developed the 'Integrated Personal Development System', a comprehensive training programme backed by research that prepares firefighters for their current and future roles. And obviously a whole range of new skills will be required to deal with terrorist incidents.

Those familiar with construction work for the fire service know already of the investment in training facilities and the challenge involved in their provision. While the drill tower, so familiar to all, is still a feature of fire stations, much training now occurs in specialist facilities backed by research and development such as Hot Training buildings where real fires are tackled.

Another feature of fire stations is the Young Fire Fighters Association Building. Here young people train and develop skills, teamwork and awareness in an enjoyable environment. This just one of many 'community' initiatives designed to prevent fires and promote social responsibility. Social Services have found that it is only firefighters with their street credibility who are able to provide effective leadership to criminal youngsters in difficult neighbourhoods.

The huge development of firefighters' skills has led to a new level of professionalism which must be reflected in their pay. But the government can only focus on a narrow concept of limiting public expenditure, to fit criteria for entry into the euro and to satisfy the demands from businesses greedy for lucrative Private Finance Initiative

Continued on page 11



Photo: Chris Croome (chris.croome.net)

Firefighters march in Sheffield on 18 January — against the threat of war against Iraq, organised by the local Stop the War Coalition

Continued from page 10

projects — including fire stations.

This is why the government sees the FBU as a threat, and this is why it is determined to seek to undermine firefighters' professionalism.

One of the telling signs of their narrow focus is the attitude to the economic value of the fire service to society. In March 2000 the government published a draft White Paper. This paper recognises that the fire service is "one of the most consistent high performing services in local government".

It had "made considerable progress towards local modernisation".

Under the White Paper proposals, it would change to a more pro-active service which "works with communities to reduce risks to life and property and has a well equipped, skilful and highly motivated workforce, able to work safely and whose composition reflects the diverse communities it services as it seeks to achieve reductions in the number of fires and death and injury from fires and other emergencies it attends and reduce the economic and social costs of fire."

The estimated savings resulting from the investment and improvements was £3 billion per year. But this required investment in the service and work force so instead we have the Bain report and job cuts.

Firefighters have increased productivity by 55% in 10 years compared to 19% for the rest of the economy and they have led in the modernisation of their service.

A government that needs to lie to defend its position is a threat not just to the fire service, but to all other services. — and to the safety of all of us.

The Thames Gateway is a huge project with huge possibilities, but what about the people?

The East London clearances

IN JANUARY THE government gave the go-ahead for an ambitious project which will involve a huge expansion of London eastwards into Kent and Essex together with a massive redevelopment of a deprived area in London itself, stretching along the River Thames from the Millennium Dome to the Essex border. A magic wand has been waved over the deprived areas which are now to be known as the Thames Gateway, in much the same way as the industrial, working class Docks were refashioned into Docklands in the 1980s.

Government departments have been given a month to report on how the project can be funded. Also, special delivery agencies are to be deployed by ministers to fast-track building in a string of new townships along the Thames in east London, Kent and Essex.

These agencies will use legislation designed for the former London Docklands Development Corporation to assemble land, using compulsory purchase powers where necessary, in the largest exercise of its kind since the creation of new towns in the 1960s and 1970s.

It is a vast project, due to take place over the next 20 years, which could involve the creation of 200,000 new homes in a 40 mile corridor. The corridor has been divided into 5 strategic areas: a new Metropolitan district of Inner East London, Outer London Riverside, Ebbsfleet and Mid Gateway City, Medway City and South Essex towns (such as Basildon and Southend).

These 5 strategic areas have been further split into 14 specific zones where special agencies (working in tandem with local councils) will be charged with assembling land. The overarching authority for this project is to be English Partnerships, a government agency, with its new chief executive, David Higgins, in charge.

Higgins is managing director of the Lend Lease Group, which built the massive Bluewater shopping centre. Bluewater is bang in the middle of the

proposed development area...

In addition there are plans to build a 6-lane road bridge over the River Thames in the region of Beckton/Woolwich and Thamesmead (a formal public consultation will begin next year). Ultimately there are other plans to build

‘Local people think the intent is to make the area fit for those who want convenient pads close to the City...’

a railway tunnel under the river in Woolwich and another road crossing in north Greenwich, near the Millennium Dome.

This whole project is awash with exciting phrases and ingratiating buzz words: “largest redevelopment of brownfield lands”, “regeneration programme of bleak wastelands”, “Britain’s new linear city”, “the opportunity to build a quarter of a million affordable new houses”, “a series of new linked communities”, “ending the east-west divide on river crossings of the Thames” and so on.

One might think that Jerusalem was about to be builded here in the east end of London, courtesy of capitalism.

Workers cannot afford to ignore the development. We must have an attitude to this proposed transformation of the region. We must attempt to influence the outcome, even though time is pressing and the government wishes to move fast to outflank any reasoned opposition to aspects of the proposals.

The Mayor of London, business lobbyists London First, the City and Canary Wharf developers are all in favour of the project. But what do we think?

On a lesser scale we have been here before, most recently with the London Docklands Regeneration. Although some

of the neglected local communities gained some benefits from a new social infrastructure (Docklands Railway, new roads), there was a marked lack of new jobs and large-scale employment to replace the lost traditional ones in the docks and further away at Fords Dagenham.

Most jobs (apart from the City Airport) came in the plethora of supermarkets and hotels that have been constructed. Most people have to find work elsewhere.

Instead of making dormitories, there ought to be a commitment to integrate large-scale industrial employment within the project. Also, most of the new housing was beyond the financial reach of many of the traditional communities living within or near to Docklands.

If we take the Newham section of the proposed Thames Gateway, particularly Canning Town and Custom House, then the area is already rife with horror stories and fears about wholesale pressures on the local inhabitants to be uprooted elsewhere to make way for the proposed transformation. Massive punitive rent increases and inducements to leave are being placed on residents and small businesses.

Most local people believe they will not feature in the proposed redevelopment. Despite claims to the contrary, they think the intent is to transform the area and make it fit for those who want convenient pads close to Canary Wharf and the City, the upgraded internal rail link at Stratford and other key parts of capitalism’s brave new world.

A cursory look at the proposed sites of the Thames Gateway project leads one to conclude that this massive project (which will dwarf all others and lead to a lopsided development of the nation) is deliberately invoked to weld the south-east corner of Britain into the strategic province of the EU. The rest of Britain could well become the equivalent of a region beyond the Pale, beyond Hadrian’s Wall.

The City of Culture is born of EU regionalism. One of the essential concept is to inject divisiveness where once there was a common

Bidding to become a City of Culture

FIRST THERE were 12, then there were six — would-be European cities of culture 2008, that is.

Those remaining, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, Newcastle and Oxford all share the common desire to be confirmed as Britain's last European Union city of culture for the next 30 years. A strange idea to embrace, really, as if to say, "That's it, count Britain out after this."

What prompts such a desire? Certainly, a feature of all the bids has been the hope that being selected by the Labour panel of judges will guarantee a boost from tourism. That happened in Glasgow, City of Culture 1990.

Another, less positive, feature has been the steadfast indifference displayed by the citizens of all candidate cities. In some cases this has extended to a frantic desire to shun that which has already led them to become culturally vibrant cities.

A major criticism everywhere has been the amount of money each of the bidding councils has stumped up. Others doubt that the supposed benefits of a successful bid will materialise. The grant money gets paid to multinational firms, and little is left behind. This can happen with sporting events too.

There have been cogent arguments that the bid money could have been better spent. For example in Brighton or Bradford, two of those eliminated, it is said there is a greater need for expenditure on accommodation for the elderly and other such causes.

Scarcity of council resources is a persuasive argument, but not one that gets to the heart of the question. Surely, it's a false juxtaposition to say you must choose between care of

the elderly and cultural amenities? We should want and deserve both.

Criticism should instead be reserved for the notion of competitive bidding, and for the content of many of the bids.

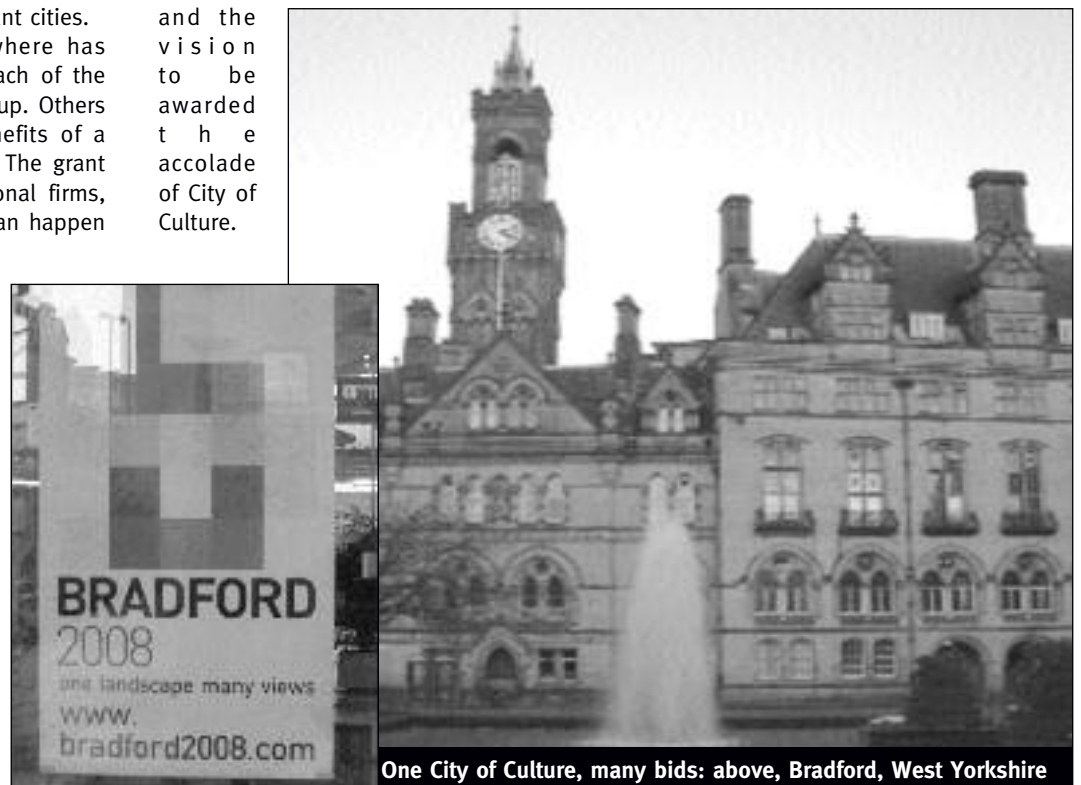
The City of Culture is born of EU regionalism. One of the essential features of this concept is to inject divisiveness where once there was a common interest. A common culture is one of the defining characteristics of nationhood, which has no part to play in any celebration of culture sponsored by the EU. Instead the EU wants to emphasise a spurious localism blended with tenuous internationalism.

As a result, we had twelve, now six, cities fighting tooth and nail for subsidies drawn from our money. Each one vies to impress how it alone has the necessary cultural infrastructure, the heritage, the foresight and the vision to be awarded the accolade of City of Culture.

That has led in turn to a desperate scramble to find any advantage over rival bids. For example, Newcastle declares it has the Baltic, the river and the "Winking Eye" bridge, the Gateshead Angel and err... a football club!

Liverpool boasts in response that it has the Pier Head buildings, the Tate, the river and err...two football clubs! Liverpool's bid even ends up distancing itself from the rest of Britain; as if it had somehow become detached and had become a new Atlantis. We are treated to Liverpool as Europe's gateway to America, Africa...and Europe!

Cardiff tries to style itself as the mythical centre of some alleged Celtic nation, so that should go down well in Brussels. Only the Oxford bid boldly states its reputation as a city in Britain recognised worldwide as a seat of



One City of Culture, many bids: above, Bradford, West Yorkshire

al features of this
n interest. ...

learning and invention.

The majority of the bids put an over-emphasis on multiculturalism and populism of the meanest sort. Anybody and everybody who's reached the pop music charts in the last couple of decades has been wheeled out as proof positive of the city's youth culture. And if you can get a curry in the place, then stick it in the bid!

It is no surprise that some city councils see the city of culture bid as a means to get their hands on some regeneration cash. The tenor of the competition has become increasingly frenetic from those involved. The majority of citizens supposedly represented by these councils aren't included in the excitement.

Culture has been epitomised as business. In that guise it is a chance for a relative few to make a buck out of "heritage", and not an opportunity to encourage cultural development. Ironically there's a lot going on out there, beyond the bidders' view. In particular, but not exclusively, this is amongst the young with all sorts of music which doesn't have chart potential but which flows from British urban life.

There's plenty too going on with art and design, literature, oral history, photography, but all struggle for resources. They receive not a mention in these sterile packages which, on the whole, have been long on form and short on content. Nor do they reflect the need to support orchestras, and theatres, under threat everywhere. No doubt they are too traditional or supposedly elitist.

There is a need to rebuild the British film industry, our textile design capability and innumerable aspects of our national culture. To do so would draw on the many strands present in our multi-talented, many-faceted nation. But we can do better than play "beggar-my-neighbour" for the benefit of the eurocrat chic elite.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via "faith" schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

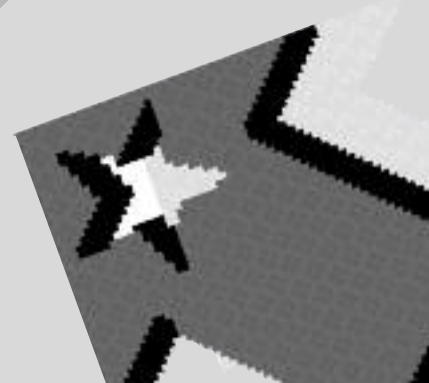
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Back to Front – Who needs sovereignty?

‘Blair is a man with the feeble ambition of being at the centre of Europe... perhaps he could make a stab at being in the centre of Britain...’

THE NEWS that France and Germany are to celebrate 40 years of the European Union with a joint session of their parliaments is more than a symbolic act. They know that nothing untoward could happen at a joint meeting, if only because their parliaments seem to have abandoned not just the idea that they might be central to their nations’ sovereignty, but also the idea that sovereignty might be a good thing.

It is more than this, of course. It is a reminder to Blair that whatever pose he likes to strike in Britain, no one is taking too much notice of him. Here is a man with the feeble ambition of being at the centre of Europe...perhaps he could make a stab at being in the centre of Britain, instead of either trying to hand us over to Brussels, or, on other days, provide cannon fodder for the US’s imperial ambitions.

Franco–German cooperation is not a concept with a long or distinguished pedigree. Before the European Union was set up, its most noticeable achievements were a failed iron and steel cartel (replicated, perhaps, in the EU’s iron and steel policy, which appears to be to have no iron or steel capacity), and Vichy France. The aim, as always, is to get more power for the owners of capital.

When the French and German parliaments do get together, it won’t be a question of not mentioning the war, more like don’t mention the economy.

Germany, in particular, is mired deep in recession, with faltering growth at the start of the year followed by actual decline in the last three months of the year.

Meanwhile, Blair is reduced to sending his Europe minister, ex-journalist Denis Macshane, on a “charm offensive”, an unlikely combination of concepts. Macshane, interviewed by the BBC in the middle of January, would have us believe: “What we have to avoid is making the question of the euro a political issue...At the end of the day it is a currency, a measure of value, that’s all.”

So, the question of who controls your currency is not political? But then again, Labour, having given up political thought for itself, now insists the whole country does so as well.

And then in the middle of January, a German court decided that since we are all in the EU, German laws must apply throughout the EU. It issued an injunction banning the MAIL ON SUNDAY from talking about German chancellor Schröder’s sleaze. To its great credit, the MAIL ON SUNDAY defied this injunction, and published.

We shall have to wait and see what the courts say. In the meantime, we have all to consider ourselves as having been served notice: inside the European Union, the only laws that are going to count are ones that come from parliaments other than your own.

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