

# WORKERS

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LIFE & SOUL

THE ULTIMATE TAKEOVER

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Nice: a(nother) treaty too far

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# WORKERS

## “ First thoughts

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS often enough, a pattern will start to emerge. Over the years, a definite political pattern has become clear in Britain's relations with the European Union, one that holds true regardless of which party is in power.

It goes like this. European heads of state get ready for big meeting, somewhere like Maastricht, or Nice. The agenda contains a host of centralising proposals from the European Commission. At this point, the British prime minister will announce that there are two, or sometimes three, items that are central to Britain's interests, and that on these nothing will be conceded.

Then a miracle occurs. After intense bargaining, the prime minister emerges from the conference room to declare proudly that, indeed, nothing has been conceded. Yet another triumph for Britain.

And yet each of these conferences has turned out to be a disaster for Britain. Nice, despite its unfinished business, may yet turn out to be the most disastrous yet (see “A lesson in diplomacy”, p6).

Blair managed to mock Hague in the Commons about surrendering the veto on the EU auditors' pensions, but no one should be laughing about the surrender of the veto on industrial policy — along with control over currency and army, control over industry is one of the most important controls that an industrial country could have.

And Blair surrendered it, without even a

semblance of a fight.

So here we are, trapped in an EU membership which provides the structure to enable destruction to take place (see also Back to Front, page 16). And on the horizon, the euro, the ultimate enforcer.

And despite all this, no national parliamentary party is talking about the implications. Labour because all is triumph. The Liberals because they openly want more power to go Europe. The Conservatives because industry is the gaping hole in their anti-euro position: like the capitalists which support them, they want the freedom to move goods, services, workers, anything, across any border without restriction.

They want to be able to play workers off against workers. They want to destroy Britain as an independent manufacturing nation — because industry is the basis for working class power in this country.

If the debate is to begin, it must begin, too, inside the unions, especially those with members in manufacture. Yet those union leaders who espouse all things euro will run as far as they can from any real debate — as last month, when a planned debate involving John Monks and others, on one side, and union leaders from rail, youth service and public service on the other was called off in suspicious circumstances (see “Running away from debate”, p3).

Well, they can run, but we can't let them hide.

## ”



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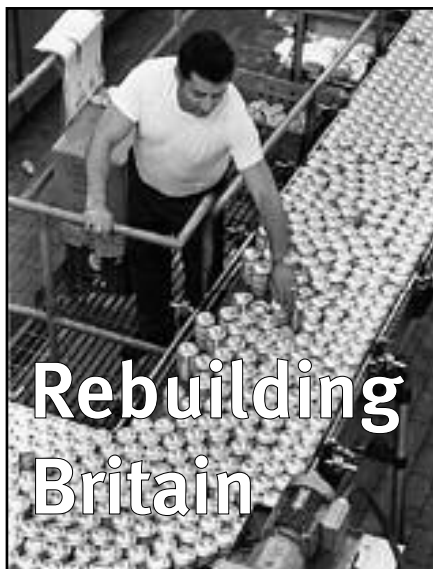
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## Running away from debate?

A PLANNED trade union debate between supporters and opponents of the euro was cancelled at under a week's notice last month. The decision to cancel, taken by NUJ General Secretary John Foster, has awakened suspicions that the pro-euro camp were as unwilling as ever to debate the issue in public.

Foster says he consulted only with the president. His reasons for cancelling were that the meeting had 'only' 23 people who had filled in reply slips with £5. Despite being told the obvious — that 23 replies a week before a London evening meeting meant at least the same number would show up on the night — he called the meeting off.

One of the speakers, CYWU General Secretary Doug Nichols, was told only 48 hours before the planned debate. Brendan Foley, an NUJ National Executive member for London, described himself as astonished and "deeply underwhelmed by an uncharacteristically poor decision from a normally excellent General Secretary". Foley will be pressing for a new meeting to be organised for this year.

"This raises two main issues," said Foley, "which we will be discussing at future national executives. The first is about our own democracy. When a decision to hold and support a meeting on the EU is voted on and agreed at our annual delegate meeting, then confirmed by a national executive, no general secretary should cancel it for anything much short of an earthquake.

"The second issue, is the importance of the EU and single currency debate. One of the greatest strengths of our trade union movement is that, unlike many others, we have only one unified TUC, not left, right and centre ones. The euro issue has deeply divided trade unions, with some, including GMB, AEEU and the TUC General Secretary being wildly in favour while others in ASLEF, CYWU and Unison are equally opposed and many others are internally divided. Huddles of people preaching to the converted is not the answer.

"That's why I will be urging the NUJ to reconvene a bigger, better meeting in 2001, with speakers from all shades of opinion on the single currency."

This time, the debate organisers will aim to get the trade unions involved to circulate their London membership well in advance through their branch newsletters and trade union journals, rather than concentrating their advertising on rounding up the "usual suspects".

**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)**

### UNISON Bickerstaffe retires

RODNEY BICKERSTAFFE, General Secretary of UNISON and previously NUPE, retired on 31 December 2000 after 35 years working in the trade union movement as a regional and national organiser.

In 1980 he became NUPE's youngest ever General Secretary and finally the first elected General Secretary of UNISON, Britain's largest trade union. Throughout his time, Rodney has given unqualified and ceaseless commitment to eradicating inequality, social injustice and advancing the interests of workers both in Britain and internationally.

Two major personal goals have been achieved — the introduction of the statutory minimum wage, and the establishment of UNISON, a radical attempt to establish one public services trade union.

Rodney's early retirement at 55 years old will see him take up activities with the national pensioners' movement and other causes advancing the interests of working people both in Britain and abroad.

### EUROPE Irish referendum call

SINN FEIN have called for a referendum because it undermines Irish neutrality reduces sovereignty and threatens peace. The extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) to a new range of areas is starting to concern may Irish voters as they realise they can overruled by other states that do not have to suffer the consequences of the decisions.

**TEXTILES****Clothing jobs at risk**

OVER 1,000 MORE textile jobs will be lost at former Coats Viyella clothing factories across the East Midlands. The new owners, Marplace, announced the closures within a week of taking the business over. Workers are disappointed because they thought that the management buy out would help secure at least some of the 3,500 jobs at Coats Viyella.

Coats Viyella announced in September that it would pull out of clothing manufacture, blaming the loss of orders from Marks & Spencer. Two factories at Ollerton and Workshop were marked for closure before Christmas. The remainder of the business was to be sold off.

Despite a setback with buyers pulling out, and the lack of tangible support from government, there was some hope among the workforce when a mystery buyer came forward in November.

The Knitwear, Footwear & Textile Workers Trade Union (KFAT), representing most of the Coats Viyella workers, remained suspicious at the last of consultation. Their fears were realised last month with the announcement in early December that a large part of the remaining workforce would lose their jobs in the next few months.

Barry Morris, KFAT Deputy General Secretary said: "Our members are extremely angry. They have been kept in the dark for months ever since Coats Viyella put the business up for sale. Then their hopes are raised at news of the management buyout, only to be told they will lose their jobs. It's an appalling way to treat people."

And he added: "This new company is only a week old and already they are closing factories. There has been no consultation with KFAT over these plans, and we are now considering whether a legal challenge is practical. From the very beginning this matter has been handled badly by the Coats Viyella management."

- Another former Marks & Spencer supplier, William Baird, sold off its formal menswear division just before Christmas.

A management buy out for £19 million, supported by Alchemy (the venture capitalists of Rover fame) divests Bairds of its loss making business, leaving it to concentrate on womenswear and casual clothing.

Baird is still in legal dispute with Marks & Spencer over the loss of its contracts. Already 4,000 jobs were lost, and it is doubtful if the buy out will mean any more jobs.



**GMB members made redundant from manufacturing industry make their stand outside the Bank of England during December's monthly interest-setting meeting.**

Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

## Air traffic fight continues

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS continue their fight against privatisation of the National Air Traffic Service. The government forced the Transport Bill through parliament, but only after conceding important principles.

The Institution of Professionals Managers & Specialists (IPMS) and other unions in the industry argued that privatisation was not the only way to ensure investment, preferring a non-profit trust. They argued that safety was in danger if a company looking to profit ran air traffic control. They won the arguments, especially in the wake of Railtrack's failures.

The House of Lords initially voted against the measure, but passed it when the government pressed. But the unions did win pension protection for workers and a guarantee that safety should be the top priority for whoever runs NATS in future.

Paul Noon, IPMS general secretary, said: "We do not think that privatisation is inevitable. With three seriously flawed bids on the table, there is a long way to go before a credible plan is produced that will protect the interests of taxpayers and the travelling public. We shall be vigilant in ensuring that both government and the strategic partner keep their word."

**SECRECY****Tap, tap**

THE LEVEL of phone-tapping and mail interception in the UK, during 1999, was the highest level since records commenced — 2,022 warrants. This was up on 1998 (2031 warrants) the previous highest record. The previous record was 1940 — 1,682 warrants and a minor inconvenience of antiquated technologies plus a global war.

All appeals against the known issuing of warrants have failed.

Interception covers pagers and email. Any warrants involving Northern Ireland, MI5, MI6, GCHQ are excluded from the figures. GCHQ, the US Menwith Hill base

and RAF Fylingdales base in Yorkshire boast the ability to intercept every phone call made in the UK — who needs a warrant?

In October it was revealed that British security services were proposing to record every phone call, email, pager, etc message sent. This is to prevent international terrorism and drug dealing, presumably by all the 60 million people living in Britain. It follows on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. Under this legislation, everyone and anyone is guilty until proven innocent. Everyone and anyone is under suspicion.

The cooperation of US and EU in establishing global databases to collect, analyse and exchange information continue unabated.

**NHS****Half a nurse...**

IN THE NHS PLAN FOR ENGLAND the claim was by 2004 "we will provide... more than 20,000 extra qualified nurses". Now it is revealed that the 20,000 might be part time and that the government was counting heads rather than hours worked!

The NHS unions and health service managers had believed that there would be funding for the equivalent of 20,000 full time nurses. Any other means of counting is nonsensical as some part-time nurses might only work one or two shifts a week!

Meanwhile, the government's other cunning plan of recruiting 5,000 Spanish nurses (presumably Spain does not need nurses) is not going too well either — none has arrived yet, due to what are described as "bureaucratic" difficulties.

The message from nursing unions is less pantomime tricks, give us a pay rise. The Royal College of Nursing's annual membership survey showed that pay was the most important factor that would encourage nurses to stay in the profession, a message the government seems unwilling to hear.

It is estimated that if nurse staffing losses and retirement continue at their current rate, the National Health Service will need to recruit about 110,000 nurses over the period to 2004.

On current projections, less than half of these will be newly qualified nurses. So it follows that the only thing that can make a difference quickly is retention of the existing workforce.

**TUBE****Plan put in doubt**

PLANS FOR A public private partnership (PPP) to run London Underground are in doubt. The National Audit Office reported before Christmas that the case for PPP was not proved. The government wanted to keep running of the tube in public hands but to give ownership of infrastructure to three private companies on 30-year leases. London Mayor Ken Livingstone and his transport commissioner Bob Kiley have described the current plans as "fundamentally unsafe and flawed". Now it looks as if a compromise will be reached. LU has an alternative plan. Now John Prescott and Lord Macdonald, the ministers responsible, will now have to take this into account and draw up revised proposals.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT****Library workers fight cuts**

LIBRARY WORKERS in Cornwall have held a day of action in opposition to a massive cuts package. The staff — members of UNISON — voted for the protest after Cornwall County Council axed 32 posts, involving 57 full and part time staff.

The cuts were announced following a projected budget overspend of around £700,000. A spokesman for the public service union UNISON said: "This vote shows the anger of staff who are not militant by nature but are paying the price for the incompetence of senior managers."

Librarians from all over the county lobbied a full council meeting on 12 December and handed in a petition with thousands of signatures. One banner said simply: "This is how Cornwall County Council celebrates 150 years of public libraries."

Staff are already taking voluntary redundancy and UNISON pointed out that these included some of the most experienced and best qualified in the service.

Only 17% of those remaining will hold professional qualifications. This contrasts with 29% recommended in a proposed government target.

**WHAT'S ON****Coming soon****JANUARY**

SERTUC CONFERENCE, LONDON  
An Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy for London — developing a trade union response to the London Development Agency's consultation document.

**Wednesday 31 January, 10.00 – 15.30.**  
Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

**MANUFACTURING****Unsafe at Chubb**

WORKERS AT CHUBB, the lock and safe manufacturers in Wolverhampton, taken over earlier this year by the Swedish firm Gunnebo, have been told they are to lose 170 jobs.

The world-famous Chubb name is based on the craft practised in the town since the beginning of the 18th century.

The workers, members of the National Union of Lock and Metal Workers, feel Chubb was bought to be closed down. The Gunnebo takeover was the third in the last four years. Each takeover has resulted in job losses.

# Teachers unite on pay

THE NATIONAL UNION of Teachers is campaigning for an allowance of at least £4,000 a year for inner London, with consequential improvements in the outer London and fringe areas, and the restoration of the recruitment and retention allowances which were drastically cut by the Pay Review Body this year.

There is a teacher shortage crisis in London. Many schools are taking drastic steps to cover the timetable. Others are propped up by teachers from overseas, whose presence, though a temporary assistance, is not a long-term solution. Teachers are leaving London after a few years in teaching because of the high costs of transport and housing.

The General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers has said: "Teachers need to earn to live in London, not learn to live in London on inadequate levels of pay." As a first step, the union has organised the sending of campaigning Christmas cards to David Blunkett, the education secretary. It is also calling on teachers to gather evidence about the impact of shortages. There is the possibility of an all-London meeting of teachers in the offing.

School groups need to meet and express their support for this campaign. London traditionally was the powerhouse of the union in terms of organisation. This campaign could allow London teachers once again to be the spearhead of the drive to restore higher levels of salary for teachers and make teaching an attractive option for young people in Britain.

The London Allowances have been devalued. They have not kept pace with housing and transport costs in the London area. The inner London allowance of £2,316 does not compare with like groups of non-manual workers. The outer London allowance of £1,524 and the fringe area allowance of £591 do not address teacher recruitment and retention problems.

## The European Army

THE EURO is not the only means by which the EU is trying to dissolve all Europe's independent nations into a single state. Especially now, it is trying to create and impose a single EU foreign and defence policy, enforced by a single EU army. Commission President Prodi said: "When I was talking about the European army, I was not joking. If you don't want to call it a European army, don't call it a European army. You can call it 'Margaret', you can call it 'Mary Ann', you can call it any name." So Tony Blair says this is not a European Army.

In November, the EU announced the formation of its own Rapid Reaction Force, ending NATO's decision-making monopoly on military matters in Europe. Alain Richard, France's Minister of Defence, said that this would enable the EU to develop global security responsibilities. He said that the European army must be able to deal with a 'high intensity crisis' by being able to carry out 'deep strikes'.

Geoff Hoon, Britain's Minister of Defence, said that there would be no geographical limits to its operations. Blair told the Polish Stock Exchange on 6 October 2000, "Europe today is no longer just about peace. It is about projecting collective power." This is a programme for war, not defence. A Common Foreign and Security Policy in Europe with huge spending on Europe-wide military hardware and a centrally controlled European Army were signs of gathering war clouds, not of universal peace breaking out.

For the first time in our history a British Prime Minister is putting British armed forces under foreign command, allowing the European Commission to involve itself in the matters of our defence and military policy. The government is proposing to put European defence and military questions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Yet the Prime Minister has told the British people that defence and military matters in the EU will be purely inter-governmental. In 1995, the Labour Party said it opposed measures to set up a common European defence. Once in power, it has done all it could to forward the EU's aims of creating a European army.

## Unified command

This Euro-force is to have its own single unified command independent of NATO, its own political and security committee, its own military staff, headquarters, logistics and intelligence supports, and its own EU 'high representative', Javier Solana. Elmar Brok, chairman of the European Parliament Committee on common security and defence policy, said: "The EU can take over the responsibility for European-led operations."

The EU announced that this force would comprise 100,000 troops (240,000 in rotation), backed up by 400 warplanes, including the Royal Navy's Sea Harriers, and 100 warships, to be operational as a force by 2003. Britain was to contribute 12,500 troops at any one time, with at least 25,000 (half the army) needed to sustain the force abroad for any longer than six months.

This meant one brigade at any time, either armoured, infantry or air assault. Britain's contribution also included 72 combat aircraft (half the RAF's contingent), 18 warships (half the Royal Navy's force, including an aircraft-carrier, two nuclear-powered submarines, four destroyers or frigates and an amphibious task group), and artillery, attack helicopters and logistic support. Yet Tony Blair says this is not a European Army: he said that this formidable array of military might was "limited to peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks. It is not a conflict force".

Some oppose the Euro-army because they believe that it would weaken NATO. Some claim to welcome it because they believe it would weaken NATO. But the impact on NATO is not the point. The point is the impact this would have on Britain. A European army, because it would be a threat to Britain: the EU's leaders could well decide to use it against any people who wanted to leave the EU, any people whom they decreed to be insufficiently 'European'.

Blair tells us it hasn't g  
power over our lives, a  
the EU — and why do

## A lesson in Eur

IN 1938 NEVILLE Chamberlain came back from Munich to proclaim his diplomatic triumph with Hitler. In December, Tony Blair returned from Nice to proclaim another diplomatic triumph, this time against the European superstate, we are told.

What actually happened is another story. Sovereignty was yielded across a wide range of issues, including industrial policy.

The Nice Treaty is in fact a massive assault on Britain's powers. It cuts back our sovereignty in key areas of policy; in

**'...if a majority of the other members decide to make us abolish the pound and adopt the euro, the government would have no veto'**

particular, it robs us of control over introducing the euro.

The proceedings were only superficially chaotic; in reality, the agreed reductions in member states' powers mean a huge step forward to a more tightly centralised European state.

## Farewell to the veto

Before the conference, the EU's leaders said that they aimed to end national vetoes by introducing Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in a large number of areas: appointing Common Foreign and Security Policy representatives; international agreements; anti-discrimination measures; self-employment; geographical mobility; border controls; visas; refugees; immigration; intellectual property; WTO proceedings; workers' rights; culture; structural and cohesion funds; cooperation with overseas countries; the environment and industrial policy.

Lo and behold! The Treaty introduced

got a constitution, it doesn't have an army, it doesn't have any and we shouldn't worry. So why is desperate for us to embrace as he call Nice a triumph?

## European diplomacy

QMV in all these areas. The areas Blair loudly professed to defend were never under serious attack. Meanwhile he quietly agreed to every single one of the EU's demands for surrender.

Member states ceded 39 vetoes, including those on such vital areas as measures for introducing the single currency, industrial policy and agreements on foreign, justice and home affairs.

### Euro by force

So if a majority of the other members decide to make us abolish the pound and adopt the euro, the government would have no veto and we would be supposed to do what they tell us. Without a referendum, and against the opposition of the majority of the British people, the euro could be forced upon Britain.

If a majority of the other members decide to run down what remains of British industry, the government would

**'This treaty...will apparently not be published for two months, preventing its being put to Parliament before the next election'**

have no veto and we would be supposed to do what they tell us.

If a majority of the other members decide that we should have a European system of justice, ending the right to jury trial and habeas corpus, the government would have no veto and we would be supposed to do what they tell us.

Other areas where we lose the veto include: regulating European political parties (including a rule enabling the EU to ban parties of which it disapproves); some environmental measures, rules

governing the European Central Bank's Council; emergency financial aid to member states (possibly having trouble funding their pensions?); trade in financial services (to prevent any blocks to liberalisation); European Court of Justice procedures; choices of the EU President and of its 'foreign policy supremo'; regional subsidies; the cohesion and structural funds, border controls; visa rules; implementing rules governing asylum; immigration and refugee policies (where Britain retains its opt-out)

### Two-tier Europe

Blair also gave up the veto on 'enhanced cooperation' between some but not all states, enabling the 'two-tier' EU that he said he opposed. Around 90% of all EU laws will be passed by QMV.

Blair also agreed to the Charter, the proposed new Constitution of the European Union: every other EU leader says that it will be legally binding, by 2004, if not before. He agreed to setting up the Rapid Reaction Force, which every other EU leader says will be an army independent of NATO and under EU command.

The treaty provides for even more Commissioners, up from 20 to 26 as new members join, and for even more MEPs, up from 626 to 738. It also gives significantly more powers to the Commission's President.

This treaty, meant to streamline decision-making, will apparently not be published for two months, preventing its being put to Parliament before the general election.

This is not the end of the integration process: however far it goes, it's never enough for the EU. Another meeting is to be held this spring, and a new IGC is to be held in 2004, to further develop EU integration.

Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister, said that some countries "want an inter-governmental Europe; others, like us, want a federal Europe. We have to choose, once and for all." Belgium takes over the EU Presidency in July.

## Not the European Constitution

BLAIR WAS quite explicit that Nice did not constitute a constitution. It was just a charter.

That's not what they think in Brussels. Commissioner Michel Barnier said: "We must not close off the possibility of giving the Charter legal force later."

Members of the Convention that drafted the Charter said that they worked on the presumption that the Charter would become legally binding on EU members and 'therefore justiciable in the courts'.

Nicole Fontaine, President of the European Parliament, urged EU leaders to give the Charter the full backing of the law: "If we give the Charter legal force, we will show that these values are binding on every one of us." She also said that the Charter could become the preamble to a 'future Constitution' of the EU.

For the French Government, Lionel Jospin said that the Charter would soon be law. The German and Italian Governments want to make the charter legally binding. In their joint 'non-paper', published in THE TIMES on Wednesday 6 December, they called for 'further treatment of the Charter' at the next IGC in 2004. (Typically, Blair said on Wednesday that he opposed holding another IGC; by Thursday, he supported the idea.)

For the Blair Government, Keith Vaz, the Minister for Europe, concluded from all this that, "nobody has talked about it [the Charter] being legally binding."

We can conclude from all this that the EU has produced for our delectation and delight not just a 'non-paper', but also a non-Charter leading to a non-Constitution for a non-State, to be enforced by a non-army, paid in a non-currency. Let's make sense of the whole nonsense by leaving it altogether!

## Good profitability and a full order book is no protection against c

# Privatising water: thirsty multinational com

THE MURKY dealings of two multinationals, with the collusion of Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers, are to result in the sacking of 700 skilled workers at a profitable pipe works in Derbyshire if the bosses of the companies concerned have their way.

“With its highly successful track record of working internationally, Biwater has built an enviable global reputation and has operated in over 60 countries,” boasts the company blurb of Biwater PLC, which operates in all aspects of the water supply industry.

The latest example of their “successful track record” is the sale of their Clay Cross, Derbyshire, pipe making plant to St Gobain, their French based “competitor”. St Gobain has 600 subsidiaries operating in 42 countries around the world. Within half a day of buying the plant — first established in 1837 — St Gobain had announced its closure with the destruction of 700 jobs, and the removal of the machinery to France.

Many of the 700 are ex-miners, previously thrown out of work in the pit closure programme of the Tory Government.

### Orders

The Clay Cross plant has a full order book, having taken large orders from 10 foreign countries in the last 18 months, from Syria to Chile and from Malta to Hong Kong. In addition they have orders from two British water supply companies and London Underground among others in Britain. Biwater bosses are demanding that workers accept increased working hours in order to meet order deadlines before they are made redundant.

The Government in the person of Stephen Byers, Trade and Industry Secretary, had considered a report on the deal three months before it was announced and the workers were issued with redundancy notices. He backed the sale, refusing to refer it to the Competition Commission — and decided to keep the workers and the local community, which will be devastated by

the job loss, in the dark. The job loss will double unemployment in the depressed area, and will take £500,000 each week out of the local economy.

Despite appeals by the Clay Cross MP, Harry Barnes, by the NE Derbyshire District Council, and by the leader of Derbyshire County Council, a parliamentary debate on the issue has been refused by Margaret Beckett, Commons Leader — and herself a Derbyshire MP. Harry Barnes said that St Gobain’s intentions were clearly to “destroy the pipe manufacturing potential of a key rival” and to “capture

**‘The destruction of jobs, skills and whole industries... must be countered by workers’ own plans for our own industries...’**

Biwater’s extensive and growing order book.”

But Biwater itself is pleased with the sale. Chairman Adrian White said: “The decision to accept the offer from St Gobain...will leave the Biwater group free to focus on its core business as a provider of engineering solutions to the water industry around the world.”

These “solutions” have not been universally popular, to say the least. Biwater was a prime mover in the disastrous privatisation of the British water industry, and was the first company to buy a water company — East Worcestershire Water Company — in 1988. They went on to buy more the following year. OFWAT, the water supply regulator, put their company in the lowest category for customer service. Now that is an achievement.

Its operations in other parts of the world have been roundly criticised, and it has attempted to silence opposition and

criticism on a number of occasions by liberal threats of legal action. When its role in the threatened privatisation of the water industry in South Africa was criticised in a South African Broadcasting Corporation programme in 1997, Biwater refused to accept an invitation to take part in the programme, refused to make any comments on it, or suggest areas that it considered to be untrue.

Biwater simply issued the statement: “Until an apology and corrections are issued by SABC, parent company Biwater PLC in the UK has indicated its intention to withhold its 200 million Rand investment in the proposed pipe factory in Johannesburg, which was to have created jobs for several thousand local people.” (17 November 1997)

### Legal threats

Biwater then went on to threaten legal action against two internet sites for carrying a press release by the South African Municipal Workers’ Union, which had announced its intention to begin a campaign of protest against the purchase of South Africa’s water supply industry.

The company also threatened legal action against the use of an article which had appeared a year before in South Africa’s WEEKLY MAIL AND GUARDIAN, which was concerned with the privatisation ‘debate’ and which alleged Biwater’s involvement with the British Conservative Party’s “aid-for-trade” programme.

For this Biwater was condemned by Public Services International — the global federation of trade unions representing 20 million public service workers worldwide. Its general secretary, Hans Engelberts, said: “This behaviour is unacceptable bullying from any multinational” — though many would agree that it is far from unique.

In a bizarre and yet to be explained twist, workers in Derbyshire have been further mystified and outraged by the sale of Milltown Quarry, near to the Clay Cross pipe-manufacturing plant. This was previously owned by (you’ve guessed it) Biwater Waste Management. It has been sold to Aggregate Industries — another



closure, as Derbyshire workers have been finding...

## panies, murky dealings

huge transnational company. The quarry has planning permission for the extraction of minerals for another 42 years.

Having bought the quarry, Aggregate Industries has decided not to apply for permission for further mineral extraction, and has sought local councils' limitation on activities at Milltown to the existing work area. Aggregate Industries' director Philip Bartrop, the proud new owner, said: "If the proposals are agreed by Derbyshire County Council and NE Derbyshire District Council, it will result in the closure of the Milltown Quarry site by the end of 2005."

### Campaign

Workers at the pipe-making plant have been conducting a spirited campaign against the wilful destruction of their jobs by international capital. They have lobbied, demonstrated, rallied and won support from all other unions in the area and beyond.

The secretary of the NUT in Derbyshire, and the union's national executive member, Bill Greenshields, told one of their rallies that their fight was not just for their own jobs and skills — important as they are.

"It is a fight for future generations, for the children currently in our schools, and for generations to come," he said

"The destruction of jobs, skills and whole industries by transnationals in their search for profits, and for economic and political power worldwide, must be countered by workers' own plans for our own industries and communities. They attempt to turn worker against worker within Britain, and British workers against those in other countries — attempting to force us to compete for work.

"We need to be as strategic as them in organising to defend what we have built, and to develop it for the good of the people, here and abroad. If that is incompatible with transnational companies, and their economic and political structures such as the world Trade Organisation and the EU, so be it."

## Sleight of hand in Yorkshire

FOUR months after the great 'water industry mutualisation' fiasco, Kelda, owners of Yorkshire Water are back with another wheeze. The mutualisation proposals were basically the handing back of £2.4 billion worth of assets to the 'customers', who in turn acquired a £3.9 billion debt. Bizarre maths on a par with daylight robbery but explained in detail in *WORKERS*, September 2000.

The Water Regulator promptly ruled the matter out of order as a not too sophisticated sleight of hand, effectively dumping the proposal.

So what's new from Kelda? After failing to hand the industry back to a strange form of public and massively indebted ownership in July, they are now seeking further government intervention.

The chief executive of Kelda has stated: "I am inviting the regulator and the Government to say whether they want the UK water industry to exist in the future. I believe this is a listening Government and they are seriously concerned about what is happening in other regulated industries."

In other words, the privatised capitalist-controlled water industry is a disaster. Not because the water has stopped flowing through the pipes, but because the rate of return on investment is not enough for the snouts in the trough. It is an arrogant statement threatening the very existence of the water industry. Kelda are calling for the government to arrive at a strategy for the water industry. They draw the parallels with the disaster of under-investment on the railways.

Surely 'robust' privatised industries, standing on their own two feet should arrive at their own strategies? Privatisation gave £20 billion to shareholders. The failure on profit returns means shareholders are desperate to off load the assets tying up their capital, and who better than the public and the government?

The privatisation and asset-stripping of Britain's public services, the industrial infrastructure which has meant Britain could function as a modern nation — gas, electricity, water, rail, transport, etc, coupled with parallel destruction in the social infrastructure — health, education, housing, etc, now moves to a crisis of incredible proportions. If the Labour Government of 1945-1950 faced a massive crisis of capital fleeing the country, this government faces a crisis of foreign capital seizing and stripping the very essential structures of the country. The crisis for the government is that abandonment of any pretence of nationhood means it has no control, influence or strategy for how to deal with these matters.



**It's all looks over, bar the voting. Workers will have created a giant industrial union — but will they be able to control it?**

## **AEEU/MSF: who runs the unions?**

THE AMALGAMATED Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) and the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union (MSF) have agreed in principle to a merger. For MSF Conference in May 2000, this was conditional on safeguards to protect the sovereignty of Conference, the right of Conference to amend new rules, and a commitment to maintain branch and regional structures.

MSF members had not sought merger, and only on the above democratic basis was MSF instructed to proceed to ballot its members. Ken Jackson, general secretary of the AEEU, said MSF's insistence that Conference be the 'supreme governing body', jeopardised the merger.

The re-negotiated instrument of amalgamation reflects AEEU pressure. Conference is to be 'the supreme policy making' body, which is an improvement on the existing MSF rules, but still allows the executive to circumvent conference decisions. Still, it was good enough for MSF delegates, recalled on 11 November. They voted for a ballot, influenced by a pre-emptive poll with two heavily biased questions. Some 21% of MSF membership had taken part, with 90.9% in favour of merger. On that basis it seems likely that the eventual MSF ballot will also be in favour.

### **Strength**

The AEEU and MSF have campaigned together for aerospace, the car industry, and shipbuilding for many years. Half the MSF membership is in manufacturing. Their combined strength brought about the 35-hour week. In 1999 they successfully fought off the imminent closure of Rover at Longbridge, and established an Alliance for Manufacturing. They fought together to preserve jobs at Fords of Dagenham. In September the two unions held their first major joint conference on the future of manufacturing.

The introduction of single table bargaining in recent years also requires a common agenda. Shared interest in the advancement of science and in higher

education involves joint bargaining with the University and Colleges Employers Association (representing the 'old' universities); the AEEU has virtual monopoly of the post-1992 university sector. At British Airways they would together represent over 8,000 of the 11,000 in engineering. With joint membership in other airlines too, they could prove a formidable influence at Heathrow.

The AEEU is the wealthier of the two. It is estimated that merger would significantly increase MSF's resources for recruitment, organisation, education and training, while the AEEU would benefit from MSF's high profile as a campaigning union. Combined membership would total in excess of 1.1 million (430,000 MSF, 720,000 AEEU), making it the

**'To say one union is to the right and another to the left is to deny the dynamics of working class struggle and its potential for change'**

second largest union in the TUC. There would be structural changes to MSF. Small independent sectors, such as pharmacists and tourist guides, would be absorbed into larger 'autonomous' industrial and professional sectors, a move previously resisted by MSF.

These changes, says MSF's Roger Lyons, would act as a magnet for the millions who are currently outside the trade union movement. It would also appease the non-manufacturing sectors of MSF, uneasy at being outnumbered by engineers. A new rule book is due for debate in 2002. It will have been drawn up by a lay commission, but will be approved by a simple majority at conference in 2003. The AEEU has an in-built majority; there are naturally fears

that they will determine the rules. Also that fewer meetings will undermine democracy; MSF has an annual conference, AEEU has alternate policy-making and industrial/sectoral conferences. Already the MSF executive have started to meet less frequently.

Around 77,000 NHS workers are in MSF. These include doctors, scientific and technical staff, clinical psychologists, community nurses, health visitors, pharmacists, and speech therapists. The AEEU has only 8,000, and its recruitment in health has been waning. In finance and insurance MSF also has 77,000 members. Growth in the selling of financial services by telephone and the internet has led inexorably to redundancies, as at BA and Virgin Air, where both unions have members. At the recall conference finance delegates were noticeably in favour of merger.

Competition between these two large unions would be ended by amalgamation. There is no doubt MSF has felt the aggressive — some would say predatory — nature of the AEEU's recruitment tactics. Incorporation of the electricians into the AEU in 1992 resulted in moving away from election to appointment of officers, undermining lay control. They began to move into areas where other unions, such as the Transport & General, were on strike, as with Cabin Crew 89 at BA and British Midland, and at Go Air (now going, or gone). The result was exclusion from the International Transport Federation, activities being confined to UK airlines only, to the detriment of recruitment of aircraft maintenance engineers.

An AEEU single union no-strike deal at Western Mail & Echo also eroded the ability of other unions to defend their members. MSF was not, however, an innocent party, either at the airlines or at the print, where it was seen off by the NUJ, which increased its own membership. Latterly, the AEEU moved in on Prudential Insurance in the middle of an MSF recruitment drive. It has also been expelled from the Confederation of Irish Trade Unions.



Sitting comfortably? Don't be so sure. Ken Jackson of the AEEU (left) and Roger Lyons

There is no point in pretending such scandals do not exist. They are the inevitable result of unions taking the route of least resistance after the onslaughts of Thatcher, combined with the insidious effect of the Blair government, which pretends to stick up for British industry, but in fact concedes more to Brussels than any other country.

## Respect

Workers have to rebuild their organisations, and take control. This could mean resisting the temptation to grow bigger and richer at the expense of losing identity. Or it could mean persuading the new bedfellow to change its ways. Unions are only as good as their members. Besides, there is a price to be paid for refusing to respect fellow unions. The AEEU made itself unattractive; efforts to retain members, and to fight other unions, have proved costly.

More significantly, there are those within the labour movement itself who cannot tolerate workers who stand their ground. In MSF there is a struggle for ideas between those who would have members subservient to the Labour government and its friends in Europe, and those who genuinely want to run their own union in response to members' needs. John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC, has said the number of British trade unions should be reduced. For the TUC and the government, the MSF/AEEU merger is "a unique opportunity to create

a new model of a European Trade Union...in line with the TUC's challenge to restructure the trade union movement." (Paul Talbot, MSF).

What this means was made transparent by Ken Jackson at the TUC in September, in a motion committing trade unionists to campaign for a single currency, combined with a raft of EU measures for 'partnerships' with employers in the name of 'employment rights'.

Without the right to employment, all such benefits are illusory. We are in fact to be part of a 'New Union Concept', a 'single union for workers', in which labour will be 'free' to forage for jobs across a whole continent. This has nothing in common with workers' aspirations to jobs and security where they live. It has everything to do with redesigning unions along lines suggested by the World Trade Organisation and the EU, the more easily to denationalise and control them in the interests of the ruling multinationals.

It is clear from statements put out by both unions that, despite being forced to defend jobs at Rover or Ford, their leaders are in fact in the business of planning for the decline of manufacturing on British soil. The AEEU is turning away from its engineering base. "We are looking to...expand our membership in an area traditionally dominated by UNISON." It is envisaged that in the new union manufacturing numbers will rapidly drop to 50% — the same as in MSF today.

"Decline is inescapable," they say; specialist manufacturing unions are decreed to be no longer viable.

Only in this context can attacks on union democracy be properly understood. In London MSF, such attacks have taken the form of a series of suspensions of useful and vigilant trade unionists whenever they have acted independently of Labour policy, as with Blair's attempt to fix the London Mayor, or Lyons' attempts to stifle debate over amalgamation or Europe.

Awkward questions have also been raised about secret pay-offs to officials, and EU-style expense account living, as revealed at the Marcia Solomon tribunal, alerting the membership to be more generally on their guard.

By the same token, 'right-left' accusations are symptomatic of lazy thinking, peddling half-truths. They are at best an irritant stemming from old sectarian rivalries, and at worst purist and hypocritical. To say that one union is authoritarian and to the right, while another is democratic and to the left is to deny the dynamics of the working class and its potential for change. There is a welcome determination to forge a democratic union.

Structure and procedure will be important — but not all-important. When ordinary branch members cut through all the baggage of the past, and begin to map out a future for their own industries, then we'll see democracy in action!

To keep the housing stock under their control, workers and tenants' Executive's — and Glasgow council's — collaboration with corpora-

## Glasgow takes on the housing vultures

TORRENTIAL RAIN didn't deter workers employed by Glasgow City marching together with council tenants through the city centre in their hundreds to a joint rally in the City Halls on the first Saturday in December.

Glasgow tenants are being prepared for the biggest privatisation give-away of municipal housing and land in Europe. Glasgow City Council, in conjunction with the Executive of the Scottish Parliament, is proposing to transfer all of Glasgow's council housing to the ironically misnamed Glasgow Housing Association.

But tenants across the city — and many council workers are themselves council tenants - are not being fooled by the empty gloss and presentation roadshows. Tenants' leaders are convinced that they will not be flummoxed by phoney forms, nor bought off in a Hobson's choice of voting yes to private finance (with promised double-glazing!) or for the option of no funding at all. Glasgow tenants are demanding a New Start (see Box, below) for publicly funded housing — not one of the options currently on offer.

The council's plan parallels other moves in Britain to kill off council housing, most notably in Birmingham,

which after Glasgow has the second largest stock of council housing in the country. There, tenants are being offered five options, which do at least include keeping the Council as the landlord.

The mood of the Glasgow tenants has forced the proponents of the plan onto the defensive, and has pushed the

of its responsibilities as a provider of housing. He also told them that the now twice-postponed ballot of tenants might not take place until November 2001. Clearly, the previous date of May 2001 was too close to the possible date of a general election.

Throughout Scotland another six councils are to hold ballots on whether to transfer housing stock to a privately financed landlord — and pensioners are already feeling the effects. Jackie Bailie, the Scottish housing minister, has confessed that thousands of pensioners, from Aberdeen to the Western Isles and down to the Borders, will not get their promised central heating installed for at least another year, since these improvements "will be subject to the result of the tenants' ballot on the transfer proposals".

### Cynical

Last September the late Donald Dewar, the First Minister, who supported the policy of privatisation, denied that central heating installation was conditional or linked to any ballot. Tenants do not want their housing stock transferred, but because of this cynical new policy twist the elderly are to be allowed to freeze. Pensioners not awaiting a ballot on the transfer are scheduled to get a new heating system fitted in the spring.

Fiona Hislop, housing spokesperson for the Scottish National Party, said: "The bottom line is that pensioners in Glasgow are being left in the cold because of Labour's ...stock transfer proposal, when they should be getting heating installed from next April."

Banks and construction companies cannot wait to be invited to get their hands on tenants' housing, and even more so on their land. Tenants say that rents will go through the roof if the transfers go through.

The proposals in the new Housing Bill for Scotland make it clear that even model tenants could be evicted if the privately funded new "community-based" landlord cannot bring home the lolly for

**'The Government has been forced to look to the private hospital sector...but spare private capacity is patchy around the country'**

proposed date for a ballot further and further back. In the autumn Charles Gordon, leader of Glasgow City Council, admitted to the GLASGOW EVENING TIMES and the GUARDIAN that if a ballot had been held this year tenants would have decisively rejected the plans.

On 8 December Gordon wrote to all 94,000 Glasgow tenants reminding them of the council's proposed abandonment

**GLASGOW CAMPAIGN  
AGAINST THE HOUSING  
STOCK TRANSFER**

**LOBBY THE TUC  
CONFERENCE AGAINST  
PRIVATISATION OF OUR  
COUNCIL HOUSING**

on Wednesday 13th September 2000  
at 12.15 pm at the  
Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre

Let us call for a new start for public sector housing, meaning:

- Writing off the debt releasing £132 million immediately for repairs and maintenance
- Restore housing support grant to lower rents and build new council houses.

## New Start

The New Start for public sector housing that Glasgow tenants are campaigning for includes:

- The immediate write-off of the council's housing debt without that being conditional on privatising housing
- Affordable rents
- A high level of public investment
- Secure publicly accountable funding for the long-term maintenance of homes
- Genuine democratic involvement of tenants in creating a strategic policy for housing in the city.

## Tenants in Glasgow are standing up against the Scottish rate takeover



Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

**Sleeping rough: as council housing stocks decline, so homelessness is on the increase.**

the shareholders of the private funders.

The plan comes in stages. Stage one is for the giant Glasgow Housing Association to take over the housing stock. Stage two is to be the break-up of housing to lots of small privatising landlords, all of whom will have to compete with each other. Who will sink and who will swim? Already, predatory housing companies such as Sanctuary Housing are sensing prey.

The new landlords will not be accountable to anyone but their shareholders. The knock-on effects are predictable: it is known, for example, that housing associations have a deplorable record in housing homeless people.

Privatisation will also mean the end of secure tenancies, more demolitions, and more land give-aways. Tenants

calculate that land speculation could net private developers profits of £300 million if they get their hands on the sites till now held in trust by the council for housing.

### Victorian values

The plan is taking social thinking back to the 19th century, say tenants. It would mean loss of existing housing points, massive council job losses three years after the transfer, reduced services for tenants, fat-cat deals for officials and their business pals, and less democratic control. In one particular example, Glasgow City Council has admitted that many pensioners would have their housing benefit reduced.

Glasgow tenants are desperate for information, but they are not getting it from the Government, which pours

millions of pounds into glossy but empty propaganda. Instead, with few resources the Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfer is taking the Government's closeted information to tenants at local meetings across the city. Tenants' action groups and associations and residents' groups are continuing to oppose the ending of publicly funded housing.

The need for better low-cost housing could provide a stimulus to rebuilding industry in Glasgow, helping transform the jobs situation, both in quantity and quality of jobs available. Instead Government is merely talking about getting rid of what it considers to be a burden. Glasgow tenants are definitely expected to vote No, and deserve every support. If you would like to read more about this campaign in the next issue of WORKERS, please write to the editor today!

## A new book lays bare the corporate penetration of British life — offer some solutions

# The ultimate takeover

A review of **CAPTIVE STATE: THE CORPORATE TAKEOVER OF BRITAIN**, by George Monbiot.

Macmillan, London, 2000

THIS BOOK provides factual evidence to show the extent to which the New Labour Government of Britain has kowtowed to the interests of corporate capital which acknowledges no duties but to its shareholders. As such, it is a useful contribution to our understanding of how Britain is controlled by large corporations and the way in which governments, especially the current one, appears to offer solutions but in fact drags us deeper into the mire.

A good example of this is Monbiot's description of the true effects of PFI, a means of funding embraced by Conservative and Labour governments alike, on the health service. In 1993 the Conservative government informed the NHS that it would release no money for major hospital building works until the NHS had first considered financing the new works privately. But when Labour came to power, far from abandoning PFI, it cleared the remaining obstacles to it out of the way. As a result, in 2000 it was able to announce that public projects worth some £20bn would be privately funded by 2003.

But PFI will not only reduce the number of hospital beds, it will also cut the number of Britain's hospitals. Healthcare will become less accessible, especially for the 32% of British households with no use of a car. The decline in both beds and staff precipitated by PFI will force hospitals to

cut corners and reduce the number of prolonged and expensive treatments they offer. The only way the private companies can make the money they need is for the NHS to give them

from the public to the private sectors will be accompanied by a transfer of control. Gradually, as hospital schemes are tailored to meet the needs of companies, the consortia will come to control the NHS.

While taxpayers' money is being given to corporations, the corporations themselves are required to contribute ever-decreasing amounts of tax. The Conservatives had reduced it from 52% to 33%. In 1997 the Labour government cut it by a further 2%. In 1999 it cut the tax again to 30%. Gordon Brown boasted that this was "now the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax, the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere, including Japan and the United States".

Academic institutions provide further examples of the encroachment of corporations and today there is scarcely a science faculty in the United Kingdom whose academic freedom has not been compromised by its funding arrangements.

Cambridge University has sponsorship from among others Shell ( a chair in Chemical Engineering), BP (professorships in Organic Chemistry and Petroleum Science) and ICI (a chair in Applied Thermodynamics).

Oxford University's includes a Chair in English and a professorship in the broadcast media by Rupert Murdoch who controls 40% of what ought to be Britain's free press. Independent investigators have found that nearly 1,000 research projects are being conducted for oil and gas firms.

Five times as much money is spent in British universities on research into oil and gas as on research into renewable



subsidies. The scheme which government ministers tell us will bring money from the private sector into the health service will instead drain money from the health service into the private sector. Doctors, nurses and NHS managers are all concerned that this transfer of money

and seeks to

sources of energy.

The same shift of control from publicly accountable government to big business serving only shareholders is apparent in other areas such as prisons and education. Jack Straw in opposition said that private prisons were morally unacceptable. Within a week of taking office he had decided to sign contracts for privately financed prisons. Within a year he was saying all new prisons in England and Wales would be privately built and run.

Monbiot's main concern is for the demise of liberal democracy. He says, "The struggle between people and corporations will be the defining battle of the twenty-first century. If the corporations win, liberal democracy will come to an end."

### **Solution?**

His solution is "the peaceful mobilisation of millions of people in nations all over the world, so that globalisation can be matched by internationalism campaigning worldwide for better means of government".

On both these counts we part company. Liberal democracy has been developed to sustain the very corporatism he deplors, and the idea that the millions of people being exploited by the global corporations can simply mobilise themselves together for resistance is utopian in the extreme. It is only an organised working class, that is a working class where trade unionisation is already in existence, which can effectively oppose a global capitalist class. But as Marx says: "The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie."

Monbiot's book gives good up-to-date evidence on how governments collaborate with capitalism against workers. Any suggestion that it would tolerate being peaceably removed fails to

# **WHERE'S THE PARTY?**

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**

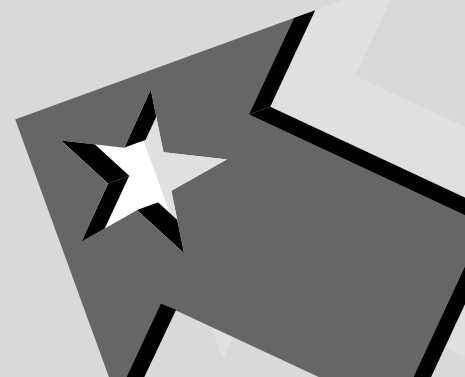
\* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet **WHERE'S THE PARTY**. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

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# Back to Front – Policy-free zone

**‘It is hard to imagine anything of greater significance to the future of Britain as an industrial country’**

AMONG THE GREAT mysteries of life must be whether the Government has an industrial policy. To judge by appearances, the answer must be that it doesn't — except, that is, if its policy is to dispense with industry.

This might explain why the surrender at Nice of the veto over industrial policy is not counted as being of any significance. And yet it is hard to imagine anything of greater significance to British workers and to the future of Britain as an industrial country.

Last month, General Motors of the US decided to 'rationalise' its operations. This included 'rationalising' Oldsmobile out of existence, as well as several thousand jobs in mainland Europe. And it included closing car production at Vauxhall in Luton, where cars were made for most of the last century.

What does our government do? Nothing. Just as it did nothing a month earlier when Ford pushed through its closure of car production at Dagenham.

These and other closures before them have been met with government mantras about the allegedly high pound (it is, in fact, low against the dollar and against a stack of other currencies that make up over half of Britain's trade) — a mantra shared by the Europhiliac trade union leaders like Ken Jackson. Over Vauxhall, he even ended up in a public argument with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, whose spokesman was adamant that the "strong pound" was nothing to do with the decision.

Their only policy is to join the euro. As if that would improve things! Simply being in the European Union is bad enough. It means that car manufacturers can set up shop anywhere in the EU, and import into Britain at will. With Nice setting the stage for the expansion of the EU, that potential

area for car plants will soon expand to include the Czech Republic, Poland, and on and on. And the EU will try to forbid us from protecting our livelihood against this onslaught.

This no-policy government says there is a problem with overproduction of cars. Too many, it seems. If that's true — and there are millions of people who would like a car but can't afford one — the overproduction is not in Britain. In 1999, only 28% of the cars sold in Britain were produced here: almost three-quarters were imported.

In that year, car production in the UK was 1.9 million. This year, with closures and contraction at Vauxhall, Ford, Rover and, it is thought, Nissan, car production will fall below 1.3 million cars.

So some people certainly seem to have a policy, namely to wipe out engineering and manufacturing in Britain. These people include the European Commission, which thinks we ought to have only two industries, pharmaceuticals and tourism. And by default they include our own government, which declines to have a policy.

Workers at Dagenham declined, too, to have an industrial policy, even a limited one for themselves and their children. They voted instead to accept Ford's plans. To their credit, those at Vauxhall have shown greater clarity, and greater anger, too. When the decision about Luton was announced, they besieged the company headquarters, while colleagues in Ellesmere Port walked out in support.

We are an industrial country. We either create and manufacture the bulk of the goods we need, or we will disappear. The government has surrendered the industrial veto. Workers must take it back.

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