

WORKERS

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AS 2012 BEGINS...

OUT OF THE EU! REBUILD BRITAIN!



Pensions A nation in struggle | 06



Culture The fight for work | 08



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WORKERS

“A happy ending

LAST YEAR ended with a bang. There was the 30 November action over pensions, a nation united in struggle (see pages 6-7). And then the EU summit on 9 December, whose outcome represents a big breach in our relationship with the European Union and accordingly a significant advance for Britain.

The EU answer to its crisis is yet another pact for “stability and growth”, ignoring the failure of the last one. But the fiscal union now proposed in the 17-member eurozone would be a huge step towards a single European state.

The tiny band of pro-euro fanatics – including Blair, Miliband, Salmond and sundry press commentators – who say Britain is now “isolated and marginalised” need their heads (and their motives) examined. What could leave a nation more isolated and marginalised than giving up a huge chunk of its sovereignty?

Tax and spending plans will be scrutinised by EU officials before national governments. Automatic sanctions against countries that overspend will make monetarism a constitutional obligation. Marginalised? More like missing the maiden voyage of the Titanic.

German chancellor Merkel wants legally binding restrictions on deficit spending in the eurozone countries. This would outlaw any industrial growth policy: eurozone nations

would effectively be forbidden to invest in industry, jobs, wages and public services. It would make the slump obligatory and permanent. Now French president Sarkozy wants parallel bureaucracies set up in every EU institution to run the single fiscal policy. Assault on the working classes of Europe is the aim: the European Union is the weapon of choice.

Merkel says that the eurozone had set an “irreversible course towards a fiscal union”. Yet even now the deal is under pressure, even without the peoples of Europe having yet been allowed a voice – will they put up with losing their national sovereignty to Germany? Ireland is talking about a referendum. The Danish government lacks the votes it needs to agree to the deal, with calls for a referendum growing. Both Hungary and the Czech Republic say that the proposed fiscal rules are unacceptable because they would take away their sovereign taxation rights.

Cameron vetoed the proposed treaty, the first good thing he has done, in a bid for voter popularity. Whether he meant it or not, it’s a big step towards our being free of the EU. The British people do not want to be in the euro, nor in the EU. The question is, what shall we going to do about it? Now, there’s material for a New Year’s resolution! ■



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New workplace laws threat

ORCHESTRATED LEAKS from the Coalition indicate that a series of anti-worker laws aimed at targeting workplace rights is being planned. A leaked report written by venture capitalist Adrian Beecroft in October called for the abolition of unfair dismissal protections – empowering companies to sack staff at will. The argument is that employment protection legislation stifles investment and flexibility. The Beecroft report then hides behind EU legislation as the minimum acceptable benchmark.

The report was followed by talk from Cameron about legislating to introduce “protected conversations”. This means the employer can have full and frank conversations with an employee before sacking them because their face does not fit but without the sacked worker being able to introduce such evidence at an Employment Tribunal. This would supposedly get rid of the terrible cloud of constructive dismissal which hangs over employers. Only 1 per cent of constructive dismissal cases are successful. Some threat!

In November employment secretary Vince Cable regurgitated all these arguments, now openly stating that employment legislation holds back economic growth. The General Secretary of the TUC gently drew Cable’s attention to the fact that German workers have greater workplace protection than British workers and that the German economy is the strongest in Europe. He could have said that German pensions for both public and private sector workers are also significantly higher than British pensions!

On 30 November, the day two million workers struck to defend pensions, Cameron raised the old chestnut of taxpayers subsidising trade union stewards and representatives in the workplace. Rattled by the strike, he resorts to threats and intimidation.

In the first year of the Coalition the number of Employment Tribunals rose by 56 per cent to nearly 240,000, reflecting how bad real industrial relations are with bullying employers. The Coalition response is to double to 24 months the qualifying period before you have legal workplace rights. This was the period Thatcher set, and it led to a culling of workers in their 23rd month of employment. Cameron bluntly stated in November, “This means anyone taking on a new employee can now be confident that they have two years to get the relationship right, rather than just one. And if things aren’t working then they can end the relationship without being sued for unfair dismissal.”

Workers have to return to basic concepts of workplace organisation, commonality of interests, unity as strength as we enter this period of greater fragmentation in the workplace, uncertainty and employer/government attacks. Work cannot be a one-way street with the employer dictating the agenda. Being organised at work and controlling work is about us asserting direction and improvement for our own class interests. ■

PENSIONS Battle at Unilever

ON 8 DECEMBER, 2,500 workers at manufacturer Unilever went on strike over moves to close their final pension workplace scheme to all its members by July 2012 and move to a less generous career-average scheme. The strike affected 11 production sites all over Britain that make PG Tips, Marmite, Dove, Pot Noodle and Hellman’s Mayonnaise. The unions point out that these plans would cut retirement income by up to 40 per cent and that the pension fund is financially robust. ■

BBC The fight for a public service

UNION MEMBERS at the BBC are continuing their fight for public service broadcasting in the face of the corporation’s plans to cut jobs and services under its cynically named Delivering Quality First programme.

A lobby of parliament on 6 December was followed the next week by the opening of a strike ballot by members of the media and entertainment union BECTU at BBC Birmingham, which faces the transfer of much of its production to Bristol.

The fight for the BBC continues on the back of a significant victory at the end of November, when BBC management withdrew its attempt to impose worse terms for staff taking pensions from September 2013, and worse general terms and conditions for new staff from April 2012.

The withdrawal followed solid ballots for strike action from the three unions that organise at the BBC – the National Union of Journalists, BECTU and Unite. The BBC now accepts it must negotiate any changes. ■

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Money, and more money...

IN DECEMBER the markets were still wrecking European economies. Greece was running out of money and their 130 billion euro IMF bailout stalled. Italy, France, Spain and Belgium had to refinance loans totalling 17 billion euros. Next year, Europe's banks have to refinance 800 billion euros of debt. Ratings agencies decide the future cost of sovereign debt and the credit freeze continues: loans totalling 3 trillion euros are likely to be pulled out of Europe in the next few months.

In 2010 (the latest year for which full figures are available) Britain's gross contribution to the EU budget rose to £18.5 billion, up 5.7 per cent. Funds coming back from the EU fell by about a quarter to £8.1 billion.

Farming cash

THE COMMON Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidises big business. In 2009 the top 9 recipients were sugar processing companies, which received a total of 928 million euros: none was in Britain. Next year is expected to bring sugar shortages and a sharp price increase. France has 174 Common Agricultural Policy subsidy millionaires, many from banana-producing companies in French overseas territories.

Fishing for trouble

SPANISH trawlers will no longer be able to fish in Morocco's waters after MEPs rejected the extension of a bilateral deal under which the EU paid Morocco 36 million euros a year for fishing licences. Morocco has now urged all EU fishing boats to leave its waters at once. The British fishing fleet will get a raised quota, but fewer days at sea. Many fishermen doubt it will help them at all.

Come on in

WITH 9.5 per cent of Europe's workers unemployed – and more than half of Spain's young people jobless – the European Commission clearly reckons the figures aren't high enough. EU Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmström has unveiled a package of new measures aiming to make it easier for legal migrants to enter the EU. In November she launched a helpful website, the EU Immigration Portal, which provides information for foreign citizens interested in moving to the EU. ■



Photo: Stephanie Delvin

30 November, Newcastle: the pensions march lines the Tyne as workers in the North East joined with the rest of the country in protest at the government's plans. Many of the workers were on strike for the first time in their lives. Rallies took place from Scotland to the Isle of Wight – where a rally took place in St. Thomas Square, Newport, with the union members from St. Mary's Hospital and teachers as well as council workers and workers from the Jobcentre. See pages 6–7.

Collusion over fares increases

GOVERNMENT MOVES to connive with Britain's private train companies to raise profits have been exposed by a recent report from the National Audit Office. The report highlighted the fact that instead of reducing the burden on the taxpayer as claimed by transport ministers, the above-inflation fares increases that came into effect in January 2012 will mean more profits for rail companies and more dividends for shareholders.

The government has been forced to reduce the fares increases from an average of 8 per cent down to 6 per cent following a vigorous campaign by rail users and unions. But the maximisation of profit at the expense of workers many of whom have seen real terms pay cuts over the past few years continues. The private train companies will also be reaping a bumper profit increase from increased station car parking charges, which are completely unregulated by the government.

Today's railway companies have made huge profits out of privatisation. And no wonder: they currently receive in real terms nearly five times the public subsidy that British Rail received in its last year of existence. Even Sir Roy McNulty in his recent "Value for Money" report acknowledges the massive structural costs of a fragmented and privatised railway. It is obvious to all except him that ending profits by returning the railways to public ownership would substantially cut the need for subsidies.

McNulty's solution, enthusiastically embraced by the government, is to increase fares and attack the pay, conditions and pensions of rail staff. The imminent publication of the delayed government "command paper" in response to McNulty will reveal the challenges ahead for users and workers alike. ■

WAR

Hypersonic nuclear missile

THE USA is once more threatening the world. Last month it announced it had successfully fired a missile capable of travelling five times the speed of sound. The missile hit a target up to 2,300 miles away in less than 30 minutes.

Dubbed the Advanced Hypersonic Weapon, the missile will allow the US to bomb anywhere in the world within an hour. The question is, why develop it?

The Advanced Hypersonic Weapon,

like stealth bombers, Cruise missiles and the neutron bomb, is an offensive weapon designed to attack, strike first – a strategy the US military and government have advocated against anyone they object to since the end of World War Two.

Initially that list comprised the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, but now it includes Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Cuba – or more exactly, anyone and everyone they do not control.

The warmongers are rattling their sabres. This development must not be allowed to progress beyond a test to field deployment. ■

East London teachers fight

BACKED WHOLEHEARTEDLY by the National Union of Teachers, 78 striking teachers at Langdon School in Newham, east London, have waged a significant struggle against excessive workload and oppressive management – a growing problem in many schools. Following 10 days of strikes stretching over a number of weeks, an agreement was reached which enabled the union to suspend industrial action scheduled for 14, 15 and 20 December, and future planned actions in January.

Attempts to solve the problems by discussion and negotiation began in the previous academic year, but got nowhere owing to management intransigence. A first strike led to increased belligerence from the head and resulted in the suspension of several members of the leadership team, members of the NUT unhappy at the deterioration in leadership style. There were two references of the dispute to ACAS conciliation. After the first meeting, the union thought an agreement had been reached but it was never acted upon by the head teacher or by sections of the local authority. Instead, when intensified strike action followed (three days of strike on consecutive weeks), the head teacher recruited outside agency staff and used cover supervisors to replace the strikers on the days of the dispute.

Recruiting agency staff to replace strikers would have been illegal, so in order to allow it to take place, Labour-run Newham council intervened disgracefully by giving the agency staff temporary employment contracts for the days of the strike. This crude attempt at strike breaking not only increased strikers' morale but also antagonised teachers throughout the borough, who voted to request that the union consider involving them in a general trade dispute.

At the second ACAS meeting, the council became more constructively involved and an agreement was suggested, but the Langdon strikers rejected it, as it did not contain enough safeguards for them and contained too many loopholes favourable to the head. Half a dozen points were suggested for union negotiators to take back. As strikes resumed, the LA made a revised offer which was recommended by union negotiators and the school reps, and which proved acceptable to the strikers. Then the strike action was suspended and the teachers returned to work.

The agreement means that there will be: an independent survey on workload and oppressive management, with NUT input on questions, to be referred to the LA; a mechanism for dealing with the 28 existing workload issues, involving the LA and governors; the appointment of a senior leader, to whom staff will have access, to work in school at least 2 days a week; and a mechanism for referring school-based disputes to the LA and NUT. This approach will considerably strengthen the NUT group's position in the coming months.

At the peak of support from parents and at its strongest in terms of the action (the number of strikers had continued to grow), the NUT group felt that with this agreement the time had come to get back inside school in order to maintain their strong links with their students. Though the strike action has been suspended in order to progress the dispute, it has not been called off. There is still a live ballot and there will be a return to strike action if it is needed. The teachers remain in dispute and anticipate being so for months yet.

This dispute proves that collective action works: considerable gains have been made that were only possible because the union group was willing to stand firm in the face of massive bullying and strike-breaking attempts. A solid and united strike was maintained in very difficult circumstances. Also, there was brilliant support from the NUT at all levels: school, association, London Region, national officials and national executive members. The action has shown that the NUT is a union that fights for its members and stands up to bullies at work. The school group has been transformed with new members, new strikers, new pickets, new speakers and new organisers. The strikers have shown enormous solidarity and have complete confidence in one another. Morale is high and many lessons have been learned. ■



Langdon School, Newham.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

February

Wednesday 15 February, 7.30pm.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London
WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

"Trade Unions – Dead or Alive?"

The press continually carry the obituaries of trade unions. Yet they survive, as organic and necessary to the working class as the air we breathe. But what state are they in? Are they truly alive, or just going through the motions? Can they regrow, or will workers let them fade away? Come and discuss the future for working class organisation. Everybody welcome.

NHS

Private providers preferred

IN NOVEMBER the Department of Health published lists of services which "Any Qualified Provider" can bid for or offer to patients. This is to replace the unified integrated National Health Service as the "preferred provider", which it has been for 63 years.

Patients will be given a choice as to who can provide them with the health care they need – "patient heal yourself"! No provider will be guaranteed a level of patient throughput.

These changes come in before the demise of the Primary Care Trusts, and before the General Practitioner Commission Groups are established – and even before the Health and Social Care Bill is enacted. They will introduce duplication, confusion and chaos, and waste precious NHS resources. Out of the chaos will come private monopoly, as has occurred with every privatisation in the past 25 years. ■

ENERGY

British Gas looks abroad

BRITISH GAS owner Centrica, currently being wooed by Russian utilities companies, has announced a multibillion-pound deal to get gas supplies from Norway until 2025. The deal will involve joint exploration and exploitation of new and existing fields between Centrica and Norway's Statoil – and raise Britain's imports of gas from 50 per cent to 70 per cent by 2020. This may partially address the immediate need for power supplies but it fails to address medium or long term strategies around keeping the lights on (see "Running out of power"), p11. ■



TYNESIDE



GLASGOW



LONDON



BRISTOL

Pensions: a nat

THE UNPRECEDENTED national stoppage of 30 November was the best possible riposte to the Coalition's economic statement of 29 November. Two million workers striking, marching, providing emergency cover or showing solidarity with striking colleagues was a great uplift to the people of Britain. Over 30,000 people attended the central London rally. Across Britain thousands of picket lines and hundreds of marches and rallies proclaimed that organised workers still can and will act together.

Despite over 240,000 jobs being lost in the last 12 months in the public services trade union recruitment is soaring. Those who thought unions were museum pieces are changing their minds. Picket lines across Britain were the clear sign of members taking control of their dispute, a membership taking responsibility for their own organisations and themselves.

In health, the Royal College of Nursing and British Medical Association, neither of them on strike, made their presence visible on the picket lines. Both are committed to ballot for industrial action if the December negotiations between the government and TUC are fruitless. As no offer in any pension scheme is on the table or has been during the last 8 months of talks then they need to dust off their balloting procedures. It is time both organisations affiliated to the TUC so as to demonstrate a greater trade union unity.

The government's only plan, plan A, is rapidly collapsing around their ears as



SHEFFIELD

tion in struggle

their predictions for growth tumble – 0.9 per cent for this year, reduced to 0.7 per cent in 2012. Additional taxation hitting public sector workers, along with the proposed pensions contribution increase of £3.6 billion, will add insult to injury following two years of pay freezes and the derisory 1 per cent increase for four years from 2013. This will equate to a 16 per cent cut in living standards during the existence of this government. Economic indicators of the quality and standard of living are already equating to the lowest figures since the early 1970s.

Unemployment has now hit a 17-year high of 2.62 million, with youth unemployment topping 1 million for the first time ever. Throughout this period the growing inequality over wages and pensions is harshly demonstrated. The High Pay Commission report shows the salary for the Barclays Bank chief executive rose 5,000 per cent in the last 30 years, compared to three times for the average worker. The average director's pension in Britain's top 100 companies is £227,000 per annum. The average public sector pension is £7,800, and £2,800 for women in local government.

We've already been forced to give our wages to the banks and now their government asks us to starve and freeze in old age. We need to wise up.

• **As WORKERS went to press, the outcome of the December negotiations with the government was still unknown.** ■



LONDON



LONDON

The festive season and the holidays have again brought home to us
let's keep it that way!

The fight for work in Britain's cultural industries

NO DOUBT MANY readers will have taken the opportunity over Christmas to visit a favourite museum, catch a favourite band or orchestra, take friends or family to a seasonal ballet or panto, be enlivened by jazz at a local pub. Even for the stay-at-homes there will have been the experience of some great character acting on radio or television.

Some will have felt compelled to join forces and put on their own community show or dance events. There's no lack of enlivening inspiration around – from Brazilian to Bangra, from classical to ceilidh. The English Folk Dance and Song Society reports little let-up in the popularity of social dance and more is in evidence in dance classes and folk festivals from Shetland to Sidmouth.

Ours is also a singing nation: the harmonised sea shanties of the south coast, the Welsh Choirs, the Gaelic vocals of the Western Isles, the classical song tradition of the concert hall, the raw rap of the urban studio to mention but a few.

For others it's the more reflective tasks of oils on canvas or poetry on paper. The brass, pipes and wind band movement continues to involve many tens of thousands - persisting long beyond their origins in mine, mill and other workplaces. Remember that great film 'Brassed Off'? From nursery to older age (as demonstrated by Live Music Now), music and other arts have proven vital for educational development.

Behind the scenes

Yet we must recognise that behind this swirl of activities lies considerable teaching of a high order and professionalism that's world class. Now it's from these workers in the field that an epic appeal has gone out. They warn that a terminal decline to this whole picture could set in if erosion of such teaching and standards is not halted, if the debilitating or axing of key arts organisations is not resisted.

To flag up this danger, a campaign has been initiated by eight trade unions whose members are directly affected by the current undermining of our cultural life by a failing capitalism. It's called "Lost Arts"



Modern British opera: dress rehearsal for "The Loving of Etain", written by composer Eddie McGuire in collaboration with playwright Marianne Carey.

and intends to defend the arts by first of all finding out exactly the extent of the attack and undermining.

A glance at the unions involved shows the really wide range of professional skills that provide the backbone to our culture. We have the Musicians' Union, Equity (actors), BECTU (broadcasting, film, theatre and leisure), the NUJ (journalists), the Writers' Guild and the large unions (Unite, PCS and Prospect) that have smaller sections working in the cultural field. An absence that will be rectified at a later date is Unison, which represents those working in museums and local government arts and heritage activities. Support is coming in from many other organisations such as the Book Trust, the British Archaeological Trust, the Scottish Artists Union, the Society of Playwrights, and so on.

In the seven months since the campaign started, £21 million has already been cut from arts funding in Britain – estimated to be a loss of over £42 million to the national economy. (Yes, through royalties, copyrights, sales and touring the

arts are an earner and not a loser – a measure of the quality that has been built up).

Public funding is an established characteristic of arts in Britain. It is often forgotten that it was the third component – along with a National Health Service and a free education system for all – which our class fought for and achieved during and after World War Two. Administratively it took the form of the Arts Council of Great Britain. That model has been gradually divided, distorted and riddled with the privatising ethos.

Yet it is still this public funding that provides 53 per cent of backing for the cultural industries. Earned income (ticket sales, royalties, etc.) brings in 32 per cent. What is called "business investment" in arts has been falling 7 per cent each year since 2007, now standing at about 15 per cent of total arts funding. Instead of "arts for all" it may soon become "arts for those who can afford it" – if it is even there at all, with music and drama services shutting down and instrumental music teachers being made redundant.

o many of us just how much the arts can enhance our lives –

stries

Out of hundreds of examples of threats to the arts some stand out – like both Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council chopping their entire arts budgets; Yorkshire Libraries & Information closing its Music and Drama Collection and Service; closure of the University of East Anglia's Music Department; Argyll & Bute Council selling off the superb outdoor, music and drama residential facility at Castle Toward (gifted to the nation, part of the death knell of such residential centres so beneficial to youth throughout Britain); a 50 per cent cut to the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland and its Jazz Orchestra; a £140,000 cut to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and resultant 3.2 per cent pay cut.

Fighting tactics

Often the dilemma is whether to suffer and live to fight another day or to cease working. The occupation or work-in is hardly applicable in most of these jobs – although the Musicians' Union in its second year (as a forerunner to the Amalgamated Musicians' Union) hit on some innovative tactics: an 1886 opera at Her Majesty's Theatre London saw half the orchestra walk out after the first act, coordinating with stage-hands and carpenters who walked out after the second act. With worrying talk of a BBC review of its music budget (this is the biggest patron of British orchestras), the tactics of the Britain-wide Musicians' Union strike of 1980 that saved the orchestras (though sadly not the Radio Orchestras and "Big Bands") will have to be revisited.

It was that year, 1980, that Musicians' Union membership reached a peak of over 41,000. In the decline of general union numbers since then, the MU has managed to keep membership above 30,000 - but the present decline in arts funding is again beginning to bite. Union membership in the full time, fully contracted stage and theatre orchestras has proven very resilient. A vast array of other music tasks are represented by the union - from those playing in jazz or folk bands to the composer, conductor, instructor or DJ. This union has plugged "Keep Music Live" for

"Instead of 'arts for all' it may soon become 'arts for those who can afford it'..."

decades – the phrase seems to have entered everyone's vocabulary – and a long campaign against the punitive Licensing Laws seems to be coming to fruition now. This had imposed a draconian system of payments on even the smallest pub or venue that employed musicians in England and Wales. The musicians who play these venues can be the first to lose out as the traditional British pub culture is ruined by exploitation and bankruptcies.

Behind the very special British tradition of stagecraft, both live and recorded, lie the endeavours of Equity, the actors' union. From stand-up to Shakespeare, to the opera chorus, it has been representing a perplexingly diverse

industry since 1930. Through a focus on youth recruitment, its 36,000 members include 5000 students. The veteran actor Simon Callow points to the need for "strength in numbers in a complex industry, to improve and defend our position. Equity is a unifying factor, with its expert knowledge, speaking for actors and to actors – indispensable."

And behind or often in front of the actors and singers there is BECTU, for those working in broadcasting, film, theatre and leisure crafts. 1991 saw the current formation of a union that can trace its origins back to 1890 and the Theatrical and Music Hall Operatives Union. It represents visual art crafts as well. However, there have also been efforts to create specialist unions for visual artists – a profession that has long been at the bottom of the ladder compared to all other art forms. One of the youngest trade unions is the 10-year-old Scottish Artists Union with 700 members, already gaining valuable experience through several high profile campaigns and collaboration with

Continued on page 10

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings began on 29 September 2011 and will finish on 14 June; except on May Day, all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings will be advertised in What's On, see page 5.

M The theme of the next meeting, on Wednesday 15 February, will be "Trade Unions – Dead or Alive?". Details of further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2012, Tuesday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings elsewhere in the country.

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



Continued from page 9

its counterparts in the rest of Britain.

Under the umbrella of the TUC (and STUC in Scotland) these unions co-ordinate their actions through the Federation of Entertainment Unions, which, together with the unions already mentioned, brings in the NUJ (the world's largest journalists' union with over 40,000 members, founded in 1907), Unite, the Writers' Guild, the Society of Playwrights and the Professional Footballers Association (an interesting addition – coming to public notice for their “united British team” motion at the recent TUC). Founded in 1907, the PFA has 4,000 members in England and Wales, with the affiliated PFAS in Scotland. The federation of unions represents over 130,000 working in the cultural sector.

Fight back

The potential is there for a fight back, a vigorous defence. There is much that is unique about British culture created by those who work in it and those who listen and participate – from the pioneering visuals of Tate Modern, to the Royal



Early advance: Britain's National Youth Orchestra was set up in 1951.

Shakespeare Company, to our jazz and folk festivals, to our groundbreaking BBC Radio 3, envy of the world for the presentation of musical classics.

The vitality of our popular music can also be world leading. But it takes quality and effort, not just a cheap exploitative commercialism. The Beatles did it in the 1960s. Now the Tottenham-born vocalist Adele Adkins has matched their achievement, selling 12 million albums (titled “21”) worldwide in 2011 and with 3 million sold in Britain, the fastest selling ever. This helped reverse a general nosedive in album sales. (Legal downloads now account for 28 per cent of sales, with more efficient providers like iCloud and Spotify). Behind such success lies talent and teamwork - and arising out of the innovation and creativity outlined above.

Bringing back revenues to Britain is a major task carried out by the royalty collecting body the Performing Rights Society – a complex operation of licensing British owned copyrights in every country of the world for performances on TV, radio, internet, downloads, mobile phones, juke boxes or any other system. However, taking into account all sources, the British music industry has declined in value for the first time, down 4.8 per cent to £3.8 billion since 2009. Other sections of the creative industries such as film and animation, computer games (bringing back the symphony orchestra in a big way), and touring exhibitions and productions make an invaluable contribution.

All this and more is part of our legacy and our future that is undoubtedly worth fighting for! ■



CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London Wednesday 15 February, 7.30 pm “Trade Unions – Dead or Alive?”

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

The press continually carry the obituaries of trade unions. Yet they survive, as organic and necessary to the working class as the air we breathe. But what state are they in? Are they truly alive, or just going through the motions? Can they regrow, or will workers let them fade away? Come and discuss the future for working class organisation. Everybody welcome.

Along with protecting our territorial integrity, securing energy supplies must be the top priority of any government. But it hasn't been for nearly 30 years, with disastrous results...

Running out of power

FOR THE past 25 years we have had governments that have placed our energy supply in serious jeopardy. In this, they have been aided by the European Union, by green bigots, by reliance on the so-called free market and finance capital – and by the failure of the working class to understand just how serious the position is.

For a succinct summation of the problem, listen to a capitalist, Rupert Soames, a grandson of Winston Churchill. He runs a rarity, a British manufacturing company – Aggreko, based in Dumbarton, where it makes mobile generators used not just for one-off events but also for countries where the power supply is not secure (which is most of the world). It's a huge manufacturing success: on 18 October it announced it would make pretax profits of at least £320 million. About a year ago Soames warned that urgent action is needed to secure Britain's power supply. This is what he told the Scottish Parliament:

“Over the next eight years a third of our coal-fired capacity, two-thirds of our oil-fired capacity, and nearly three-quarters of our nuclear capacity will be closed down either through age or the impact of the European Large Combustion Plant Directive.”

He went on:

“I don't know an example of any industrial country anywhere in the world planning to lose so much of its generating capacity so quickly. Absent a massive and immediate programme of building new power stations, with concrete being poured in the next two years, we will be in serious danger of lights going out.”

The National Grid stands to lose 30 per cent of its capacity by 2019, and we are probably beyond the point at which we can start building to plug the entire gap. Then Britain will join the developing countries that are Aggreko's big customers. And when lights go out, industry and commerce stop, operations stop in hospitals, traffic

This article is an edited and updated version of a speech given at a CPBML public meeting in London in November.

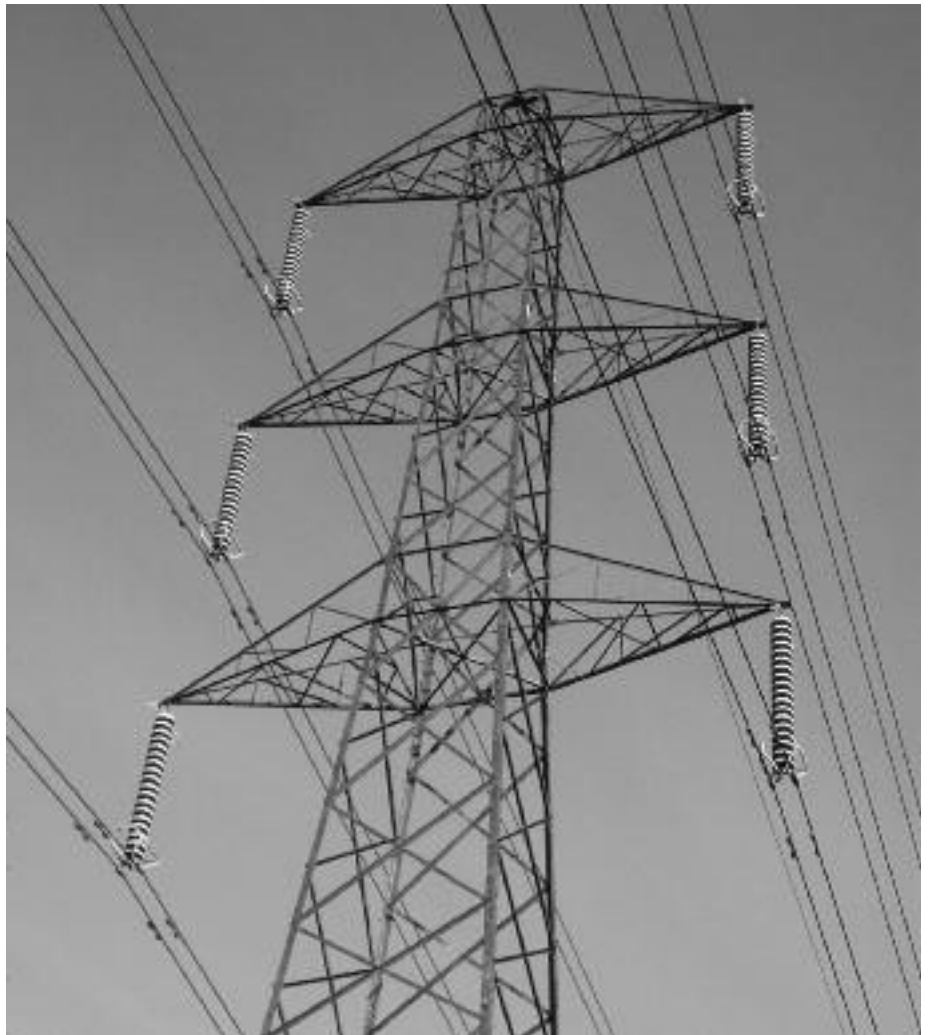


Photo: Workers

lights fail, sewage farms stop working. People die.

Shutdowns

It could happen earlier: by the end of 2013 the EU Large Combustion Plant Directive will have shut 9.8 gigawatts of oil- and coal-fired generation – on their own, 12 per cent of our total capacity: Tilbury, Cogenzie in Scotland, Didcot, Ferrybridge 2, Ironbridge, Kingsnorth, Littlebrook, Fawley and the Isle of Grain.

The EU Directive came into force in Britain in 2008, and applies to all combustion plants with a capacity of more than 50 megawatts (in practice, all the

coal, oil and gas plants linked to the National Grid). It sets limits on the maximum levels of emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide and particulates (bits of ash, etc). Power stations had two options: either “opt in” by meeting the new limits (through technologies such as flue-gas desulphurisation) or “opt out” and close by 2015 at the latest.

In the intervening period, “opted out” plants have new limits on their emissions, forcing them to burn low-sulphur coal – which means coal from outside Britain. Never mind that our coal still produces less

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sulphur (1.6 per cent average) than burning oil (2.9 per cent average).

Out of around 27 gigawatts of coal-fired generation, power stations generating 13 gigawatts “opted out”. So here was the first sign of planning for over a decade: planning to lose around half of our coal-fired capacity. Planning for decline, but no planning to fill the gap. In addition, closures of 8 gigawatts of ageing nuclear power stations are anticipated by the end of 2015. Since 2008, though, some nuclear plants have had their lives extended, in particular Hinkley Point B, Hunterston B, Hartlepool, Heysham 1. But the extensions reach just to 2019.

Britain has around 80 to 85 gigawatts (thousand billion watts) of generating capacity. The bulk – 80 per cent – comes from burning coal, oil and gas; and almost half of this is gas. Nuclear provides around 13 per cent, other renewables (mainly wind) just 6 per cent, and hydroelectricity 1 per cent. Not all of the energy is available all the time: no power stations can run continuously, and wind power, obviously, needs wind. So we need the 80 to 85 gigawatts to service average maximum demand of around 60 gigawatts. Around 7.5 per cent is lost through transmission. We need a safety cushion, and we are losing it fast.

How did we get to this point? Go back 25 years and Britain’s energy industry – electricity and gas – was in state hands. Gas and electricity were both nationalised in 1948 following the disastrous winter of 1946/7 when the government had been unable to maintain electricity supplies. Power was switched off for 5 hours a day, industries lost power completely, radio broadcasts were reduced, television suspended, magazines told to stop publishing, etc.

Planning

Following nationalisation, British Gas and the British Electricity Authority (that became the CEGB) set about securing the nation’s energy supplies, and did so with great efficiency. It’s called planning – out of fashion these days – and it built up a highly developed industry.

Then the capitalist state decided that it would not assume any responsibility for the provision of energy. In came privatisation, and out went planning. The idea was that the market would provide, specifically the wholesale electricity market, with government intervention limited to incentives to produce power. If new power stations were needed, industry would build them. But the market hasn’t provided; hence the looming shortage.

In 1986, Thatcher privatised British Gas to be followed four years later by the

privatisation of electricity supply. Fortunes were made by the new owners, increasingly foreign. E.On and RWE (npower) are German, EDF is French, Scottish Power Spanish. That’s four of the big six electricity companies.

No one loved the market more than Blair. He even pushed it onto a not-unwilling EU in 2007: “The European Council decided in particular that supply and production activities should be separated from network distribution to allow competition on the networks, as already happens in the UK. ... This means that for the first time, at least at distribution level, British companies can compete on equal terms with French or German companies—in particular, in France and Germany, not just here in the UK. That will bring reduced costs to business and to customers, and again it has our full support,” he said.

Yet our supply is less secure than at any time in history, and French, German and Spanish companies have moved in to take over the bulk of Britain’s energy distribution. Increasingly, these foreign owners are treating the British people as a captive colonial market. As the DAILY MIRROR exposed last year, French-owned EDF Energy increased gas prices here by 22.9 per cent and electricity by 12.3 per cent since the start of 2011. In France, gas prices went up 15 per cent and electricity



The solar power money machine

SOLAR POWER is an expensive bad joke for most of Britain. One of Labour’s last contributions to Britain’s energy disaster was the introduction of special feed-in tariffs and incentives for domestic solar power. You could install solar panels and be guaranteed 41p per kilowatt-hour for any electricity you feed into the grid. That’s about 10 times what you get for feeding electricity in from a hydroelectric plant.

If you lived in a house with a large enough south facing roof, and had £10,000 spare to invest in the installation, you would be getting an

inflation-linked, tax free return of around 10 per cent, guaranteed for 25 years. The estimated cost to the taxpayer was £8.6 billion – £70 per UK household per year for 20 years. Or to put it another way, a transfer of wealth from everyone who doesn’t own a house with a large roof and hasn’t £10,000 spare to people who do. That’s the kind of redistribution of wealth Labour got into.

When the government halved the subsidy recently – it’s still a pretty attractive investment, better than buying government debt! – Friends of the Earth threatened legal action. ■

by just 3 per cent. At npower, owned by RWE, gas rose in January by 21.6 per cent while in Germany RWE's customers faced an 11 per cent rise. E.On's UK customers had leaps of 21.4 per cent for electricity and 21.6 per cent for gas; its German customers saw electricity rise by an average of 6.7 per cent and gas by around 9.1 per cent.

There are effectively no controls on electricity prices – not since Labour told Ofgem, the Office of Gas and Electricity Management, to remove price controls, which it did in a phased way between 2000 and 2002. No wonder we pay a fortune for power. And those who can't afford it die. According to the charity National Energy Action, between 25,000 and 30,000 old people die early in the winter because they can't keep warm enough.

When prices started soaring, so did fuel poverty – that's when you have to spend 10 per cent or more of household income on fuel costs to maintain sufficient health and comfort. Labour pledged in 2001 to abolish it for vulnerable families by 2010, and for all families by 2016. Then it took the brakes off price rises in 2002. From 2 million households in fuel poverty in 2003, this year the figure reached 6.6 million households.

If there's one thing that's even worse than expensive electricity, it's no electricity. But get used to the idea. Steve Holliday, chief executive of the National Grid, told Radio 4's TODAY programme on 1 March 2011 that the days of permanently available electricity are coming to an end. People, he said, would have to “change their behaviour” and consume electricity “when it is available”. It's hardly sarcastic to speculate that this will mean you can only put the fire on in daylight hours when the sun is shining and a good wind is blowing.

In February last year Ofgem warned that after 2015 our energy supplies might not meet demand. Well, surprise, surprise. Actually, the mining and electricity supply unions were warning in the 1980s that this would result from privatisation.

How can Britain fill the gap? One way would be to use the coal that still sits in

“If there's one thing that's even worse than expensive electricity, it's no electricity. But get used to the idea...”

vast quantities under our land. But there we come up against the Large Combustion Plant Directive. New plants will need to stop carbon gases being emitted – and there is a way: it's called carbon capture and storage technology. This and the previous government say they want to “encourage” the technology. It is still not fully developed though tests in Norway have been very successful. Nothing has been achieved so far apart from a tiny pilot plant at Ferrybridge, Yorkshire, that is looking at one-fortieth of the station's output and then only at one part of the process. At present there is not a single idea for a new coal-fired station that has planning consent.

The nuclear necessity

Another way would be – and will probably have to be – nuclear. If we don't build any new nuclear power stations, all but one (Sizewell B) are scheduled to close by 2023. In October 2011, the nuclear industry announced plans to build up to 16 gigawatts of new nuclear capacity in Britain, but nothing has actually happened. It takes time, rightly, to get plans right and go through the planning process. But we are woefully late. Ten years ago, when the government looked at the loss of nuclear generating capacity, it thought, fancifully, that renewable energy could fill the gap. So nothing was done until 2007, when it announced plans for 10 new nuclear stations.

But as with just about everything Labour did, it expected the market to carry out the plans. So here we are, four years on, without a single planning permission for a new nuclear station. EDF expects to put in a full planning application for

Hinkley C in 2012. Just wait for the green screams – but if we don't get these power stations, people will die for lack of power. The truth is that nuclear power is stunningly safe. The latest designs in China have a physics that shuts them down automatically when reactor temperatures get too hot.

We could plug the gap with gas. Gas-fired power stations are relatively easy to build, and increasingly efficient. But gas is costly, and we have to import it. Hence the significance of the gas deposits found in shale off Blackpool. They are simply enormous: enough, at current rates of consumption, to provide Britain's entire gas requirements for 60 years or so. Of course, the greens object to any new use of gas, because it has to be burnt.

What about renewables? The short answer is that they are very costly. Wind power cannot be a solution. We're paying for it already: in 2009 every single bill payer was shelling out £13.50 a year to subsidise renewables, mainly wind; by 2020 the figure for subsidising wind alone is set to rise to £70 on every bill per year.

What we need is simple: enough energy to run our lives and develop Britain. And we should do so at a reasonable cost, not hand billions to the rich. To get it, we will need energy from a variety of sources, nuclear and coal included. We must also attract more young people into the energy industry: some 80 per cent of the UK's energy workforce is expected to retire by 2025. Power stations don't build themselves, and their construction cannot be left to the market and the profit motive. We need investment by the state, including in science and in education and training.

The challenge for the working class is stark. Do we want a civilised life? Do we want a life without power cuts, random or not, and energy rationing? If so, think hard about what capitalism is doing: let it rule, and we will end up in the new Dark Ages. Think hard about what green activists say: let them influence things, and we'll also be in the Dark Ages. We can't all become energy scientists, but we can all make a bit more effort to find out what's really going on. It's called taking responsibility. ■

To start off the New Year, two books on different aspects of war, than fifty years...

Two graveyards of imperialist ambition

Ghosts of Afghanistan: the haunted battleground, by Jonathan Steele, hardback, 437 pages, ISBN 978-1-84627-430-5, Portobello Books, 2011, £25.

JONATHAN STEELE has 30 years' experience reporting as a foreign correspondent, from Afghanistan and elsewhere. His book places the current Afghan war in its historical context and puts the case that foreign intervention there is futile.

The 9/11 attacks were "criminal attacks" by a non-state actor. Afghanistan's armed forces had not attacked the USA. UN Resolution 1368 called on all member states to bring the perpetrators of terrorism to justice. Resolution 1373 authorised police measures against terrorists. Neither authorised the use of military force, or even mentioned Afghanistan. Instead of a "war" on terrorism we need to deal with terrorism by a mixture of politics and good police work.

64,000 foreign troops were in Afghanistan when Obama took office in January 2009; by 2011, it was 142,000, but there is no military solution. The main recruiters for the resistance are the presence and behaviour of foreign troops, and the Karzai government's corruption. Similarly, Gorbachev's troop surge of 1985 did not work either. The war is a stalemate. Between 2006 and 2010 Coalition forces killed increasing numbers of civilians and lost as many troops in 2010 as in the three years 2007-09.

Two British soldiers are killed every week. So the coalition government's commitment to another three years of war condemns another 300 young British men to death, for nothing, in a pointless, unwinnable war. It has cost us a total £18 billion so far; another three years of war will cost us another £18 billion – figures to remember when the government lectures us about public debt.

Hillary Clinton spoke in February of "reconciling with" the Taliban, but has done nothing to follow this up. The US government wants a bilateral deal to

keep US bases and "trainers" there.

Steele writes of "the doomed strategy of building up local Afghan forces to prolong the civil war". He concludes, "The biggest lesson of recent Afghan history is that it is wrong for foreigners to arm factions engaged in civil war. For foreigners then to intervene with their own troops is even greater folly. The only way to end thirty-five years of war is through a negotiated peace in which the main fighting groups and their political allies are included." Peace can only be achieved by the complete withdrawal of foreign troops. ■

Stalin's keys to victory: the rebirth of the Red Army, by Walter S. Dunn, Jr., hardback, 179 pages, ISBN 0-275-99067-2, Praeger Security International, 2006, £27.50; paperback, 208 pages, ISBN 0811734234, Stackpole Books, USA, 2007, £14.50.

AMERICAN HISTORIAN Walter S. Dunn has written a fascinating study of how the Red Army won in World War II. He explains how the Soviet Union replaced its manpower, produced its arms and formed new units. He refutes the common myth that its victory was achieved only by throwing thousands of disorganised, untrained men into battle.

He observes, "The improved living conditions in the Soviet Union in the 1930s made dramatic improvements in the health of the population, specifically in the health of potential soldiers." In World War I, 30 per cent of Russians called up were unfit for service; in World War II, just 5 per cent.

The author notes, "The actual reason the Soviets were able to stop the Germans in late 1941 was an unbelievable mobilization of men and weapons beginning in September 1941, which created a new Red Army. The Soviets formed and sent into combat in a few months more new divisions than the United States formed in the entire war." By comparison, "the French and British had ample time to create additional armies between September 1939 and



The end of the war: victorious Red Army soldiers

May 1940 but chose not to do so."

Dunn also points out, "Beginning in the summer of 1941, an incredible effort was made not only to form new divisions and other units to replace those destroyed by the Germans, but also to equip them with modern weapons capable of matching German weapons. The herculean effort culminated in the defeat of the German Army at the gates of Moscow, the first defeat inflicted on Germany during World War II."

He gives the details: armoured vehicle production increased from 2,800 in 1940 to 29,000 in 1944, guns and mortars from 53,800 to 129,500, rifles and carbines from 1,460,000 in 1940 to 4,050,000 in 1942 and Maxim machine guns from 53,700 in 1941 to 458,500 in 1944. "The Russian arms industry produced more than enough artillery despite German occupation of the most industrialised part of its country."

As a result, as Dunn observes,

separated by more



... raise the Soviet flag over defeated Berlin, 1945

“Beginning in 1943, there was a sharp drop in the number of killed and wounded in major operations. ... The ratio of rifle divisions and tank corps demonstrates the growing power of the Soviet armed forces.” They were less dependent on infantry attacks.

Lend-lease from Britain and America was helpful but not decisive. “Although lend-lease played a significant role in providing trucks, canned rations, boots, uniforms, radios, and other equipment, the Red Army fought with Russian-made weapons.”

Dunn sums up, “Few nations could have survived such an onslaught. In World War I, Russia had succumbed under much less pressure. Somehow Stalin had convinced the many Soviet nationalities to fight for their country, which the czar had failed to do in 1917.” As he concludes, “Soviet sacrifices to defend their homeland ended Hitler’s threat to the world.” ■

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

SOCIETY AND THE WORKING CLASS

Human life is utterly dependent on social organisation and activity. As the poet John Donne observed, “No man is an island entire of itself.” Yet addicts of the free market declare that there is no such thing as society. We should interpret their odd claim as a call to arms of a ruling class determined to stop its rival leading a dignified life. Capitalism’s innate urge is to dragoon working class existence inside purely economic parameters, within exclusively market constraints, free from other civilising influences.

Left to itself, capitalism operates a system where the only connecting mechanism, the only functioning link between classes and people is the cash nexus of the profit drive. Capitalism is obsessed by maximising profits and keeping costs – particularly those of labour – down. It is not concerned by workers’ working conditions or quality of life (unless these factors happen to hamper their ability to maximise profits). Accordingly, in recent decades it has set about dismantling and undermining those enhancing aspects of society that support or benefit workers, spawning a stark age ever more bereft of professionally delivered social provision, churning out privatised profit-grabbing organisations as alternatives. As wealth accumulation for capitalists soars, workers plummet into deprivation and suffering.

Society does exist, but today it only finds expression, it only has a source, within the working class. The capitalists, acting as if they are beyond and outside of society, want to remove the protections and enhancements of society from workers. Two opposing perspectives are clashing. Workers, propelled by the nature of their economic position, are having to combine to press their class interests, to counter the incessant exploitation and degradation stemming from the market. Letting the barbarism of profit be the supreme arbiter of human existence would otherwise cripple us.

If we want to survive we must sweep capitalism aside. Civilisation means meeting collective need and fostering the blossoming of social organisation and activity. Nowadays there is society only when workers act together to pursue and enforce common interests.

While denying and hemming in society, the capitalists shamelessly wield power in their favour through the mechanism of an increasingly corporate state. So we live in a paradox where the working class majority are without the trappings of power whilst the ruling class minority selfishly dictate the direction of life. But who pays for the state? Workers do, via a range of taxes. The state must not bulldoze society. Nor should we be reduced to mere individuals or families at the beck and call of callous market forces. Rather we must grow into a class wanting to exercise power as a mutually supporting society.

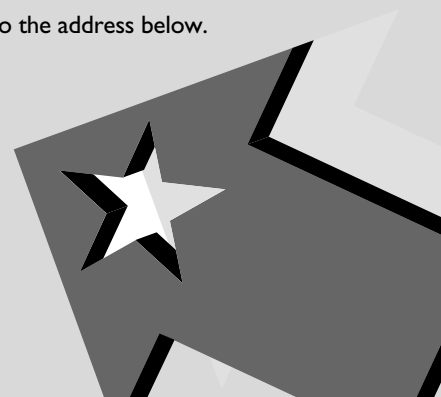
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Back to Front – Getting desperate

‘NATO intervention in Syria would be a prelude to regime change in Iran...’

THE NATO campaign to oust Syria’s president, Basher al-Assad, is gaining momentum, but losing substance. The propaganda machine is being wound up, with tales of atrocities filling the press. Yet there is a touch of desperation here: the attempt to re-create the Libyan intervention is already on rocky ground.

No sooner had the Arab League announced that sanctions would be introduced than the whole idea started to fall apart (naturally, with little or no coverage in the British press). Iraq and Lebanon voted against. Jordan said that sanctions would hurt its economy. Egypt and Algeria then changed their minds and withdrew backing for sanctions. With support haemorrhaging, it’s no wonder that a meeting in Cairo to set the terms of the sanctions was abandoned (without setting a new date).

Meanwhile, both Iraq and Russia are putting forward their own peace plans, leaving the Arab League nothing to say except that it will appeal to the UN Security Council – and Russia shows no sign yet of allowing the kind of resolution used by Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama to wage war on Libya.

NATO intervention would be a prelude to regime change in Iran, Syria’s near neighbour and ally, and the main threat to Israeli military superiority in the region. EU ministers have threatened Iran with more sanctions after the UN accused it of trying to build nuclear weapons. The Coalition government says “all options remain on the table” in dealing with Iran. Early in November, General Sir David Richards, Britain’s military chief, went on a secret visit to Israel to discuss plans for an attack on Iran.

In a direct echo of the war on Libya,

France has formally recognised the opposition Syrian National Council and proposed that international troops should “protect civilians”. The SNC is an Istanbul-based group of Syrians, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, launched on 2 October.

The upheaval in Syria is not a peaceful grass-roots movement, as in Tunisia. Weapons are being smuggled in from Turkey and Iraq to Sunni rebels who are funded and trained by the USA and have links to Israel. They join peaceful protests to attack Assad forces, as in Jisr al-Shagour in June, where they inflicted heavy casualties.

Sunni tribal chiefs are being paid to put people on the streets, and work with international non-governmental organisations to feed stories of atrocities to Western media to give NATO the excuse it wants to intervene.

NATO military planning on Syria is already “well under way”, it is said. The SNC is in talks with Turkey to set up a secure zone inside Syria to give the Free Syrian Army, its armed wing, a safe base. A source in the French military was reported as saying, “If the Syrian rebels manage to hold a position (a bit like Benghazi in Libya) all cards are on the table.”

On 23 November, French foreign minister Alain Juppé said, “We will ask our European partners about the possibility of launching humanitarian operations to alleviate the suffering of the population ... Should we create humanitarian corridors, or humanitarian zones?” So NATO troops could be used to set up military bases.

Our responsibility here in Britain is clear. No to intervention. No to war. ■

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