

WORKERS

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JULY 2002 £1



LIFE AND SOUL

SONGS OF AN
EPIC CLASS
STRUGGLE

14



Walkout at the British Museum

04



Derbyshire's Cuban link

06



The selling of British power

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STILL GUNNING FOR IRAQ



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

IN MAY 1997, the British working class asserted itself and consigned 18 years of Thatcherism to the scrap heap. Blair and ‘New Labour’ were a weapon wielded by British workers, perhaps the only weapon fit for the purpose at that time. Some viewed May 97 as the birth of a new era, others saw it as the death of an old order. So what has changed, and what remains the same.

From a particular vantage point, things certainly sound different. The shrill admonitory rasp of Thatcher has given way to the unctuous, apparently self-effacing siren song of Blair. Every politician and political wannabe is concerned for the environment, the underprivileged, society’s losers. Even the Tories are seeking a more humane, compassionate image. The major parliamentary parties slug it out over who cares the most for education, for health. Apparently there is near unanimity that privatisation of rail transport was a disaster. And yet...and yet.

Health workers have rumbled Brown’s pro-health budget as smoke and mirrors. Blair’s education, education, education mantra has done nothing to placate teachers

and lecturers. Transport continues its downward spiral. Crime and drug abuse climb inexorably. Hardly a picture of a society at ease with itself.

In truth the one thing which could have marked some sort of new beginning in 1997, a re-dedication and commitment to investment in and expansion of modern industry is conspicuous by its absence. The source of our wealth, the means by which we feed, clothe and provide for ourselves, continues the decline begun decades before. Thatcher’s rejoicing over the slaughter of manufacture was bitter indeed, but Blair’s spoonful of sugar has changed nothing.

The elimination of industry ushers in unemployment, uncertainty, and war. There’s the axis of evil for you. And in 2002, can we say that the prospect of such horrors has receded? The relentless crusade of Thatcher against organised workers and work itself put many in mind of a juggernaut, criss-crossing the country mowing down anything that got in its way. Surveying the ruins of the industrial landscape in 2002, it would appear the juggernaut is still rolling, albeit with a different driver.



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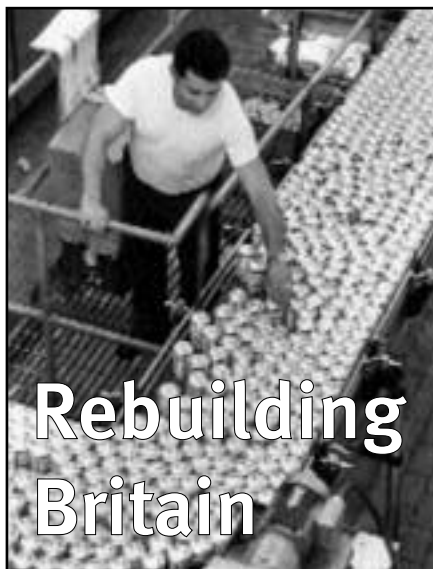
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No to Single Skies

ON WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE something the European Union dreaded finally occurred — an almost total EU-wide industrial action in opposition to an EU directive as European air traffic controllers protested against privatisation. While EU leaders met in Seville, unions in 10 countries coordinated their action against the Single Skies directive.

Single Skies goes further than just air traffic control. It aims to reduce the 14 national air carriers to one: EU Airways. It is about the abandonment of the sovereignty of air space and is part of the EU intention to control all transport issues within its borders: rail, shipping, roads and flights.

Most worked to rule, others such as the Spanish were on strike. The French air traffic controllers clearly stated that their aim was to resist the move to the privatisation of air traffic. They use the example of Britain's disastrous partial privatisation of air traffic control (National Air Traffic Services or NATS) to prove their point.

British controllers did not take part; they are about to enter a pay dispute. Prospect, the controllers' union, led a fight last year to stop outright privatisation, primarily on safety grounds. They were successful to an extent — National Air Traffic Services (NATS) was only partly privatised. But the decline in air travel since 11 September, and technical problems with the new Swanwick control centre have led to a financial crisis in NATS. European controllers are determined that they will not follow the British experience.

Only the British air traffic control management supports Single Skies. Only Britain's partially privatised NATS teeters on bankruptcy. Now NATS faces industrial action over pay. The management have tried to persuade their 5,500 workers to accept a two-year deal, supposedly worth 6% overall. The unions think this unacceptable, in view of the uncertainty surrounding the industry. Prospect, representing the 2,000 controllers, said that a 2.2% increase for this year was unreasonable in the light of the operational pressures on its members. None of the problems is of their making. The government decided on the structure for air traffic control. Workers say it should ensure that it was properly funded.

Controllers backed their union with a 4:1 rejection of the offer at the end of June. Talks will take place over the following few weeks.

- In a separate development, 100 controllers in Scotland working for Highland & Islands Airports Ltd have discovered that talks have taken place about contracting out, despite recent assurances that these jobs would remain in the public sector. They will be taking their case to the Scottish Executive.

BELGIUM Dockers strike against Brussels

NEARLY 8,000 dock workers staged a 24-hour strike in Belgium's four main harbours last month to protest at European Union plans to deunionise their jobs by allowing shipping companies to use their own personnel to load and unload cargo. The strike brought a halt to most shipping traffic in Zeebrugge, Gent, Antwerp and Ostend.

One of three trade unions leading the strike called it "a warning to the European powers in Brussels". The three unions, representing nearly 100% percent of Belgian dock hands, say further actions are planned.

CUBA March against US policy

A MILLION CUBANS marched in Havana in June to protest at US foreign policy and against accusations that Cuba was making biological weapons to share with enemies of the US. At the rally President Fidel Castro urged Cubans to approve a referendum that would make socialism an inalienable part of the constitution. He was the first person to sign a petition for this constitutional amendment.

"We will show our steadfast fidelity to the country, to the revolution and to socialism," he later told a crowd who had gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the births of guerrilla folk hero Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and Antonio Maceo, one of the revolutionaries who fought the Spanish imperialists.

"Imperialist domination and the capitalist system will never come back to Cuba," he said.

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

ROYAL MAIL**Gathering storms**

EVENTS MOVE ON quickly in the postal world and the last couple of months have been no exception. At the end of May there were warnings from senior executives that Consignia faced insolvency unless government stepped in. There is pressure on government to return part or all of the £1.8 billion paid by the company to the Treasury when it was in the black. Under pressure, Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt has written to the Postcomm chief to ask him to reconsider the radical plans for opening up markets to competition by 2006.

And in an attempt to sweeten the pill of the massive redundancies announced earlier, chairman Alan Leighton has said he would now like to introduce a share scheme for employees if after three years the company is returned to profit.

Meanwhile, Consignia announced on 13 June that another 17,000 jobs will be cut on top of the 15,000 already announced. It was confirmed that second deliveries will also be cut, 'saving' £350 million a year. The CWU has pointed out that had the price of stamps risen with inflation the business would have made an operational profit of over £200 million. The business has also had to pay for the project to computerise Post Offices to provide links with benefit agencies, a move forced on them by government but which has never worked. This privatised initiative cost £1 billion.

To add insult to injury it has also been announced that the non-executive chair is now going to work two days instead of one. What a tough life it is at the top! There will be a new Chief Executive on what is reputed to be the highest comparable salary for such a 'public' sector post.

On 18 June Leighton launched an extraordinary attack on union officials in a memo to staff. He said he was "fed up" with politics clogging up the business and seemed to accuse both union and company negotiators of "struggling to find time to talk" about new delivery arrangements, redundancies and the new pay deal. Union members were outraged at his suggestion that "They must all be in the Costa del Sol or watching every game in the World Cup." This comes at the same time as the company is trying to attack union facilities.

The CWU Deputy General Secretary, John Keggie, told members that the crude attempts to intimidate the union would not work. He also wrote to Leighton in strong terms, concluding, "The last thing this industry needs is the Ian McGregor type approach, which destroyed the mining industry."



The British Museum: closed by strike action for the first time in its 250-year history

Museum workers strike

THE BRITISH MUSEUM was closed on 17 June as 750 staff were on strike. The workers, including warders, curators and administrators were protesting at a proposed 15 per cent cut in jobs. This is only the latest in several rounds of cost cutting.

The action was successful, closing the museum for the first time in its 250-year history — something that did not happen even when the civil service struck for pay in 1979 and 1981. Support from union members was solid and senior staff not on strike stayed away. Members of the public who were turned away expressed understanding.

Unions want to preserve the quality and reputation of the world famous institution. A proposal to contract out specific exhibition work has angered workers. They see it as a ridiculous response to the museum's funding crisis, and no solution. Despite some allegations of mismanagement, workers in the museum want the government to take some responsibility.

PCS and Prospect, representing the museum's workers, say that years of government neglect will soon cause irreparable damage. Funding has declined by about 30 per cent in real terms over 10 years. Through that time it has opposed the imposition of entrance fees, but now faces funding cuts. Because it stood firm and resisted charges, the museum is being excluded from the extra government funding flowing from their abolition.

Management says that without the cuts there will be a deficit of about £5 million by 2004/05. Workers say there must be another way than taking steps that will destroy the museum's reputation for excellence. They do not believe that it can be run on the cheap.

The museum recently opened the Great Court (see above), a millennium project, with much publicity. It remains one of the most popular tourist attractions. But the financial plan to attract conference trade has been hit by the decline in tourist numbers.

RUSSIA**Poverty grows**

THE STATE STATISTICS Committee in Moscow has reported that around 33 per cent of Russians live below the poverty line. The number has increased to 47.7 million in the first quarter of this year,

reversing last year's downward trend.

Economic reforms of the past decade have wiped out the savings of millions of Russians and left many without steady incomes. State employees, including teachers and doctors, are among the worst hit, and many survive by growing potatoes and other vegetables on tiny garden plots and canning them for the winter.

COUNTRYSIDE**Bad timing**

THE LABOUR PARTY is to organise a national conference on rural issues. This is Labour's attempt to derail the Countryside Alliance.

It is an attempt to address the concerns of hundreds of thousands of workers beset with problems of housing, transport, health, education and employment in rural areas.

Much the same problems as workers in urban areas face!

The deft touch and sensitivity to active trade unionists and campaigners from rural and agricultural areas is demonstrated in the timing. New Labour's first rural conference clashes with the TUC and agricultural workers annual Tolpuddle weekend on the 20/21 July. Tolpuddle, having been on trade union calendars since 1834, must have slipped passed the whizz kids from Millbank.

London weighting fight deepens

FOLLOWING ON from the highly successful one-day strike over the London Weighting Allowance on 14 May 2002, local government UNISON members held a further two-day stoppage on 12 and 13 June. Effective action took place across all 32 boroughs, reflecting the level of organisation and the amount of work put in.

Many branches reported a boom in recruitment following the May strike, with an estimated 1,000 new members in a single day and a greater willingness and enthusiasm by the membership to participate on the picket lines. The May strike was the first London region-wide action since UNISON was established in 1993. The strike was well supported by the membership and the public, despite some concern in UNISON branches over the tactics adopted by the regional lay leadership, which moved mechanistically from a one-day to a two-day strike.

Many UNISON activists are aware that the strength of the branches is not uniform and that different guerrilla tactics may need to be used. For example, the use of different groups of key workers may be the key to escalating the strike, with minimal damage to the membership. Sometimes, so the saying goes, if you allow the regional lay structures to fall into the hands of armchair generals, then you cannot be shocked when they trip up over their own cardigans and slippers. Several hundred members held a lobby of the employers at their meeting with the union negotiators on the afternoon of Thursday 13 June. A further one-day stoppage is planned for Wednesday 17 July. This will also coincide with the proposed national one-day stoppage in support of the national pay claim.

CIVIL SERVICE**Back to Beirut?**

THE MAIN civil service union is under threat from within. The Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS) is riven with factional infighting, which has spilled out into a court hearing. Its members and fellow trade unionists are anxious bystanders at this stage. PCS was formed out of the merger of several civil service unions three years ago. One of these, the Civil & Public Services Association (CPSA), was known as "the Beirut of the trade union movement" for its sectarianism. Many fear that recent events mark a return to those days.

Merger terms included joint general secretaries, one of whom has since retired. An election was held 18 months ago to decide on a replacement new sole general secretary. The winner, Mark Serwotka, worked with remaining joint general secretary, Barry Reamsbottom, expecting to take over entirely on 1 June this year. It did not happen, and that is the reason for the court case, due for 4 days in mid July.

On 23 May the outgoing general secretary produced an opinion that the election of his successor was not legal, because of the terms of the merger. He expected support from the newly elected national executive, called at short notice to meet that day. Others including the new president didn't agree. The inevitable result was a suspended meeting and a dispute over what took place. Both old and new general secretaries have taken to law to support their claims (and the union will pay for both).

An interim court ruling held that the union should conduct its business as it was before 23 May. It hasn't quite worked out like that. Members are being told nothing official about the dispute and full-time officials are under pressure to support the incumbent. Rumour and suspicion are everywhere. Support for the new elected general secretary seems to be growing among members, even those who did not vote for him. Members particularly in areas outside the former CPSA are incensed about what is being done to their union at a time when they should be focusing on recruitment and the government's pay policies.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****JULY****Saturday 20 July
Respect Festival 2002**

Free festival sponsored by the Mayor of London, the National Assembly Against Racism, SERTUC and trade unions in London. Victoria Park, London E3. Details: www.respectfestival.org.uk

Saturday/Sunday 20/21 July**Tolpuddle Trade Union Festival**

Tolpuddle, Dorset. A great family weekend. The annual parade starts Sunday, 3.15pm. Details: www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle

MINING**...and then there were seven**

UK COAL has only 12 deep mining pits left. It intends to close three at Selby, with at least two others on its closure list, which would leave only seven pits open in Britain. These are likely to be subsidised by the EU. This has nothing to do with Britain's energy interests or long-term planning. It is about the EU backing several horses at once: it gradually closes the coal industry in Britain but manages to give the impression pits are staying open. If need be, as a belt and braces measure, it keeps certain pits open for a number of years, until cheaper coal supplies from Poland or other EU wannabees come on stream.

The government hails the EU subsidies as a great success. When the EU pays for the last pit to be closed, mothballed, turned into an industrial museum, that too will be hailed as a great success.

The rationale behind the establishment of the European Economic Community was the need to address iron, steel and coal production. The closure of Britain's coal industry has been a long-term goal. The 1984-85 Great Miners Strike against pit closures — "100 pits, 100,000 miners' jobs" — has to be seen against this EU backcloth and successive government betrayals of industry in Britain.

Any government with a strategic policy for energy production would look to maximising Britain's energy resources by investing in clean coal technology, which is more environmentally friendly. A new coal industry would be built on the estimated 1000 years' worth of coal reserves still in the ground. This would also help to stop the waste of North Sea gas in power station electricity generation.

• See feature on Britain's electricity supply industry, page 9

Something stirring in the colleges...

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY lecturers in the union NATFHE met for their Annual Conference in Torquay over the Jubilee weekend amid growing anger as lecturers in further education began their pay dispute with a national two-day strike in the previous week. They are set to be joined in the autumn by other workers in FE and by those in higher education unless there is a realistic pay and conditions agreement in both areas.

Angry

The FE lecturers had just been offered a 1.5% pay increase for this year. But their pay is on average 12% or £4,000 less than schoolteachers — no wonder they are angry. Soon after, the offer was raised to 2.3% but this was roundly rejected, and the lecturers will now pursue non-strike industrial action until the autumn when they will be taking escalating strike action.

At the conference General Secretary Paul Mackney spoke of inadequate core funding in both the FE and HE sectors, relentless reorganisations in colleges, rationalisations leading to the loss of 22,000 full-time lecturers — a whole generation wasted. Those remaining are overstretched, and there are massive increases in casualisation.

In higher education the new universities, which NATFHE represents, have been even more badly affected by job losses than the old institutions despite delivering the miracle of expansion for poorer students. This sector has 60% of all university students but only 14% of the teaching cash and only 7% of the research money.

Resources

Now the government want to raise participation rates in higher education to 50% — without the resources needed to deliver it. When Ivan Davis, the Minister for Young People and Learning, gave a prepared address to the conference on the final day he merely condemned the strike in FE and told the negotiators to get back to the table with the employers. Had he been properly briefed he would have known that it was the employers who had cancelled the last meeting and said it was up to NATFHE to lobby the government directly. Delegates were so incensed that many walked out.

The shortfall in pay for lecturers in universities is now reckoned to be about 10-15% compared with that in similar professions, so a joint pay claim for a 14% increase has been lodged. It has produced an overall 2.8% offer, which all the unions have rejected. University unions are now set to ballot for strike action in the autumn and join their colleagues in further education in one of the biggest walkouts ever seen in post-16 education.

What is it about Cuba that upsets the US so much? Workers from Derby set out to find out why...

Derbyshire's Cuba link

Over the last few years, workers in Derbyshire have been developing "twinning links" with Camaguey province in Cuba. The links started when a few people from Derbyshire visited Cuba on holiday, and, having met people in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, the island's second city, came back determined to do what they could to tell people about the huge achievements of the Cuban people — and why the USA is so determined to undermine them.

As the Cuban socialist system received a massive endorsement in a countrywide referendum, and as the USA adds Cuba to its list of countries in the "Axis of Evil", one of the organisers of the links spoke to WORKERS about the developments since then.

WE'VE ALWAYS MADE it clear that support for Cuba is not just a kind of humanitarian venture — though with the problems caused by the US blockade there is a need to organise material support. But while we can offer support, we have a great deal to learn from them. They are an inspiring people if you believe in independence, and workers' rights.

Twinning

So we decided to make things happen, and to establish twinning links between Derbyshire and Camaguey Province — the Midlands areas of our two countries — both rich in agriculture and industry, and in history, too. But while rich and developed capitalist Britain allows economic and social decline, the Cubans struggle against adversity to build and develop.

When we first visited we saw their magnificent education system deprived of such basics as pens and paper, with children working in pencil and rubbing out their work so that they could use their paper over and over until it became unusable. We visited hospitals where people were dying because Cuba was deprived of drugs to stop people vomiting as a result of chemotherapy, for example. The blockade — now 41 years old — is indeed criminal.

But despite all the damage caused by the blockade it's obvious that Cuba is winning through. In the

face of acute lack of resources, their health and education systems continue to advance, and there are areas in which they are world leaders.

It was Cuba that developed the meningitis vaccine for example — though the US attempted to prevent them from supplying it to the rest of the world.

They have a developed system of community health based on GP surgeries and polyclinics and a comprehensive network of general and specialist hospitals. Doctors and nurses work throughout the community — based in schools, places of work and housing developments.

Working abroad

Cuba sends more medical workers abroad to assist other countries than the whole of the World Health Organisation. It offers medical training to students from developing nations free of charge, as long as they agree to use their knowledge and skills in the service of the people of those countries, and not take part in "brain drain" emigration.

Their education system has many lessons for us. They have higher literacy rates than the USA. All children attend schools, have uniforms and food provided, and study to a high level. Post school education is the norm, with 16 year olds usually staying on in vocational studies or pre-university education.



Education in Camaguey — there are 250,000 teachers in a population of 11 million: top left, inside a primary school; left, role play in the playground of a nursery school; above, carnival time!

Higher education institutions are available throughout the island, again educating not just Cubans but students from over 30 other countries. Again education professionals work throughout the community. There are 250,000 teachers in a population of 11 million — and they are among the most respected members of the community. There is currently a great drive to develop the use of new technology — and they are developing the “University For All”, which is very similar to our Open University.

As well as maintaining and developing the education and health systems, the Cubans are hard at work developing their industries. Of course the rapid development of tourism — designed to bring in the dollars they need — is a mixed blessing. But everywhere you go now you see building and

agricultural and industrial development as they seek, successfully, to rebuild their economy.

Cubans are absolutely clear about the need for self-determination and self-reliance. They are a well ordered, patriotic, internationalist people with the number one priority of providing for the people’s needs. Their system of democracy has deep roots, based not just on regular elections but on the real control of people over their local areas and over their workplaces. They are optimistic and positive about the future — and all of this means that the USA regards them as a threat.

Recent papers released under the US Freedom of Information legislation show that the US had plans — approved by the then Secretary of State McNamara — for creating “incidents’ around the US

Guantanamo naval base to justify an invasion of the island.

These incidents were to include the sinking of a US naval vessel, and the shooting down of an aircraft by a plane painted in Cuban air force livery. The plans were only stopped by the arrival on the island of the missiles from the USSR. Now the Cubans are vulnerable again — though their readiness to defend themselves is unquestionable.

We started our twinning links by visiting the region and making contact with the CTC, the Cuban trade union organisation. The CTC is independent of government in Cuba, but works closely with it and with other organisations of the people. They were very receptive to

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our approaches, and sent two representatives to Derbyshire in 2000 to visit workplaces, meet with trade unionists and make contact too with local government in the county.

They made quite an impression while they were with us. They took part in lessons in local schools and visited the hospitals in Derby which have, through us and the SALUD! Project (the British union-based campaign to donate medical equipment to Cuba), contributed a great deal of decommissioned NHS equipment,



Ballet at Camaguey's specialist vocational arts school. Many students live in and return home at weekends and holidays.

including dialysis machines, fetal heart monitors, mobile X-ray equipment, surgical equipment etc.

The Cuban delegation visited libraries and social service provision — and had a very interesting trip to Rolls Royce. They visited the railway engineering works in Derby, and were appalled at the wanton

'We met people who took control of their lives for granted...'

destruction of engineering jobs and capacity over the years. Their visit to a fire station saw all the vehicles and equipment for inspection and the arrival of the FBU Executive member and the Chief Fire Officer. They met with workers in social clubs and with the Derby City Council at the invitation of the mayor.

In turn, they invited us to send a delegation to Camaguey, and we spent the next 18 months developing our work in Derby to ensure that the delegation wasn't made up of "politicos" but of people with a genuine interest in the twinning.

Our local independent cinema — The Metro — got involved, putting on a short season of Cuba films, with us doing the introductions. We ran a Cuba night there with documentaries, speakers and music that "sold out" in the best sense of the word! We got support from presenters on BBC Radio Derby, and further developed the work with local trade unions, with Derby City Council, with the hospital trust and with the schools.

Our delegation to Camaguey in February of this year was made up of a consultant in communicable disease, a professor in child health, a headteacher, and three other teachers, a social worker, a welfare rights worker, a sixth form student, a local government worker and the mayor of the city of Derby. A number of these hold elected trade union positions.

Everywhere we went in Camaguey — and as well as a packed programme of visits and meetings, we could go where

we wanted on an impromptu basis — we met people who were clearly proud of their country and determined to see it survive.

We met people who took workers control of their lives for granted — though very conscious of the threats to it. We met people whose personal and collective commitment was rock solid. We met people who had a love of life reflected in the ever-present music and dance, and also in lively open debate, whether it be about a burning political issue, or a matter of local concern or the nation's obsession: baseball.

Our report-back meeting had the owner of one of the most popular clubs in Derby donating his venue, and a seven-piece Latin band donating their talents. The club was packed, the politics and music were great, the mayor's opening remarks were very supportive. Everyone had a good time.

Friendship

This month the Mayor of the City of Derby and the Secretary of Derby City Unison have returned to Camaguey for a few days of festival and to sign up and develop the "friendship links".

If you want to see a genuinely democratic country visit Cuba. If you want to see how patriotism and internationalism are just two sides of the same coin, visit Cuba. If you want to see how people, in the face of attack and adversity can make steady progress and have a great time doing it, visit Cuba.

And when you come back, take the inspiring lessons to the workers of your town, your workplace. You'll find the response interesting, rewarding and demanding. The Cubans deserve our support. They have much to offer us. Take up the challenge!

**A copy of the full report of the visit to Camaguey can be ordered from:
NUT Office, Chatsworth Hall, Chesterfield Road, Matlock Derbyshire DE4 3FW.
Also visit the Derbyshire Cuba Network embryonic website on
<http://pages.unisonfree.net/dcn/>**

Privatisation didn't just take ownership of power generation away from the state. It took it right out of the country...

Britain's power: privatised and foreign



ONCE UPON A TIME Britain had an integrated electricity supply industry. We had central generation, national distribution and regional retailing. Naively, the electricity supply industry had developed to meet the requirements of the people of Britain, rather than the requirements of profit.

Having emerged from municipal Victorian civic pride, the crisis of the First World War and the ever-growing technological demands of industry, the power industry was nationalised in 1947 — a direct result of the Second World War.

Every city had its power stations, small, technologically hide-bound and stunningly original in name — Ferrybridge 'A', 'B' and eventually 'C'. During the 1970s and 1980s the local power stations were closed and the colossi of coal generation were built — Drax, Fiddlers Ferry, Ferrybridge. Nuclear power was dabbled with — the endless debate about building Sizewell or which of the existing nuclear technologies — US or British — were to be purchased.

By the time Drax was completed in the

late 1980s its design was already 30 years out of date. Enormous 20th-century edifices epitomised by the cooling tower dominated the Vale of York and the Ouse and Trent river valleys. The combination of enormous quantities of water and coal were to be harnessed to generate electricity for industry's demands.

The 1989 Electricity Act, followed by vesting day in 1990, shattered all these bedside tales: electricity privatisation arrived with a vengeance.

Reserves

The new generation of power stations became gas-fired in what was known as "the dash for gas" (see Box, page 10). The vast reserves of North Sea gas were (and are being) wasted in the myriad gas-fired stations — effectively a huge gas fire with low construction costs and very few staff.

It was a licence to print money. Tens of thousands of jobs directly and indirectly employed were shed — perhaps more than 500,000 in total. Coal generation remains with a dwindling number of the 1960s-designed stations, the knock-on result being effectively the

closure of the British coal mining industry.

Nuclear generation has seen partial privatisation, with no new capacity being built and old stations, the Magnox type, continually having their life expectancy increased till at least 2010. Of course decommissioning is another matter and could take centuries!

The ownership of half the generating capacity in Britain, and most of the distribution and retailing companies, has transferred to foreign hands — US, French, German. The devouring of Britain's utilities — gas, electricity, water — by privatisation has created gigantic examples of company takeovers and re-branding.

Scottish Power remains as the only British-owned, geographically rooted remnant of the 1990 privatisation. But even Scottish Power is a player on the international scene — in the US. In the British market it is actively seeking merger or takeover. A bid for Scottish and Southern Energy would create a monster with assets of £13 billion.

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The Central Electricity Generating Board was divided into three: the National Grid, Powergen and National Power. Though National Power started out with 70% of the British market, foreign competition and Powergen's ruthlessly effective marketing shattered its grip.

Numerous name changes — such as “International Power” or “Npower” — dividing the business between the UK and overseas as two separate operating wings (or even more ridiculous names — “Innogy”), has not saved the company from being asset-stripped. Innogy was bought for £5.2 billion by RWE, the fifth largest German industrial grouping.

RWE's acquisition gave it a customer base of over 7 million as Innogy had Yorkshire and Northern Electricity scalps from previous take-overs. So RWE, for the moment, is No.1 in electricity (customer base) and No.2 in gas. It also takes them into telecommunications, since Innogy was linked with BT's also interestingly named Energis.

RWE is an interesting case to study. Founded in 1898, its industrial history rivals any multinational. If German and British industrial or trade interests clashed before — World War One and Two — they are avoiding such conflict by buying not only their opposition but also the world of utilities. RWE bought Thames Water for £4.3 billion, hence indirectly sponsoring English Test cricket. RWE also owns American Water Works in the USA, Transgas in the Czech Republic, and Highland Energy in Britain.

Seeboard

And the company is hovering around Seeboard — the now US-owned British electricity distribution company. These and other acquisitions have turned RWE into Europe's second largest company for generation and the third biggest for electricity sales.

RWE is not alone in controlling Britain's energy and utilities. Electricité de France (EdF) owns London Electricity and SWEB (what was the South West

Electricity Board). TXU — owned by US AES — owns Norweb and Eastern Electricity. Eon — German — bought Powergen. Powergen in turn owns LG&E Energy of Kentucky, which will become Eon's springboard into the US.

Though both RWE and Eon are rivals in Germany, both see the US market as being highly lucrative. After the scandal and collapse of Enron and the California power shortage crisis of the last three years all is seen as being up for grabs.

The privatisation and so-called liberalisation of the British utilities market has allowed capitalists to extend their empires across all utilities. Though this has led to attempted regulatory controls, nothing has slowed up the march of the multinationals which are multi-utility based. RWE see themselves as being No.1 in the world.

Shock waves from Enron

Though the US regulatory base is more complex, the continued shock waves from the Enron collapse, coupled with the generators' inability to prevent the frequent and confidence sapping power cuts in California, has meant that world predators are prepared to tackle their US competitors on their home ground. Whichever corporate image hack dreams up the names of these companies — Enron, Dynegy, AES, TXU, CMS Energy — all are sniping at one another, circling like hyenas. It needs a map as complex as the Tube to explain who owns what and who has stolen what from whom.

In the wake of the Enron scandal, Dynegy is one of a number of US energy companies being investigated for fake deals and creative accountancy — ledgers full of fiction. Dynegy tried to buy Enron just before Enron's collapse, a minnow trying to swallow a beached whale. It was able to intervene in the British market, buying from British Gas Britain's largest on- and off-shore gas storage facility in Yorkshire in 2001. Dynegy are also predicting power cuts in Britain by Spring next year. Why? Because they argue the price of electricity is too low! Read profit for price. They argue generators will

‘It needs a map as complex as the Tube to explain who owns what and who has stolen what from whom...’

mothball generating capacity rather than make a loss. Reduced generation will lead to power cuts unless the price goes up. Blackmail? Daylight robbery? Exactly the scandal which hit California? Dynegy's chief executive and chairman have just resigned in the face of investor and regulator investigations in the USA.

The privatisation of electricity (and other utilities) returns to the single concept of ‘ownership’. Does RWE or Eon or EdF own the companies they have ‘bought’? They may be in possession of them and they may be creaming vast profits from them, but do they own them? What do British workers want from services that are essential to life and existence? Fewer than 1% of workers employed in the power industry at the time of privatisation exercised their right not to take up shares.

Have the innumerable name changes, the re-labelling, the ever-quickening games of musical chairs of company take-overs made the task too difficult or the trail too hard to follow? Have workers in the industry lost that sense of pride and identity, too shell-shocked by the commercial thrust to remember that driving duty: always keep the lights on come snow or German bombs?

Water, energy (gas, electricity) and telecommunications are inter-linked in providing the essentials of civilised life. The ‘ownership’ of such essentials cannot be left in the hands of those businesses that see them as nothing more than money-printing machines. Nationalisation in 1947 was recognition that only an integrated system would get you through a world war. Nationalisation was not socialism but presented great

opportunities for workers to exercise great power and organisation. A great power which evaporated in the late 1980s in the face of the onslaught of greed.

The organisation of the industries essential to life must be reconsidered. Why competition at all? Why not have one integrated organisation, saving on duplication and waste? RWE may have the same view but its end goal will be different. One industry organised to deliver the essentials of life as near to the cost of production as possible in the interests of the people of Britain. Or one organisation to deliver the maximum profitability to the RWE boardroom in Essen, Germany?

Edict

As recently as 1978, in the case of the power industry, draft plans to unify the generating and retail sides — ideas originally floated in the 1964 Labour government — were being drawn up for Parliament. Competition by privatisation is the edict from the European Union. The Tories' subsequent adoption of the privatisation ethos pioneered privatisation and monetarism. Again a clear choice over the future direction of Britain was demonstrated. It is an edict, which has been interestingly followed by Electricité de France (with the French nationalised gas industry under its belt), by going on a predator march abroad while maintaining its structure at home.

If your water, gas, electricity, communications industries are foreign-owned how do you maintain your sovereignty? How do you stop an executive from Dynegy threatening to hold the country to ransom — he is totally justified in mothballing 'his' property, his power station? How do you stop an EU Commissioner likewise telling you to close down? How do you plan for the future if the controlling factor is not home grown need but boardroom returns? If the question of ownership is considered, if the question of who benefits is studied, if the question of the very future of civilised life is posed, then the choice of a socialist or capitalist solution stands stark before us.

The dash for gas profits

IT IS PREDICTED that Britain's natural gas reserves will run out in 2015. Vast quantities of natural gas have been wasted in burning gas for the generation of electricity during the last 15 years. Now, to sustain supplies energy companies are looking to Norway and new developments in the North Sea, Russia and Central Asia for extensive fresh energy sources.

A £4 billion deal by Centrica (British Gas) and Statoil, Norway's recently privatised energy group will supply a mere 5% of the expected demand in 2015. Statoil will be looking not only to Norwegian reserves but also to those of Russia and the Central Asian republics.

Pipelines

The construction of gas and oil pipelines which started in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, now deliver vast strategic supplies to Germany and Western Europe. Although there is no longer the fear that these will be turned off, the control of the pipelines is hotly contested, as are the rights to new ones which will tap the vast natural resources of Asia and Siberia.

Even the Taliban were in negotiations with the US about a pipeline from the Central Asia republics, through Afghanistan to India, prior to the US invasion.

As the construction of pipelines is critical in the geo-political thinking of governments and multi-nationals, particularly in the USA, economic and military policies have been constructed to help the process.

Liberalisation

Economically, energy markets have been liberalised. In the EU this has been driven by directive for the last two decades, resulting in the wholesale privatisation of gas, oil, water and electricity industries. State monopolies have been broken down in the name of competition, to be replaced by even vaster multi-national monopolies and energy supplies are often run by foreign interests.

Militarily there has been direct and covert US and allied military intervention in Albania, Kosovo, Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq, which all have strategic importance in terms of oil supplies and pipelines. The dismemberment of the former Soviet Union and the continued undermining of the Russian Federation is part of the struggle for control for energy resources and is reminiscent of the Scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century.

So keeping the gas cooker lit has ramifications that leave the long forgotten municipal gas company in the mists of time. The global interests which shadow box around the vast natural assets of Asia, manipulate control of pipelines spanning continents, and are prepared to use military intervention to ensure continued supply pose as great a threat as the exhaustion of the North Sea oil and gas fields.

The drums are beating again. In Washington and London the lie machines are in full swing. The world is in danger...

Still gunning for Iraq



Gulf threat: a pilot gives his F-14B Tomcat a pre-flight inspection on the deck of USS George Washington

THE US GOVERNMENT is threatening to attack Iraq and other states, claiming that the USA's safety requires it. But in a dangerous world, sensible states need only to practise deterrence to prevent wars. However, the demise of the Soviet Union has increased, not ended, the danger of total, nuclear, war. The foolish belief that this danger has gone increased the US and British governments' readiness to threaten war, risking turning limited conflicts into all-out war.

An ICM poll in mid-March showed that 51% of the British people were against the British government backing a

US attack on Iraq; only 35% approved. Since we live, we are told, in a democracy, our representatives should do their job and veto any support for Bush's proposed war. Otherwise we would see that our MPs agreed with Blair's law, "MPs are not here to represent their constituencies, they are here to support the new government." And we would act to assert our interests, against the government.

Blair and Bush's main problem with Iraq is that it is still there despite supposedly having been sent to oblivion by the US/British war against it after the invasion of Kuwait. Not only is Iraq there,

but Saddam Hussein as well. Iraq's crime is to have exposed the myth that the US cannot be resisted.

But this is not just about an affront to imperialist dignity: Iraq is a major oil producer, at a time when the US is becoming nervous about one of its main oil sources, Venezuela. OPEC, which almost brought the US to its knees some 30 years ago, is once again flexing its muscles. Washington is distinctly uneasy.

All the same, neither Bush nor Blair can start a war without at least an attempt at gaining the moral high ground. This is why every attempt to claim that Iraq is a warlike nation, a

threat to the world, is itself an essential part of the preparation for war.

Bush's case for war on Iraq is threefold. His first claim is that Iraq threatens, or will threaten, to attack the USA with weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. On nuclear weapons, in 1997 a UN Special Commission reported that "there are no indications that any weapons-usable nuclear materials remain in Iraq" and there was "no evidence in Iraq of prohibited materials, equipment, or activities". The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed this January that no nuclear weapons capabilities remain in Iraq.

No evidence

In addition, a US official stated, "We have seen no evidence of reconstruction of weapons of mass destruction." (WASHINGTON POST, 15 July 1999.) Scott Ritter, a former UN weapons inspector, asked, "Does Iraq have a chemical weapons programme today? No. Does Iraq have a long-range missile programme today? No. Nuclear? No. Biological? No. Is Iraq qualitatively disarmed? Yes." In Britain, the Foreign Office admitted, "There is no firm evidence that President Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction at present." (DAILY TELEGRAPH, 13 March 2002.) This wrecked Blair's claim, "There is a threat from Saddam and the weapons of mass destruction he has acquired. It is not in doubt." (GUARDIAN, 12 March.)

Alone among the nations of the world, the US and British governments demand that weapons inspectors have unconditional access to Iraq, but this is a pretext. The 1991 ceasefire resolution, No. 687, says that the UN will lift the ban on Iraqi exports when Iraq complies with the resolution. Iraq has now complied fully or largely with seven of its eight demands. But Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said in March 1997 that the US Government would not lift the ban even if Iraq complied fully. As another US official said, Bush, too, "will not take yes for an answer" (GUARDIAN, 14 February) — so the US government is breaching the resolution.

Early in April, Blair decided not to

'Neither Bush nor Blair can start a war without at least an attempt at gaining the moral high ground...'

publish an intelligence dossier on Iraq's weapons, allegedly because it would cause alarm, but more likely because it would not cause alarm! If he had good evidence, we would never hear the last of it...

There is no reason to believe that we are in danger from Iraq, but the US and British governments are still threatening the country.

Even if Iraq did create a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon, why would its government use it? To attack the USA would provoke nuclear retaliation. If Iraq wants weapons, it is to deter a US attack, not to provoke one by attacking the USA. Suicide bombers, like Kamikaze pilots, may have nothing left to lose by killing themselves, but states have. As Bismarck said, there is no sense in committing suicide for fear of death.

Where's the smoking gun?

The second part of Bush's case for war is his claim that Iraq's government was linked to the terrorists who committed the 11 September atrocity. The Al-Qa'ida terrorists are indeed moral absolutists who threaten unlimited wars. They want to drag us all back to feudal darkness and are prepared, as they showed by killing thousands of workers on 11 September, to kill us in huge numbers to achieve this. But Bush has produced no evidence that Iraq has aided them. THE NEW YORK TIMES wrote in February, "The Central Intelligence Agency has no evidence that Iraq has engaged in terrorist operations against the United States in nearly a decade, and the agency is also convinced that President Saddam Hussein has not provided chemical or biological weapons to al-Qa'ida."

So attacking Iraq and killing people unconnected to 11 September would not

help to defeat terrorism; it would not be justified. We do not need a Second Front in the war against terrorism.

However, a limited war focused on defeating the Al-Qa'ida terrorists is justified. This requires a political strategy to meet people's justified grievances, by setting up a Palestinian state, making Israel pull out of the illegally occupied territories, and ending the blockades of Iraq, Cuba and so many others. It also needs a good military strategy, using intelligence and ground forces to pinpoint and kill the Al-Qa'ida killers.

Humanitarian war?

The third part of Bush's case is the claim that attacking Iraq would be a humanitarian war, to rescue the Iraqi people from an oppressive regime. But it is for Iraq's people, as for every other people, to decide whether they want a regime change. Further, in the 1991 war against Iraq, the US attack killed an estimated 145,000 Iraqis, hardly a humanitarian precedent that the Iraqis would want them to follow.

However, Bush and Blair would be following a long, if ignoble, tradition: even the Roman Empire practised so-called humanitarian intervention. As Polybius, the 2nd-century Greek historian, sardonically noted, "The Romans have the fine custom of joining together to punish the injustices done to individuals and of helping the victims of injustice." The Empire's annual wars, always of course undertaken for the best of motives, brought Rome's rulers temporary success and lasting oblivion.

The ECONOMIST noted (26 January), "The US does not, to date, have a legal mandate for serious military intervention" against Iraq. Bush will not get such a mandate from the UN General Assembly, because only Blair and Sharon support him. Ironically, the result of Bush's efforts is that he has united all 22 members of the Arab League into issuing a 'categorical rejection' of an attack on Iraq. He might try to twist arms on the UN Security Council into giving him a mandate, but the Council would be exceeding its powers if it did so. If it did, the General Assembly must overrule the Council, to prevent Bush and Blair from starting an unnecessary war.

A new CD throws a musical spotlight on the heroism of Clydeside workers in the First World War...

Songs of an epic class struggle

DAVE SWARBRICK is the only folk musician to have won an apology from the DAILY TELEGRAPH — when it wrongly printed his obituary! Readers can be assured that he is alive, well and fiddling vigorously — all attested to by a superb new CD in which he produces and accompanies the highly talented singer/composer/guitarist Alistair Hulett. His entirely original words and music tell the gripping story of a remarkable phase in industrial working class history, RED CLYDESIDE.

This is their third CD collaboration, but their paths have crossed before. Dave became legendary through his work with Ewan MacColl on the Radio Ballads (while he was an ICI apprentice in Birmingham in the 1950s), his recordings with folk collector A. L. Lloyd, the Ian Campbell Folk Group, Martin Carthy and, from 1969-1984, the Fairport Convention. Alistair teamed up with him while they were working in Australia, but the present creative explosion finds Dave settled in Coventry and Alistair in Glasgow.

Alistair has sung and composed since his teens and his songs have been taken up by singers around the world, such as John McAuslan, Kate Delany, Ron Bailey and June Tabor. His recordings have always been strongly inspired by class struggle, with CDs such as DANCE OF THE UNDERCLASS and THE BACKSTREETS OF PARADISE, and his own group, The Hooligans. His current duo with Dave Swarbrick was launched at the Sidmouth folk festival in 1996, and this collaboration has culminated now with their musical spotlight on the heroism of Clydesdale workers in the years around the First World War.

The nine songs of RED CLYDESIDE were over two years in the making, deeply felt and well researched, with the CD making impressive use of new technology in the form of picture files and song words.

Our journey begins in 1910. As the Great Unrest sweeps through Britain,

Alistair focuses on one incident, the thread mill girls' strike at Neilston. "Mrs Barbour's Army" moves us on to 1915 when the Govan rent strike spread throughout Glasgow. He quotes William Gallagher's description of the organised resistance to evictions where "the officer and his men would be met by an army of furious women who drove them back in a

the old ballads has enabled him to recreate those times in stirring, epic songs, and this CD must rank with the very best of recent years. It is up there with Dick Gaughan's OUTLAWS AND DREAMERS, which features such classics as Brian McNeill's "No Gods and Precious Few Heroes".

As the songs and the CD booklet point



Folk musicians Dave Swarbrick (left) and Alistair Hulett

hurried scramble for safety."

In another track, "Don't Sign up for War", he sings of the militant anti-war movement of 1915. His quote from John Maclean, "It is the task of socialists to build class patriotism, to convince workers not to slaughter each other for a sordid world capitalism" seems ever relevant today.

However, Alistair does not shirk from looking at the tragedy of the split between Maclean (appointed Bolshevik consul) and Gallagher (the first communist MP), and Maclean's isolation, imprisonment and early death in 1923.

His experience of the form and style of

out, it was the skilled workers in the engineering and shipbuilding industries who bore the brunt of the government suppression of their struggle against the lowering of pay and conditions. The Defence of the Realm Act also controlled the press and any anti-war activity.

The areas targetted were Sheffield, Newcastle and Glasgow. Unrest reached a peak with the seizure of a mass meeting by the audience of 3,000 shop stewards during a speech by Lloyd George in Glasgow on Christmas Day 1915. They were then addressed by leaders of the Clydeside Workers' Committee, who launched their own newspaper, THE

WORKER, on 8 January 1916 (the widely read FORWARD had been suppressed a week earlier). A. W. Stewart, writing in its second issue, commented, "The British authorities, having adopted the methods of Russian despotism, British Workers may have to understudy Russian revolutionary methods of evasion...but here is THE WORKER once again, symbolical of the fact that the cause of Labour can never be suppressed. It may be and has been bamboozled, hoodwinked, side-tracked and misled; it may be browbeaten, persecuted and driven underground, but it cannot be killed; and just when its enemies think they have finally subdued and made an end of it, it emerges more virile and vigorous than ever."

Then, as the fifth issue was being printed, THE WORKER itself was suppressed and its editorial team arrested. Industrial action temporarily freed them, but one-year jail sentences were imposed later. Unrest and the attempt to create a strong working class party continued after the war culminating in the 1919 events, when Churchill confined local troops to barracks and occupied Glasgow city centre with tanks and loyal soldiers. The Irish rising of 1916, the Russian revolution and insurrection in Germany had compounded his fears. The CD relates the events of "Bloody Friday", 31 January 1919, and the weaknesses that led to the fading of resistance.

As for their future plans, the Hulett/Swarbrick team are certainly not focusing exclusively on the past, however heroic or tragic. Their current workshop presentations such as "insurrection and resistance" and a study of the protest song movement bring us right up to the present.

Red Clydeside is on Red Rattler RAT CD 005. For further information on Alistair Hulett or Dave Swarbrick see <http://www.folkicons.co.uk>.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

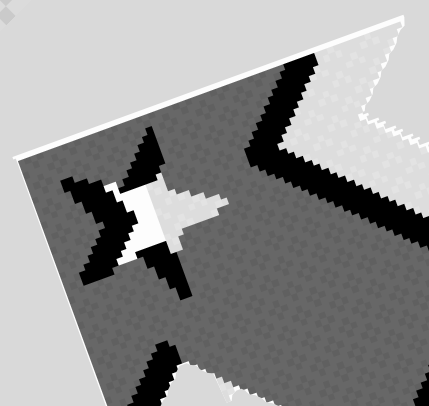
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Back to Front – Festivals and flags

‘Workers in Britain have to organise in a new way now to stop the export of our wealth by the billion every day, the domination of our country by foreign powers which stoke up race and religious bigotries to divide us...’

THE FOOTBALL is over. The St George’s flag (last of the British flags in this tournament) is folded away and out comes the red flag for the season of festivals. Two of the highlights of the labour movement calendar are held on the weekend of 20/21 July (see What’s On, page 5).

On 20 July workers gather at Victoria Park in London’s East End for a day of music and fun to express the deep-seated hatred within the British working class of theories of racial difference. Unions will use the occasion to encourage the young crowd to get organised and join the struggle day in day out for respect and dignity at work. Unions and a vast array of community organisations offer themselves as vehicles of collective aspirations and unity, expressing the strength of our culture. Organised workers have always wanted to integrate workers who have been forced here.

Our culture rests on key ideas about behaviour and key political principles – trade union participation, the democratic struggle for accountability in public life, nonsectarian education and art, the appreciation of a free health service and contribution to it, the equality of men and women, the legal principles of innocence until proven guilty and trial by jury, respect for all workers, no death penalties, no floggings, no sexual or racial discrimination.

It is this culture which capitalism seeks to undermine. We cannot shy away

from the fact that the mass migrations of peoples enforced by it destabilise communities, undermine nation states and erode socialist cohesion. Workers in Britain have to organise in a new way now to stop the export of our wealth by the billion every day, the domination of our country by foreign powers which stoke up race and religious bigotries to divide us and the import of a new and dreadful traffic in human beings.

If the largely community-based campaigning that underpins the Respect Festival were linked more directly with the organised trade union movement, no power in the land could stop our progress. Perhaps everyone who goes to Respect should travel to Dorset the next day for the expanded and equally festive Tolpuddle Martyrs Rally.

At this we do not celebrate early trade unionists as the victims of cruel circumstances, we celebrate the fact that the trade union movement was born out of a recognition that there was an unsolvable contradiction between the needs of workers and those of capitalists. The Tolpuddle martyrs were highly class conscious, as their writings show. They asked a question still central to our thinking today:

“Never, no never will the rich and great devise means to alleviate the distress and remove the misery felt by the working men of England. What then is to be done ? Why, the labouring classes must do it themselves, or it will for ever be left undone.”

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