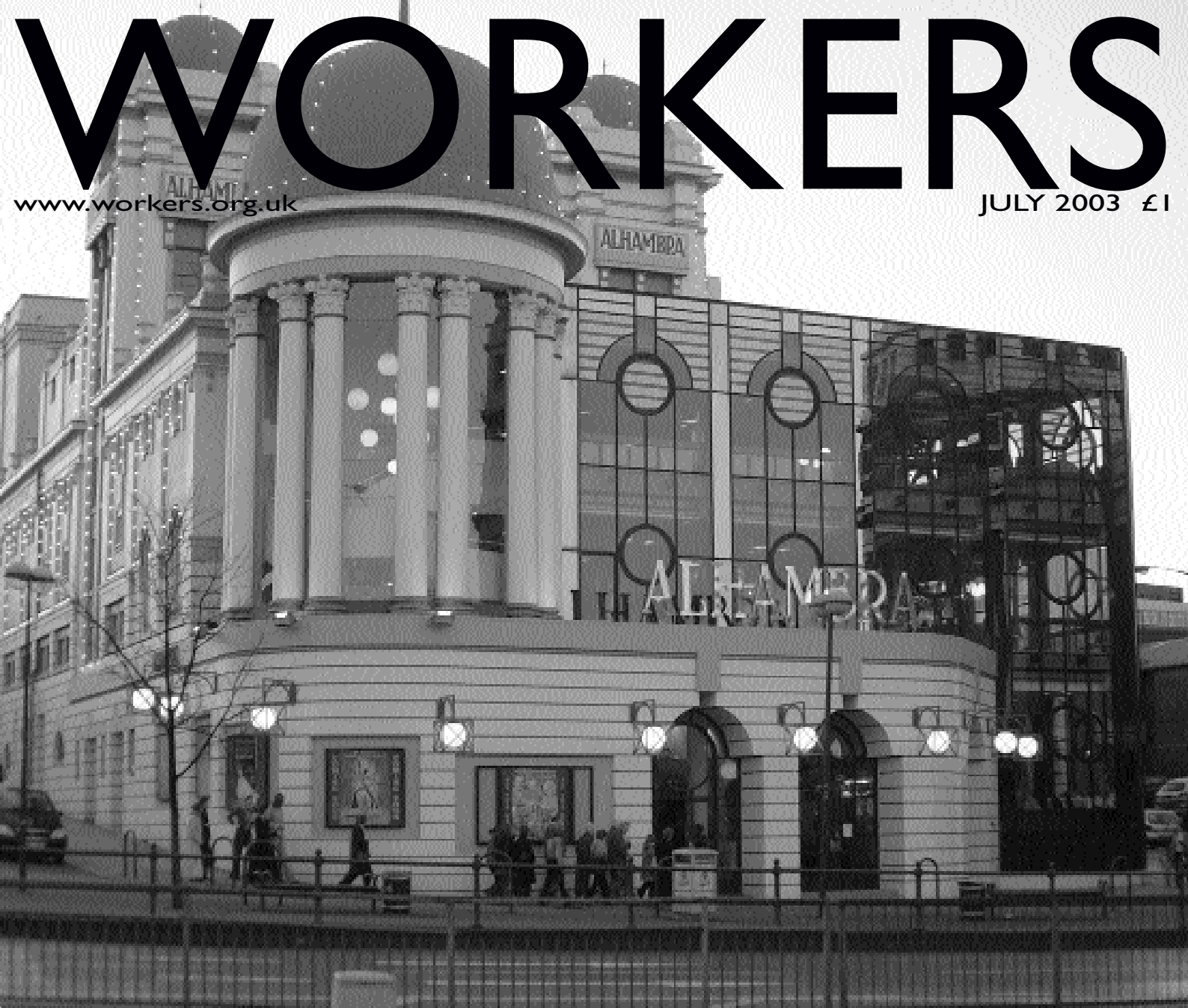


WORKERS

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JULY 2003 £1



BUT WHERE ARE THE REAL JOBS?



Lessons on rail safety

03



The weapons that never were

06



Remembering Tolpuddle

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WORKERS

First thoughts

THE DAILY MAIL'S poll on whether we should have a referendum on the proposed EU Constitution received 1.7 million responses. 89.8% said that the final decision should be put to the British people. An ICM poll of 54,973 people in 172 town centres across Britain, also on 12 June, confirmed that result: 88% for.

So the MAIL poll, whatever criticisms some make of it, expresses pretty accurately what the majority of the British people actually want! If the INDEPENDENT'S editor doesn't like the way that the DAILY MAIL did it, the answer is simple — let's have a national referendum!

Meanwhile the government is pressing

ahead with its plans for referendums — on regional assemblies, of all things! Ministers claimed an “overwhelming case” after getting no more than 3,329 people, out of 14,000,000, to back referendums in Yorkshire and Humberside, the North East and the North West. So we are to get referendums we don't want, but not on the core constitution of Britain.

This Blair government wants to de-recognise Britain as a sovereign, independent nation. (Hence, no doubt, its rushed plans to introduce a euro-like Justice Ministry and Supreme Court.) We must act to de-recognise this anti-British government, and get rid of it.

Second opinion

THE G8 CIRCUS at Evian, with its equally ritual anarchist demonstrations, cost an estimated £144 million, money that could have been far better spent, on, say, getting clean water to Ethiopia's people. But the G8's leaders had nothing to say about improving water supplies, nothing to say about reducing the exorbitant costs of generic drugs.

Before the G8 meeting, a London branch of the National Union of Teachers sensibly asked

its members whether they wanted to use union money to send a few members to the demonstration against the G8. To the consternation of the few, members voted to keep their funds to support their union's own work.

Who is doing more to hurt capitalism — teachers organising in their union to save teachers' jobs, cut class sizes and improve education in the real world, or anarchists having a sponsored trip to an overseas circus?



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Late lessons from Potters Bar

THE HEALTH AND SAFETY Executive's third "interim" report on last year's rail crash at Potters Bar has put the blame squarely on the poor maintenance practices and procedures which exist in the fragmented and privately owned railway industry. Notably, it is clear from the report that there was no negligence on the part of the railway workers involved.

The fact that it has taken the HSE over a year to reach these conclusions is down to the political and legal back-covering which it clearly feels are necessary in dealing with the many players involved. These include the government, Railtrack (and its successor Network Rail), the British Transport Police, Jarvis, and WAGN (the train company — a subsidiary of National Express).

All parties have been involved in chicanery in order to deflect blame, most notably Jarvis, which soon after the accident suggested that sabotage was the cause. This was a cynical attempt to defend the value of their shares which fell sharply immediately after the crash.

The key question now is — how long will the fragmented railway take to learn the lessons of this accident and make the necessary changes? Under British Rail, changes could quickly be put into effect. Change on today's railway, governed as it is by legal contracts and bureaucracy, is painfully slow.

It is particularly noteworthy that the HSE's report blames "the system" and not one particular party. In that respect it is flawed. It is the Tories who should be blamed for privatising British Rail, and the Labour government that should be blamed for not taking steps to reverse the damaging fragmentation inflicted on the railways at privatisation. How many more lives will be sacrificed in the name of capitalism before this government acts?

- The Post Office's announcement that it is ending the use of trains for the carriage of mail has been met with condemnation from rail and postal unions, who point out that this is a move diametrically opposed to the government's stated objective of moving freight off the roads on to the railways. Up to 800 jobs could be lost, and will mean an extra 160,000 lorry journeys a year.

This announcement came days after the Post Office closed its own underground railway under central London (a line built specifically for the transport of mail) despite the fact that the replacement vans will take twice as long as the trains they have replaced.

Unbelievably, the government has claimed that the decisions of this nationalised organisation were taken without its knowledge! Now that the government is clear that the Post Office is sticking two fingers up to its supposed transport policy, will it order the decisions to be reversed?

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

CUBA Anniversary of attack

ON 26 JULY 1953 Cuban revolutionaries, led by Fidel Castro, launched an armed attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba's second city in Eastern Cuba. A military coup the previous year had brought the fascist dictator Batista to power, leaving little option but armed struggle for Cuban revolutionaries.

The plan was to attack simultaneously the barracks in Moncada, Santiago and in Bayamo 100 kilometres away. If successful, the island could be cut in half, as there was only one road out of mountainous eastern Cuba. The rural population would be armed with weapons from the barracks to continue the struggle.

They were spotted by a military patrol which reduced the element of surprise. During a bloody battle, many rebels were killed, executed or captured.

Fidel and others were taken alive only because the black lieutenant commanding the detachment that found them insisted that they be taken to the city jail rather than the Moncada barracks, where he knew they would be executed in cold blood.

Imprisoned and then freed on amnesty, Fidel and the other revolutionaries went on to organise and lead the revolution that triumphed on 1 January 1959. But the Moncada attack inspired the Cuban people: 26 July became Cuba's national day, and Santiago de Cuba was awarded the title 'Hero City'.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the attack, and it will be celebrated throughout Cuba. A group of leading trade unionists from Santiago de Cuba will be visiting Britain to celebrate that event with British communists and trade unionists.

AEROSPACE

Outsourced to the EU

EARLY IN JUNE, the Blair government tore up its agreement with BAE Systems to supply the RAF with 30 new Hawk training aircraft, the only fixed-wing plane designed, developed and built in Britain. It ordered the work to be put out to foreign tender, in line with EU policy. BAE has already spent £30 million on the work.

At a government press conference, called, ironically, "to highlight cooperation between the government and industry on the aerospace sector's future", Sir Dick Evans, BAE's chairman, said, "I don't think the British taxpayer is in the business of subsidising foreign companies to compete in our home markets."

Under EU rules, that is exactly what happens.

Evans argued that the government's action was just the sort of move that had led to the Nimrod debacle, which lost the company millions of pounds a few years back, and endangers the jobs of 470 skilled workers at the BAE Systems plant in Brough, Humberside.

Winning the RAF order is crucial to BAE's ability to win orders from overseas customers for 400 planes, meaning about 15 years' production at Brough. Without these export orders, the whole plant's future, and the jobs of all of its 1,900 workers, would be at risk.

TRANSPORT

Action on Yorkshire buses

BUS WORKERS in Sheffield and the surrounding area began a series of escalating strikes over pay on Saturday 7 June. They are challenging their employer's failure to end low pay for drivers.

Over 1,000 members of the Transport & General Workers Union working for First South Yorkshire strongly supported action in a 24-hour strike.

A 48-hour stoppage took place the following week. If the dispute is not resolved, there will be a further walkout, this time over three days.

The union says that low wages lead to high turnover and poor service. It wants an improvement in the starting rate from £5.36 an hour to £6.

More importantly it wants an established rate of £7 after 2 years, compared with the present £6.49 after 4 years.

T&G national officer Graham Stevenson said: "Such low wages are an absolute disgrace in this day and age."



Photo: Workers

UNISON MEMBERS working for the private contractor ISS Mediclean at Whipps Cross hospital in Leytonstone, north east London, have taken strike action for the second time in a month. Following a two-day strike in May, they held a three-day strike on 18-20 of June to support their demand for equal pay.

The dispute is over the two tiers of pay and conditions for workers doing the same jobs at the hospital. When cleaning, catering and portering services were contracted out to the private company at the hospital, existing staff retained their NHS pay rates and conditions, but new staff were taken on at new inferior rates. This situation now includes workers in transport, security and switchboards, and average hourly pay for the newer workers is £4.62. Staff turnover means that a majority are now on the lower pay rates.

Anger about the employers' refusal to address the problem has led to a growth in Unison membership, from 60 a year ago to 263 at present, out of a workforce of 360. The Agenda for Change NHS regrading exercise has evaluated these jobs at £5.35 an hour. The Whipps Cross employers have offered £5, with a promise to equalise pay by April 2006 — an important concession given their previous intransigence — but the workers are not willing to wait that long.

On the first day of the strike the picket line was around 50-strong. Many of the workers are members new to trade unionism. They have been quick, though, to recognise the lesson from other similar disputes around the country that, in the words of the Whipps Unison branch secretary, "Where you organise, you can win."

Computers down, workers out

GOVERNMENT WORKERS have expressed frustration at unreliable computer systems over the past few weeks. Civil servants in the Home Office and the Inland Revenue have walked out as a result of poorly implemented systems, the product of private IT partners.

The first payments under the government's new tax credit scheme were due in April. The Inland Revenue's new computer system was not able to cope. People whose claims had not been processed besieged tax offices. They had to wait hours for hand-written giro cheques, even though the system was meant to work on direct payment to bank accounts. Under pressure, staff in several offices walked out for short periods.

The Revenue IT contract is one of the biggest anywhere in the public service. The problem with tax credits is only one of a series of high-profile failures from EDS, the Revenue's US-based "strategic partner". EDS is one of the bidders for the new contract, due to be awarded next year.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) walked out from the Home Office as well. Home Office payroll and pensions staff protested about what they described as "an unworkable computer system".

A new payroll system was introduced in 2001 to pay salaries to 70,000 civil servants working for the Home Office and its agencies. It has never performed in the way it should have done and needs manual support never originally intended. Extra payments were made to staff operating these systems, but were withdrawn in March this year, even though problems continue to occur.

A new pensions system is also flawed according to the union and there have been earlier well-publicised IT failures at the Home Office. The pension and payroll systems were provided by CMG. The deal the Home Office struck with CMG was hailed as a breakthrough in public-private partnership agreements when signed in five years ago.

MINERS**Ballot for action over pay**

THE NATIONAL Union of Mineworkers is balloting for industrial action over pay in the few remaining deep mines operated by UK Coal. The NUM is looking for a 25% wage increase over three years. The employers are offering an inflation-linked cost of living award.

This offer has been accepted by the UDM (set up to oppose the NUM) and is being paid to all miners irrespective of their union loyalties. In other words, the divisions at the point of production between miners are as deep as ever and are being successfully exploited by the employer.

The pit closure programme threatens the very existence of the handful of pits left working. UK Coal will willingly push this option as the industry teeters between life and death. Every year since the 1984-85 miners' strike there has been posturing over industrial action and pay, but no vote to act.

Survival of the pits will depend upon a strategy based on realistic, deliverable tactics and a strong unified organisation.

This may be anathema to some. But a closed pit is a dead pit and a dead Miners' Lodge. Survival of the industry to fight another day is critical.

MINERS**More pensions won back**

A FURTHER 150 miners sacked by British Coal during the 1984-1985 miners' strike are to receive their pensions. This is a great achievement for the NUM and its unceasing campaign to ensure justice for these men. Over 1,000 miners were sacked during the dispute — all denied jobs and re-employment.

On average £20,000 in denied pension payments will be forthcoming, nearly 20 years after the strike ended. There are an estimated further 200 miners who still have to have their cases re-opened. This ignores those who have died since the strike.

Miners want a further review of the privatisation deal, which currently allows the government to skim off 50% of miners' pension fund surpluses, netting £4 – 6 billion.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****JULY**

Saturday 12 July

Durham Miners Gala, starts 9am

Despite the end of Durham mining, still organised to respect and celebrate the history of labour. Details from neuag.gn.apc.org/Gala/galadur.html

Friday/Saturday/Sunday 18/19/20 July
Tolpuddle Festival and Rally

For more information, see http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-6486-f0.cfm

Saturday 19 July, 12.00 – 8.30pm

Respect Festival, The Dome, London

In association with the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR),

LECTURERS**Unity against divisive bosses**

THE FURTHER and higher education union NATFHE has endorsed a statement which commits the union to work closely with the Association of University Teachers (AUT). Three weeks earlier the AUT had also endorsed a similar statement.

The unity comes at a critical time, as all unions in higher education — academic, technical and admin — are negotiating with the employers over pay grading.

The employers, in contrast, are seeking to emphasise the differences between and within institutions. Their favourite term is "market supplements" whereby staff in "hard to recruit areas" are given small extra pay supplements while the overall pay levels remain low.

Negotiations are due to end by 1 August, so staff must return in September ready for possible action.

Unison votes for change

THE GOVERNMENT'S proposed new pay determination system for all NHS workers (Agenda for Change) took a step closer to implementation as delegates at the Harrogate Unison health conference in April voted overwhelmingly to support the executive position of a two-ballot approach.

The delegates voted to put a recommendation of acceptance in the first ballot to the members. The ballot closed at the end of May with an 81% majority in favour of a three-year pay deal and an agreement to start 'early implementer' pilot sites in 12 health trusts. These early implementer sites will test the system and have the ability to iron out any problems before a second ballot in 2004. The second ballot will be asking members to vote on acceptance of the new pay system being rolled out across the whole of the NHS.

The April Unison conference made an important decision not to throw away four years of negotiations. The delegates dismissed the arguments of those who would drag the union into damaging annual confrontation over pay in favour of those that wanted to take the union forward with a system that would bring stability and fairness as well as giving greater influence to the unions in the future of the Health Service.

ENERGY**Nuclear meltdown**

BRITISH ENERGY (BE) has announced a loss of £3 billion together with £2.7 billion 'exceptional costs' — a 50% reduction in the value of its assets (its power stations). Not a bad track record for privatisation and the private market economy.

At the same time, the once integrated nuclear industries, including British Nuclear Fuels and the Atomic Energy

Authority, are to see a new publicly funded body established to take nuclear power stations out of service, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, with a budget of £54 billion.

Once up and running it is only a matter of time before its remit is extended to British Energy's decommissioning costs.

The re-arrangement of the nuclear industry's deckchairs has cost the public billions. Now it is to be returned to the public surreptitiously, and unsurprisingly will cost tens of billions more.

POTTERIES**Exported to China**

A FURTHER 1,000 jobs are to be lost at Wedgwood potteries at Stoke on Trent. This follows the 1,400 jobs lost in 2001. Now fewer than 2,000 jobs remain. Wedgwood is shipping production to China.

China is supposedly up to 80% cheaper in production terms than Britain. Yet even though the average wage in the Potteries is just £12,500, job losses have led to membership of the Ceramic and Allied Trade Union falling by 75% in the past 25 years. The companies and the brand names remain the same, but production is being exported lock, stock and barrel.

GPs agree a new contract

FAMILY DOCTORS have voted overwhelmingly to accept the new national GP contract. In a ballot of general practitioners throughout Britain and Northern Ireland, 79.4% said "yes" to the question: Do you wish to see the proposed new GMS (General Medical Services) contract implemented? But that does not mean that everyone is happy about all of the agreement.

The contract includes a pay uplift backdated to April 2003 for GPs averaging 11% in the current financial year and amounting to an average of 26% by year 3. This is the result of two years of negotiation by the British Medical Association's General Practitioners' Committee. The committee also secured from government a "minimum practice income guarantee" to ensure that every general practitioner's remuneration will rise if the profession as a whole backs the contract.

Under the new contract, surgeries are obliged to open between 8:00am and 6:30pm five days a week. Extra, early morning, evening and weekend services can be provided, and will be paid for; but there is no requirement to participate.

GPs are no longer obliged to provide out of hours services to patients in the evening or at weekends — other NHS bodies are intended to take over this responsibility, and will employ trained paramedics and specialist nurses to provide emergency services (also taking pressure off hospital A&E units). The assumption is that shedding this responsibility could save up to £6,000 a year for practices that now pay in to a cooperative arrangement to meet on-call obligations.

There is more money for primary care services, and additional practice staff from the nursing and other healthcare professions could be employed to deal with less urgent cases, allowing GPs to give more time to those patients who actually need the specialist skills of a doctor.

Practices which are demonstrably overstretched would no longer be obliged to provide cervical screening, contraception and immunisation services. They could opt out and devolve responsibility to associated primary care organisations.

Changes

These are big changes, and the level of concern expressed by the 36,000 GPs in the BMA meant that the ballot to ratify the proposed deal, originally scheduled for March, had to be postponed. The Patients' Association also had reservations about the new out-of-hours arrangements, worried that they might disadvantage non-urgent elderly patients.

GPs themselves are split: there are worries that they might be disadvantaged financially. The formula for calculating practice income, in a way that favours the most deprived areas with the sickest patients, remains a cause for disagreement, as the BMA recognises.

It is vital that doctors assert their independence to obviate circumstances where managers are able to hold sovereignty over clinical decisions affecting individual patients. But modernisation of the NHS must also be pursued as part of the wider agenda. Issues of morale and recruitment and retention will be resolved only through effective negotiation — a settlement is urgently required so that the organisation collectively can concentrate on serving the general patients' interest.

The government spread the passes, the lie looks lamer

Desperately seeking



Hyde Park, London, 12 April 2003. The war is over, but we h

"THEY SAID WE would be facing another Vietnam!" scoffed Tony Blair as he tried to attack and discredit those in parliament who had him on the rack over his lies to justify the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq.

And they are facing resistance. More than 40 troops from the US occupying force have now been killed by Iraqi guerrilla resistance fighters since Bush declared the war over on 1 May. The occupiers have killed hundreds of Iraqis in "search and destroy" missions. The US colonial governor, Paul Bremer, has put hundreds of thousands of Iraqis out of work by abolishing the Iraqi army and civil service. Bremer is trying to set up a puppet army in its place. The Pentagon is desperately trying to shoe-horn in its stooge, exiled Iraqi aristocrat and Washington playboy Ahmed Chalabi, as the US puppet leader of Iraq. Déjà vu? Good morning, Iraq.

But Tony Blair has a cunning plan to get his critics off his back over the invented justification for the invasion. He has sent Ann Clwyd, under US military protection, to Iraq as his special "human rights" envoy. Her job is to come back with sufficient horror stories to retrospectively justify the invasion of a sovereign nation.

Sacked

Clwyd is a Labour MP who is dismissed as strange by a number of her colleagues and who was used to persuade other Labour MPs to vote for the war (they are now having second thoughts). Clwyd was sacked as a junior opposition spokesman in 1991 because she failed to return, for a meeting with Blair, from visiting anti-Iraqi Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq.

big lie about weapons of mass destruction. As every day
and lamer...

ing justification



Photo © Andy Laitwaite (see www.stopwar.org.uk)

ave not forgotten how Blair and Bush lied their way into it

‘Those who who believe that Blair is, whatever his faults, a sincere man, would do well to remember just how we were sold the Iraq war...’

This was at the same time as the CIA was on the ground in the area, supporting these groups against the Iraqi government following the Gulf War.

Later Clwyd helped to set up, and subsequently chaired, Indict, a US-sponsored organisation intended to try Iraqi government leaders after the US overthrow of the Iraqi government. The US Congress Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 provided multimillion dollar funding to four Iraqi opposition groups including Indict. Ahmed Chalabi was an Indict board member as well as being leader of the self-styled Iraqi National Congress, which also received multi-million dollar funding.

It was the 1998 Act that marked the beginning of the regime change doctrine, and Labour MP Ann Clwyd, recently described by the British tabloids as a “leftie”, was at the heart of this monster from the beginning.

For one country to pass such laws about another sovereign state is a sure

sign of colonialism and imperial design. You only have to look at the scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century to see the justifications given for grabbing Africa were just as high sounding — they were ending slavery or spreading Christianity. The US also operates the Cuban Adjustment Act and Congress is about to approve the Iran Democracy Act.

Desperate

Clwyd was last heard of coming under fire from Iraqi resistance fighters in Northern Iraq while under the protection of a US military escort. But having been sent there to gather stories for the desperate Blair, something like Iraqis eating Kurdish babies or 15-stone men being put through the office shredder, we can be sure that he and the US military will do their best to protect her in this rearguard action.

Meanwhile Bush is preparing for his next adventure, pressing for regime change in Iran. Those who were taken in

last time, and those who believe that Blair is, whatever his faults, a sincere man, would do well to remember just how we were sold the Iraq war, and the particular role he played in it.

At the March 2002 meeting between Bush and Blair, Bush announced, with Blair’s agreement and support, that he would attack Iraq in the summer of 2002. Bush then gave Blair the job of selling the war, which he did by describing his approach as “the best, indeed the only, way of avoiding war”.

Blair could not build a case upon the Bush demand for regime change, because by then everybody knew that the aim of regime change was illegal under international law, so the UN could not support an attack on Iraq on these grounds.

He could only sell the war by telling us that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, despite no evidence that it had any. The only way to justify attacking Iraq was to claim that we had to defend ourselves against imminent attack: in international law, only a justified belief that it is necessary to use force in self-defence is acceptable.

That is why Blair lied that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction at

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us “in 45 minutes”. Of course, if it was not necessary to use force in self-defence (which it wasn't) then the war would be (and was) an illegal act of unprovoked aggression.

Blair knew very well that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction. General Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, who had been in charge of Iraq's military industries before defecting in 1995, told the CIA that Iraq had destroyed all its remaining chemical, biological and nuclear weapons after the Gulf War. The UN inspections had indeed achieved their aim. By July last year, the UN, the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), the Foreign Office, the CIA and the State Department had all told Bush and Blair that there was no evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

'No evidence'

The US Defense Intelligence Agency reported in September that there was “no reliable evidence” that Iraq had developed chemical weapons. The IAEA said on 17 March this year that there was no “evidence of the revival of a nuclear programme”.

As Hans Blix said, yet again, on 5 June, “no evidence of weapons of mass destruction was found”. Contrary to Donald Rumsfeld, absence of evidence after such an exhaustive search is evidence of absence. If you find no fairies at the bottom of your garden, that really is because they are not there.

AS WORKERS concluded in March, “The CIA, MI6 and Mossad have all stated that the threat from Iraq is low and not immediate. (Which is why Alistair Campbell's teenage spinners, not MI6, prepared the plagiarised ‘intelligence dossier’ which Colin Powell waved at the UN.) There is no Iraqi threat.”

Compliance

If Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, then clearly it had complied with all the UN Resolutions, so the UN

'It is no surprise that politicians lie...what is surprising is that anybody is surprised that they lie...'

could not support an attack on Iraq on these grounds. But Bush and Blair, desperate to find a plausible rationale for the war that they wanted, ignored these realities.

They invaded Iraq precisely because they knew it had no major weapons with which to defend itself. The lesson? If you're a “rogue state” in the US sights, you'd better get yourself some big weapons pretty quickly.

Some were shocked that a prime minister should lie about matters as serious as a country's security. But it is no surprise that politicians lie; what is surprising is that anybody is surprised that they lie.

There is nothing new, or even New, about a Labour government lying to us about threats to our national security. The Attlee government lied that the Soviet Union was a military threat to Britain. It told this lie in order to found NATO, to let the US have bases across Britain, and to threaten the Soviet Union with nuclear attack.

Lies

We get more lies with Bush and Blair's claims to be “nation-building” in Iraq. US forces are still killing Iraqis, 97 on 13 June alone. You cannot build a nation at the same time as killing its people.

The Bush, Blair and EU governments must stop interfering in the Middle East, just as they must stop interfering in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and now Congo. Does any worker really believe that these governments, so hostile to our own interests and concerns, suddenly become caring, sharing altruists when

acting abroad?

Countries must all solve their own problems, without outside interference. Outside forces prevent the resolutions that these nations themselves must decide and create. British workers have to stop the Blair government's endless foreign interventions.

Assassinations

In the Middle East, Blair plays the same role, supporting the US and its client, Israel, while pretending to seek a peaceful solution. All during the 1990s the US gave Israel \$5 billion a year. Now the Bush government's funding, aid and advice fuel Sharon's intransigence, the main obstacle to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Every one of Sharon's recent actions, the assassinations, the attacks on civilians, was intended to destroy peace.

If Bush really wanted peace in the Middle East, he would stop arming and funding Sharon's forces, which would stop him sabotaging all prospects of peace. If Blair sincerely wanted peace, he would be telling Bush to stop supporting Sharon. But Bush and Blair only want Israeli dominance and Palestinian surrender.

Pattern

The pattern by now is perfectly clear. Britain provides the plausibility; the US provides the money and firepower. But the plausibility has now completely unravelled, and British workers are going to pay a heavy price for continuing to allow our government this role in international affairs. The job for workers now is not simply to stop one war or another, but to get rid of a government that by its very nature involves us in war after war. War is built into capitalism, from firms setting up low-wage operations in foreign countries, to the worldwide chains of military bases, ports and airfields, to the networks of aid agencies, intelligence agencies, and ‘humanitarian’ bodies. A system in absolute decline breeds wars as naturally as rats breed rats.

While the organised working class in Leeds set out to combat industrial decline and Thatcherism, down the road in Bradford things have been sadly different...

A tale of two cities



Photo: Workers

The Alhambra, Bradford — a site of rare renewal, though it is constantly short of cash

THE DECLINE of industrial cities, especially in northern England, has become a cliché. Yet they've not all suffered equally. Bradford and Leeds are an example. Within a few miles of each other, they are still large cities and have undoubtedly suffered from decline. But the outcome for one of them has been much worse.

Both Bradford and Leeds were heavily dependent on textiles and clothing. Unlike smaller towns they had a wider base, with related and specialist engineering too. These industries, and mining in that part of west Yorkshire, have all but

disappeared. No new large-scale manufacturing has moved in to replace them in contrast to other areas of the Britain, which have been compensated in part with new car plants or high technology manufacture.

At the public enquiry into Bradford's Unitary Development Plan this May, a local businessman asked that the "gateway corridor" to the city, linking it to Leeds, be upgraded through planned and concerted action. He rightly stated that the Leeds link into the centre of Bradford "creates a lasting impact in terms of poor first impressions".

His comments are backed by evidence

as well as his impassioned interest in the city's fate. Yet they were dismissed out of hand by a smug and self-satisfied council representative.

This exchange is typical of the recent past in Bradford. The city, home to 450,000 people, is a tragic shadow of its former self. Fantastic Victorian buildings which would be prized assets elsewhere lie derelict and deserted. Others house the plethora of short-term "bucket shops" which come and go around the dying heart of the city.

There are admirable cultural

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institutions in the city. The Museum of Photography, Film & Television and the Alhambra theatre have good reputations, well beyond the city. The Bradford Bulls, rugby league world champions in 2002, are truly admired. They are winners in a losing city, and have taken their game to a wider audience. But the general air is one of defeatism. Bradford is not alone; unfortunately it shares this feature with many run-down former industrial centres.

In stark contrast is the buzz that exists in neighbouring Leeds. A larger city only 8 miles away centre to centre, Leeds was once on a par with Bradford but is no more. There is still much in common, but organised labour in Leeds set out to confront the effects of industrial decline and Thatcher with some success.

When it became apparent that Thatcher's assault on industry would have a serious impact on the city, Leeds Labour council confronted the anticipated

'Bradford centre stands as a testament to how not to develop a modern city...'

problems. They set out to construct and implement a strategic plan for reconstruction of their city.

At the time it was often described as being merely cosmetic, but the shrewd planners behind the scheme understood that regeneration encompassed employment, transport and retail investment. At the heart of the plan was the need to identify the new industries and services which could and would replace the ailing clothing trade.

Leeds council showed leadership lacking in many other northern towns and

cities. For example it should be self-evident that to attract new jobs, you must identify where skills are lacking and how the workers within the area can acquire them. Leeds set about that task; many so-called regeneration plans elsewhere did not even address that practical level.

Unfortunately it was not only a lack of application that was wrong in Bradford. Every exciting diversion one could think of was pursued — especially anything that fostered division and disharmony amongst workers. The only Labour leader who formulated a unifying anti-poverty strategy was knifed by the myriad self-seekers in his own dying party.

Success story?

Leeds is now seen as a success story with its smart shops and cafes and expensive, chic apartments. It's not that straightforward of course. Within the city, the most prosperous area of Britain exists cheek by jowl with one of the poorest. There have been failures such as the Royal Armouries museum, and not all of the new jobs have lasted. With growth has come strain on transport and housing. Other less successful towns have those problems too and despite them the decisions taken a few years ago have benefited the people of the city.

Leeds is now the foremost financial centre in England outside London, close behind Edinburgh, and among the most important in western Europe. It ceased to merely hanker after the past and focused on creating a future. Other commerce has been sought and encouraged, nurtured to the point where the city has become a magnet for new investment and reconstruction with the consequent positive impact on employment.

The willingness to embrace change in Leeds has promoted an optimism reflected in an attractive, modern, popular city centre, vibrant by day and night. The contrast with Bradford could not be starker. It is run down and shabby by day, dangerous by night. Bradford centre stands as a testament to how not to

Left: money for cinemas, but not industry



Spawned by the EU, the idea of regionalising Britain is an attack on the nation state...

No to balkanisation!

develop a modern city.

Bradford council has long fostered its image as a guardian of victims. In its pursuit of such diversions it has singularly failed to grasp the nettle of securing a working future for this once-proud city. The dank, venal office blocks of the crook John Poulson still stand as monuments to the city's successive follies. And there is no sign yet of any realisation that they've done anything wrong, just bafflement at the contrast with their neighbours.

It's not that Bradford has completely ignored its problems. Regeneration schemes abound in the estates that ring Bradford, but they bring no jobs. In the inner city SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) areas, corruption is rife. Punjab politics holds sway. They bring no jobs either, just "projects". Against this backdrop, local government itself comes under intensified assault — and who would defend the indefensible?

The education system too has been under attack, in both cities. Bradford's authority was demonstrably failing and was replaced. In contrast the feeling in Leeds is that one of the reasons for the Blairite attack on its education system was a personal jealousy of the city council's success which could not be ascribed to Blair's leadership.

Yorkshire Forward

Yorkshire Forward (YF), the government's regional development arm has pulled the rug from under the feet of Bradford council's proposed regeneration project.

At the same time YF has covertly purchased a major development site in the centre of Bradford. The council knew nothing until the press found out; YF still won't say what it is up to. It is supposed to be a regeneration partner with the council, charged with working together to prepare a master plan for the district.

The government seems to be taking weak cities on in an attempt to strengthen the dead hand of regional government. Despite the fanfare and promise of a referendum few have asked for this, and fewer still believe that it will be the answer to problems in declining cities.

FRUSTRATED IN HIS ambition introduce the Euro to Britain, Blair has quickly turned to regionalisation, another plank of the European project. In the ideas of the European Union there is no place for the nation state — a concept viewed as outmoded by political sophisticates.

The favoured model is a "Europe of the Regions" made up of small, easily-controlled areas dependent on the centre for funds, paying taxes at a level dictated by Brussels. Regional government will then lobby for funds against all contenders. It is a policy of Balkanisation, of divide and rule, the politics of the begging bowl.

EU integration

The EU view is that integration can only be considered credible if member states maintain "a sufficient level of economic and social cohesion". The concept of economic cohesion is one of the three pillars of the EU, alongside the single market and economic union. Cohesion ostensibly means bringing poorer regions into line. In fact is a tool for undermining the ability of EU constituent nations to make their own decisions. Structural policy is the second most heavily funded sector in the EU after the common agricultural policy. Its aim is EU integration, and not bettering the lives of workers across Europe.

Who asked for it?

Proponents of regional government face an uphill struggle here. Few in the regions have ever asked for it, and nobody knows what it is for. In a tacit admission of failure to do the job they were elected for, government spokesmen say that regional government will be more in touch with local feeling and needs. How they will be better equipped to do that than the local government structures which will be abolished to pay for it remains a mystery.

A government consultation exercise produced only 833 people expressing an interest in Prescott's Yorkshire and Humberside region. The plan is going ahead on the established EU method of

asking the same question until the right answer is delivered.

Of course, a regional decision to save the remaining local coal mines would be popular in Yorkshire, but who imagines the EU would permit such power, when it prevents the whole of Britain having its own basic industries?

Regional identity is an idea that has little purchase in solving workers' problems. The big political issues in northern England are the same as those in the south and in Scotland and Wales. They are problems with precious little regional dimension, such industry, agriculture, transport, the NHS and education. All of them are problems which can in the end be tackled only on a national scale within the framework of a nation state.

Of course the government already has regional bodies. They sponsor development agencies like Yorkshire Forward and unelected "assemblies". All of them are in favour of regional government, thinking no doubt that they will run them.

Nonsense

Unfortunately there are some members of our class who go along with this nonsense. After 1992 demoralised and disillusioned trade unionists in the north east of England thought that separatism and nationalism could also save them from the Tories. Like Scotland and Wales they had all but eliminated Tory MPs in the region.

At that time the formula for local government funding gave more money to Scottish councils than to English ones because Scotland was a "more deprived" area.

Some Labour councillors thought that North East separation would give them more funding because they were more deprived than the rest of England. These trade unionists and councillors, who were completely out of touch with North East workers, then campaigned within the Labour Party for a North East regional assembly. It is time they buried those ideas along with Thatcherism.

How come the teacher unions are fighting each other... instead of the government?

Conspiracy against teacher unity



Delegates at NUT Conference — but unity between unions is needed as well as unity within.

THERE IS A CONSPIRACY afoot to maintain and exaggerate the divisions between teacher unions. This is led by the government in pursuit of their 'modernisation agenda', but it is also assisted by those within our unions who seize every opportunity for division and membership war.

The government found itself at the end of 2002 facing the unions united in their demand for a reduction in teacher workload, and for an end to teacher shortages. Not only had union research established beyond doubt that the level of workload had reached intolerable proportions, and that insufficient teachers could be recruited and retained for as long as it continued, but the government's own research had confirmed it. Teacher unions had won the argument hands down, and had strong support from parents, school governors and the 'general public'.

To counter this, the government

decided on a high risk, but potentially devastating strategy. They would hijack the workload and teacher shortage issues by 'bundling them up' with their long-planned proposals for 'workforce remodelling' — and attempt to 'modernise' by dividing the unions.

Margaret Hodge, then Chair of the Education Select Committee, now Minister for Children, wrote in the *NEW STATESMAN* in May 1998 under the title "Fewer Teachers, Please, Not More",

Fewer teachers

"We should be thinking of employing fewer teachers not more...In a few years, I believe, some classes will not be led by a fully trained teacher...if pupils are working from lessons on the Internet, a trained classroom assistant may be as useful as a teacher. In ten to fifteen years, I believe, there will be fewer fully trained teachers in our schools. The teachers' monopoly in the classroom will

be brought to an end... they should become an elite force backed up by trained assistants."

So, instead of the breakthrough on workload and recruitment that teachers were set to win, the government sought to establish its programme for substituting teaching assistants for qualified teachers. But how could they get this past the unions?

Making some apparent concessions on teacher workload was the first necessary step. They agreed that teachers would no longer be routinely required to undertake a range of administrative and clerical tasks, and further that all teachers would be entitled to "non-contact time" for some of their professional tasks concerning planning, preparation and assessment.

Secondly as a "something for something" deal, they insisted on making Margaret Hodge's "vision" a reality — promoting the role of teaching

assistants in teaching whole classes of children in some circumstances, and taking classes for absent teachers in others.

Crucial to their strategy, they left these matters sufficiently vague as to be open to very different interpretations. As a real inducement, they offered signatories a place at the table to determine the specific detail of changes to the teachers' contract and regulations controlling the use of teaching assistants — in return for agreement to promulgate these before they were written.

Divide and rule

They had an "outside-chance" hope of unanimous agreement, but gambled that without it they could divert the demand for workload reduction into "remodelling" if the unions were divided — and they were not to be disappointed.

By imposing a tight deadline, they ensured that the ambiguities of the proposals could not be explored, but still demanded signed agreement, the end of all industrial action over workload and "promotion and promulgation" of all aspects of the agreement. They were banking on the different unions adopting different tactical positions — and they were right.

The NUT, seeing the government's 'modernisation agenda' at work, refused to sign anything that did not guarantee real workload reduction, or which threatened to de-professionalise the teaching workforce.

The other unions saw an opportunity to get an outline agreement on workload reduction together with further talks on detail, at which they believed they could avoid the threat to professionalism. Playing down the "modernisation agenda", they signed up.

The NUT decided in January, on the recommendation of General Secretary Doug McAvoy, to seek no further amendment to government proposals, but to mobilise its members against them.

The NUT Executive agreed that all teachers should be informed about the

'The NUT Conference had a good spirit of defiance about it. But we are not the Republican Guard...'

union's position, in part through an advertising campaign. It struck a chord with the membership — but the advertising campaign also contained much negative campaigning against the other unions.

There is a numerically small but much publicised Trotskyite-led faction of the NUT, which has long opposed a single union for teachers, knowing that their ambitions could not possibly be achieved in a union with nearly half a million members. Their position has been marginalised by strong membership support for unity.

They were delighted with the attacks on the other unions, seeing an opportunity to gain ground by encouraging an increasingly strident NUT tone against the other unions, and an aggressive membership campaign, using this as a wedge to drive the unions further apart.

Lately, the government's failure to fund schools properly, and in particular the costs of "remodelling", has caused signatory unions — particularly the NAHT — to waver in their support.

The TUC tried to intervene to allow teacher union affiliates to unite on the matters they agreed on. These approaches were largely unsuccessful. The unions continuing to fight at the bottom of the pit dug for them by the government, apparently unaware for the most part of having fallen into it.

Other campaigns

These divisions have prevented any united response to other key issues facing teachers.

The imposition of a "pay freeze" was meekly accepted. A unanimous

agreement by the NUT Executive to call on the TUC to convene a meeting of all teacher affiliates to discuss a joint salaries campaign was never acted upon as a result of the acrimony over the agreement.

The prospect of a joint campaign against the professionally despised SATs testing regime has been undermined. It was disunity over the previous SATs

If the aim is for teachers to prevent excessive workload, to protect children from a two-tier education system dominated by narrow testing and selection, to prevent the deprofessionalisation of education, to begin to reassert our professional control of education, there is no foundation to be had in disunity, sectarian and factional manoeuvring and internecine warfare.

Blair and Clarke will be well pleased. They see teacher trade unionism as a major obstacle to public sector "modernisation".

The NUT Conference had a very good spirit of defiance about it. But we are not Saddam's Republican Guard. We don't need a Comical Ali to tell us that we will turn the tanks back without any problem — as they roll up the garden path. It is not "militant" to wait for the whistle and go over the top with only half the troops ready to fight.

Held to account

Fifteen public sector unions are soon to discuss a response to "modernisation". We know that this mix of deregulation, fragmentation, competition, privatisation and de-skilling, will not only produce worsening standards, but is designed to undermine pay, conditions and, most importantly for Blair, the trade union organisation that, he complained, left "scars on his back".

Will teacher unions respond with renewed unity? Or will sectarian attacks continue, undermining strategic opposition, and preventing us from looking forward in terms of our own policies for education? Future generations of teachers will rightly hold us to account for what happens next.

Every year the tiny village of Tolpuddle becomes a magnet for the labour movement — remembering one of the key events in British

Transported for “administering unlawful oaths”

ONCE A YEAR hundreds of trade union members and socialists descend on the little Dorset village of Tolpuddle to celebrate an important chapter in trade union history. In 1834 six farm workers were arrested for unlawful assembly, tried, transported to New South Wales and then pardoned. They returned as heroes of the trade union movement. What is the story behind these events?

Through the 18th century the enclosure of lands accelerated. This theft of property, which saw poorer farmers swept from their lands, and the loss of common land, was, as Marx said, necessary for the introduction of capitalist agriculture, whilst providing labour for the growing needs of industry. In most rural areas the bulk of the population became waged labourers, working for large landowners or their tenants.

The population was rising rapidly and there were too many day labourers. Once the Napoleonic Wars finished, the labour market was swamped with returning soldiers and sailors. At the same time threshing machines were being

introduced, which meant fewer jobs. Before this, threshing had provided winter work for labourers.

It was very hard for workers to take action. Combination Acts were passed in 1799 and 1800, which made it difficult for workers to act together, although in fact many still did. It was the reserve army of unemployed which made action hard for the unskilled, such as farm labourers. Combination was difficult to maintain and action often degenerated into violence.

New laws

However, in 1824 a new Combination Law did declare that combination should not be illegal, but violence or threats would still be grounds for prosecution. From then on, attempts were made to combine workers, especially into a general union.

1830 saw deep unrest in the countryside. Riots began in Kent in June with the firing of ricks, barns and houses. This then spread to the destruction of threshing machines. The Swing Riots, as they came to be called, really took off in

November, as they spread through the south and east, in particular through Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset.

A crowd of rioters destroyed William Coward's machine at Woolland. Next day they demanded money from a small farmer and blacksmith, then smashed a machine on John Pount's farm “with a great noise and blowing of horns”.

The riots lasted only a few days and many men were arrested. The government acted ruthlessly and appointed a special commission to punish the rioters. Although some were sentenced to death, this was often commuted to transportation to Australia or Van Diemen's land (Tasmania). A ballad of the time includes the following verse about this:

We labour hard from morn to
night, until our bones do ache.
Then everyone we must obey,
their mouldy beds to make.
We often wish, when we lay
down, we ne'er may rise no
more
To meet our savage Governors
upon van Diemen's shore.



the organised
sh labour history...

ths”

There was little to show for the riots in terms of higher wages, although threshing machines did decline for a few years. In fact the wage of an agricultural labourer dropped from 9 shillings in 1830 to 6 shillings in 1834.

Somewhen between 1831 and 1833 the men of Tolpuddle, led by George Loveless, set up a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. It grew rapidly and it was agreed that the men would not accept work for less than 10 shillings a week. The authorities were scared of a repetition of the 1830 riots and arrested six men, including George Loveless, his brother, brother-in-law and his son, for unlawful assembly.

In March 1834 they were accused of “administering unlawful oaths” which was illegal according to an Act of 1797, passed to deal with a naval mutiny and never repealed. They were all found guilty, despite the fact that one of them had not even been present at the meeting. They were sentenced to seven years transportation in the penal colony in New South Wales, Australia.

But they became popular heroes, supported even by the TIMES, and in the face of public pressure the government had to rescind the sentences. Only one returned to Tolpuddle. Three emigrated to Canada, where their descendants still live.

In 1834 the TUC erected six memorial cottages in the village and founded the Tolpuddle Museum. The court where they were sentenced is open to the public as part of West Dorset District Council’s HQ.

Today, there are still real problems for agricultural workers. April’s wage settlement, covering 150,000 workers, which runs from July 2003 to October 2004 takes the standard rate to £5.10 in July and £5.15 in October. The craft rate will rise to £6.02.

The impossibility of buying houses in rural areas on low wages combined with the increasing influx of ununionised foreign workers, make organisation in this sector as necessary as it was back in 1834.

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.

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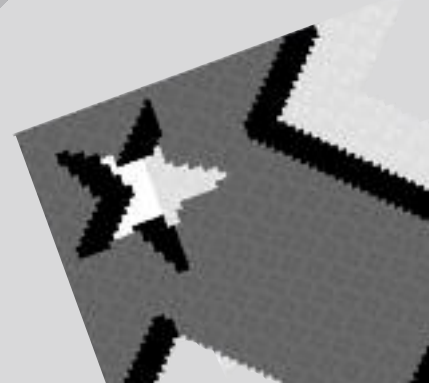
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Back to Front – Keeping control

‘It was hardly surprising after 25 years of pay increases tied to those of other workers that the FBU should begin to lose control over the issue of pay...’

FIREFIGHTERS TOOK a realistic but courageous decision at their union’s special conference on 12 June in accepting their employers’ latest pay offer of 16% following nine months of struggle. The Fire Brigades Union has a proud class conscious tradition of maintaining total control of the workplace and manning levels, and it was this that the government was out to destroy.

It was hardly surprising after 25 years of having their pay increases tied to those of other workers by a special pay formula, and 25 years of not submitting or struggling for pay claims, that the FBU should begin to lose control over the issue of pay. It was also no surprise that there were tactical mistakes as a result.

There was the unrealistic 40% pay claim that other workers could not relate to. And the unrealistic call to other workers to rely on the FBU’s legal opinion that workers could leave their work if they felt at risk of inadequate fire cover in a strike — this was supposed to lead to the closure of transport, cinemas, offices and premiership football matches, but it didn’t.

Again, it did not resonate with other workers except for a handful of class-conscious London Tube drivers who risked their jobs for the FBU. The alienation of their natural allies and fellow emergency workers in the ambulance service, over extracting people from road traffic accidents and constant reference to the

Professional Association of Paramedics instead of their union UNISON was unnecessary.

Ironically, these same ambulance workers, with a strong communist presence among the leadership, are close to a winning a pay deal that will yield over £32,000 a year to the most skilled, while their union tries to build the same control over the workplace that the FBU rightly seeks. And of course, there were and still are the calls of the ultra-left for the FBU to emulate the Charge of the Light Brigade. They will now be seeking to replace one set of generals with another — their own.

It’s time now for the FBU to regroup and to fight a guerrilla struggle over the conditions of the pay deal, and to regain and retain that working class control the government desperately wants to destroy. Using guerrilla tactics, the FBU has a tremendous capacity to confound, to beat the enemy where it is weak, withdraw when it is strong and to harry the enemy when it pursues.

These are supreme tactics of active defence and the FBU can still inspire the working class by demonstrating their imagination in developing these industrial tactics rather than falling into the ultra left’s divisive game over whose turn it is to be the general.

Although this battle is over, there is still a war to fight.

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