

WORKERS

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FIGHTING BACK OVER PENSIONS



Blair's Iraq quagmire

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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE FIGHT for pensions (see “Pensions plan threatened”, p3) cannot take place in isolation. It has got to be part of the fight for the future of Britain. Our pensions are a vital part of our wages and salaries, and as with our wages, employers and their governments always seek to keep pensions as low as possible.

But there’s another link. The decimation of Britain’s wealth-producing heart, manufacturing, and the huge job loss associated with it, is steadily reducing the numbers of people in work (see “The relentless rise of unemployment”, p13) and paying contributions. Those workers who have tolerated the jobs massacre are putting our and their own future pensions in jeopardy. And those who have tolerated the massive expansion of private pensions should reflect on how these have contributed to the decline of British industry — £250 billion of pensions money has been invested

overseas since 1979.

With the state pension set up on the ‘pay as you go’ basis, each year’s contributions are fully paid out to those who have retired, without any contributions being held back.

That is as it should be, but the whole idea is anathema to capitalism — because it implies some kind of social control over the level of pension.

On the other hand, private pension funds seek to accumulate more contributions than are needed for immediate payout. So the funds build up but at the same time they fall outside of our control. Financiers, out to make a fast buck from our money, use the funds to gamble on the stock exchange.

An expanded ‘pay as you go’ scheme would leave little room for robbery and speculation. No wonder capitalists want to get rid of State Pensions altogether.

Second opinion

THE ILLEGAL 37-year US occupation of Diego Garcia and related islands by the US military has now been extended by the British government. The forcible deportation of the islanders in 1967, to create a vast US military base threatening the Middle East and Indian Ocean, was authorised by the British government, which leased the islands to the US. After 30 years of legal challenge, the High Courts ruled in 2000 that the islands should be

returned to the indigenous people.

Now, using feudal legislation dating back nearly 800 years, the Labour government has bypassed Parliament, set aside the High Court ruling and arbitrarily extended the US occupation. The arrogance of the British government clinging to territories seized by imperialist aggression is only matched by the warmongering ambitions of US imperial might.



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Rebuilding Britain

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Pensions plan threatened

THE FINANCE INDUSTRY is leading an assault on government proposals to fund a rescue package of £400 million to help the 60,000 workers whose pension entitlements have been destroyed by failed company pension schemes or outright fraud.

Despite the scandals of the looted pension schemes, the industry is raising every conceivable objection and obstacle to the reforms. These include ensuring any regulatory body can consult but cannot bite, and blocking "levy" proposals to protect the pensions and insurance companies from having to cover collapsed pension schemes.

The industry also wants to ensure that any pensioner bailed out by the government's rescue scheme has benefit entitlement clawed back. The financiers are fighting tooth and claw to ensure the elderly and vulnerable remain in poverty. Over 5 million pensioners are eligible for additional means-tested state benefits — effectively half of all pensioners.

The misuse of pension funds in the private sector is echoed by recent revelations about the Local Government Pension Scheme, which covers council employees. In the early 1990s ministers, alarmed by the revolt against Thatcher's poll tax, encouraged councils to keep the tax down by raiding their employees' pension schemes. Councils were allowed to do a "Maxwell" — switching money from the pension funds into council coffers until only 75% of the money needed to pay for pensions was left.

Many did exactly that. At the last valuation in 2001 councils such as Surrey, Kent and Newham had failed to grow their pension funds back to the 100% level needed to be able to pay out to pensioners. As a result, a number are now having to switch money the other way — from council tax into pensions — to meet their liabilities. Surrey still has a 25% deficit. Council fund values, invested heavily in shares in a falling stock market, have collapsed.

So what is the Labour government's response to this past daylight robbery of workers' money? Just do the same again. It has forced through new rules that give workers a choice between working five years longer before retiring or face swingeing cuts in pension. Local government minister Nick Raynsford and his boss John Prescott take the view that council workers get "gold standard" pensions and should be grateful. Yet the average pension payout to a retiring council worker is less than £4000 a year, and death benefits are twice salary, while the private sector average is four times salary.

And the reason this is happening now? So that council pension fund trustees can start to include the savings in their calculations, conveniently easing pressure on council tax in time to coincide with the next general election.

RUSSIA Health workers sacked

AROUND 300,000 Russian doctors and health workers, half the health workforce, are expected to be sacked as part of the 'reform' and 'modernisation' of the Russian health service.

Such is the latest proposal from the Russian government — enthusiastically supported by the World Bank. More than 500,000 hospital beds and wards are expected to be shut.

Russia spends 2.9% of its GDP on health. This is 80% less than comparable nations in the West. One of the last remaining jewels from the days of the Soviet Union, cradle-to-grave health care throughout the vast lands of Russia, is to be demolished. Private clinics and private healthcare will be fostered to fill the void.

RAILWAYS Billions for profiteers

THIS YEAR, the government is paying out £5.32 billion to the myriad companies involved in our railways. This is four times the amount that governments used to spend on British Rail.

Now we have twice as many late trains as with BR, and all that the government can promise us for the future are higher fares and more cuts in services.

Meanwhile, costs escalate, and all land on the taxpayer. For example, the train companies need to find another £7 billion to use the tracks, but their contracts protect them from having to pay this money themselves. As a result, the full cost lands on the government, and, via them, on us.

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

FORENSIC SCIENCE**First-ever national strike**

ON 9 JUNE forensic scientists in England and Wales, members of the Prospect and Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), took part in the first-ever national strike in the service, in response to a pay offer worth only 1.1%. Picket lines were mounted outside laboratories in Chorley in Lancashire, Wetherby in West Yorkshire, Birmingham, London, Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire and Chepstow in Monmouthshire.

PCS general secretary Paul Noon said, "Offering dedicated public servants with a worldwide reputation for excellence only 1.1% is derisory. Their evidence is often crucial to a case, requiring a high degree of skilful analysis and years of training, yet they are the poorest paid professionals in the criminal justice system."

Currently the service is an executive agency of the Home Office serving all 43 police forces in England and Wales. But the Blair government has put forward plans to privatise the service in 2005. The union believes that the derisory pay offer is a crude attempt to keep down costs ahead of the controversial plans to privatise the service.

UNIVERSITIES**Swansea closures**

RICHARD DAVIES, vice-chancellor of Swansea University, is trying to close five of its departments: Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Development Studies and Chemistry. Students due to start their courses at the threatened departments this autumn received letters from Davies telling them that they would not be able to come and study at Swansea after all.

The Association of University Teachers and the National Union of Students are both strongly opposing the proposed closures. An emergency injunction has prevented the vice-chancellor from taking any further steps towards closure.

Meanwhile, a new report from the Association of University Teachers shows that higher education was better off under the Conservatives. Public spending on higher education fell by 7.5% in real terms between 1994-95 and 2003-04. In 1994-95, 0.64% of GDP was spent on it, compared with 0.63% this year. The reason is a 56% fall in real-term public spending on student support, from £3.7 billion in 1994-95 to just £1.6 billion this year.



19 June: relaxing at the rally after the march for pensions (see story, p3)

Mail privatisation chaos

THE POST OFFICE may be back in the black financially, going from a £197 million loss in 2003 to a £220 million profit in March 2004, but the service is in turmoil and faces further chaos. For over 20 years until 2000, effectively the Royal Mail was the golden goose for successive governments. Always in profit, providing an effective, secure, twice daily delivery and collection service, let alone hundreds of millions of £s into the Treasury coffers. Since 2000, when the government moved towards implementing the EU directive to privatise the post, the system has started to collapse.

The Royal Mail has failed all service delivery performance targets. In 2002-2003, the Royal Mail was fined £7.5 million by the Regulator for poor and inadequate service. The service has now slipped further. It is expected that further fines will be announced later in the year, with an expected sum of £80 million being paid in compensation to business customers. In delivery, collection and sorting, 30,000 jobs are being cut, over 1100 post offices closed, the parcel service effectively hived off.

Staff morale has collapsed while the six Royal Mail executives shared over £2.8 million in salaries and bonus payments. The Royal Mail's proposal to change the basis of payment of post and packages from weight to size is a sleight of hand intended to undermine competition already gathering from competitor EU countries. The shift in accounting, from loss to profit, was only really achieved by the increase in the cost of the first class stamp.

This false financial bloom has to be set against a collapsed system. The orchestration behind the scenes to ensure that the Royal Mail fails is really about making its new competitors look attractive. Remember the stalking horse Mercury and its battle with BT? Or the anarchy in the rail network now painfully limping back to a unified single rail network? Or the competition in electricity, gas, water and even telephone directory enquiries?

From all the deliberate chaos, state monopoly is destroyed and private monopoly emerges. This is the real goal of the government in implementing instructions from the European Union.

UNDERGROUND**£455 million for consultants**

THE PART-PRIVATISATION of London Underground has resulted in a taxpayers' bill of £455 million. To hand over a national asset, paid for and financed over decades by the public, we have paid this vast sum of money in legal fees, consultancy charges, advisers' bills.

John Prescott should be proud of setting the world record for rip-off charges and the fattening of legal businesses — another first for Labour in proving its capitalist CV. The coincidental 30-year engineering contracts, supposedly to modernise the Tube, will result in over £15.7 billion falling into the coffers of 'private' enterprise. Profit returns of 20% will be made, a third higher than previous private finance investment robberies.

Mines under EU threat

ANOTHER EU DIRECTIVE, supposedly intended to reduce sulphur emissions and due to be in place by 2015, now directly threatens six out of the remaining eight deep mines left working in Britain. Nine thousand miners' jobs are at risk, and the effect will be to topple the whole British coal industry into bankruptcy and closure.

Environmental improvements and controls can be achieved if coupled with the technology, which produces 'clean coal'. Clean coal technology requires industry, it requires investment, and it requires long-term commitment. Quick fit solutions to arbitrarily cut emissions are about failure to invest and doing things on the cheap.

The alternative to deep mining is opencast or imports. Anyone who has lived near an opencast mine will be aware of the dirt, dust, and scarred landscape for years. And of course it is ludicrous that Britain, this island of coal, imports more coal than ever while rushing to close its indigenous industry.

The EU directive is not about pollution but is intended to destroy the rump of British coalmining. The government and civil servants overseeing the implementation of the directive are continuing Thatcher's bloodlust against the mining industry and communities.

MOTOR INDUSTRY

Rover heads for China

MG ROVER has announced that it intends to build its new medium-sized car range in China. This is the car range that is said to herald the guarantee of MG Rover's long-term future. Alarm bells at Longbridge should be going at decibel levels. The demise and closure of the plant will be determined by how long it takes to complete the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation complex.

As has been regularly reported in WORKERS, the "saving" of MG Rover by the Phoenix Venture Company is solely about asset stripping and closure. MG Rover will not need a British and Chinese plant. One will shut and unless the unions act it will be Longbridge. The clock is ticking.

AIRLINES

Pilots call time

EUROPEAN UNION transport ministers have unexpectedly rejected their own proposal to extend cockpit hours from 12 to a maximum of 14 hours, and to reduce rest breaks and stopover periods. The move came after a campaign spearheaded by Balpa, the British Airline Pilots Association.

Balpa had delivered clear evidence that fatal air accidents were linked to excessive hours, and this was coupled with a developing campaign for industrial action across Europe. "Research proves that you are six times likelier to have an air accident when the pilot has flown 13 hours or more. Rather than take that risk, we

will be instructing pilots to refuse to fly when tired," said a spokesman.

That threat on its own was sufficient to roll back a united alliance of employers, government and EU. The airlines wanted the extended hours, the British Transport Minister wanted the extended hours, the EU committee which proposed the extension was chaired by a British MEP now dumped after the 10 June election.

It is only fitting that a British trade union took the lead in shooting them down. Passenger and staff safety remain central for the aviation trade unions.

Meanwhile, baggage handlers and check-in staff at 17 major British airports have voted to take industrial action in a pay dispute with ground handling agency Aviance.

GMB senior organiser Ed Blisset warned that the action could cause massive disruption, as it will involve dispatchers — people who deal with the weight and balance of loaded aircraft — who are not easily replaced.

FOOD

United York campaign

WORKERS at Nestlé Rowntree sweet factory in York have joined the campaign of Terry's chocolate factory workers in trying to keep the 250-year-old industry in the city.

Petitions and public campaigning by the GMB are trying to persuade US-owned Kraft to relocate the factory to a purpose-built site in the York district. This would free up the centrally located works for redevelopment, while at the same time preserving the industrial base of York.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Friday 16 July to Sunday 18 July

Annual Tolpuddle March and Rally, Tolpuddle, Dorset

Celebrate one of the seminal struggles of British trade unionism with music, speeches and a march. Highlights for this year's festival include Billy Bragg, the Oyster Band, Brendan Coker, and sounds from Havana group Asere.

Saturday 17 July

Respect 2004, London

Victoria Park, Hackney, from 12pm to 8.30pm — free, lively and loud, the festival returns to the East End park after last year's foray into the lifeless Dome. Sponsors include Unison and SERTUC. For more information see www.respectfestival.org.uk

GAMBLING

Las Vegas comes to Britain

THE GOVERNMENT'S latest big idea is to legalise US-style "super casinos" across Britain. Its proposals favour foreign companies like MGM Mirage, which owns half of Las Vegas' hotels and casinos, and South Africa's Sun International. A representative of the US gambling firm Las Vegas Sands — clearly an expert on what we need to rebuild Britain — said that the government's initiative would bring significant regeneration benefits.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport says this is part of a tougher approach to protect vulnerable gamblers. They will be telling us next that 24/7 drinking protects vulnerable drinkers, that 24/7 fast food joints protect vulnerable consumers, and that licensed loan sharks protect vulnerable debtors.

Tessa Jowell, who is apparently the Culture Secretary, said the government was putting the interests of children and vulnerable gamblers "first, second and third". The interests of billionaire US and British gambling company magnates of course are not ranked.

She said that the government would monitor any increase in problem gambling and pointed out that currently, "Britain has one of the lowest rates of problem gambling in the modern world." Well, the government's new scheme should certainly bring us quickly up to US levels!

North Korea and the US lies

CHARLES PRITCHARD, former US special envoy to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who recently resigned in protest against Bush administration policies there, has spoken out again. He says that North Korea will not test a bomb or missiles while there are talks, attended also by South Korea, the United States, China, Japan and Russia.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) honoured its side of the 1994 Agreement with the US government, by carrying out its one specific commitment, to suspend its plutonium production facilities. The US, on the other hand, did not carry out its commitments.

The US failed to install the promised nuclear-powered generating capacity to replace the DPRK's plutonium-producing reactors. It failed to move towards the promised full normalisation of political and economic relations, and targeted the DPRK with its nuclear weapons, contrary to the Agreement.

The DPRK had warned that if the USA did not supply the promised alternative energy sources, it would have to restart its nuclear power programme. After the US failed to carry out its side of the Agreement, the DPRK restarted its uranium-enrichment programme.

In January 2002, Bush named the DPRK as part of the Axis of Evil, a US target. Only then did the DPRK declare that it had the right to develop nuclear weapons in response to the US threats.

In October 2002, the DPRK offered to shut down this programme if the USA committed itself to normalise relations, as it had already promised, and not to attack the DPRK. The US government refused and broke off negotiations.

Recognition

The DPRK wants diplomatic recognition from the USA — only the USA, Japan and France do not already recognise it — and a treaty of non-aggression and peace, ending the still-existing state of war with the USA, never resolved after the Korean War when the US government refused to honour the terms of the Armistice Agreement. The October 1953 talks at Panmunjom were ruptured when the US delegate walked out.

In the five years after the armistice, the USA turned South Korea into a military and nuclear base. At the same time, it broke Article 15 of the Agreement, which prohibited any form of blockade against the DPRK: it drew the so-called Northern Limit Line in Korea's West Sea [the Yellow Sea], and began a naval blockade which it maintained for decades.

The USA still has 37,000 troops illegally occupying South Korea, and currently plans to spend an extra \$11 billion to strengthen its grip on the South. The DPRK has every right to defend itself against any threats to its independence.

With British troops in Iraq set to soar and Blair are seeking to drag NATO into

Running out of reserves in

DESPITE THE STRONG opposition in Britain to the Iraq war, it has been leaked that Blair is planning to send 3,000 more troops, as part of a Nato force. Blair hopes that this will be formally agreed at the Nato summit in Istanbul just before the handover to the newly appointed government in Iraq on 30 June. Coming after the announcement of 600 more troops earlier in the same week increasing numbers already there to 9,200, we must ask where will this all end? And more to the point, what can we do to stop it?

We are becoming a nation of mercenaries for the protection of US oil supplies. When Blair said, "The very reason we're taking the action we are is nothing to do with oil," the tortured syntax betrayed the lie. General Anthony Zinni, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the other hand, could use a simple, honest sentence: "Access to energy drives all US policy in the region."

Consider where the USA locates its 725 military bases around the world, and it is clear that General Zinni's observation also applies much further afield than Iraq or even the Middle East. Many of the bases are for control of oil and gas pipelines — in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Turkey, Egypt, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and its six secret bases in Israel. The proposed Trans-Afghan oil and gas pipelines run south from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, to Pakistan's port of Gwadar.

Similarly, in Eastern Europe, the US Camps Bondsteel and Monteith in Kosovo are astride the proposed Trans-Balkan pipeline, running from Georgia through Bulgaria to Albania's port of Vlora. Camp Sarafovo is in Burgas, home to Bulgaria's biggest oil refinery, and the camp at Constanta dominates the centre of Romania's oil industry.

Slouching towards fascism

The US ruling class is moving relentlessly towards fascism, marked by a pattern of escalating aggression against any country it considers to be exerting independence. So Bush draws up his hit list and threatens 60 countries.

In the USA itself, corporatism, vast military spending, corruption, huge government debts, destruction of liberties and Goebbels-like propaganda all feed the drive to fascism. US democracy, always offering only a choice between evils, is now mocked, and only sustained and purposeful action by the American people can save what remains of it.

We cannot be smug, about the situation here, which is not so different, as the veteran commentator Anthony Sampson recently wrote: "Relentless pressure was exerted by a small group in No. 10 who were determined to execute their own prearranged policy for war, and to justify it to parliament and the media. That overriding power not only led to basic distortions of the truth, it represented a threat to the democratic process itself."

Who told us that disarmed, starved Iraq, not the USA, was the threat to peace in the Middle East? Who told us that attacking Iraq was the way to beat al-Qaeda? Blair's warmongering is directly harming Britain.

Torture

The US and British governments have illegally ordered their armed forces to occupy Iraq. These governments have also illegally authorised the use of torture. 75 complaints of deaths in custody, deaths through shootings and cases of alleged ill-treatment have been made against British forces.

The US state uses Guantanamo Bay as a camp for political prisoners, complete with torture, just like the British Empire used the Andaman Islands

over 10,000 and the US running out of fresh manpower, Bush
their disastrous war for oil...

the war for oil



Heads down: US troops in Iraq forced to listen to Donald Rumsfeld. Now more troops, including more British troops, are being sent

in the Bay of Bengal from 1858 to 1945. Lord Justice Steyn rightly described it as a “monstrous failure of justice” where in the face of “utter lawlessness” the British government’s approach, claiming to make representations behind the scenes, will not do.

When Iraq displayed five US POWs, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was quick to complain that this violated the Geneva Conventions. The Conventions, which the USA signed in 1955, prohibit torture and ill treatment of any detainees, whether POWs, unlawful combatants, security detainees or hostages. Torture or inhumane treatment of any POW is a war crime (Geneva III, article 130), just as it is of any civilian (Geneva IV, article 147).

The Convention against Torture, signed by the USA in 1994, says, “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency may be invoked as justification for torture”.

International lawlessness

As Gerry Adams commented on another well-known instance of torture, in Northern Ireland: “To the victor, the spoils.” Geneva means nothing to the US. Yet Rumsfeld’s staff prepared a paper that advised President Bush he was not bound by the international laws banning the torture of prisoners. It said: “The prohibition against torture must

be construed as inappropriate to interrogations undertaken pursuant to commander-in-chief authority.”

The USA has illegally prevented the International Committee of the Red Cross access to Saddam Hussein: the Geneva Conventions specifically empower the ICRC to have unfettered, multiple access to POWs and all other detainees (Geneva III, articles 9 and 125).

Such gross and continuing violations of international law must be condemned by the British government. Failing that, we must bring them down or face the consequences of being allies and accomplices to war criminals. Senior diplomats and law lords have played their part: workers’ organisations have yet to play theirs.

Britain's NHS is sick, hooked on importing workers to maintain here, it is robbing the world's developing countries of the life-a

The NHS: where have all the health worke

THE NHS HAS a long and dishonourable tradition of poaching overseas trained staff and of enticing young people from developing countries to come to Britain to train.

Alternatively you could say that health professionals around the globe give up the struggle of fighting for better conditions in their own land and seek to find an easier way elsewhere. Every overseas worker makes a conscious decision to come here, although often on the basis of poor information.

Recently the exploits of some of the private agencies, who have asked overseas nurses to part with large sums of cash, confiscated their legal documents, paid them a pittance and have expected them to cook and clean, have hit the headlines. These agencies, people traffickers in effect, represent one end of the spectrum of a huge market in labour.

This movement of labour has its origins in one phenomenon only: poor pay and conditions in the country of origin being used to depress wages and conditions in the country of destination. To put it bluntly, here is a concerted effort by states in the developed world to use low pay abroad to lower pay rates at home.

A long tradition

Although the scale of the movement of labour has grown in recent years, almost since its inception the NHS has had an unhealthy dependence on overseas labour.

Many people remember the huge influx of nurses and student nurses from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s. That influx was associated with a range of injustices — in particular the fact that

many of the student nurses with a good education were placed on the enrolled nurse programmes in order to qualify and join the workforce within two years rather than the three-year registered nurse programme and then found themselves unable to progress up the career ladder.

Much less prominence has been given



to the NHS dependence on overseas doctors. Non-EU overseas doctors currently account for 33 per cent of senior house officer posts and 14 per cent of pre-registration house officer posts. In many district general hospitals more than two thirds of junior doctors have trained overseas.

Recently Peter Trewby, a consultant at Darlington hospital, along with a junior colleague, Anand Lokare, reported in the *HEALTH SERVICES JOURNAL* on a study they conducted on the applicants for three junior posts at their hospital. In October 2003 they received a staggering 806 applicants for the three posts, of which all but three were overseas applicants.

The researchers asked all the overseas applicants about their motivation for applying. Overwhelmingly the applicants said that they hoped to gain more experience and a postgraduate diploma.

But only one applicant was positive about training they had received in Britain. Many more described financial stress, housing expenses, and registration and visa costs. Many had believed (erroneously) that having taken the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board Test (PLAB) that they would quickly

find work.

Trewby and Lokare analysed the CVs of the 806 doctors in the sample and calculated the total time in unemployment to be 753 wasted doctor years. A quarter of the candidates had spent more than one year unemployed, 10 per cent had been unemployed more than two years.

Another practical consequence of overseas recruitment waves is that it creates peaks and troughs in workforce development. This is seen in general practice in London where currently a significant group of doctors originally from the

Indian subcontinent are all now retiring at the same time. The problems which led to the high vacancy rate 40 years ago remain unresolved: the sickness levels of the patients, the poor practice premises and high insurance costs. Sadly in some areas the TB rate is little changed.

As reported in last month's *WORKERS* there has at last been some expansion in medical school places in Britain, but most of that expansion will be taken up by the need to cover the career breaks of an increasing number of female doctors and an increasing trend to part-time working.

Britain's unethical policy

Since October 2001 the NHS has had an ethical recruitment policy which is intended to protect developing countries from targeting by recruitment agencies, to protect the nurses who come here from exploitation and to ensure that those who do come here are properly qualified.

service. Instead of training new staff l-death expertise they need...

is gone?

‘Although the scale of the movement of labour has grown in recent years, almost since its inception the NHS has had an unhealthy dependence on overseas labour...’

The code has exceptions where there are specific agreements between governments. This currently includes South Africa, the Philippines, Indonesia and parts of India. Given the acute need of some of those countries — South Africa has already lost nearly 14 % of its healthcare workforce to HIV/AIDS — the code is profoundly unethical.

The agreement in South Africa is constantly overridden by the actions of private agencies and anyway cannot prevent individuals applying to the NHS directly. In 2002 Ephraim Mafalo, president of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, put it bluntly: “If Britain keeps taking on nurses from this country, it will drain us of all the expertise we need to serve the community.”

Average life expectancy in South Africa is currently 60 and is set to fall to 40 by the year 2008 if the Aids epidemic continues at its present rate. Even without the unethical brain drain, it is already a workforce that is quite literally wasting away.

Around the world

Not all workers have the clarity of Ephraim Mafalo. Despite their own problems with HIV/AIDS and other major health problems, the General Secretary of the Nigerian Nursing Association says there are 30,000 nurses without jobs in Nigeria, and the association encourages nurses to go out of the country since the government cannot give them jobs or pay

them properly.

Likewise in Uganda there is significant nurse unemployment, and their health minister, Brigadier Muwhezi, is going for option three in the ICN report and looking for compensation for exporting his people, saying the country is not against those who want to move abroad but that exporting countries should all benefit from it.

But the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Association is taking on the health minister. Its vice president Jemimah Mutabaazi recently said, “How can we talk about training nurses to export, when in our own hospitals we do not have nurses and have a problem with malnutrition?” She went on to say there are substantial problems with nurses being abused and exploited.

In the Philippines the situation is unique in scale. The country has been the largest provider of overseas nurses to Britain for the past four years, and accounted for 5,500 of those who joined the NMC register from overseas last year. There are now nearly 20,000 Filipino nurses registered with our NMC.

The USA now has a commission for Graduate Foreign Nursing Schools, and Barbara Nichols of the US commission recently reported that the Philippines will be opening up to 40 new schools of nursing to keep up with world demand. Where once there were banana republics, will there now be nursing republics?

The US commission also noted that many Filipino physicians are now undertaking two-year programmes to become nurses as well. Retrain your doctors as nurses to meet the export market? Where will this global merry-go-round end?

These are the words of Mireille Kingma, nurse consultant at the International Council of Nurses: “The idea of building a workforce for export is becoming more popular. The United Nations encourages it, and the reason is that those nurses send money home. So

The crisis in nurse recruitment

LAST YEAR ALONE more than 13,500 overseas nurses registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Much less publicity was given to the fact that the number of British nurses going abroad was 8,000.

The number of British-trained nurses registering in the USA has grown from 211 in 1993 to 2,200 in 2002. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) in a recent report entitled *International Nurse Mobility*, highlighted that it expects the US to be the biggest player as it predicts a shortfall of one million nurses in the US in the next decade.

The true scale of the international merry-go-round is hard to quantify as figures only exist for qualified nurses. But it is clear from ethnicity figures that up to 80% of student nurses at some London universities are African. The rules state that they must have lived in Britain for three years before starting their programme but nevertheless they represent thousands of young people who could have been nurses in their country of origin.

The International Nurse Mobility report was hard hitting, and the solutions it proposes should exercise thought across the globe. The analysis stated that a brain drain of young, highly skilled labour can leave a donor country with a depleted workforce and severely affect the quantity and quality of health services. The report criticises developed countries for the trade in qualified staff and states that they should grow their own. It goes on to suggest three solutions:

- Improve pay, working conditions and the prestige of nursing in donor countries
- Encourage bilateral agreements
- Recruiting countries should pay compensation to the poorer, supplying countries

While the first solution clearly flows from the analysis the latter two do not.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

instead of male workers migrating to townships and living in shacks, workers of the 21st century both male and female are to migrate thousands of miles leaving families behind.”

British workers

Both UNISON and the Royal College of Nurses have voiced their opposition to overseas recruitment and have stated that it is not a solution to the recruitment and retention crisis in the NHS. Yet much of the opposition has focused on the maltreatment and injustices faced by overseas nurses rather than on questioning the whole process of overseas recruitment.

Demands have also been made on government to extend to the private sector the recruitment regulations that apply to the NHS. But as both UNISON and the RCN have already pointed to the fact that regulation is not working in the NHS, what is the use of extending an

unworkable code to the private sector? And if British workers listen to workers' organisations abroad they will see that they do not have any faith in the efficacy of our government's codes or regulations.

Note carefully the words of the General Secretary of the RCN, Beverly Malone (an American), quoted in the *NURSING STANDARD* on 19 May this year: “I would never describe the use of Filipino nurses as unethical. It is a strategic decision to export nurses. The weak point is the independent sector. Nurses are brought here under false pretences and something needs to be done.”

A strategic decision to export nurses? RCN members will have to deal with Beverly Malone, as they have clearly stated that exporting nurses is not a solution and is unethical.

Campaign

The most effective campaign to tackle overseas recruitment in the NHS would be one that never mentions the words overseas recruitment; it would mention retention instead. The Department of

Health's Director of Human Resources Andrew Foster reported at the beginning of May that staff turnover costs the NHS at least £1.5 billion a year. He warned NHS managers that this figure was probably an underestimate as it ignored the additional costs of losing the productivity of experienced staff, the learning curve of new staff, and the staff time spent in teaching new staff.

The alternative to ever-rising overseas recruitment lies in retaining existing staff and recruiting sufficient new staff to match retirements. Retention means addressing the pay and conditions of existing staff, not importing staff happy to work on low pay and thereby exacerbating the very problem the NHS needs to address. Rather than spending £1.5 billion paying for staff turnover, why not transfer those funds into salaries? You know it makes sense!

Whether NHS staff succeed in dealing with overseas recruitment is intimately tied up with whether they are successful in implementing the new pay framework, Agenda for Change, so that skill is

And now the European Union makes things worse...

UNTIL RECENTLY THERE has not been major movement of labour within the European Union healthcare sector. Why move from the Netherlands, Germany and France for worse pay and conditions in the NHS? Enlargement on 1 May could significantly change trends.

The President of the Latvian Nurses Association, Jolante Zalite, has already sounded the alarm. The Latvians, with a national vacancy rate among nurses, have already experienced an aggressive recruitment campaign by Norwegian agencies — this was largely unsuccessful because of language difficulties — but they fear British recruitment agencies.

Poland is also worried about the consequences. Lucyna Plszewska-

Zywko of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow said that Polish nurses earn around £280 per month and there are already nurse shortages in her country.

Nurses who trained in these countries before 1 May 2004 have to prove to the NMC that they meet British standards. Practitioners whose training began after 1 May will automatically be eligible for British registration, so there could be a greater impact after 2007.

The EU directives do not require competence in English, but employers are entitled to check that a practitioner can communicate effectively with patients.

At the same time, the EU parliament has been trying to force through a directive which would

allow health practitioners to work for six months in other EU countries without registration in the host country. This move has been vigorously opposed by professional bodies but keeps resurfacing in different committees within the EU commission.

Outside the EU the next donor country under consideration is China. This has come as news to most NHS organisations, in the form of a House of Commons announcement from Lord Hutton in mid May.

Hutton suddenly announced that nurse recruitment from China is a key government target. He reported that talks have begun between the Department of Health and the Chinese Embassy.



properly rewarded. Equally important is whether they succeed in fighting for pay increases which allow them to meet the cost of living.

The greatest staff turnover is in London and the South East, which as a result rely more on overseas recruitment than other areas. The only solution is a wage which allows staff to live and travel in that area and currently public sector wage rates do not match housing costs.

And what about the patients?

This article has focused on the impact of moving labour across the globe with the consequence on pay and conditions of health professionals. But what about the impact on patients?

Professional bodies with a variety of imperfect mechanisms seek to ensure

parity of standards between those trained at home and abroad. Those entering Britain from non-EU countries currently have to undertake a three-month adaptation programme in a NMC approved placement. Those entering from EU countries are exempt from that programme as EU directives ensure harmonisation of practices.

On the one hand, many healthcare skills are international: so does it matter who manages the intravenous infusion so long as they do so safely? But if health care staff are not attuned to the communication needs of those they care for — particularly in intimate procedures or dealing with taboo subjects — then what happens to the quality of the interaction?

Others will point out that as patients

come from different countries, then isn't it a good thing that staff are culturally diverse? But when all the staff in a unit are Filipino then where is this diversity? When up to 80% of student nurses in some London institutions are African, where is the diversity?

In time, staff who study and live in London will become Londoners but if overseas recruitment is about staff living abroad and then rotating home every few years (a rotational crop for export?) and a new group arriving, when will that integration ever occur? Even to raise these questions may lead to an accusation of racism, but isn't it time to do so when a section of the nursing curriculum has to be devoted to the cultural needs of the indigenous population?

Reg Birch:

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Will Podmore

A report from the TUC gives the lie to all the sunshine talk about the British economy...

The relentless rise of unemployment

UNEMPLOYMENT IN BRITAIN is rising under this government, despite its efforts to convince us to the contrary. This is to be seen across whole sectors of workers. To stop this destruction, we need a strong national policy of investing in manufacturing industry and vital industries to increase the demand for labour, together with the commitment to retain investment and jobs in this country.

A report from the TUC last year, *Inactive Britain*, on working age inactivity in Britain and the rest of Europe (November 2003) gave the lie to all the sunshine talk about the British economy. It shows that eight million British people are not in work, or are seeking work — 22% of the working age population. This is the worst proportion in Europe: it is 8% in Germany, and 2.8% in France. This number has risen since 1992 and not fallen under Blair, or, as this report puts it, “progress...has been modest”.

The government naturally prefers its definition of the unemployed: all those who looked for work in the last four weeks and could start in two weeks. This conveniently makes the unemployment level just 5%. It defines full employment as “employment opportunity for all”, confusing a description with an ideal.

Keeping people out of work

What stops people from being in work? According to the report, one factor is that we have the dearest and least comprehensive childcare provision in Europe, so 51% of our lone parents are unemployed (13% in Sweden).

Only 49% of disabled people are in work here (compared with more than 60% in Norway and Switzerland), because Britain invests less in labour market programmes for the disabled than almost any other EU state.

The report says that there has been “no improvement in the employment rate for those without qualifications”; in fact this rate has worsened, down from 51.8% in 1997 to 50.8% in 2003. Also, between 2000 and 2003, the proportion of children in workless households fell from 15.7% to 15.2%; at that rate it would take 90 years to solve the problem.

The mid-1990s benefit “reforms” forced many older unemployed workers onto longer-term sickness or disability benefits,

or into early retirement, rather than on to the unemployment figures.

Since so many workers want to work but cannot get jobs, we do not need to increase the supply of labour by, for example, importing workers from abroad. Nor do we need “strong regional policies”, as this report urges, because every single one of Britain’s regions has areas of high unemployment and poverty. We need a national solution to a national problem.

But the report is misleading on the key question of industry when it refers to “industrial restructuring” and when it criticises only “the previous government’s approach to industrial restructuring”. Industry is not being restructured — it is being destroyed. And the destruction has accelerated under Blair: 10,000 manufacturing jobs have gone every month since 1997, compared with 5,000 every month under Thatcher. No surprise, then, that Britain’s trade deficit for April alone stood at £4.7 billion.

At the same time, Britain’s financial services are under severe attack. In early June, Norwich Union announced that it was cutting 700 jobs by outsourcing its support service operations, including software development and IT management, to other firms in Britain and India. A further 250 contract worker jobs are also to be cut.

The insurance group Aviva, which owns Norwich Union, cut more than 5,000 jobs in Britain last year. Last summer, it cut 900 jobs in its general insurance division; in November, it outsourced 2,350 jobs to Asia; in February, it cut 1,200 jobs by closing its insurance broking arm, Hill House Hammond.

Lloyds TSB is to close its

Newcastle call centre in November, axeing 960 jobs. Lloyds TSB is also threatening to “offshore” jobs from Scotland to India: its boss Susan Rice said, “Offshoring could be the best thing that ever happened to Scotland.”

Last November, Scottish Widows, owned by Lloyds TSB, cut 800 jobs in Newcastle. On top of all this, there is the planned closure of Scottish Provident and the destruction of 1,000 jobs at Standard Life.

Amicus predicts that 200,000 British call centre and business services jobs will be exported from Britain by 2008, which will mean every banking and personal finance customer will be forced to allow their details out of Britain.

David Fleming, Amicus National Secretary for Finance, says, “Offshoring is an accident waiting to happen. It is only a matter of time before a serious crime is committed which would ruin the reputation of the British financial services industry.”

Photo: John Harris (reportdigital.co.uk)

Saturday 22 May 2004: workers march in Birmingham in a demonstration and rally for manufacture and jobs called by Amicus, the TGWU and the GMB



“Overpriced; consistently poor performances; unable to stick to time to disband? I refer not to Scottish Opera but to the Scottish

The fight for Scottish Opera

THE CONTROLLED anger and solidarity in the picture says it all: three unions united to resist an attack on jobs and culture with BECTU, Equity and the Musicians' Union countering attempts to destroy Scotland's biggest employer of cultural workers, Scottish Opera. Significantly, it is they, the most solidly unionised in the arts, that the Scottish Executive view as a thorn in their side — with their Labour members rushing past last week's Edinburgh street protest with bowed heads.

Only a few independently minded MSPs came over to express sympathy, but the large crowds that gathered to hear the stirring brass-accompanied renditions of Verdi and choral folksongs are typical of the public support the campaign has galvanised. The media commentary and letters pages have been dominated by the controversy and surprisingly it is this realisation — that we have a world-class culture worth saving — that has begun tugging at the very foundations and fabric of “devolution” itself.

Disband

“Overpriced; consistently poor performances; unable to stick to budgets; elitist; time to disband? I refer not to Scottish Opera but to the Scottish Executive...I think the time may have come to disband the Scottish Parliament in favour of retaining our national opera company. When it comes to value for money, I know where my vote would go. It might even be worth considering a conversion of the Holyrood building to an International opera House. This could probably be managed within a tiny proportion of the original estimate and we could look forward to some real communication and proper drama involving true professionals.”

The wit of the DAILY HERALD letter writer, George Wilson, summarised a growing sentiment. (Costs of the new parliament have grown tenfold to nearly £500 million) The true value of what is at stake has been ignored by these politicians; built up over decades has been an army of skilled specialists including stage managers, technicians, scenic artists and sound engineers. (Scottish Opera's home, the



17 June, Edinburgh: Scottish Opera workers rally as part of the fight to save the company

Theatre Royal in Glasgow, is being hired off to commercial interests with some dozens of job losses still to come). And with the axeing of the chorus (nearly 50 of the 90 redundancies projected), the spin-offs of voice tuition and community performances would be lost and the expertise so carefully nurtured at the Opera School in Glasgow would have an uncertain future. Talent would be dispersed, even overseas.

Then the orchestra of over 50 and its freelance players is in jeopardy during a period without a pool of singers and entering a “dark season” of nearly a year without a major production. The freelance musicians of the other major music theatre company — Scottish Ballet — could lose their future work if members of the opera orchestra are re-deployed.

If the music tuition activities of these highly skilled musicians is taken into account the consequences are debilitating at a time when efforts are being made to reintroduce instrumental teaching into schools, especially at primary and nursery level, recently recognised as invaluable to child development.

Only a crassly mistaken class analysis could deem opera as an art form to be

politically incorrect or “elitist”. Excellence and deeply reflective art and music belong to all and — as the picture shows — art workers can be at the forefront of struggle. Moreover, Scottish Opera has a track record of building opera as an indigenous art form, not just being content with the great classics from Italy, Spain or Russia. Wide-ranging subjects are explored — often exploiting opera's ability to reflect while time stands still — such as the moral dilemmas of Wilson's *CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER*, Sally Beamish and Janice Galloway's explorations of Mary Shelley's life and ideas in *MONSTER* and David Horne's *THOMAS MUIR* (a martyr of resistance to early 19th-century repression). All this, and the classics, can capture anyone's imagination and covers a vast range of musical styles.

Pattern

The attack on Scottish Opera is part of a pattern. Wildcat Theatre and the 7:84 theatre company are just two of the sectors subject to cuts. The ballet company has already been downgraded, starved of funds: Richard Armstrong (he recently received the South Bank Show/Royal Philharmonic Society Award on behalf of

udgets; elitist; Executive..."

Scottish Opera) asked: "The ballet went dark because the company was on its last legs...the opera is there delivering what is considered to be the best work of its kind in the UK. Shut it down — why?"

The music critic Kenneth Walton added: "What we witnessed last week from the Executive was an act of cultural vandalism. This is an administration that has enshrined mediocrity as a standard for Scotland...A Labour government handing over £7.5 million to fire 80 people is possibly the most political act so far in the short life of the Scottish Executive."

In fact the Executive's attempt to steer a wider cultural policy is in disarray, upset by the resignation — even before its commission started work — of the Oscar-nominated composer and MU member Craig Armstrong (he wrote the music for the recent film version of Graham Greene's *THE QUIET AMERICAN*). Meanwhile prominent composer James MacMillan described the ex-SAC chief James Boyle as caving in to political masters and as "someone who will do down in history as the man under whom the opera had been destroyed". The SAC is also seen to have lost the trust of the opera employees and their unions by having devised a secret plan to replace the opera entirely with a "commissioning body".

BECTU regional treasurer Douglas McGill, senior shop steward at the company, expressed his deep unhappiness that "yet again the management has managed to overspend its budget by a reported £4 million" and that the Scottish Executive "can apparently find £5 million not to pay off the deficit but to pay for redundancy settlements".

Pledging to create an alternative vision to save the opera company in its entirety, a packed meeting of the Federation of Entertainment Unions brought the three unions together on 9 June and agreed that "The three unions are all committed to opposing redundancies in the company and are committed to fighting to save the full time jobs in the company. The Unions reject the proposals and reaffirm the importance of keeping the component parts of the company together."

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

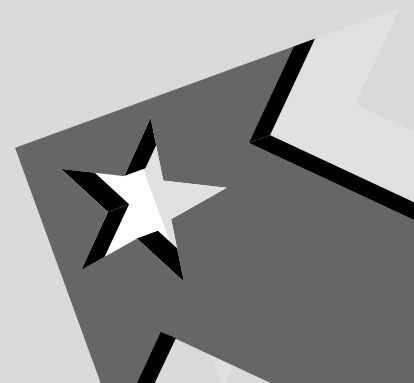
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Back to Front – Dirty dealing

‘Workers in all the EU member nations do not support the EU. We have all refused our rulers any mandate for signing their sullied EU Constitution....’

IT LOOKS LIKE we now have a new word in the language: “toiletage”. And a fitting word it is to describe the process of attempting to remove the stench from the European Constitution in order to convince the nations of the European Union to accept it (there will be a full analysis in the next edition of WORKERS). Blair talks of a triumph, but then he talks about everything as a triumph. In fact it is the biggest shift of power from Britain since the Roman invasion. We’d better all prepare for a massive barrage of spin.

Meanwhile, a new level is to be added to the EU superstructure – a European diplomatic service. Under new proposals to be incorporated into the constitution, the “European external action service” will promote the new common foreign and security policy.

There are already 123 EU missions abroad, which deal with trade and “aid” (interesting that these two are put together – they are one and the same: Nothing to do with charity and everything to do with profits). The diplomatic posts will no doubt be highly sought after by existing national diplomats and civil servants from the EU council of ministers. Welcome to the gravy train.

Why does the EU need a foreign minister with a fully-fledged diplomatic corps? Because the clear intention is to create a European state machine, armed with its own constitution and laws that take precedence over national laws. Member states’ control over this body will be nil, as the commission effectively takes the decisions, with the European parliament existing to provide the semblance of democracy.

How could a parliament in Brussels possibly represent rule by the peoples of the 25 far-away member states? This set-up is an obvious sham, and the recent European elections showed that the peoples of the member states know this very well.

And what do the low turnouts in the

elections show? The local elections showed that workers don’t believe that the Labour party can run local services. In London, only the sheer awfulness of the Conservative candidate let Labour back in. And the Euro elections, once again, showed how much we detest the EU.

The government’s introduction of postal voting for four regions in the local elections was a fiasco, a disaster, cynical and incompetent gerrymandering – and that’s just what THE INDEPENDENT wrote! It didn’t save Labour from losing Newcastle, Leeds and St Helens, or from its worst ever performance in local elections, coming third behind the Liberal Democrats. Clearly, Labour itself is an electoral liability.

As for the BNP, nationally it now has 17, rather than 16, councillors. In Burnley it came fourth, winning only one of the eight seats that it was contesting and losing the only one it was defending. The British working class has far too much sense to vote for the BNP, and we don’t need the parliamentary parties and the “left” to tell us not to vote for it.

In the Euro elections, the United Kingdom Independence Party’s vote rose by 11%. Labour yet again went for the wrong target: it was not the BNP that was threatening it, but UKIP.

Across the European Union, turnout dropped to another new record low. In the ten new EU members, turnout was only 28.7%. Workers in all the EU member nations do not support the EU. We have all refused our rulers any mandate for signing their sullied EU Constitution.

The results reflect the national disgust with Labour’s permanent delusion that only outside forces can solve Britain’s problems. Allying with the USA does not make us safer or freer. Being in the EU does not make us richer or freer.

The election message is that workers are rejecting the parliamentary parties and want Britain to be independent and sovereign.

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