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NO TO RULE FROM BRUSSELS. REFERENDUM NOW!



New treaty, same old Constitution

06



Waiting for a decent train service

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Blair's Middle East legacy – destruction

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WORKERS

“By any other name

THEY LIKE grand names in Brussels. So when they came up with a plan to give the European Union a proper legal personality (now, there's a thought...it doesn't really exist) and strip national governments of their powers, it only seemed right to give it a grand name. Let's call it a constitution, they said.

So proud were they of their creation that some of them decided to let their own populations vote on the great text. Even Blair said there would be a referendum, regardless of how other countries voted.

But then something went wrong. The French and the Dutch held referendums and said no. And Blair went back on his word to hold a referendum here. No point, he said.

Back to the drawing board, you might think. But then, the European Union does not think like ordinary people do. For Brussels it was back to the make-up pack. They redefined the constitution as a couple of amending treaties, and inserted everything they wanted into them.

Now Blair and Brown (the latter sat in London, negotiating away British sovereignty by conference call) said they wouldn't agree to anything that would require a referendum.

That's the formula they use to say that what they have come up with does not need a referendum...the mere fact that they agreed

to it is supposed to prove that no referendum is required.

But look at what came out of Brussels and compare it with the "discarded" constitution. Both establish the EU as a legal entity – no minor hair-splitting change here: it means the EU, rather than its constituent nations, has the right to sign treaties over our heads. Both give it a President and a foreign affairs supremo (no longer called a minister, but with a minister's powers all the same). The voting system has been reformed – qualified majority voting – so that individual countries have even less say over what Brussels does.

Brown's major contribution, it appears, was to halt a French attempt to water down the commitment in the treaty to unfettered competition – in other words, surrendering national control over the economy.

There can be only one response. We must demand a referendum. Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett witters on about "parliamentary democracy". That's a poor joke. Democracy, if it means anything, is about rule by the people. Parliament is a machine for ensuring rule over the people, packed with placemen whose pay cheques and promotion prospects depend on toeing the line.

The voice of the British people must be heard. Referendum now!



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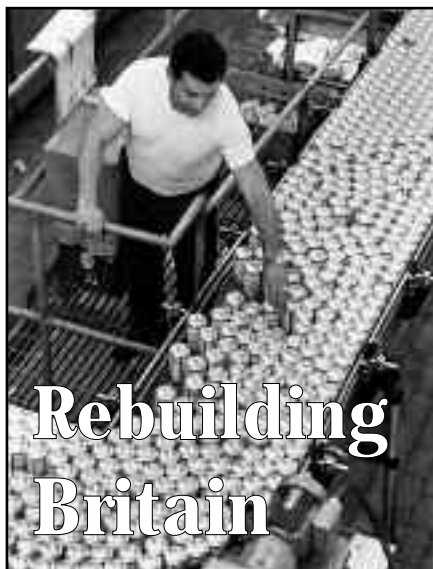
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The language of cuts

THE GOVERNMENT is planning to cut access to free English classes, contradicting its claim that a top priority is to provide courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages, known as ESOL courses. In response, the University and College Union (UCU) says that the prohibitive costs will result in far fewer people taking English classes.

A recent survey by the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults showed that at least 40 per cent of learners will be adversely affected by restrictions to free ESOL courses. The fee contribution for a fairly minimal length quality course of six hours a week will be around £426, while a notional 'full-time' programme of around 450 hours will cost around £990. And on top of that there are exam costs and often childcare expenses.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion report, Our Shared Future, says, "a lack of language or employment skills and difficulties accessing English classes" are two of the barriers faced by migrants trying to integrate. It also calls for ESOL funding to be "reconsidered; and that more innovative ways of providing ESOL need to be looked at".

UCU contributed to the original commission consultation and welcomed its finding that "it is only right that those who benefit most from migration, including businesses that employ migrant labour, should pay a contribution towards the cost of ESOL training". But UCU said it was disappointed that the report does not call on the government to insist that employers meet the cost.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said, "If the government really wants people settling in this country to be English speakers it must realise it has to invest the money. It also needs to realise that this is actually investment and not a cost. We need a proper joined-up approach from government to ensure that no individual requiring ESOL is debarred through long waiting lists or an inability to pay.

"Failure to invest will result in embarrassment for the ministers who have backed English classes for migrants and an economy that is held back because employees cannot speak the same language. I cannot believe we find ourselves in this ridiculous situation. ESOL classes were a success story.

"The prime minister and chancellor were exhorting non-English speakers to go on courses and they joined in their thousands. The economy and society benefit from people being able to speak English and it is about time the employers were made to do their bit and help with the funding. We have learnt that the voluntary option does not work and it is time they were forced to foot some of the bill as well as reap the benefits."

TAX

...and the rich get richer

GORDON BROWN once boasted that he'd "squeeze until the pips squeaked". Well, he didn't have Britain's super-rich in his sights when he said it: 85 per cent of the 400 people thought to earn more than £10 million a year don't pay income tax – around £2 billion in lost revenue.

Four representatives of private equity companies boasted to the Commons Treasury Select Committee that they were good for jobs and good for profits. From that, they argued that should continue to pay as little as 5 per cent on their earnings.

Meanwhile, normal people have cut discretionary spending by 6 per cent this year in order to meet higher pension contributions, household costs and mortgage repayments. A study by Ernst & Young shows we're having to meet above-inflation rises on fixed costs such as council tax, water rates, pensions and petrol. Average monthly mortgage repayments, at £700, are now 65 per cent higher than they were in 2003.

ABORTION

Catholic crusade

ON VATICAN orders, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, and his top bishops in England, Wales and Scotland have attacked Britain's abortion laws, likening them to Nazi-style policies. The World Health Organisation estimates that 68,000 women die every year from abortions performed illegally because of the Vatican's policy. The Vatican opposes abortion for rape victims.

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

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

In?

EUROPEAN Central Bank head Jean-Claude Trichet called on Britain to join the euro. He said, "...the single market to which [the eurozone] is tightly linked can only fully function with a single currency. Imagine for a second that you are the United States and that the currencies differed between Massachusetts, California, Florida and Alaska – what would you really see: a single market in the United States? My argument is no more complicated." But isn't the United States a single state, unlike the European Union?

Out?

THE LORDS have just rejected a proposal for a Select Committee to report on what withdrawal from the EU would mean for Britain. The intention was to assess the positive and negative effects of partial or total withdrawal, something the ruling class has never risked doing. "We consider that such a Committee would not be timely in view of the current Inter-Governmental Conference on the draft Constitution for Europe... and we doubt whether it would be possible to isolate the Committee's deliberations from wider political considerations," said their lordships. What can they be frightened of?

What's it all about?

INTERIOR MINISTERS have agreed to allow police forces across the EU to access other member states' fingerprint and DNA databases. The proposals have been criticised in Britain because Britain's DNA database is much larger than others. It also contains DNA details of over a million innocent people arrested but not charged; many countries rightly destroy this information. Critics question whether free access to DNA and other databases will have sufficient security safeguards after the measure was rushed through by the German EU presidency in under six months.

Taken to the cleaners

The EU is investigating Commission employees alleged to have provided false contracts worth £30 million over four years for cleaning services never carried out. The allegations follow recent arrests, including a Commission official, in a case of suspected corruption involving building contract tenders.



Housing protest: Camden Council tenants and residents demonstrate outside the council chamber on 18 June demanding the "fourth option" after the council refused to hear a deputation protesting against its latest plans for privatising council housing .

Photo: Andrew Ward/www.reportphotos.com

Cuba outflanks the US

WORKERS has often reported on US attempts to use third parties to attack Cuba in the old United Nations Human Rights Commission. The commission became so discredited that the US was voted off. But the United States continued to use other countries to attack Cuba, moves that eventually resulted in a UN investigator being appointed to investigate both Cuba and Belarus (another country that values its independence) for human rights violations. The discredited body was eventually replaced by a new UN Human Rights Committee, but the old decision remained.

But then came a surprise: Cuba was elected to the new committee by the members of the UN, and the US was not. Of course, the US through its proxies continued to harass Cuba and Belarus in the new body, but the "international community" has now spoken. The investigations into both Cuba and Belarus have been dropped.

This is a massive victory not only for Cuba and Belarus but for the international community – the members of the General Assembly of the UN. The European Union was supposed to adopt the US position on Cuba, but thanks to the steadfastness of the government of Spain, attempts by Britain, Poland and the Czech Republic to isolate Cuba have come to nothing.

Instead, the EU has proposed a dialogue with Cuba. Cuba for its part, following the victory at the UN, has told the EU that it is not interested in a dialogue until EU political sanctions are lifted. Likewise, Cuba has told the US that there can be no dialogue with them until the US blockade is lifted.

In a difficult world situation, this represents a remarkable victory for the working class of both Cuba and Belarus.

PENSIONS

Unison goes to ballot

EARLY JULY will see Unison – with just under 1,000,000 members the largest grouping in the Local Government Pension Scheme – begin balloting over acceptance or rejection of the renegotiated scheme.

Already Unite (formerly the TGWU) and Amicus and GMB unions have recommended acceptance with other smaller unions following suit. After protracted negotiations and consultations

has seen, Unison's Local Government Service Group Executive has now also recommended the new scheme.

Their recommendation was based upon the scheme having met the requirements and protections identified by the membership during extensive consultation, and at an earlier special conference.

The move to ballot, despite the permanent opposition antics and pious rhetoric of the ultra-left at the Unison Local Government Conference on Monday 18 June, will draw this protracted dispute to a close.

EDUCATION**Progress at Harlow**

LECTURERS at Harlow College in Essex have made a big stride forwards in their battle against the imposition of the principal's plan, which threatens the quality of education there, when the principal broke his refusal to speak to national union negotiators.

The lecturers, members of the UCU, brought the college to a standstill when they went on strike from 11 to 14 June. Students mounted a rooftop protest in support of their lecturers. The strike

followed days of action on 24 and 25 May.

Some lecturers face the prospect of a £13,000 cut in salary, a longer working week (up to 56 hours a week including Saturdays), an increased workload and shorter holidays. If the plans had been implemented, 52 per cent of teaching would be delivered by staff on non-teaching contracts and 35 per cent of teaching staff would be moved onto unqualified terms and conditions of service and pay.

The lecturers were also planning a programme of action to back their demands, including a boycott of the newly advertised college posts of principal tutor, senior tutor and tutor.

Ex-Muslims launch body

LAST MONTH saw the launch and establishment of the British branch of the Council of Ex-Muslims. This follows on the launch, during the last 5 months, of similar branches in Germany, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These are ex-Muslims openly proclaiming a secular and human rights programme in opposition to right-wing reactionary political Islamists and their apologists.

The London launch, fronted by four women and supported by speakers from the National Secular Society and British Humanist Society, established the council as a voice of mainstream thought, reason, secularism and open-mindedness. This is in direct contradiction to the self-appointed, self-opinionated, predominantly male so-called leaders of the Muslim community.

The Council of Ex-Muslims calls for freedom to criticise religion; freedom of religion and atheism; separation of religion from the state; prohibition of religious customs, rules, ceremonies or activities which infringe others' rights and freedoms; abolition of any religious acts which restrict the independence, free will and equality of women; prohibition of segregation of sexes; protection of children from religious abuse and manipulation; prohibition of any kind of state financial, material or moral support to any religious activity or institution; prohibition of all religious intimidation and threats.

The speakers also opposed the US threats to Iran and Syria and denounced the ongoing occupation of Iraq and Palestine.

REMPLOY**Under government threat**

OVER 2500 disabled workers employed in the Remploy Factories are facing redundancy under a government-inspired scheme to eliminate this unique employment system. Forty-three factories are to be closed. Mergers, reductions and streamlining are proposed for 40 more.

The sheltered employment system was established to cater for severely disabled ex-servicemen and women from the Second World War. The inclusive and protective environment was meant to help these workers to live more productive lives.

Now, on thinly disguised financial grounds, the government and disability charities are seeking closure of this system, which has served these workers for over 60 years. The proposal to "mainstream" employment, the placing of disabled workers in other workplaces, is seen as

mere cosmetics.

Remploy workers and their union, the GMB, are clear: this is a shift from meaningful productive manufacturing employment to casual employment on an agency's books. There are Remploy factories all over Britain, including in the most deprived employment areas, and the GMB is running an effective high-profile campaign resisting closure.

Government ministers have had to make a grovelling climb-down over the fact that notice of redundancy was issued by DVD and video! Gordon Brown has already announced a review once he takes office: he is making so many promises to the trade unions that the entire last 11 years are to be reviewed!

The GMB still hasn't had an answer to its question about why are there no cuts to Remploy factories in Cabinet ministers' constituencies (bar Patricia Hewitt). The TUC supported the GMB's campaign at its recent disabilities national conference.

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

Friday 13 July to Sunday 15 April, Tolpuddle, Dorset.

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival

The annual rally and festival kicks off with a ceilidh on the Friday and continues through the weekend, culminating in the march through the village. Not all details are finalised, but for information check www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-12942-f0.cfm

BREWERIES**Tetley's: hot property**

AFTER 180 years of brewing on the site in Hunslet, Leeds, Tetley's brewery is under threat of closure.

Leeds City planners have re-zoned the whole city riverside as a residential area, thus threatening the continued production at the plant that employs, directly, over 300 workers.

Obviously, the diminution of the city's industrial base is of little concern to those who think the future can be sustained by putting up blocks of flats which have been described by several studies as "the slums of the future".

Carlsberg-Tetley has yet to make much of a fuss. After all, the site with planning permission is worth about £100 million to speculators.

NHS**Blood money**

DESPITE continuing opposition from Unison, Unite (formerly the TGWU and Amicus unions) and the Royal College of Nursing, the NHS Blood and Transplant Service is continuing with its threat to cut 600 highly skilled staff and close seven out of ten blood processing centres.

The joint trade unions held a further day of demonstrations and protests across the endangered sites (Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, Southampton, Brentwood and Tooting) on 15 June.

The employer's plan is to reduce blood centres to Bristol, Manchester and London. This will leave whole tranches of England – the Midlands, North East, East Anglia – totally denuded.

The proposals are financially driven and have no bearing on health care, flexibility of service provision or counter-proposals made by the people who know best – the staff who run and provide the service.

The cost of overseas adventures

A TOTAL of 153 British soldiers have been killed in Iraq (as of 24 June). Conditions are worsening for our unfortunate troops. If it isn't safe to send Prince Harry, it isn't safe to send anyone [question to Downing Street: princes were always targets in wars...what's so special about this one?].

The much-vaunted American "surge" in Iraq has not reduced the level of killings – merely increased the number of targets. In April, 12 British soldiers were killed (the worst month for three years). So were 104 US soldiers and 1,500 civilians. In May, 12 British and 127 US soldiers were killed (the deadliest month since November 2004), and 1,944 civilians, 29 per cent up on April.

Occupying forces are still killing twice as many Iraqis as insurgents are, despite what the media tells us. The violence against civilians is worsening: from May 2003 to March 2004, 6,332 were killed; from March 2004 to March 2005, 11,312; from March 2005 to March 2006, 14,910; and from March 2006 to March 2007, 26,540.

The Bush–Blair claim that they must now stay wherever they have invaded just because, having invaded, "we have the responsibility", is like the rule in some backward societies that a man who rapes an unmarried woman must marry her.

Afghanistan

In 2006, more than 3,000 Afghans were killed, twice as many as in 2005 and more than in any other year since the 2001 fall of the Taliban. Coalition forces are killing more and more civilians. Aid agencies say that coalition forces have killed at least 230 civilians since the start of 2007.

In March, an air strike on Jallalabad killed 19 civilians. In April, bombing killed five people, and American troops shooting at a crowd killed 51 people in Herat.

In May, a bombing attack killed 21 people in Helmand province. On 17 June, coalition forces' bombers killed 57 civilians in Shindand, including at least 18 women and seven children.

The commander of US operations for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Brigadier General Joseph Votel, tried to justify dropping 2,000-lb bombs on mud houses: "If there are insurgents that are effectively engaging our forces and they happen to be coming from a building we would make every use we can of technology we have, and precision weapons, to eliminate the threat and minimise the effects of collateral damage."

Britain's new ambassador to the country, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles (sic), has said, "It's a marathon rather than a sprint. We should be thinking in terms of decades."

Cowper-Coles denied reports saying he believed British troops might have to remain in Afghanistan for the next 30 years, but conceded Britain would have to make a long-term commitment to the country. So, only 20 years then? Sixty British soldiers have so far been killed in Afghanistan: isn't that enough?

How do you push through a hated
Simple: call it a treaty, and declare

Same constitution as be

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Angela Merkel wanted what she calls a "new foundation treaty" – this is definitely "not the EU Constitution". Now, thanks to Blair, she has it.

As Merkel explained before the crucial negotiations, she aimed "to use different terminology without changing the legal substance". So that's alright then. Blair was clear in his treachery: he said on 20 June that the Constitution rejected by the French and the Dutch was a "perfectly good one".

What were the EU's leaders proposing with the original Constitution? A new, more powerful, full-time EU Presidency; a new post of EU Foreign Minister with a new 'external action service'; a new voting system which would reduce our ability to block new EU laws by 30%; and new powers to impose EU laws in 40 new areas – nothing to worry about, only in trivial areas like foreign policy, criminal justice and any measure that they can bill as addressing climate change.

What have they ended up with? Precisely what they wanted in the first place. Quoted on BBC News Online, writer on European affairs Kirsty Hughes, a firm believer in European integration, said: "It's much worse than the usual European stitch-up. It's essentially the same as the constitution, but many leaders are trying to sell it as something different, in order to avoid a vote. It's a collective lie."

The report continued: "Both critics and supporters of the project agree that 95%, or even 99%, of the impact of the constitution has been preserved."

Yet Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, interviewed by the BBC straight after the deal, maintained that there was no need for a referendum – even though powers are to be transferred from Britain to the European Union. Is she clueless or lying?

Brown says no to referendum

Gordon Brown even ruled out a referendum the day before the deal had been completed. Yet Ireland will hold a referendum, and probably Denmark as well. The issue of whether the Netherlands should have another referendum – they rejected the original constitution in a referendum vote – is now before the Dutch courts.

The new EU Foreign Minister will "automatically" speak for Britain at the UN. What kind of an organisation has a Foreign Minister anyway? Does a common market need a Foreign Minister? If Alex Salmond appointed a Scottish Foreign Minister, wouldn't that be a huge step towards breaking Britain up into little statelets, all dependent on the EU?

The FT/Harris Poll published on 18 June shows that 75 per cent of Spaniards, 71 per cent of Germans, 69 per cent of Britons, 68 per cent of Italians and 64 per cent of French people want a referendum on the Treaty, opposing their governments' intent to put it to parliaments for ratification. A YouGov poll for the SUNDAY TIMES found that 70 per cent of British voters think there should be a referendum on the Treaty, while 17 per cent think it should be ratified in Parliament.

What is the official EU response to what we think? You guessed it: EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso said he hoped that Blair would "have the courage" to sign up to the Treaty. Barroso said, "We have to stand up in front of our national public opinions, not give up to some of the populisms we have in our member states." Bye-

constitution that you know will be defeated in a referendum?
 that it doesn't need a referendum...

before : so we want a referendum, as before



Germany calling: Chancellor Angela Merkel flanked by German Foreign Minister Wilhelm Steinmeier and Commission President José Manuel Barroso. With Blair's help, they have the result they want. But their satisfaction may be short lived.

bye democracy!

It gets worse. The Italian President, Giorgio Napolitano, says that opponents of the EU Constitution are indulging in "psychological terrorism". So we're all terrorists now!

Taking over states

The EU is not about cooperation but about merger. As Jean Monnet, founder of the EU, said long ago, "Cooperation is all very well, but what we require is a fusion of states." Siren calls to stay in the EU and reform it, to make it more democratic and restore powers to national governments, are as delusional as the Labour left's belief that they can change the Labour Party into a socialist party.

The Constitution's main author, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, described the proposed Treaty as "a simplified treaty preserving the essential institutional advances". He wrote in *LE MONDE*, "The most innovative elements [in the new Treaty] will ... be regrouped into a bland and painless treaty ... Thus public opinion will be led to adopt, without knowing it, the proposals that we dare not present to them directly." He admitted that the EU's leaders were "camouflaging" the truth about the Treaty but warned that this attempt at deception would not work: "it will reinforce the idea among European citizens that European construction is organised behind their backs by judges and diplomats." Surely not!

- HELD WHILE Blair was negotiating away Britain's rights in Germany, the Unison annual national delegate conference in Brighton reiterated its opposition to the EU constitution.

Unison, with 1.3 million members, opposes the enforced sell-off of schools and hospitals. It doesn't want Europe being a borderless blueprint for privatisation driven by Germany's Merkel or France's Sarkozy. It is against EU laws overturning national decisions on what the people of Britain want, as opposed to the dictat of European bankers and multinationals.

There is opposition, too, to the European Court of Justice deeming national laws of nation states illegal.

You can catch a high-speed train to get out of the country – but
 And instead of returning the trains to public ownership and cont
 going to issue a whole new set of them...

Waiting for a decent train service – and a c



Photo: Workers

Passengers are being treated to rehashed versions of private franchises instead of a public vision for a public service.

THIS NOVEMBER will see big changes for Britain's railways. During that month, many passenger franchises will be reorganised under new ownership, and the newly rebuilt and massively extended London St Pancras station will fully open as the final part of the high-speed line from London to the Channel Tunnel.

The contrast between these events due to happen during November could not be greater. The completion of the high-speed line through Stratford and North Kent will see Eurostar trains travelling at 186 mph to continental Europe. Next year, similar high speed services will also serve the Medway towns and the Kent coast. Britain will at last have at least one railway that is comparable to the purpose-built high-speed lines, not only in France, but across western Europe.

The trouble is that this line is likely to remain the only real high-speed line in Britain. The government has set its face against extending the new line to northern England and Scotland. The rest of the

country seems destined to suffer from relatively slow, overcrowded railway services for many years to come.

Where's the vision?

The French have recently shown that it is possible with existing rail technology to run at speeds of 350 mph over their new railways. Meanwhile huge numbers of people are turning to Britain's rail system as an alternative to the gridlocked roads. A government with vision would invest in a modern railway system that could rival any in the world. The new Channel Tunnel link shows that we have the engineering expertise to do it!

Instead, we are treated to a rehashing of the private operators running Britain's passenger services, with no real prospect of any improvements, and in some cases, services will take a definite turn for the worse.

Refranchising will affect much of the country, particularly the Midlands. The current Midland Mainline, Silverlink and

Central Trains companies, currently owned by National Express, will disappear. So too will GNER which operates the East Coast Main Line. Virgin Trains, a company half owned by Branson and half owned by Stagecoach, runs two franchises – West Coast and cross country. The cross country franchise is now up for grabs, and will look very different come November.

The cross-country trains currently running from the south and south west to the north west and on to Scotland will cease. The many through passengers will be forced to change trains at Birmingham New Street, a station that is dark and unpleasant, and generally regarded as a place to avoid. There are real fears amongst rail staff that the overcrowding at the station will be dangerous.

All eyes are on the prestigious money-spinning East Coast services being relinquished by GNER now that the parent Sea Containers company has gone bust. Hot favourite to take over is rumoured to be Virgin, which has recruited the GNER

woe betide anyone planning to move around Britain at speed. Control when the franchises expire this autumn, the government is

complete rethink about how rail is run

management team to their cause. If Virgin win, they will have a stranglehold over services from London to Scotland on both East Coast and West Coast lines. GNER staff are aware of Virgin's reputation as a ruthless cutter of jobs, acquired when they first took over the West Coast route.

If Virgin does win the East Coast route, it is unlikely that the government will allow it to also run the new cross country franchise. The new company will be running local and regional services across the Midlands and into East Anglia, as well as the inter-city services currently run by Virgin, and with this mix the company may want to downgrade the operation, with any new trains being of a much lower specification than the current Virgin trains.

Central Trains is being carved up. Most of the services based around Derby and Nottingham will be combined with the current Midland Mainline company to form a new "East Midlands" company. As with cross country the quality of the train service is an issue once inter-city services are combined with local services.

Central's services based around Birmingham are predominantly being combined with the main line services run by Silverlink, to form a 'West Midlands' company. Some services into Birmingham will transfer to Chiltern Trains.

Local Silverlink services in London are transferring to what is described as a "concession", under the control of Transport for London. The concession is a long-term franchise to be put out to the private sector to bid for. In a controversial move, the new TfL concession will incorporate London Underground's East London Line, which closed recently for the preparatory work to commence. The publicly owned London Underground trains are to be replaced by private ones.

The unions fight back

This has provoked a massive campaign by the rail unions RMT and TSSA against further privatisation of tube services, at a time when private tube contractors are in the headlines almost daily for their failings.

The one positive outcome from all the

'Is it any wonder that many do not identify with their employer, and have instead retained an ethos of being committed to the industry as a whole?'

Silverlink changes is that a number of stations currently managed by them will transfer to the management of London Underground. This will mean much greater levels of station staffing, and better pay and conditions for the staff.

All these changes will result in huge transfers of staff from one company to another, and inevitably there will be job losses (aren't there always?). Transferring between companies has become a way of life for many on the railways since privatisation, with staff watching bemused as the sign over the door is changed from time to time. Is it any wonder that many do not identify with their employer, and have instead retained an ethos of being committed to the industry as a whole?

Of course all this tinkering with a privately run and fragmented rail network is completely unnecessary. The rail unions are united in their call to bring the railways back into public ownership.

And it can be done at no cost. How many Labour MPs do you hear bleating that they can't take the railways back because it would cost too much, or divert resources from health and education? It is nonsense, of course. All they need to do is wait for the franchise to end, or wait until they hand the keys back as GNER have done. There was an opportunity missed!

It may not even be necessary to do that. It is clear that the Scottish Executive has been looking seriously at the possibilities of getting rid of ScotRail's franchise holders First Group (another bus company) and taking direct ownership and control.

Another opportunity that will be

missed this year is to taking track-renewals work by Network Rail in house. Having taken maintenance in house, a move that has saved a fortune and massively improved performance, the next logical move was to take away the renewals from the private contractors.

But inexplicably, Network Rail has decided to reduce the current six contractors to four. The RMT, having threatened industrial action, secured assurances from the employers that no job losses would result when the change came. However, it is clear that some contractors are vying with each other to create the lean mean machine that will find favour with Network Rail, and jobs are being cut now instead.

Potters Bar

Network Rail itself is in trouble, having had to admit blame for the recent fatal derailment of a Virgin train in Cumbria. The parallels with the Potters Bar crash are self evident. Attempts at blaming individual staff for the poor state of the points are coming to nothing as it becomes clear that management processes are where the real problem lies.

It is noteworthy that shortly after the crash, the industry's safety watchdog, CIRAS, published a damning report on the degree to which safety was compromised in favour of production. Safety rules are being broken because of the often intolerable pressure being put on workers to "get the job done".

Ian Coucher, who is succeeding John Armit as Network Rail's Chief Executive, is calling for a change in culture. He wants to "inculcate new values and behaviours amongst the staff". In a company which rides roughshod over staff contractual rights and union agreements, you can imagine what that means!

But what is really needed is a complete rethink of how Britain's railways are run. The trains should be run by the same organisation as that which runs the track. Owned and controlled by workers. Run for the benefit of the people it serves. And integrated with other modes of transport.

Reg Birch:

engineer, trade unionist, communist

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Engineer, trade unionist, communist, steeped in the industrial battleground of Park Royal, the largest concentration of engineering workers in the country — for half a century Reg Birch led the struggles of the industrial working class and founded Britain's first genuine Communist Party.

This is a story to provoke reflection about the tactics and strategy of struggle, about working-class morality, about the place of communism in a modern Britain — and about the very future of our nation.

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Will Podmore

Disliked, distrusted and now unelectable, Blair has become just another failed politician. But the idea that he could become a peace envoy is truly perverse...

Blair's Middle East legacy – destruction

SO GEORGE Bush and Condoleezza Rice have asked Tony Blair to be the Middle East envoy for the so-called 'Quartet'. Blair's departure from office as Prime Minister is not a voluntary act. It results from the high levels of opposition to the invasion of Iraq, from the evidence given publicly at the inquiries of Hutton and Butler, from the disappearance of any semblance of trust in politicians. He was forced to concede that he would not seek a fourth term in government.

So what justifies a failed politician's role as Middle East envoy? What exactly is his legacy in the Middle East? Is his legacy his alone or the legacy of a Labour government? Blair and his government knew well in advance that the US planned to invade Iraq. They knew it would be illegal but they backed it nevertheless.

Blair = Bush

WORKERS went to talk directly to Iraqi refugees and Iraqi human rights organisations. They identified Blair and Bush as one and the same. They are aware that Blair could have stopped Bush in his war quest if he had chosen to do so, and that he did not. This is their description of the Iraq that Blair has bequeathed them:

"Before the invasion, we had free health care, free education and a network of welfare care. We had jobs, our sons and daughters were able to train and become professional workers. We had equal pay for women and full equality in society for women. We had a good standard of living, affected a little by the war with Iran. Our children could go out to play. We could have a good night out partying with friends, get drunk and go swimming in the Euphrates at 03.00 am if we wanted.

"After the first Gulf war, we rebuilt the infrastructure very quickly so there was a return to a proper water and electricity supply. It was our country and we were proud and had a particular set of Iraqi values. There were never any problems of religious differences because we were a secular nation. We found ways to keep going through the harsh UN sanctions although the children suffered most.

"All this was destroyed by the invasion



Decades on: Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

Photo: Workers

and occupation which destroyed the economic environment and the academic fabric. The occupiers targeted our system of values and tried to destroy them. They introduced a system of religious representation that was alien to us and set one group against another.

"According to the LANCET, 600,000 have been killed since the invasion but according to a new report from an Australian NGO, 1 million have been killed. In Baghdad, 1 person in every 160 has been killed since 2003 and in Fallujah 1 in every 120 in 2004 alone, most by the occupiers and some by militias. The rate of killing of journalists has increased and 500 have been killed since 2003. By April 2007 200 priests had been killed as well as 800 Palestinian refugees and 3,000 intellectuals and professionals. A further 40,000 professionals including many doctors were forced to leave. There are now 5 million orphans in the country, 4 million refugees in Syria and Jordan and a

further 2 million displaced persons within the country. Because the host countries only offer at best a temporary residence document, the poorer refugees that fled to Syria are desperate and beginning to resort to prostitution to survive. Some 40,000 each month are fleeing to Syria alone.

"The occupiers control four prisons at Abu Ghraib, Buka in Basra, Kroper at Baghdad Airport and Susa at Sulemania and all are full with a total of 300,000 inmates. Torture, violence and murder against prisoners in these jails are common. The Iraqi National Security services hold many times this number of prisoners. The Ministries have been distributed among the sects so that the Interior Ministry is controlled by the Badr militias and the Health Ministry by the Sadr militias.

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“Industrial capacity has been destroyed and our country has moved from being a producing and exporting economy to a consumer and importing society. Oil buys our imports. Depleted uranium from munitions litters the country and there are increases in cancers. If you walk through a cemetery with a Geiger counter, the meter will register a noticeable increase.

“Many cancer victims are told to go to Jordan for treatment that used to be free in Iraq. Once in Jordan, they find that they have to pay for everything at the King Hussein Cancer Centre whilst other governments, including the Jordanians, pay for this treatment for their citizens. In many areas of Iraq, women cannot go to hospital to give birth because of the militias and are now resorting to traditional birth at home, which needs an increase in the number of midwives. Infant mortality is now the third highest in the world. Some 30 per cent of those injured in bomb attacks die before they

‘We cannot wish him on anyone else, particularly when he has been so complicit in their ruin...’

reach hospital because of lack of skilled paramedics or ambulances. Health services are now expensive, in the hands of militias, and dangerous to access. Mental illness and trauma is at epidemic levels. The water situation is very bad and worse in the south.

“Our oil production peaked after the industry was nationalised in 1964. In 1974 and 1979 for example, production peaked at 3.5 million barrels per day. This was the best period in Iraqi life; 55 per cent of revenues went back to Iraqis. After nationalisation, oil reserves increased from 85 billion barrels to 115 billion with potentially double that amount in the reserves, and we built a major refinery in 1981. We now spend \$4 billion a year on

oil imports.”

WORKERS asked Iraqi human rights NGOs, international NGOs, and the National Coordinating Committee for Iraq – an NGO coordinating body (including human rights NGOs) based in Amman – if they had heard of or come across the work or reports of Tony Blair’s personal human rights envoy to Iraq, Labour MP Ann Clwyd. They all replied that they had no knowledge of her and thanked us for informing them of her role.

Middle East legacy

So this is Blair’s legacy in Iraq. But what about Blair’s legacy in the rest of the Middle East? Blair backed Israel in its bombing of Lebanon. He backed the US in its bid to starve Palestinians into submission after they elected a government chosen by themselves and not by Israel or the US.

Meanwhile, 2 million Palestinian refugees languish in cramped, unplanned camps in Jordan with a further 1 million in Syria and hundreds of thousands in Lebanon. Inside the West Bank and Gaza the population suffers from no wages to public workers, poverty, Israeli checkpoints similar to those in Iraq that make daily life unbearable, arbitrary arrest and shootings by Israeli troops, houses bulldozed and denial of access to health and education.

The Zionists in control of Israel treat the indigenous Palestinian population as subhuman. Little wonder then that Unison at its National Delegate Conference became the second British trade union to call for a boycott of Israel on the same basis as the boycott of Apartheid South Africa forty years ago.

British workers know well of Blair’s legacy in Britain. Fewer know much about his crimes in regard to Israel and Palestine, and the damage he will be doing as envoy. We cannot wish him on anyone else, particularly when he has been so complicit in their ruin. He should quietly go away and leave the people of the Middle East to sort their own future out, just as we must sort out our own in Britain.



Iraqi billionaires who made their fortune on contracts to build US bases in their country launder their money on building luxury hotels in the safety of Amman, Jordan.

Having created the tragedy in the Palestinian territories by strangling the elected Palestinian Authority at birth, the US is now turning its attention to Damascus...

US takes aim at Syria

AS EVENTS in the Middle East continue to move at speed, it appears that the US is adding Syria to its list of potential targets to attack. Syria's secular government has long been an example to workers in the region. Unlike its neighbours it has a comprehensive free health, welfare and education system, equal pay and rights for women. It has given full rights to its resident Palestinian refugee population including full access to free health and education, the right to travel, to work, the right to buy property and to take part in the political life of its own community and that of Syria. The only restrictions are that they cannot buy land or vote in elections.

In addition, Syria hosted 100,000 Lebanese refugees who fled their homes last year during the Israeli bombing of Lebanon. Now they are hosting some 1.5 to 2 million Iraqi refugees fleeing the violence caused by the US/UK invasion of Iraq.

But even though Syria has now opened its economy to foreign capital, prompting some Syrians to ask, "Where did our socialism go?", it remains on the US "Axis of Evil" list. Perhaps the reason can be seen in neighbouring countries. Jordan, the US's prize example of Arab capitalism, is what it sees as the model for Syria and other countries – a profitable place for massive financial investment by the US and Gulf Arab states. Luxury hotels, banks, shopping malls, satellite dishes offering the population more than one hundred 24-hour hard-porn TV channels, second homes for wealthy sheikhs and Arab businessmen away from the intense heat of the Saudi desert, profitable private health care and private universities and education are the order of the day.

Iraqi bourgeoisie

Even the new Iraqi bourgeoisie, billionaires from US contracts in Iraq, choose to live in the safer haven of Amman and launder their billions in ostentatious hotels and building projects. They are joined in buying up most of Amman's real estate by the son of the assassinated former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, who himself bought up most of Beirut. This is the capitalism that the US/UK wants to build in Iraq, Syria,



The Golan Hospital, Quneitra: before withdrawing from the Syrian city in 1974, the Israeli army used the hospital for target practice.

Photo: Workers

Lebanon and Iran on the back of their workers.

But, like Iran, Syria is not compliant. Because of US sanctions, outside investment is coming from the Gulf Arab states, Iran, China and Russia. Syria's economy is skewed because it has to spend so much on defence due to the threat from Israel, which occupies the Syrian Golan Heights. It was also badly affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US and Israel accuse Syria of "harbouring terrorists" – because it allows its one million Palestinian refugees to participate fully in the country's political life, and consequently has offices for Palestinian political organisations. Syria has also supported the resistance to Israeli occupation in Lebanon.

So to fulfil Bush's ambition of a wholly US-dependent capitalist Middle East, Syria has to be "dealt with". Having created the tragedy in the Palestinian territories by strangling the elected Palestinian Authority at birth, the US is now turning its attention to Syria. It is widely thought across the Middle East spectrum, including by a CNN

presenter, that the assassinations of Lebanese politicians are being carried out by Israeli or US agents provocateurs, to blame Syria and prepare for an invasion. The daily airlift of US arms to the Lebanese Army represents more shells and bullets than can possibly be used against the "Islamists" at the Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli. They are thought to be intended for rearming the Lebanese Army to attack Hizbollah (subject to an arms embargo) in the event of it supporting Syria if there is an Israeli attack on Syria.

Whilst there have been reports that Israel may do a deal with Syria over the return of the Golan Heights, the US has told Israel that the time is not right for such talks. Israel can attack Syria on its behalf and be territorially rewarded later.

On the ceasefire line

A visit to Quneitra on the Syrian side of the ceasefire line on the occupied Golan Heights is living proof that Syria cannot attack Israel. Under the terms of the 1973 ceasefire agreement, the Syrian military must be at least 30 km from the ceasefire line, while Israeli tanks are right on the line and the surrounding occupied mountains bristle with US-supplied Israeli electronic surveillance equipment. They can see and target Damascus without any problem. If Syrian tanks were to move towards the ceasefire line, both they and Damascus would be destroyed.

The thud of tank shells, the crackle of automatic fire and the screech of F16 jets can be clearly heard on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights as they practise attacking and taking a replica of a Syrian town. Demands by the US that Syria reinforce its border with Iraq to stop "foreign fighters" from crossing are also seen as an attempt to divert units of the Syrian army away from the Israeli front.

Kuwait has publicly said it will not permit an attack on Syria or Iran from its territory. The US and Israel complain bitterly that Syria is attempting to buy Russian fighter jets with which to defend its territory. Meanwhile, in Syria, priority is being given to building air raid shelters and bunkers.

Wilberforce's opposition to the slave trade was founded on the s
hatred of trade unions, free speech, habeas corpus and universal
interests of capitalism...

William Wilberforce: enemy of the working

FAR TOO MUCH credit for the abolition of slavery is given to William Wilberforce, one of history's biggest hypocrites and reactionaries. It was only by their own action that the slaves were freed.

During the 18th century, Britain became the slave carrier for the sugar planters of France and Spain, her rivals. The sugar colonies were far more important to France than to Britain. St Domingue (present-day Haiti), controlled by the French, was more fertile than the British West Indies (which included Jamaica), where the soil was becoming exhausted. The sugar from St. Domingue cost a fifth less and its exports and profit rates were twice that of Jamaica. By 1789, its sugar production was a third more than that of all Britain's West Indies colonies.

Prime Minister William Pitt raged that the slave trade, "instead of being very

advantageous to Great Britain, is the most destructive that can well be imagined to her interests." To ruin St Domingue, he urged his friend William Wilberforce to campaign against the slave trade: the abolitionist movement was created to serve British state interests.

The British ruling class's frenzied reaction to the French revolution of 1789 intensified the antagonism with France, as she became not just a rival but also a political alternative. In 1791, St Domingue's slave-owners offered to leave French rule and put themselves under British rule, to keep their slaves. In 1793, Pitt accepted their offer and agreed, blocking abolition for the next 14 years.

When St Domingue's slaves rebelled against Pitt's betrayal, he sent hundreds of thousands of troops to try to crush them, in a disastrous and futile war. 50,000 British soldiers died, 50,000 were

permanently invalidated. When St Domingue's revolutionary government ended slavery and declared independence from France in 1804, the British ruling class did not need the slave trade any more and so could abolish it in 1807.

Reactionary in Britain

In Britain, Wilberforce was the foremost apologist and champion of every act of tyranny, from the employment of Oliver the Spy and the illegal detention of poor prisoners in Coldbaths Fields jail to the Peterloo massacre. Wilberforce supported the 1794 Habeas Corpus Suspension Act, which let the government imprison people against whom it had no evidence at all. Habeas Corpus was suspended until 1802. Across Britain, trade union members, journalists and publishers were arrested and detained.

Wilberforce backed a series of Acts between 1795 and 1799 to suppress seditious assembly and organisation. Consequently, the state prevented meetings of the Literary Society of Manchester, the Academical Society of Oxford, and even of a mineralogical society, on the grounds that the study of mineralogy could lead to atheism. He backed the Tory government's Six Acts of 1819, including the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act, known as the Gagging Act.

In 1794 he backed the prosecution of twelve members of the London Corresponding Society for high treason. Their crime was to advocate universal suffrage. When a jury acquitted the defendants, he backed the government's decision to arrest 65 leading members of the society and imprison them without trial for two years. No wonder that it was said of Wilberforce, "he never favoured the liberty of any white man in all his life."

Wilberforce wrote that Christianity "renders the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs in their turn to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that



Photo: Workers

Toldpuddle: time for a rally against Wilberforce? He piloted through Parliament the anti-union Combination Acts, which made all unions illegal.

same basis as his
l suffrage: the

class

it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences." William Cobbett called him the prince of hypocrites, who praised the benefits of poverty from a comfortable distance.

The bishops and baronets of the Proclamation Society (as Wilberforce's Society for the Suppression of Vice was earlier called) prosecuted the impoverished publisher of Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason*. In 1801 and 1802, it launched 623 successful prosecutions for breaking the Sabbath laws. Pitt's government declared *The Rights of Man* seditious and prosecuted those who published and sold copies of Paine's book.

Censorship

The government, with Wilberforce's support, imposed censorship, launching 42 prosecutions of publishers, editors and writers between 1809 and 1812. It became a criminal offence to write that the Prince of Wales was fat (he was), or to report that Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh had ordered the flogging of Irish peasants (he had).

Wilberforce also backed persecution of the whole working class. He proposed a general Combination Act, calling combinations – trade unions – "a general disease in our society". The Pitt government's acts of 1799 and 1800 were the severest of their kind ever enacted in Britain. They made all unions illegal as such, whether conspiracy, restraint of trade or the like could be proved against them or not.

In theory, the acts applied to employers as well as to workers, but workers were prosecuted by the thousand, never a single employer. In 1834, a year after the emancipation of the slaves, the penalty for trade union activity was still transportation for life.

In sum, as his biographer the last Lord Birkenhead wrote approvingly, Wilberforce "was a Tory through and through; he never shed the political ideas he had inherited from Pitt and his religion intensified his conservatism."

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.

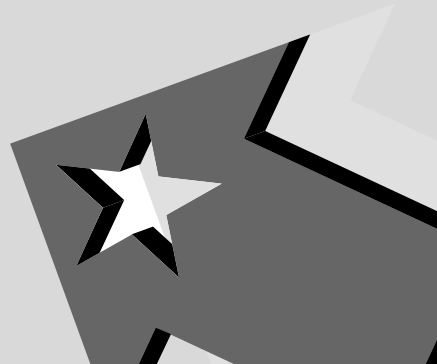
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Back to Front – Bye bye, Blair

'Previous capitalist destructions and Balkanisation of countries will be as nothing to what they plan for Britain...'

BLAIR IS finally going, leaving behind him, for all the talk of legacy, a poisoned inheritance. Even the most demented Victorian imperialists would have thought twice before entering into as many and such frequent foreign military adventures as this government has taken us into: Iraq, Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iraq again.

Blair stands as Bush's accomplice. As Talleyrand said of the Bourbons nearly 200 years ago, they have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The Bourbons, though, corrupt and stupid even by the standards of French kings and queens as they were, are as nothing to US imperialism.

We oppose these wars not because we are pacifists, nor because we prefer our wars to be conducted with a veneer of legality, not just because they are wars on the people of Iraq, but because they are war also on workers here in Britain.

The four years in which Halliburton and the others have looted Iraq stand as a warning to us of capitalism's intentions. Yeltsin's recent death brought back memories of the plunder of the birthplace of revolution by the energy bandits he presided over in the 1990s. The oligarchs now settle their differences by poisoning each other and their agents and do so in our own capital city.

Previous capitalist destructions and Balkanisation of countries will be as nothing to what they plan for Britain. Devolution for Scotland and Wales, now talk of independence, and the regional assemblies. Why stop there? Why not go back to the tribal regionalism of Britain after the Romans left?

Yet they still have not dared to take us into the euro; the constitution still remains a battleground; expansion is hotly fought,

as the EU redefines the continent of Europe in ways that defy geographical and historical logic.

Recitals of what is wrong with Britain are boring and unnecessary: a few moments' thought tells us we all know what is wrong with our workplaces and industries, and what the solutions might be, if we took power into our own hands. Consider the story of the scampi of Scotland: Young's, after sacking 120 workers in Scotland, announced that they then would send the prawns 12,000 miles to Thailand by sea, a six week round trip, to be processed – then to be returned to be sold in Britain. Blair must be proud.

Another of Blair's (and Bush's) achievements is the attack on the English language: so kidnapping becomes "extraordinary rendition", everything that is to be destroyed is to be "modernised", rewarding the government's friends with the opportunity to take over public services is "partnership".

Or "private equity", just a new name for the asset strippers that have been characteristic of capitalism since the war. Some government jargon remains impenetrable: what on earth, for example, does "opportunity society" mean? And then there's the recent Blairite phrase "open world economics", a new term that is designed to prettify the ugly process of capitalism's devastation of economies the world over, and to denigrate its opponents: it's open, so it must be good; and it has the word "world" in it. What sort of little-Englander are you to oppose it?

And they call this politics!

Real politics will come when the 60 million of us in Britain finally decide that we are prepared to take on the responsibility of being our own masters.

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