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LISBON: THE IRISH SAY NO!



JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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WORKERS

“ Ireland says No

NOT FOR the first time the people of Ireland have spoken for the peoples of Europe, rejecting the EU's Constitutional Treaty by 53.4 to 46.6 per cent.

Only the four million Irish, of the EU member states' 490 million people, have been allowed to vote on the Treaty. Even then, it took a legal challenge to force the Irish government to hold a referendum. But then, that is down to their democratic national constitution, which the Treaty is designed to override!

Will Brussels accept this No? After the French and the Dutch voted down the Constitution in 2005, the EU overruled the express wishes of the peoples of Europe for more referendums. It may try again. But the high turnout gives them a problem.

Even before the vote, Green MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit criticised the "foolishness" of the Irish referendum, and said that those thinking of voting no in Ireland were "selfish". What about the selfishness of Europe's rulers, who say that only they have the right to vote on their countries' future? Let's count up the votes: a majority of 110,000 in Ireland, and not a sixth of that number voting in Europe's parliaments.

The EU's cheerleaders call the Irish voters "ignorant", but if people don't know what is in a treaty, they are foolish to embrace it. The Irish saw it was not in their own interests, and refused to be blackmailed into voting for it.

The Irish establishment – the three main political parties, the media, the Pope, even the Irish

Farmers Association in a shady last-minute deal – all pushed for a Yes vote. They reasoned that if they were all united, then workers must surely trust them on how to vote. The opposite happened, and the people listened to their own instincts, backed up by Irish trade unions and Sinn Fein.

The EU's leaders are still stuck with a rule that their treaties can only be valid if they are ratified unanimously. The Lisbon Treaty was designed to do away with that, wiping out national sovereignty so that individual nations could be forced to do what Brussels wants. The Treaty allows them to change their laws as they wish, with no reference ever again to peoples or even to national parliaments.

So in theory the Treaty falls. But, in spite of the Irish vote, the EU – with a fascist abhorrence of democracy – will seek to impose it. To those who ask what part of the word "no" they don't understand, the answer is "everything".

Workers in all the EU's member nations must now make the EU inoperable: we must not comply with its Directives, not participate in its institutions, not fund it, and never vote in its toytown elections. We should all demand referendums now – or organise them ourselves.

The EU is an enemy occupier and we must treat it accordingly. We must withdraw all support from the EU, as preparation for dumping it altogether. We need a new democracy, a new nationalism, a national liberation to free Britain from this increasingly dictatorial EU. The Irish have changed everything.



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB
ISSN 0266-8580

www.workers.org.uk
Issue 117, July 2008



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Death of a Treaty

A YOUGov poll of 1,000 British voters, conducted after Ireland's No vote, found that they thought by a margin of nearly four to one that the Lisbon Treaty should be dropped. 54 per cent agreed that "the government should drop the Lisbon treaty and not try and ratify it." Only 14 per cent said, "The government should carry on and ratify the Lisbon treaty in the UK."

Despite this, European Commission President Barroso said, "The Treaty is not dead. The Treaty is alive." EU law clearly states that all 27 member states must ratify the Treaty before it can come into force. Ireland has voted not to ratify it, so it is dead. French President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "They [the Irish] are bloody fools. They have been stuffing their faces at Europe's expense for years and now they dump us in the s***." Steve Richards argued in the *Independent*, "the referendum and the power it gives to a tiny number of voters in one small country shows the EU is democratic to the point of paralysis."

Axel Schäfer, SPD leader in the German Bundestag, said, "We think it is a real cheek that the country that has benefited most from the EU should do this. ... With all respect for the Irish vote, we cannot allow the huge majority of Europe to be duped by a minority of a minority." Wolfgang Schaeuble, German Interior Minister, said, "a few million Irish cannot decide on behalf of 495 million Europeans." He also said, "I am completely certain that in Europe, there is on the whole a very clear majority in favour of the pursuit of European unification."

Really? Polls suggest that 75 per cent of citizens across the EU want a referendum on any treaty that transfers further powers to the EU. Majorities would vote No to such a treaty in 16 EU countries, including Germany and Britain: polls suggest that voters in Britain would reject the Treaty by a margin of two to one. As Estonia's Foreign Minister Urmas Paet said, "The no vote is not an Irish problem, it is a European problem. If the whole of Europe had voted, the result would have been the same as in Ireland."

In Ireland's vote, 862,415 people voted No, and 752,451 voted Yes – a majority of 109,164. If we add the number of MPs in the 18 parliaments that have voted to ratify the Treaty, assuming a generous majority of 600 MPs in each, that is another 10,800 Yes votes to add to the 752,451 Irish Yeses. Total 763,251. The 862,415 Noes still have the majority, by 98,364.

So of all the people in the whole EU who have been allowed a vote, the majority have voted No. So not "a minority of a minority of a minority". Obviously the EU thinks that MPs' votes should count ten times more than other people's votes!

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

TANKER DRIVERS Victory at Shell



TANKER DRIVERS working for Shell suppliers Hoyer UK and Suckling Transport settled their pay fight in June after a four-day strike that sent panic waves through the petrol industry.

With the threat of a further four-day strike – whose effect would have been accentuated by an overtime ban preceding it – drove the employers to a hurried settlement. The tanker drivers voted to accept the agreement by 453 to 56. The final settlement involved a pay increase of 14 per cent over two years.

Meanwhile, Unite and Ineos are continuing talks over pensions at the huge Grangemouth refinery.

SNOOPING They're watching...

THE HOME OFFICE is set to create a database to store the details of every phone call made, every email sent and every web page visited by British citizens in the previous year. The proposal has emerged as part of plans to implement an EU directive developed after the July 7 bombings to bring uniformity of record-keeping.

- A poll by TNS Sofres showed that only 30 per cent of British people think that EU membership is good for Britain.

EUOTRASH**The latest from Brussels****It's a hard life...**

EACH BRITISH MEP can claim up to £360,000 a year in expenses and pay, bringing our bill for UK MEPs to £28 million. Conservative MEP John Purvis has paid up to £1 million into his own firm, and Sajjad Karim MEP faces questions after paying his wife £26,000 a year to act as his assistant - while she was working as a teacher. "I consider myself completely a victim in this whole thing," Mr Purvis said.

You have to make allowances

A RECENT survey of Britain's MEPs by the think tank Open Europe asked some gentle questions - such as who handled their staff allowances, whether they had retained any of the money or employed any family members, and so on. Thirteen out of 28 Conservative MEPs refused to answer, so did 15 out of 19 Labour MEPs and eight out of 11 Lib Dems.

Keep it in the family

DEN DOVER, recently sacked as Conservative Chief Whip in the European Parliament, paid £750,000 of public money to a firm run by his wife and daughter. The company spent £56,400 for motoring expenses and £32,400 on repairs to the company headquarters, which are located at his £1 million home. The work included the building of five new rooms, a landscaped garden and the installation of electric gates on the drive.

Dover's wife and daughter are not even accredited to enter or use official buildings in Brussels or Strasbourg. As well as earning between £20,000 and £30,000 as a part-time parliamentary assistant, Dover's wife works a four-day week as a travel agent.

Good PR?

LABOUR MEP Michael Cashman has been paying £30,000 a year to his civil partner, Paul Cottingham, despite the fact that he runs his own PR firm.

It's all about freedom

TREASURY Minister Kitty Ussher told a City audience that the Brown government will lead the fight against growing calls for a crackdown on executive pay and bonuses. She said that pay and bonuses are not a matter for governments. Her comments are intended to highlight the Brown government's position as a free-market champion in Europe.



Drax power station, Yorkshire

Photo: Workers

Blackouts from Brussels

THE BLACKOUTS that plunged 500,000 homes into darkness in May were compounded by European environmental restrictions over the use of coal- and oil-fired power stations. The unexpected shutdown of two power stations earlier this summer led to the worst disruption to the UK's power network in more than 20 years, prompting new concerns over the stability of Britain's ageing power grid.

But industry sources say that a key factor was the European Union's Large Combustion Plant Directive (LCPD), which sets strict limits on the number of hours that some of Britain's largest and more heavily polluting coal- and oil-fired power stations can operate before they have to close in 2015. For power stations that have more than one burner, this has created an economic incentive for plants to be switched off unless they are being operated at full capacity, or until wholesale power prices increase enough for them to be turned back on.

Power industry managers said that the rules had contributed to mounting instability on the network because increasing numbers of power stations were not being run at any one time, reducing the margin of spare capacity and the ability of the National Grid to boost supply rapidly at times of crisis.

The problem has been made worse because it affects coal- and oil-fired stations, two of the most flexible sources of power generation. While nuclear plants need plenty of time to boost their power output, operational oil- and coal-fired stations can be fired up quickly to generate more energy.

This is yet another example of an EU dictat being against the needs and interests of the British people. National sovereignty is not a theoretical issue for workers - it affects the very basis of our lives.

SELLAFIELD**Ballot over pay**

AS WORKERS went to press, 2,000 Unite members at Sellafield, the nuclear reprocessing facility in Cumbria, were due to ballot over whether to take industrial action over pay.

Unite says the maintenance and operations staff have rejected an offer worth 2 per cent on pay with an extra

potential 2 per cent efficiency bonus. It is now looking to coordinate possible industrial action with the Prospect union, which is also negotiating there over pay.

Unite regional officer Alan Westnedge, said, "This offer falls way below our members' expectations. We have no other alternative other than to ballot for industrial action. This is a pay cut in real terms and our members are already struggling to keep up with rising household bills and energy costs."

TRANSPORT**Win for station staff**

A 24-HOUR STRIKE by station staff at 19 mainline stations in London and across the country at the end of June was called off when Network Rail backed down in a dispute over compulsory redundancies.

The TSSA and RMT unions had said the planned action by around 330 managers, supervisors and other staff would cause "widespread disruption". The

strike was set to hit stations including King's Cross, Euston and Liverpool Street.

John Page, senior regional organiser of the transport union TSSA, said, "The agreement falls short of our aspiration of a no-compulsory redundancy agreement, but it does provide substantial guarantees against abuse of the process. In particular, there will be a joint review of the organisational changes four months after implementation and no one will be issued with redundancy notices before the review."

Keele University backs down

RESOLUTE MEMBERSHIP action has forced the employers at Keele University to abandon their attempt to make 38 academic staff compulsorily redundant. The interim settlement reached should enable the university to avoid compulsory redundancies. And if the management does not conduct the negotiations in the spirit which has been agreed, "greylisting" (a voluntary boycott) and the action short of a strike can be reinstated.

University and College Union general secretary Sally Hunt, said, "We are delighted to have reached a negotiated agreement with Keele University. This agreement has been reached in no small part thanks to the quite incredible support from UCU members in both further and higher education and academics both nationally and internationally... The support of the union and the wider academic community should serve as a warning to other institutions that UCU will not allow institutions to treat its staff unfairly or disregard its own standards and procedures."

- At the UCU's recent Congress, motions called for a wider debate about what is happening in the territories occupied by Israel; there were no calls for a boycott of Israeli universities. In 2006, the UCU overturned its 2005 resolution to boycott specific Israeli universities. Sally Hunt has said, "My personal view is that a boycott of Israeli academic institutions is not the best way to promote a just peace."

Instead of a boycott, we should be working to defeat Labour's policy of supporting every act by the US and Israeli states – funding and organising the ever-increasing settlements, arming and funding the illegal occupation, and opposing in practice the repression of the Palestinian people. And the best way to weaken any government is to fight for better wages and conditions.

PENSIONS**Closing down**

MORE EMPLOYERS are closing their final-salary-related pension schemes to new employees or switching them off to existing workers, according to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It revealed that employers are closing their salary-related pension schemes to new employees at a faster pace than last year, while more than a quarter of employers surveyed have followed Rentokil's recent example and switched off their final-salary schemes to existing employees or are considering the move in the next 12 months.

The survey of 86 companies also found that 35 per cent are considering a buyout of some or all of their pension liabilities, up from 27 per cent in 2007. Larger companies were more likely to view buyouts as an option, where companies

offload their final-salary pensions to private insurance firms. No worries there, then.

Employers are using the excuse of credit tightening and economic slowdown to justify this naked worsening of workers' standard of living. Between 4 and 5 million private-sector workers expect to retire with a pension related to their final salary. There have been union fights to preserve these retirement plans, notably in May when workers at Grangemouth oil refinery forced their employer to back down after they went on strike to keep its final salary pension scheme open to new accruals and new entrants.

But the pattern of contemporary capitalism with regard to pensions is clear: employers will aim to worsen or scrap their pension schemes, leaving workers with no choice but to organise collectively to defend them – or to see themselves plunged into poverty and degradation in old age.

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

Tolpuddle, Friday 18 July to Sunday 20 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival 2008

Annual rally to commemorate the six farm labourers from the Dorset village sentenced to transportation in 1834 for daring to form a trade union.

The festival just gets bigger each year, with more music, stalls and events than ever. There's even a Tolpuddle group on Facebook. For details of the festival programme, including online purchase of camping tickets, see www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/regions_info_southwest.cfm.

POST**Because the EU says so...**

A LETTER from Brussels to Foreign Secretary David Miliband, dated 28 November 2007, discussed the relationship between the EU and our postal service. Its Paragraph 11 stated, "The transformation programme will involve Post Office Limited reducing the size of its post office network by around 2,500 branches."

But since the start of the year there's been no need for letters like this: an EU official has been appointed as one of the seven Commissioners of Postcomm, the government's postal regulator. Ulf Dahlsten, as Postcomm's own website states, is "on sabbatical from the European Commission" for three years. "Ulf Dahlsten has been actively involved in the deregulation of the Swedish postal, taxi and telecom services," the website informs us.

The government said the closures were needed because Royal Mail was losing millions each week – due in important part to the liberalisation of postal service markets. The EU Postal Services Directive, amended in 2003, requires liberalisation and opening up to competition, which has damaged Royal Mail's revenues.

As the EU Commission notes, "The Postal Directive implicitly endorses the objective of full market opening and also sets a target date of 2009 for the accomplishment of the internal market for postal services."

- New rules introduced by Royal Mail in August 2006 called Pricing in Proportion require post items to be priced by size as well as weight. The Postal Services Directive is behind the new rules: Article 12 states that "prices must be geared to costs".

A matter of priorities



WORKERS MUST focus on what we need to do in the here and now. What should be our practical priorities? What should we be deciding to do in our own country for our maximum benefit? We should plan rationally what we need to produce, and how to produce it, to meet our needs, heedless of fashion or advice from outsiders.

The Copenhagen Consensus, a panel of eight economists including five Nobel laureates, recently said reducing malnutrition should be the world's top priority for aid. The countries affected by mass hunger will make their own assessments of the panel's suggestions. But is providing aid to other nations the top priority for workers here in Britain? We should start with growing far more of our own food: we grow only 58 per cent of our food now; 15 years ago we grew 80 per cent, instead of importing food from countries short of it, as we do now.

Some say that our top priority should be stopping climate change. But directly targeting CO₂ emissions would be hugely expensive and would harm our industries. Note that the 2007 International Panel on Climate Change predicted that sea-levels would rise by 29 centimetres (the same as the rise since 1860), as against the 20 feet that Al Gore publicises. We could cope with this by better use of floodplains, more wetlands, stricter building policies and fewer floodplain subsidies.

We are not in a post-industrial world, nor is such a world remotely desirable. Industry is the material base of civilised life. Our environment includes our cities, our workplaces, homes, hospitals and schools. The great majority of us live in an urbanised, industrialised economy, not in some idealised countryside. We need our industries, to produce the goods we need, to give us light, electricity, heat and food and to keep our cities alive. A world without industry would be a world gone back to the Middle Ages: life would be nasty, brutish and short.

To maintain our industries we need massive public investment in nuclear power, in restoring our coal industry and expanding our oil and gas production. We need research into new low-carbon technologies (like nuclear fusion power), into energy conservation and renewable energy. Private companies are not doing it, and will not do it. We would maximise our welfare not by rolling back our civilisation's industrial advance, but by using our industrial know-how to meet our needs.

Only one ingredient is missing in the great public sector pay disputes – the members...

Fighting by numbers

THE FIRST WORLD War was described as war by railway timetable in that once the order to mobilise had gone out and the troop trains had started to roll, then the war was supposedly unstoppable. The looming dispute over pay in local government has all the hallmarks of slow motion painting by numbers.

The difference between the First World War catastrophe and the present painting by numbers dispute is that the latter has one ingredient missing: where are the troops?

Unison has achieved a majority position for a dispute on a 27 per cent turnout, leave aside the question of the 73 per cent of those unwilling, unable, unconcerned enough not to bother returning their ballot paper. So local government will see a two-day stoppage on 16 and 17 July. Will Unite join in? Its original consultative ballot was as poor as Unison's and hostile to taking action but there is the possibility to join with Unison in July. The GMB has indicated it will accept the offer.

Given all the factors for why there should be a pay fight – rising inflation, dropping living standards, costs of daily essentials soaring and so forth – why has there been such a failure to capture the hearts and minds, the enthusiasm, the willingness to fight from amongst the members? While tubs are thumped and sabres are rattled across numerous trade union head offices and bunkers of so-called activists, no one seems to be paying them a great deal of attention and nobody seems to be paying any attention to the membership.

Needed: guerrilla campaigns

No one is addressing questions of tactics other than tokenistic strike action – and if London is the model for the rest of England and Wales then picketing only occurs between 8 and 10 in the morning. So genteel. There is no thought of a protracted campaign of guerrilla action, utilising the strengths and tactical ingenuity of the members, no attempt to engage the members as participants and owners of the dispute: just painting by numbers and a “we've always done it this way” mentality.

Unison needs to have the strike before the end of the school term because the almost sole remaining industrial muscle or rather public perception that there is a dispute is to close the schools. There are those whose perception of a strategy across the public sector unions is to try and co-ordinate unified days of action – teachers, civil servants, rail workers, further and higher education, local government workers et al.

The bringing down of Gordon Brown's public sector income strategy is seen as sure to follow, with lots of backslapping and memories of the 1970s. The sham and charade of such wistful thinking is that it is playing games. It's not about seizing the bakery or even insisting on an additional slice of the loaf. And how many would-be Thatchers are waiting in Brown's shadows?

What after the 16 and 17 July? The summer break will intervene, at least giving 6 weeks or so to think hard. Or go to sleep like the NUT after its one-day strike in April. Could it be that one of the lowest public sector pay offers made to local government workers is based upon how they are held in almost total contempt by the government and local government employers' organisations?



Photo: Workers

Coventry, 2005: the issue of pay won't go away.

Health

Despite Unite promising to go it alone while ignoring their own previous indication that they had already accepted the government's 2.75 per cent offer before Unison went out to ballot, the three-year deal for over a million health workers, including its inflation re-opener clause, is now a fact of life.

The role Unite is playing in health is deeply cynical – posturing to be seen as the 'Left' trade union in order to poach members from all other health trade unions – and truly pariah.

Both courses of action will expose the largest trade union merger strategy in recent years as sectarian, flawed and divisive. Perhaps the Unite tanker drivers

could advise their health colleagues on unity and principle?

Further education

Negotiations in further education for support staff continue. The unions involved rejected a 2.5 per cent offer: an improved offer worth between 3.2 to 4.2 per cent is now being consulted upon.



New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the CPBM-L, this pamphlet publishes – for the first time – an analysis of the British trade unions by founding Party Chairman Reg Birch. Available now, price £3 including p&p, from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB. Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.

In Britain, the trade unions were created, uniquely, as the “weapons of a working class”. They were an “organic coming together of a class out of the conflict of class relationship” – a necessary tool for survival, built for defence not attack, against the employer in an economic system based on class exploitation.

This is the starting point for this speech, given by Reg Birch in 1982, which goes on to outline the history of our trade unions – tracing them back to at least the 14th century – and to analyse their development, peculiar to Britain.

The CPBM-L is re-issuing the text of this important speech by its founding Chairman, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Party, not as an academic exercise or a historic curiosity, but because Reg Birch's analysis raises important questions for us today.

Read it, consider it, and discuss it with your fellow workers.

As the National Health Service reaches its 60th anniversary, it's it, and why...

The NHS at 60: not given to us by Labour, I



Photo: Workers

November 2007: Marching in London for the National Health Service in a demonstration called by Unison.

THE NATIONAL Health Service came into being on 5 July 1948, and has played a major part in the quality of our lives ever since. Most people in the UK have known no other way of providing medical care. The NHS faces many threats and challenges despite all its successes. The alleged need to improve patient choice is pushing many changes, not all of them welcomed by patients and health workers.

Medical care has advanced beyond belief compared to 1948. The NHS today employs 1.3 million workers, with an annual budget of over £100 billion. It is organised into many different trusts, which compete for patients and funds. Some will soon have “foundation” status with even greater independence. Financial performance is as important as clinical in deciding which trusts have resources.

The government promotes the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and private/public

partnerships (PPP) in the belief that “the market” is the best way to exercise financial control. But it does not talk about the huge future costs these entail, or the effect on clinical decisions.

When the NHS was created, patients were promised “your own doctor”. Superficially the promise of greater choice is a progression from that promise. But it's worth looking in more detail at the reasons for creating the NHS. Two days before the NHS came into being Health Minister Aneurin Bevan wrote the following in the *British Medical Journal*:

“On July 5 there is no reason why the whole of the doctor-patient relationship should not be freed from what most of us feel should be irrelevant to it, the money factor, the collection of fees or thinking how to pay fees – an aspect of practice already distasteful to many practitioners.

“The cost of ill-health is a burden on

the community and a burden on the family, and the startling advances made by Medicine in the past 25 years have steeply increased this cost. There is, therefore, a logical case for spreading it over the whole of the community so that those who are fortunate enough to remain in good health may help those who temporarily fall out of the ranks.

“The price Britain will have to pay for this new service is high, but the fact that the country is prepared to pay this high price shows that it is well aware that on the crude economic level an efficient and complete medical service will pay a good dividend in health, happiness, and efficiency in work”.

The NHS was not a creation of the Labour Party, given out of generosity. Lord Beveridge, whose report recommended setting up a national health service, was anyway a prominent Liberal. The NHS was

time to look back and explode some myths about who created but fought for and won by workers

fought for and won by pressure from workers. Health provision was one of the reasons a Labour government was put into power in 1945 (and again in 1997).

The impetus for providing standardised comprehensive health care services came in the wake of the industrial revolution. Britain was transformed with great rapidity from an agrarian, rural nation into an industrial, urban one in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. People congregated in towns and cities, which produced an explosion of disease, industrial injuries and destitution. Lack of clean water, drainage and refuse disposal were major contributory causes of disease, particularly of cholera outbreaks.

Royal Commission

A Royal Commission was convened in 1832 under the stewardship of Edwin Chadwick, to examine the problems of urban poverty. This gave rise to the establishment of a Public Health Board, with him as Chairman, following the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. He subsequently produced a paper entitled "Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain", which was the chief stimulus behind the Victorian Public Health Movement. The first Public Health Act went onto the statute books in 1848; from then it became generally accepted that the health of the population was the responsibility of society as a whole.

Health services in Britain emanated directly from industrialisation and the needs of the manufacturing base. It is not a question of chicken and egg. Wealth creation and health are linked inextricably.

The National Insurance Act of 1911, passed under Lloyd George, represented the most important direct intervention by the state into health care prior to 1948. It introduced a compulsory system of contributory health insurance for a major section of the manual workforce. It was known as the "10 pence for 4 pence scheme". At the outset 11.5 million workers were covered, rising to 20.3 million by 1938, which was 43 per cent of the population. The income limit for participation was extended from £160 a year to £250 in 1920. In addition to a weekly receipt of

"Bevan wanted to take money away from the relationship between patient and doctor. Labour wants to take the NHS in the opposite direction"

sickness benefit, members and their families were eligible for adequate medical attendance and treatment, without further payment, from their chosen "panel" doctor. By 1938, 90 per cent of all active general practitioners were involved in the scheme. Hospital treatment was excluded, except for tuberculosis.

After the 1914-18 war, Lloyd George, under pressure to create a "home fit for heroes", commissioned the Dawson Report. This proposed the need for a nationally organised comprehensive health system with primary and secondary health services, specialist services for infectious diseases and mental illness, and teaching hospitals with medical schools.

The first Ministry of Health was established in 1919 with a doctor, Christopher Addison, at its head. During the interwar economic depression, Neville Chamberlain was minister from 1924-1929, and briefly also in 1929 and 1931. He was forced by the electorate to support a whole series of laws comprising 25 Acts of Parliament which brought all Health and Poor Law services into a single scheme, and extended access to health insurance and pensions. The 1929 Local Government Act is of particular significance.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, there were 3,000 hospitals in England and Wales of which 1,000 were voluntarily supported, with excellent standards and high calibre medical staff.

Of those, 300 hospitals specialised in a particular branch of medicine such as paediatrics, orthopaedics or ophthalmics. The remaining 700 were small cottage hospitals staffed by general practitioners.

In addition 2,000 local authority hospitals comprising the Poor Law

Infirmaries provided a very basic standard of care for the elderly and chronically sick. There were 300 large hospitals for the mentally ill and about 50 infectious diseases hospitals established under 19th century sanitary legislation.

Between 1939 and 1946 events moved rapidly towards a proposal for a central government-directed and structured national health service. The Beveridge Report of 1942 promulgated the concept of comprehensive public protection for all individuals from "the cradle to the grave" against sickness, unemployment and poverty. Ernest Brown was Minister in 1942. The state, he said, will provide free medical care and pensions, family allowance, insurance against unemployment, improved housing and basic public health services. One-sixth of the cost would be met from National Insurance Contributions, five-sixths from the Exchequer.

No longer tolerable

Though differences existed between him and the doctors, the profession as a whole were no longer prepared to tolerate a situation whereby people hesitated to seek medical advice for fear of the cost that might be entailed by the discovery of a serious illness. No major operation or prolonged medical investigation could be allowed to impose a financial strain at a time when a family might be least able to bear it.

As we've seen, Bevan wanted to take money away from the relationship between patient and doctor. Labour wants to take the NHS in the opposite direction: monetary considerations are to the fore with direct and indirect privatisation of parts of the service and the increase of enterprises in health care with no purpose except to profit. But it's not only Labour – all parliamentary parties have similar views on "what we can afford".

The challenge for the working class in Britain is once again to assert the importance of the NHS to our health and to fight as much to maintain it as we did to create it and revive it. In the end it's us who will decide the future for NHS by taking action or failing to do so.

By the late 20th century, many infectious and deficiency diseases went to the history books. Now, thanks to government action and inaction,

Welcome to the 21st century: the return of

BRITAIN WAS supposed to see the end of infectious diseases. This feat of public health was achieved by a combination not of drugs, doctors and hospitals but of clean water, proper sewage systems and better nutrition. Of course there were medical advances such as vaccination, antibiotics and widespread availability of barrier contraceptives, combined with greater knowledge and awareness of illnesses. In 1980 the World Health Assembly declared one disease – smallpox – eradicated throughout the world.

But in recent years, some diseases thought to have largely died out have seen a resurgence. Let's look at why.

Measles

2007 saw the biggest rise in occurrence in cases of measles since the Health Protection Agency started collecting data in 1995. There were 971 cases in England and Wales – an increase of 30 per cent on 2006. Of these, nearly four fifths were in children under 15 and linked to small outbreaks in nurseries and schools.

Measles, which is highly infectious and can be transmitted between people breathing the same air, used to be endemic in the UK. After the introduction of a vaccine in the 1960s, cases fell massively. In the early 1990s the World Health Organisation set a target to eradicate measles by 2000. The strategy relied on protecting 95 per cent of the susceptible population using the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, MMR.

But in 1998 a team of researchers including Andrew Wakefield published a controversial paper in *The Lancet* describing a novel inflammatory bowel condition in 12 autistic children. It said behavioural problems had begun in 8 of the 12 children shortly after receiving the MMR vaccination.

Uptake of the MMR vaccine plunged. While in 1996/97 92 per cent of 2-year-old children in England received both doses, by 2003/04 it was only 80 per cent. Although levels of the vaccination uptake have begun to improve, there are still pockets of very low uptake, particularly in London.



“The plan was to clear polio and then measles. We were well on the way to doing that in this country. It is disgraceful that that chance should be gone,” says Eithne McMahon, Consultant at Guys and St Thomas’ Hospital.

“In order to ensure that you do not get the disease spreading, the target we are aiming for is 95 per cent uptake with 2 doses of vaccine and it is quite hard to realise. You don’t need that kind of coverage with a lot of other infections,” says Dr McMahon. “Autism was a fear parents felt threatened with. Because there was no measles around, no one was afraid of measles. Once people start to see that this is a very serious and potentially fatal illness that is best avoided, that helps the pendulum swing back in the other direction.”

Dr McMahon is perhaps being a little polite. That so many British people can be so easily swayed not only to do the wrong thing by their children, but by other people’s children – the possibility of a critical mass of epidemic proportions being achieved through the lack of use of MMR vaccine is very real – is a sign of the

backwardness of our thinking, as well as our susceptibility to pseudo, or just plain wrong, science.

Tuberculosis

The tuberculosis vaccine BCG used to be given to all children through the schools programme, but this ended two years ago, and it is offered only to babies in high incident TB areas or with parents or grandparents from high-incidence countries. BCG is not as effective a vaccine as MMR, and probably would not get through medical trials if it was new today. There is a misconception that TB was eradicated in Britain, but it never was. Although the figure got down to around 5,500 cases in 1987, every year since then has seen an increase. Last year there were 8,496 cases recorded, and although this is a tiny decrease on the previous year about 40 per cent of all reported cases of TB occur in London.

Great Ormond Street Infectious Disease Consultant Delane Shingadia says that while the UK as a whole has only seen slight increases of TB, rates have almost quadrupled in the capital in the

es that were once commonplace seemed to have been confined
 ction, and backwardness, they're back...

the killer diseases

past 10 years: "The WHO cut-off for a high incidence country is a rate of 40 cases per 100,000 population and London has now exceeded that at about 43 per 100,000." Some 70 per cent of TB cases in Britain occur in people not born here.

Although a TB screening programme is in place for migrants entering the UK from countries with a high incidence of the disease, Health Protection Agency Consultant Ibrahim Abubakar says that this is not the solution.

"In 80 per cent of cases the disease developed at least two years after arrival and often in other parts of the body than their lungs, so a chest X-ray would not pick it up anyway," he says. Abubakar says TB resurgence is caused by the breakdown of infrastructure in former Soviet republics and sub-Saharan Africa, and by the latter continent's HIV epidemic. "Our data does not suggest that the epidemic has in any way affected the indigenous population. If you look at the absolute number of UK-born white individuals, the numbers getting TB are actually dropping."

If you add to this the WHO's estimate that around a third of the world's population has latent TB, then we can see what might lie ahead for Britain with unrestricted economic migration.

Rickets

The bowed legs characteristic of rickets was frequently seen after the industrial revolution on children living in urban slums on a poor diet. The disease is linked to a deficiency in vitamin D, which is needed for strong bones and is found in certain foods, but is also made by the body if the skin is exposed to sunlight of the right wavelength. In the winter in Britain there is not enough sunlight of the right wavelength in areas north of Birmingham to enable the body to do this, so residents who do not go out in the sun, who cover up or have darker skin are at particular risk of vitamin D deficiency.

When rickets reappeared in the 1970s among children across Britain, a public health campaign to reduce it by issuing vitamin D drops to everyone at risk was launched. As time went on, the NHS

"That so many British people can be so easily swayed...is a sign of the backwardness of our thinking..."

stopped providing the vitamins and children stopped taking them. The Department of Health now estimates rickets can affect 1 in every 100 children from communities which originated in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

In 2005 paediatricians in Bradford were seeing around 60 children with vitamin D deficiency every year, predominantly from the South Asian community, and about a third of these had rickets. "We felt that in 2005 we shouldn't be seeing any children with that kind of problem," one of Bradford's Public Health Consultants said at the time.

In Blackburn, around one case of rickets a week is being identified in the South Asian community. The NHS in both these areas is now spending hundreds of thousands of pounds a year on vitamin D supplements. Children from these communities often do not get much sunlight until they go to school because they stay at home with their mothers and adolescent girls are at particular risk when they start wearing the hijab. In Blackburn the local NHS organisation is even employing someone who can take Asian women out for walks around local parks and away from the suppressive households who deny them the sunlight that they and their children need.

Syphilis

Once associated with sailors with a girl in every port, syphilis began resurging in the 1990s in former socialist countries of Eastern Europe when health systems collapsed. Cases in Britain have increased tenfold, from 301 in 1997 to 3702 in 2006.

While the disease can be concentrated amongst gay men, the "globalised" party

scene is also contributing to the problem with cheap flights taking over from sailing ships as conduit of the infection. The Director for the Centre of Public Health in Liverpool says, "It is just as easy and maybe quicker for people in Manchester using a cheap flight to go to a party in Berlin as anywhere else, so you are exposed not just to the profile of infection within your own country but the profile within another country as well."

So what are the morals of these stories? To begin with, improving working conditions and infrastructure such as sewage and housing can eradicate disease. This is very difficult to do within capitalism, because the imperative is not people's health but maximising profits.

The collapse of the economies of those socialist countries to the west of the Soviet Union, and of the Soviet Union itself has had a massive effect within those countries. Added to that, workers have been encouraged to migrate elsewhere, both to make a living themselves but also to undercut the wages of western European workers. In so doing they have spread many diseases which were previously eradicated from Britain. Countries such as Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and parts of the Soviet Union once had among the best health systems in the world.

Further unrestricted economic migration from parts of the world whose populations are even poorer and who have little or no defence against some of Britain's climatic and other difficulties is further spreading once-eradicated diseases.

Employers care little or nothing about this. Apart from anything else, they know that the tab for all these imported diseases will be borne by those working here not by those employing them.

No civilised country can abrogate responsibility for its own borders. Without border control there can be no planning, and with no planning there can be no certainty that life-threatening conditions can be eradicated, or even effectively dealt with. There will be no improvement in health without control of Britain's borders.

It's no surprise that the Zimbabwean economy is in difficulty: the country for the past seven years...

Intervene? Haven't Britain and America already

IN ALL THE coverage of Zimbabwe, it is rarely noted that the US and British states have been imposing punitive economic sanctions on the country since 2001. Western academics and journalists instead portray the crisis in Zimbabwe solely as the result of the land reform or of Mugabe's mismanagement.

As former Assistant Secretary of State on African Affairs, Chester Crocker, told the US Senate in 2001, "To separate the Zimbabwean people from Zanu-PF we are going to have to make their economy scream, and I hope you senators have the stomach for what you have to do." 'Make the economy scream', is exactly what President Nixon said he would do to Allende's Chile. The senators did as Crocker proposed.

Finance crippled

Under the USA's Zimbabwe Destruction and Economic Ruin Act, sorry, Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA), the US representatives at every international financial institution were instructed "to oppose and vote against (1) any extension by the respective institution of any loan, credit, or guarantee to the Government of Zimbabwe; or (2) any cancellation or reduction of indebtedness owed by the Government of Zimbabwe to the United States or any international financial institution." Due to the sanctions, foreign trade dropped towards near zero, and foreign direct investment in Zimbabwe fell by over 99 per cent. The US and British states, having knifed Zimbabwe in the back, now say, 'look, you spilled blood on the floor'.

There was huge US-British interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs during the run-up to the 29 March elections:

- The US and British states threatened to keep the sanctions until Zanu-PF was ousted. NGOs distributing food threatened to cut off food aid if Zanu-PF won. Foreign governments and corporations funded the Movement for Democratic Change, as MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai admitted in a February



Downtown Harare

Photo: Damien Farrell/GNU FDL

2002 SBS Dateline programme.

- Western-financed anti-Zanu-PF radio stations, including Radio SW Africa (financed by the US State Department) and the Voice of America's Studio 7, stepped up their broadcasts during the election period.
- MDC activists doubled as vote educators working for the US government-financed Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network and promoted the opposition under the guise of explaining electoral procedures.
- During the election campaign the Labour government increased its funding of civil society organisations in Zimbabwe opposing the government.
- Australia's government spent \$18 million backing critics of Mugabe, two-thirds of it in the run-up to the elections.

- US and British diplomats spoke at MDC rallies.

The opposition had planned to use the elections according to the USA's familiar counter-revolution script – declare victory in elections before the first vote was cast, and then denounce any outcome other than a clear opposition victory as proof of electoral fraud.

But the opposition's charges of vote rigging fell flat when the results showed Zanu-PF losing its majority in the assembly and its candidate Mugabe trailing MDC leader Tsvangirai in the presidential contest. If the vote had been rigged, Mugabe's party would have sailed to victory.

The opposition needed a way to grab power without having to rely on the uncertainties of a run-off election on 27

The US and Britain have been imposing trade sanctions on the

Already done enough damage?

June. It decided to copy its US and British patrons and invent a pretext for military intervention – a scare story of imminent genocide. Outside forces, preferably those of the former coloniser Britain, whose corporations still have a large stake in the country, would be called upon to intervene militarily to avert impending genocide and, in the process, install the MDC as the new government.

Early in April, MDC's secretary-general Tendai Biti appealed to his "brothers and sisters" across Africa not to "wait for dead bodies in the streets of Harare". "Intervene now," he demanded. Twelve days later, still with no sign of genocide, Tsvangirai called on the West to intervene. The next day a group of clerics warned, "If nothing is done to help the people of Zimbabwe from their predicament, we shall soon be witnessing genocide similar to that experienced in Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and other hot spots in Africa and elsewhere." Two days later, Tsvangirai's spokesman Nelson Chamisa warned, "If something isn't done in a few days, this country is going to be converted into a genocide zone." Archbishop Desmond Tutu joined in, calling for British troops to go into Zimbabwe and insisted that this would not be aggression, claiming, "It is merely ensuring that human rights are maintained."

Violence

It is true that there has been politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe, but it has occurred on both sides, is political, not ethnic, and is too limited to count as genocide.

While Mugabe is portrayed as a monster egging on thugs to beat opposition supporters, he has often spoken out against violence. On 17 May, he told the country, "Such violence is needless and must stop forthwith." He added, "support comes from persuasion, not from pugilism. Genuine support for the party cannot come through coercion or violence." Zanu-PF has proposed a joint Zanu-PF-MDC committee to investigate political violence. On 14 May,

Moral authority? From Brown?

WITH ALL THE bluster, and huffing and puffing by Brown and Miliband over events in Zimbabwe, with the calling for the overthrow of Robert Mugabe, with the stripping of Mugabe's knighthood and the cancellation of cricket tours, it's interesting to examine issues of moral authority.

Nobody who has led, or supported, or voted for the illegal invasion of a sovereign state, Iraq, that led to the deaths of one million Iraqi souls and the displacement of six million refugees, has any moral authority to criticise Zimbabwe over human rights. Nobody who collaborated in the denial of the democratic choice of the Palestinian people, following their elections, and who consequently imposed economic sanctions on Gaza creating a replica of the Warsaw ghetto, has the moral authority to criticise Zimbabwe over its elections. Similarly, nobody who is coercing us into an anti democratic Euro State whilst denying us a say has any moral authority to claim to uphold democratic values.

Nelson Mandela, who does have the moral authority to speak out on such issues, describes events in Zimbabwe as a "tragedy of the failure of leadership" and has probably got it about right, although he also knows that subsequent British governments have contributed heavily to the situation in that country over many years. He also knows that this situation will only be resolved by the people of Zimbabwe alone. Neighbouring African states may help if asked and if they choose to do so.

South African President Thabo Mbeki, who is the mediator acting on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community is accused of sitting on the fence and is called upon by Bush and Brown to condemn Mugabe and demand that he goes. Yet the role of a mediator is precisely to "sit on the fence", to be neutral in public and to try to find common ground between the parties. It seems that nothing can satisfy the demands of Bush and Brown, described on TV recently during Bush's visit to London as the "world's two most unpopular leaders". So much for Brown's claim to be guided by a moral compass.

police arrested 50 Zanu-PF activists. On 9 May they had arrested 58 opposition activists on suspicion of setting fire to the homes of Zanu-PF members.

The MDC claims to be the party of democracy, founded on non-violent principles, but its behaviour belies its claims. No sooner had it been born, with Britain acting as mother, father and midwife, than it was threatening political violence: "What we would like to tell Mugabe is please go peacefully," said Tsvangirai. "If you don't want to go peacefully, we will remove you violently." In the USA or Britain, a political leader who threatened to use violence to oust the government, appealed for foreign military intervention and economic warfare, and accepted funding from hostile foreign powers, would be branded a terrorist and traitor and locked up.

Of course, what Mugabe should have done was to follow the EU's example: refuse to hold nationwide elections at all, allow just one province to vote on his proposed constitutional changes, and then overrule their No vote. Then a servile press, for example Steve Richards of the Independent, would write that this was 'democratic to the point of paralysis'.

Now Tsvangirai is again calling for 'intervention to stop the genocide'. So are Lord Ashdown and The Times. 85 people have been killed, not all by ZANU-PF, but this does not constitute genocide. The Labour government has tried to get the UN Security Council to recognise the opposition's right to rule, but it failed, because the governments of South Africa, Russia and China all oppose any interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

Our fifth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by looking back over four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, THE WORKER, this month: Thatcher's Falklands War...

1982: War in the South Atlantic



THE FALKLANDS WAR was probably the most important foreign policy event in domestic terms in the 1980s. It occurred when Thatcher was deeply unpopular, giving her the chance to gain support.

Thatcher insisted that the Falkland Islands had the right of self-determination and refused even to discuss the matter of sovereignty. This obstinacy clearly increased the risks of Argentine action to gain what negotiations were not allowed to achieve. On 26 March 1982, MI6 warned of an imminent invasion on 2 April. After receiving this warning, the government did nothing, perhaps to lure the Argentine government into attacking.

On 2 April, Argentine forces landed on the Islands. Thatcher decided that they had to be repelled by force. As Reagan said, "Maggie wants a skirmish." On 3 April, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 502 calling on both parties not to escalate the dispute and to settle it by negotiation. Thatcher vetoed the Resolution. Nicholas Henderson, Britain's Ambassador to the UN, later revealed that Thatcher would negotiate only after a war, not to prevent one: "if negotiations were going to lead to anything, this would only be as a result not of conciliatory noises but of direct and heavy military pressure."

British casualties were 218 killed and 777 injured; the Argentinians lost 746 killed. In Britain, a servile press inflated this victory into an equal of the war against Hitler, helping Thatcher to win the 1983 General Election.

We reprint below our coverage of these



events at the time, when on 27 May 1982 *The Worker's* front page said:

“As Thatcher plunges Britain into unjustifiable war, trade unionists demand: RECALL THE FLEET!

- With the clarity of workers in active class struggle ASLEF at their annual conference have demanded the recall of the task force from the South Atlantic.

- Health workers all over the country are escalating their war with Thatcher over wages in spite of her attempt to divert all attention to her vicious war over the Falkland Islands.

- Benn, Dalyell, Hart and 30 other Labour MPs defied the pusillanimous leadership of their Party and voted in the House of Commons to oppose Thatcher in their demand for an immediate cease fire.

- The Fire Brigades Union along with other unions have called for a cease fire in the South Atlantic so that negotiations can continue.

- The Inner London division of the NUT has called for the withdrawal of the task force and for a prosecution of the war against Thatcher at home.

- Engineers at Rolls Royce, Coventry, have blacked Harrier engines needed by

the task force in a dispute over union recognition.

- Demos up and down the country reflect the growing opposition to Thatcher's war which only strengthens her hand against the workers of Britain.

- Make the June 6th demonstration to keep Reagan out of Britain a mighty rally to get

Thatcher out of the South Atlantic, northern Ireland, Oman and No. 10!!!!

Our war is at home”

On 10 June *The Worker* said:

“Thatcher is waging a completely unnecessary and totally unjustifiable war in the South Atlantic to strengthen her position for waging war against the working class in Britain. We shall pay dearly if we don't stop her.

We shall pay with our freedom. Thatcher says the war is being fought for freedom. She lies. It is being fought against our freedom. The fatuous chauvinism whipped up by the press, the phony nationalism from pulpits and on TV screens have fastened Thatcher's yoke on our necks tighter than ever. Each khaki election victory won is a green light for her

Looking at the past THE WORKER. This

to go ahead with her vicious attacks on our jobs, wages and unions.

We shall pay in cash. Already more than a billion pounds, representing schools, colleges and hospitals which could be kept open and industries which could be saved, have been blown away in this bellicose adventure. Many more billions will be poured down the same military drain while here in Britain monetarism is invoked as the excuse for cutting our public services' expenditure on our welfare.

We shall pay in national honour. Britain's name is beginning to stink in the nostrils of the decent people of Latin America and the Caribbean, of Africa and Asia. Her veto of a UN resolution calling for a cease-fire shows Britain's growing isolation. The barbarous howl of The Sun for blood, the savage cries of the SAS to hunt down and kill 'Argies' show that the hated voice of British imperialism is not dead. Thatcher, like some Cecil Rhodes in skirts, is talking now, to the cheers of a lumpen mob, of hanging on to the Falklands permanently for the export of more capital.

Thatcher says the war is being fought to punish aggressors. She lies. We are the aggressors. The Falkland Islands were stolen from Argentina by imperialist force a hundred and fifty years ago. Just before the Heath Government came to power, arrangements had practically been made to hand the Falklands back. The negotiations that will have to be held on the sovereignty of the Islands could have been held without any bloodshed. Over a thousand young men have died uselessly.

Britain once repelled an armada sent by a villainous king to reduce the British people to vassals of the Pope and Spain. This time the armada was despatched by a British Prime Minister to bolster up her power over the British people at home through belligerence abroad.

It is not too late to undo the shameful damage done in our name for the purpose of undoing us. Pull down the warmonger and pull out the troops – out of the South Atlantic, out of Ireland. They can be housed in the bases from which we expel the GIs.”

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.

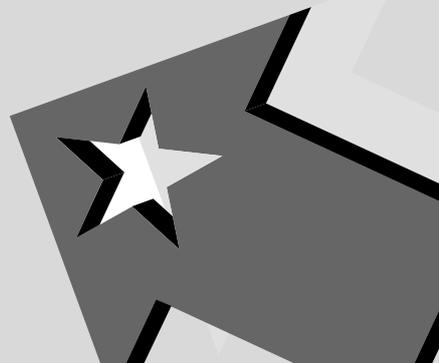
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Back to Front – Wages, prices, profits

‘Guerrilla struggle is anathema to the armchair generals and the general-strike-now brigade, but it is the only way forward.’

TO CAPITALISTS, the system that supports them is a complete mystery, and despite decades of Nobel prizes they have been unable to shed much light on its workings. So they seize upon any theory, however pathetic, to explain why it is so good, and what workers must do to keep it going.

From time to time someone comes up with an idea such as that in the 1960s and 1970s, which held that the most important thing for Britain’s economy was the balance of payments. Then it was the exchange rate of sterling. For Thatcher, it was the mysterious M3, or money supply (and, yes, someone got a Nobel prize for that one).

But one idea has been constantly embraced: the notion that the less workers get paid, the better it is for everyone. Hence the frequent calls over the decades for pay “restraint” on the part of workers and their unions, as if unfettered proletarian greed was continually threatening to bring down civilisation.

Surprise, surprise, the calls are coming back, all the louder now that inflation, having already hit the roof, is heading for the clouds. So far, though, the response from workers has been muted. Indeed, as the article on pages 6 and 7 describes, the public sector is in disarray: barely a quarter of Unison’s local government members voted either way in their ballot on the latest pay offer.

Unquestionably, our unions are in a mess, from the bottom to the top. The head offices are full of armchair generals dreaming grandiose coordinated schemes, while the members – who know instinctively that the strength is not there for prolonged all-out action – are walking away.

There is, though, an answer: guerrilla struggle. It’s a form of fighting that relies on our strengths, not our weaknesses. It relies, too, on what the membership in any given workplace is willing and able to do. That may (and does) make it anathema to the armchair generals and the general-strike-now brigade

who in the absence of mass involvement have wormed their way into many union positions, but it is the only way forward.

Fight on ground chosen by workers in struggle – that’s how the British trade union movement developed and advanced since the days of Karl Marx and before. With a few exceptions, the history of grand strikes once a decade or so is one of grand defeats once a decade or so. The engineers, until recently the leaders of industrial struggle, never had a national strike, yet won, over and over again, and advanced the working class.

Of course, guerrilla struggle is not easy. For one thing, it demands the involvement of the mass of members, at a time when the majority of trade union members clearly want to hide their heads under pillows and hope somehow that the nightmare will go away. It won’t, not unless workers take action.

There’s nothing more basic to the relationship between workers and capital than pay. It’s a relationship described by Marx in the 19th century, before Alfred Nobel had turned from making armaments to founding prizes (none for Marx: Nobel’s testament allows no posthumous prizes).

Marx’s analysis of the falling rate of profit inherent in capitalism, and what capitalists try to do about it, was truly visionary – a totally accurate picture of the development of what’s become known as globalisation.

For the employers, the “going rate” they want to pay is the lowest they can find in the world. Pay restraint? They want to cut our wages to what is earned in China or India.

Some think the way to a pay rise is promotion, but we can’t all be promoted. Some seek – or sought – money from buy-to-let, but (thank goodness) we can’t all be landlords. There’s no escape, only a battle yet to be joined. That battle needs new generals, but first it needs new thinking in the workplaces, where wages are earned and profit is taken.

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