

WORKERS

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When the Constitution confers on the Union a competence in a specific area, the Union and the Member States shall have the power to legislate and adopt legally binding acts in this area. The Member States shall exercise their competence only if and to the extent that the Union has not exercised its.

3. The Union shall have competence to coordinate the economic policies of the Member States.
4. The Union shall have competence to define and implement a common foreign and security policy, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy.
5. In certain areas and in the conditions laid down in the Constitution, the Union shall have competence to carry out actions to coordinate, supplement or support the actions of the Member States, without thereby superseding their competence in these areas.

WHY WE NEED A REFERENDUM



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WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE DECISION by the European Court of Justice to declare illegal the ‘golden share option’, whereby the government retains strategic control of key industries and service providers, shatters any pretence that the EU is compatible with the preservation of sovereignty in Britain.

The golden share option was a sop by the Thatcher government to those who opposed privatisation. It was supposed to prevent strategic industries from falling into foreign, competing ownership that conflicted with the

national interests of Britain.

The bland acceptance by this government of this EU ruling puts at risk whole swathes of industrial interests. These range from British Airways, Rolls Royce and the National Grid to utilities and defence companies.

This will result in a further feeding frenzy of takeovers and closures across the whole of Europe. It will further assist the EU’s intention to regionalise and relocate industrial production to fit their blueprint. Industrial Britain does not figure in such a ‘roadmap’.

Second opinion

WHAT IS a fitting education system for an advanced industrial nation in the 21st century? The picture from the British schools front line is of teacher redundancies, crumbling buildings and four-day weeks – with only the commitment and professionalism of education workers holding things together.

Education Secretary Clarke has been trying to blame councils for the £2.5 billion “black hole” in funding identified by head teachers.

But that doesn’t wash as it might have done in the old days, because heads run their own budgets now and know where the money is supposed to come from.

The costs of Blair’s adventure in Iraq are uncomfortably close to education’s black hole, and are being felt throughout Britain’s classrooms.

Will we allow British children to pay the price?

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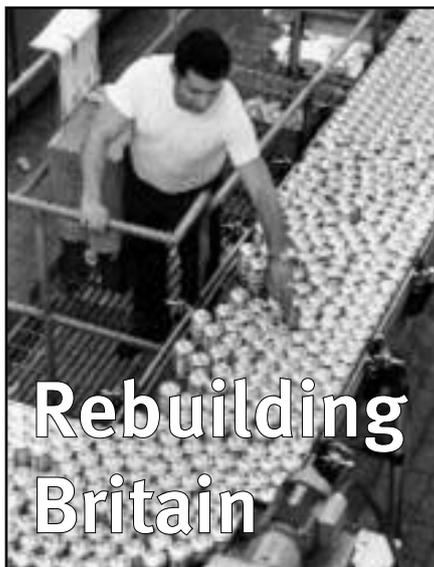
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Return of the journalists

REGIONAL PRESS JOURNALISTS in the north of England are engaged in a series of long-running disputes about pay with their US-based owners. National Union of Journalists members working on the TELEGRAPH & ARGUS and other Newsquest Bradford area titles will begin an indefinite strike on 26 May, after 31 days of stoppages this year.

Colleagues at Newsquest's Bolton and Bury newspapers were on strike from 22 April, after a similar period of limited action. They were meeting at the end of May to consider the latest proposals and their best way forward, after talks between management and national NUJ officials.

The American-owned chain of 240 papers is trying to impose an increase of just 2% across the whole group. Action has taken place elsewhere too. NUJ members in Kendal, in Cumbria, were on strike earlier this year. The Newsquest NUJ chapel at the NEWS SHOPPER in southeast London is due to take action from 23 May. The NUJ is supporting all the disputes from the union's fighting fund to prevent strikers suffering hardship. Fellow unionists in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester have given support to both the main disputes. The union has some parliamentary support as well — 53 MPs signed an Early Day Motion calling on the newspaper publisher to make a realistic pay offer to the striking journalists.

The company says the average salary of those on strike in Bradford is £21,000. The union says that rates are too low — fully qualified senior journalists start at £15,000 on the weeklies and £17,100 on the daily. The NUJ chapel asked for a rise of £1,500 per year, which would still leave most of them well below the British average wage of £24,000.

The company claims it cannot afford more than 2%. The journalists are not convinced. Newsquest Bradford made over £7 million profit in 2002 — representing a profit-to-turnover margin of 31% — and it paid a dividend of £4 million. Pay settlements at other provincial newspaper groups have been higher than the Newsquest offer.

After the latest strike decision, management offered 3% for some of the journalists and a performance-linked bonus scheme. That offer was unanimously rejected.

Over the Pennines, the Bolton and Bury NUJ Chapel decided that going on strike indefinitely would be more effective than taking action for just two days a week. Father of Chapel Dave Thomson explained: "We realised that the short strikes were not effective because they were able to build up a stock of stories so after the second one we decided not to go back." Since the strike began, the resolve of the chapel has strengthened and has increased in pace and momentum virtually every single day. The Bolton and Bury titles are part of Newsquest Lancs, whose latest profits increased by 16% to over £5 million. A significant part of that amount, £500,000, was saved by not filling vacant posts in Bolton.

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

SECRECY They're watching you...

EVIDENCE PUBLISHED by Statewatch (www.statewatch.org/news) demonstrates how secret treaty negotiations are being advanced between the EU and USA over extradition, circumvention of data protection and civil liberties, joint EU-US surveillance through Europe, circumvention of the International Criminal Justice Court, use of US Special Courts (Military Tribunals) etc.

As well as the EU secret talks, separate and even more secret negotiations between the British and US governments are attempting to agree the provisions in advance, and so lock the rest of Europe into their strategy.

National parliaments, EU Parliament and other areas of public accountability are being bypassed.

The British government is accused of taking the lead in frustrating meaningful parliamentary scrutiny, public debate and transparency over this extension of US intervention across Europe.

EXECUTIVE PAY Shareholders call time

GLAXOSMITHKLINE shareholders have voted against the excessive executive pay plans at the company's AGM. Shareholders and trade unions have become much more active this year as executives continue to take huge salaries and payoffs even when profits drop or pensions funds are cut.

The TUC has also called for votes on this issue at Corus, Shell and Reuters, and will be extending this to other companies now this tactic has paid off at GSK.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The labour trade

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY workers are often thought to be immune from recession and changes in the job market. The image is that there is always someone else ready to hire skilled people. That was probably never true, but insecurity has increased recently. As well as the export of jobs, IT workers are threatened by inward migration.

BT has been under fire for its plans to move call centre work to India. Employees in Britain are unconvinced by company statements that a £100 million outsourcing contract would not affect British operations and staff. The Communications Workers Union protested against the plans, but BT went ahead anyway.

Now there are fresh concerns for BT employees. Software developers are being brought to Britain from Mahindra BT, an Indian joint venture company. Unions allege that the amounts paid are undercutting British rates. The company says that this frees British IT professionals to deal with cutting edge projects, and gives the Indian workers valuable skills. A more realistic view is that this another step in BT's plan to move key skills and work out of Britain.

At IBM, staff will suffer from proposed changes to overtime and call-out rates. People working in Warwick, Manchester and Portsmouth may be up to £6,000 worse off. Their union, Amicus MSF protested at the limited consultation about these changes.

Last year the union criticised the company for a poor redundancy package, which was significantly worse than others in the IT industry. IBM is believed to have shed hundreds of jobs as part of its worldwide restructuring, but has not disclosed the exact number of redundancies in Britain.

Freelance IT contractors are affected as well as direct employees. The Professional Contractors Group, which represents them, believes that companies are breaking work permit regulations. The PCG believes that employers are replacing British IT workers with overseas contractors, mainly from India, at lower rates. They do this by abusing the inter-company transfer scheme, set up to offer fast-track visas to overseas employees with skills unavailable in Britain.

The PCG has evidence that overseas contractors brought in under the scheme have limited IT abilities. Software houses bring over untrained staff, train them and then fire permanent staff.



Photo: Workers

THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS (NUT) in Northampton has begun a campaign (see picture, above) to gather support from parents, teachers and students to scrap the SATs tests children take at 7, 11 and 14. Children in England are the most tested and reported on in Europe and a child will take up to 105 national tests during their first 11 years.

The union believes that tests are not helping children to learn and that the test results which are published in league tables put teachers under pressure to teach to the tests, at the expense of the rest of the curriculum. The NUT voted at its annual conference in Easter to campaign for a national boycott of the tests. Teachers argue that they use their own assessments and tests to help to assess progress and so they can adapt their teaching to children's needs. Head teachers agree.

Charles Clarke, the Education Secretary, has announced that targets for Key Stage 2 will be dropped and that changes to the testing regime will be needed. However, many teachers feel this does not go far enough, and the NUT will press ahead with a ballot on action over the tests.

Disappearing steel

THE COMMONS TRADE and Industry Select Committee, examining the debacle associated with the steel industry, has heard conflicting views as to the future. The retiring Corus Chairman, Sir Brian Moffat, defended his catastrophic management regime of the last 4 years: over 13,000 job losses, the 99% collapse in share value, losses of over £2 billion and closures threatening the remaining steel communities in Britain and the actual ability to continue making steel. He summed up his strategic thinking for the industry by welcoming a Russian 'entrepreneur' buying into Corus as, "He has the right to buy if he has the money." If Corus and Moffat's successors remain, steel will die.

Mick Leahy of the ISTC union called for government to intervene to preserve steel as one of Britain's strategic industries — all manufacturing is dependent on it. The parallels with the support given to coal and nuclear power in recent years are clear. The future of Corus may be less than 12 months.

In January 2004 Corus's £1.4 billion bank debt has to be renegotiated, and so far the banks are not indicating support. Unbelievably, Belgium, a buffer state of the 19th century, produced more steel in January 2003 than Britain. Mr Leahy clearly indicated that the problem of Corus was not the "strong" pound, was not the workforce — who have given unstinting support and flexibility — but the disastrous ineptitude of Corus management.

For most of the 20th century, successive governments either nationalised or retained a substantial controlling interest in the existence of the British steel and metal industries. This interest went to extraordinary degrees and even included published tonnage of strategic reserves of every conceivable grade of steel and scrap, because of a cold-blooded rationale: to defeat trade rivals you needed to be able to produce armaments. Britain's shambolic steel and metal industries nearly lost Britain the first imperialist world war. Workers put that right, but now we have the prospect of having no steel in Britain at all.

EASTERN EUROPE**Alliance against the EU**

IN A UNIQUE coming-together Polish Communists and the Solidarity organisation have both denounced the entry of Poland into the European Union as the "colonisation of Poland". Both see the handover of Polish agriculture and provision of cheap industrial labour as being on par with Hitler's "Lebensraum" — living space at the expense of the Polish people.

In the Czech republic, the Czech Communists have called for the closing down of the offices of the organisation campaigning for the return of Sudetenland Germans to the Czech republic. Germany is calling for the overturning of the Benes Protocols, the settlement of German-Czech relations after the Second World War banned all Sudeten German compensation claims.

The transfer of industrial production

and agricultural exploitation into eastern Europe, including the actions of British companies, is the resurrection of the colonialism first advocated by the Nazis.

ENGINEERING**Alstom slashes jobs**

ALSTOM, the international engineering power generator builder, is to cut 450 jobs at its plants in Knutsford, Rugby and Whetstone. The job losses come as Britain reaches saturation levels for gas fired power stations. It also reflects Alstom's attempts worldwide to shed 10% of its 118,000 workforce as part of a debt-restructuring and cost cutting exercise.

Alstom has debts of nearly £4 billion. Siemens, the German engineering and electronics company, has expressed an interest in buying parts of Alstom. The job cuts may well be the early signs of the company's fragmentation.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****JUNE**

Saturday 21 June

Stop the War Conference

The Stop the War Coalition is planning a conference for all activists. Details available soon from www.stopwar.org.uk

FISHERIES**Caught in the EU net**

AFTER THE EUROPEAN Union's Common Fisheries Plan — essentially the hijacking of Britain's fishing grounds for the EU — even landlocked Austria got a claim on the North Sea — comes the Common Fisheries Agency.

By early 2004 the EU will create an EU-wide fisheries police agency to oversee catches, inspection, vessel sizes, licences etc.

The EU has taken the arguments of British fishing crews about preservation, unfair competition, sovereignty, etc and stood them on their head. So-called preservation will aid those who have ignored and devastated not only British but also African fishing grounds.

'Unfair competition' will aid those fleets (Spanish) which have seen vast subsidies while Britain's fleet has been scrapped.

The establishment of a multi-national police inspectorate — reporting to Brussels — will further undermine sovereignty.

Congress rejects constitution

THE NINTH CONGRESS for Democracy met on Friday 16 May 2003 at Church House, Westminster — and either as a consequence or as a coincidence it took place against a rising tide of concern about the draft European constitution.

Out of it emerged a clear statement on the threats implicit in the proposed constitution, and further backing for the groundswell in the country calling for a referendum on this key issue.

The Congress — representing a broad swathe of anti-EU feeling in Britain — resolved that "the draft Constitutional Treaty presently being formulated by the Convention on the Future of Europe would take major and irreversible steps to convert the EU into a fully fledged State and would yet further subordinate the nations of Europe to EU institutions and powers."

Its resolution went on to say that the treaty "would yet further diminish the democratic control by and accountability of EU institutions to the peoples of Europe while vastly reducing the powers of national parliaments".

The Congress resolved that each nation should decide its own constitution, taxation, defence, foreign affairs, jurisprudence, police and electoral policy. This will involve retrieving powers already granted to the European Union and rejecting the legal process by which powers are expanded by the EU's unaccountable federal institutions and then retained forever.

• For more on the proposed Constitutional Treaty, see feature article, p9

RAIL**Where's the maintenance?**

THE RESULTS of the break-up and privatisation of railway maintenance work are a near doubling of costs and increasing problems and complaints due to poor standards. The planned budget for the five-year period until 2006 was £15 billion but the cost will now be £25 billion. The train operators have severely criticised Network Rail's maintenance regime in a letter which

lists a catalogue of complaints about poor standards of work, project delays, bureaucracy and increasing costs.

With a fragmented service and complete reliance on private sector firms to do essential maintenance the government is caught in a trap. Increased regulation simply results in greater charges. Reality may be forcing a change. When one of the maintenance contracts came to an end, a directly employed maintenance organisation was created to provide skills and information on real costs.

POST OFFICES**Northampton campaign**

A CAMPAIGN by Northampton Public Sector Alliance against the closure of a Post Office in Northampton has won wide support from local residents.

The closure is part of a nationwide plan to shut 3000 urban post offices (one in three) to recoup the current losses made by the Post Office.

The Post Office pledge that everyone will remain within a mile of a local post office cut no ice with users in Northampton, many of whom are pensioners and young mothers with children.

They know they will have a longer walk to the next nearest post office or the expense of a bus ride into town. These Post Offices are already stretched to deal with existing customers, so longer queues will be inevitable.

The dangers of not vaccinating

THE INTRODUCTION of combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine into Britain's childhood immunisation schedules from 1988 markedly reduced, initially, the incidence of all three diseases. In between 88% and 100% of cases, the protective antibodies are established after the first dose, and all recipients have protective levels following the second.

The incidence of all three diseases decreased markedly within four years, and there have been no recorded deaths from measles since 1992, when uptake rates reached 92%, only three percentage points short of a target uptake that would have virtually assured the immunity of the whole population.

But in the mid-1990s a series of studies claimed a link between MMR vaccine and the steady rise in the reported incidence of autism, along with intestinal symptoms similar to serious colitis and associated developmental regression. Parents responded by shunning MMR vaccination or opting for three separate injections, of unlicensed vaccines, procured through importation, often at their own expense.

Ill informed

These reactions were ill informed, and they are beginning to have alarming consequences. Immunisation rates in England and Wales have fallen to 80% on average, with only about 73% of two-year olds actually protected in London, our capital city. Scotland is on the verge of a measles epidemic with cases up 60% so far in 2003. There were 256 reports in 2001, and 405 last year of a potentially fatal disease that can cause blindness and brain damage.

Notifications of rubella jumped 50% from 234 to 371 last year and again deafness, brain damage, blindness and foetal abnormalities can develop in severe cases.

The Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health has just released figures showing that cases of mumps now stand at 250, up from 155 last year. Mumps can lead to meningitis and sterility.

The scientific evidence is unequivocal and clear. Combined measles, mumps and rubella MMR vaccine provides protection so unique that it has the potential to eliminate these infections, preventing serious illness in our children and saving many lives in danger of being lost unnecessarily.

There is no convincing evidence whatever that MMR either causes, or facilitates inflammatory bowel disease or autism. Under such circumstances it would be completely unjustified to increase use of unlicensed, single antigen vaccines, with all the associated compliance and usage risks, creating more illness and potentially death for our children, and others that they might infect.

The weight of evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of MMR. Bring back society. Get your kids protected now.

Iraq, Cuba, Saudi Arabia – which of the main source of terrorism? Let's have**War on terror? Quite the**

IN IRAQ, the replacement of the US's very own Boss Hogg — ex-general Jay Garner — by Paul Bremer, underlines the US's ghastly failure to get anything right. Everything that the Bush and Blair governments have done there, from trying to form an administration to awarding contracts to US firms, is illegal. As the Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith stated on 26 March, "a further Security Council resolution is needed to authorise imposing reform and restructuring Iraq and its government".

So now Bush and Blair have had to bully the UN into backing a resolution giving them the authority to form an Iraqi government and control the oil.

The USA will not allow the UN to deliver humanitarian aid or send its weapons inspectors. Didn't the USA accuse Saddam Hussein of preventing UN aid and inspections? US oil companies will control Iraq's oil, Bechtel will get all the rebuilding contracts, and Cargill will run agriculture, not to develop it, just to open the Iraqi market to US imports, sold by — Cargill.

Where are they?

US arms inspectors have found no weapons of mass destruction, because Iraq had none. It was because they knew this that Bush and Blair invaded. The Blair government lied when it said that Iraq was a threat to us, nowhere less than when he said that Iraq could use nuclear or biological weapons against us within 45 minutes.

Those who opposed the USA's illegal and immoral attack on Iraq said that these things would happen. From the beginning it was about oil, not democracy, about US domination, not Iraqi freedom.

Iraq was never a legitimate target for a war on terrorism: it had, unlike the US administration, no links with Al Qa'ida. Blair and Bush used this excuse as cover for their unwarranted and unnecessary attack. All the time, however, the real terrorist threat from Al Qa'ida was growing, and now we see the inevitable, and predicted, result of the Blair/Bush policy, a wave of terror attacks in Africa and the Middle East.

Successive US governments bear a grave responsibility for this terrorist activity. In 1980, President Reagan armed, funded and sent reactionary forces into Afghanistan to try to overthrow the progressive government, long before the Soviet Union sent troops to defend the people and their government against that foreign aggression. These reactionary forces aided by the CIA spawned the Taliban, which in turn spawned Al Qa'ida.

Letting it happen on purpose

From January to August 2001, the Bush administration held talks with the Taliban government in Afghanistan to try to win their agreement to the US oil company Unocal's proposed pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. In August, the Taliban rejected the deal. The Bush administration then threatened them with war, while at the same time reducing its domestic anti-terrorism efforts.

Israel, Russia, Egypt, France and Germany specifically warned the Bush administration of imminent terrorist attacks using hijacked airplanes against US landmarks. The administration did not pass these warnings on to airport security agencies. When this was later revealed, Bush responded that he did not order heightened airplane security because it would have cut the travel industry's profits.

of these countries is not in Bush's 'Axis of evil'? Which one is the
 the reverse...

the reverse...



Ground zero, New York City: Bush has consistently refused to allow a public inquiry into the events surrounding 9/11.

'Iraq was never a legitimate target for a war on terrorism: it had, unlike the US administration, no links with Al Qa'ida...'

Stanley Hilton, a former aide to Republican Senator Bob Dole, charges that Bush and his administration allowed 9/11 to happen on purpose, so that they

could make political gains from the tragedy. Not surprisingly, Bush has consistently refused to allow a public inquiry into the events surrounding 9/11, and has signed an Executive Order sealing all presidential documentation.

After 9/11, US forces invaded Afghanistan, kicked the Taliban out of government and replaced them with a government friendly to the USA and its oil interests: Afghanistan is now, nominally, run by Unocal's man on the spot. Otherwise, the country is as before — no democracy, run by warlords, producing most of the world's heroin, and the Taliban regrouping.

Where is the main source of terrorism

in the world? Saudi Arabia, the USA's key ally in the Middle East and supplier of most of the USA's oil, also supplies 80% of Al Qa'ida's recruits. It is the chief funder and sponsor of Al Qa'ida. Yet Saudi Arabia is not part of Bush's 'Axis of Evil', while Cuba is.

No evidence

Since 1994, the State Department's annual studies of 'Patterns of Global Terrorism' have found no evidence of Cuban 'sponsorship' of terrorist activities. Yet the US government lists Cuba as a 'terrorist state', but not Saudi Arabia, nor

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Afghanistan when it was under the Taliban. Cuba denounced 9/11 as an 'atrocious and insane terrorist act', and offered to cooperate in the global war on terrorism. Bush rejected the offer.

Anti-Cubans

Cuba has every right to act decisively to deter terrorists who hijack planes, bomb hotels and fly over Havana. Those who criticise its actions on 'human rights' grounds assist the terrorists. The US government funds and supports these anti-Cuba terrorists.

In 1999, the Clinton administration passed the Cuban Internal Opposition Assistance Act, providing extra money for 'dissidents'. The US state funds the Cuban American National Foundation, the European Coalition for Human Rights in Cuba, and the Cuban Dissidents Task Force.

'The main obstacles to investigating Islamic terrorism were US oil corporate interests' – so says a former Deputy Director of the FBI

Of course, 'dissidents' is too polite a term for those who consciously act as paid agents of a hostile foreign power. In 1994, the State Department could find that there were only six alleged political prisoners in Cuba, somewhat fewer than in the USA.

No, Cuba is no source of terrorism, but Saudi Arabia is. John O'Neill, Deputy Director of the FBI before he resigned in protest at Bush's policy, made it clear: "The main obstacles to investigating Islamic terrorism were US

oil corporate interests, and the role played by Saudi Arabia in it."

The CIA did not investigate the roots of Al Qa'ida terrorism in Saudi Arabia because this could have harmed US oil companies' interests. (Incidentally, George Bush Senior is on the advisory board of the Carlyle Group, a US firm involved in the oil business.) The USA has now withdrawn its troops Saudi Arabia, under pressure.

Threats?

On 16 May 2002, the BOSTON GLOBE revealed that the CIA had warned Bush months before 9/11 that Al Qa'ida planned to hijack planes. Four days later, on 20 May 2002, the US government issued warnings of more terrorist threats: Donald Rumsfeld, for example, said that terrorists would definitely use nuclear or biological weapons in the USA.

The next day, 21 May, the TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL reported, "the White House acknowledged that the threats are not urgent and that they are partly motivated by political objectives...the blunt warnings issued yesterday and Sunday do not reflect a dramatic increase in threatening information but rather a desire to fend off criticism from the Democrats."

In Britain, we too have been lied to about fictitious threats to our national security. What could be more irresponsible than playing politics with national security and people's fears?

Prevention

How do we prevent the next unnecessary US/British war? Not by simply rerunning the superb opposition to the war against Iraq. Certainly not by running 'anti-war' parliamentary candidates!

No — first, we the working class must focus on evicting this warmongering Blair government (never call it a British government, because it always acts on behalf of either the EU or the US, never on behalf of the British people). Secondly, we must evict capitalism itself, the source of all wars.

So far, the discussion
been behind closed d

The EU constitution



Would you want to be ruled from here? The head

ACCORDING TO a poll in the SUN newspaper, 81% of the British people have not heard about it, but 84% want a referendum about it. The DAILY MAIL says it will hold its own referendum. Peter Hain, the Minister for Europe (an apt title), says this is ridiculous, that it's just a little tidying up.

So what is the proposed new European Constitution, and where is it coming from?

The answer to the second question is straightforward. The European Union appointed for this task a select band of trustees, chaired by Valery Giscard D'Estaing, a man who as prime minister of France made off with some rather large diamonds. It called this cabal the Convention on the Future of Europe, and will present its proposed constitution to governments on 20 June.

The EU's governments are due to finalise it at an Intergovernmental Conference in December, and they plan to ratify it as early as next year. The several

about the new European constitution has doors. Now it's all coming out in the open...

Constitution: referendum now!



Photo: European Commission

Headquarters of the Council of the European Union

hundred pages of draft Treaty articles can be found at the Convention's website, european-convention.eu.int.

What will it do? The Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice all tightened the noose around member nations' sovereignty. The new constitution aims to place a permanent lock on the noose. The aim is to ensure that once in, no one can escape.

The unprecedentedly far-reaching measure of a new constitution, "A Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe", as the convention calls it, would definitively set up a single European state for "an unlimited period" (Part 3, Article H).

Without in any way consulting the British people, the Blair government has already agreed in principle to this constitution. It claims that this is "just another treaty", involving "no significant change", merely "tidying up past EU Treaties", or a "mere revision

of club rules", as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw would have it.

A constitution is of course far more than any treaty: a constitution establishes a body's sole source of all legal authority. Under this constitution, the EU itself would be that sole source, unlike under the existing EC and EU Treaties, in which 'the High Contracting Parties', i.e. the member nations, are each the sole source of legal authority in their countries.

What would this constitution mean? Under its Article 1, "This Constitution establishes a Union [possibly called 'United Europe'], within which the policies of the Member States shall be coordinated and which shall administer certain common competences on a federal basis." It moves the EU from being based on intergovernmental cooperation to supranational imposition.

The EU would no longer be based on agreements between sovereign member

Euro-bank attacks pensioners

WANT TO KNOW what a future under EU economic control would look like? Look no further than the European Central Bank's Monthly Bulletin for April 2003. It carries a revealing policy statement from the Bank, blandly entitled, "The need for comprehensive reforms to cope with population ageing". (See it for yourself: www.ecb.int/pub/pdf/mb200304en.pdf, pages 39-51.)

The Bank states, "A comprehensive institutional framework has been set up at the European level to co-ordinate and monitor ageing-related policies...[This] should be implemented in full to support governments in adopting appropriate policies at the national level."

What policies are we being told to implement? "Reforms should place both public pension systems and health and long-term care arrangements on a sustainable financial footing by limiting the public sector's exposure, enhancing private funding and setting incentives for efficient service provision."

On pensions, the Bank calls for "strengthening private involvement in pension and health insurance arrangements", the "private management of pension assets"; it advocates "reductions in public pensions" and "measures to raise the effective retirement age". With regard to existing pay-as-you-go systems, it says that "overly generous provisions will need to be reduced".

On health services, it demands the "promotion of long-term contracts between providers of health services and the cost-covering institutions". It says that within public health services, "market forces can help to move towards efficient solutions". It demands that public health systems "should focus on providing core services".

It calls for governments to differentiate between 'essential, privately non-insurable and non-affordable services' and those where 'private financing might be more efficient'. This would limit free health care to accident and emergency care. It says, "Greater private involvement in healthcare financing can be achieved, in particular, through patient co-payments, as already implemented in a number of countries."

In general, the Bank calls for "the extension of working hours", the "containment of labour costs and the abolition of overly rigid labour market regulations".

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states, but on a single authority, unaccountable to and above its members. There would be a single EU authority, responsible to nobody. It would be a new executive power under a new, unelected President, more like Charles I's government than anything seen since in Britain.

Article 9(1) says, "The Constitution, and law adopted by the Union Institutions in exercising competences conferred on it [sic] by the Constitution, shall have primacy over the laws of the member states." EU laws would override nations' laws.

Transfer

The constitution would transfer power from national parliaments to unaccountable European judges. It would incorporate the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. We would all be obliged to carry out the edicts of EU bodies.

Almost all policy areas would be subject to Qualified Majority Voting, where no nation would have a veto. The EU would have exclusive competences over the movements of capital, goods, services and persons, including a common asylum and immigration policy, over competition policy, trade policy and fisheries.

Sharing?

There are also 'shared' competences, where member states "shall exercise their competences only if and to the extent that the Union has not exercised its" (Article 10(2)). These include monetary policy for the Eurozone; the internal market; industrial policy; R&D; space exploration; freedom, security and justice; policing; agriculture; transport; energy; social policy; economic and social cohesion; environment and public health; and the EU "shall" (not "may") "coordinate economic policies".

These "shared" competences would leave member states only tiny, diminishing and residual powers.

Crucially for British workers, the EU

'Every European nation and every working class must act against this threat to their nation's sovereignty.'

would decide industrial and employment law (Article 5).

The Constitution also provides for state funding of pan-EU political parties (Article 35a of Title VI), to assist the breakdown of national identity. Under Title VII, the EU could raise its own taxes levied on all of us, even if we disagreed with their purposes.

Common security policy

Under Article 10, "The Union shall have competence to define and implement a common foreign and security policy, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy." This would include EU control over "armaments capabilities", i.e. over EU members' defence industries, including the British defence industry, our last great reservoir of engineering skills.

Under Article 14, we are told, "Member States shall actively and unreservedly support the Union's common foreign and security policy in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity. They shall refrain from action contrary to the Union's interests or likely to undermine its effectiveness."

The draft Constitutional Treaty would yet further diminish democratic control and accountability of EU bodies. It would end trial by jury and habeas corpus, and impose on us the Greek legal system, so beloved of British plane-spotters. It installs the "free movement of judgements", meaning that we could be arrested here, to be jailed in Greece.

As if all these powers were not enough, Article 16 would allow the EU to take "appropriate measures" to enforce the constitution's aims even where "the constitution has not provided the

necessary powers".

The proposed constitution is fundamentally opposed to Britain's interests, to our sovereignty and independence. Every European nation and every working class must act against this threat to their nation's sovereignty. Each nation should decide its own constitution, taxation, defence, foreign affairs, jurisprudence, economic and monetary policy. Democracy and sovereignty are indivisible.

No to blocs

We do not need to be part of this EU bloc, or of any other bloc. The EU is becoming an 'anti-US' bloc, risking a build-up to war between rival capitalist and imperialist powers. We seek friendly relations with all nations, but subordination to none. Blair would sell us to the highest bidder.

There must be no more dithering between the EU and US blocs — we must say No to the EU, and No to the USA! We need to pull out of the EU, and reject subordination to the USA.

Surely if democracy and a referendum on its proposed constitution are good enough for Iraq, they are good enough for us! France, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Holland, Denmark and Ireland are having referendums on this matter: they can decide our future, but we can't — not least, we are told, because we are too ignorant and stupid.

If Blair tries to force through this unprecedented change, a Labour-Liberal Democrat alliance could vote this constitution through parliament despite popular opposition. If we allowed this to happen, parliament would once again — as over the unpopular and illegal attack on Iraq, and the proposed foundation hospitals — prove itself irrelevant and unrepresentative.

We the British working class must assert our sovereignty, say No to the euro, and No to the EU Constitution, Yes to Britain, and Yes to sovereignty and independence. We have to take responsibility for Britain and for our future.

The culture of Britain is unique because it is the product of this country and its people. In fact, work is crucial to our culture...

Culture and the working class

WHAT IS CULTURE? The term is used in a variety of ways — to approve of something, to criticise it, or to ward off criticism, as in “it’s my culture so leave me alone”. Some think that all cultures are of equal value, so all should be welcomed — although even a little reflection would show nobody could defend this in practice. In fashionable education-speak “culture” is used to mean whatever the speaker wants it to mean.

We hear about gun culture, black culture, muslim culture. What do these mean?

The dictionary defines culture as “the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action” (Collins). Culture does not emerge from nowhere, as a “lifestyle choice” — it has deep roots in the material life of a country.

So the day to day realities of life — geography, climate, language, work, economics, class, and the history of all these — are what emerge in the culture of a nation. Culture grows and changes, but remains rooted. That’s why culture is so unique to a nation.

And just as an individual plant species grows in a particular kind of soil with certain climatic conditions, a particular culture belongs to a particular country. If you try to uproot cultural norms and plant them in a different material environment, they rarely work. In fact, they change, as they must.

Absurd ex-pats

The British islanders in the Falklands and the Welsh in Patagonia might think of themselves as maintaining their culture, but if they came back to their country of origin they would realise they are foreigners. Hence the absurd spectacle of ex-pat Brits going to live in Spain because they like the climate and

culture, yet trying to recreate a little Britain there. If you want to change countries, you must adjust and adapt your way of life to a new culture, not expect to import your own.

The culture of Britain is unique because it is the product of this country and its people. This is nothing to do with morris dancing or maypoles. In fact, work is crucial to our culture in this country once dubbed an island of coal in a sea of fish. Here we have the oldest

working class in the world, with a history of struggle and of having created its own organisations — the trade unions — in order to survive the onslaught of capitalism, which would have destroyed it. Workers didn’t waste time complaining about being victims, they organised together and fought for progress, often at great personal cost.

The working class in Britain has been

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Photo © Andrew Ward/www.reportphotos.com

The roots of British culture: class, work, industry and struggle. Right: marching for jobs, Luton, 2001

‘Our culture matters — it is about who we are as a people and what is progressive about our society...’

Continued from page 11

overwhelmingly in the majority for centuries — the peasantry died out long ago with land enclosures and the agricultural revolution.

The working class here was already highly skilled and literate by the 19th century. And the industrial nature of economic life in this island produced a particular world view among its workers — materialist, down to earth, collective rather than individualist, highly independent in thought, and secular.

Those who were part of the process of changing raw materials into finished goods on a massive scale in their daily work understood early that people can change reality.

So-called high culture — the world of music, visual arts, theatre, books, philosophy and science — reflects this cultural root in Britain. Among the first public libraries were book collections built up by the industrial trade unions and their organisations, such as the Miners’ Institute, the Mechanics Institute, and the Cooperative Society. Local public galleries, museums, libraries reflected the intellectual life of the whole population — the “common reader” of Victorian times.

Nineteenth-century authors such as Mrs Gaskell, Dickens and George Eliot describe in their novels the highly intelligent nature of the industrial working class. It is no accident that the nation which produced Shakespeare could also produce a Darwin.

In Britain the concept of the “intelligentsia” has never caught on

because it simply did not and does not reflect reality. In spite of the stupid and hopeless desire of some to belong to an intellectual elite, they simply get laughed at for their presumption.

Now that Britain’s industry has been largely destroyed, and workers engaged in making things form a tiny minority of the class, is British culture changing? The root which made us what we are is still there, but the material reality of our lives is different.

Other cultures

Over the centuries Britain — this nation of “mongrels” as Daniel Defoe described us — has absorbed influxes of people from many other nations and cultures. Over a few generations, immigrants have become part of the working class and, although they retained aspects of their own culture, being part of the working life of the country they adopted its culture too. In turn that culture too has adapted to the incomers.

Recently we have seen this with those who came from the Indian sub-continent to live and work, and whose children and grandchildren now largely see themselves as British.

The older generation which wants to impose the old ways and religions on the young has had an uphill battle against the prevailing secular, urban British culture. But if backward cultures are imported and attempts made to impose them here, they have to be rejected and fought against.

Violence

The present anxiety about a growing acceptance of violent street crime using guns, which some newspapers have dubbed “black culture”, is in fact nothing of the sort.

How could there be such a thing? The fact that someone is black is simply a superficial physical characteristic, not a cultural one — as absurd an idea as blonde culture or tall culture. Most black workers reject it in the same way as most white workers.

Of course, Britain has its own home-

‘There is a tradition of control over standards of work exerted by skilled workers, which extends back in British history...’

grown gangsters and crime barons. But one new, worrying development seems to have its roots abroad — in the drug- and gun-fuelled culture of Jamaica. Jamaica is an unstable economy in hock to the IMF, which cannot feed, educate or provide work for its people. Thuggery in political life is reflected in violence and gangsterism in the towns — this makes Jamaica a gateway for South American drugs into Europe and North America.

Now the gangster “yardie” culture is being imported into Britain, and the use of guns in drugs turf wars is spreading to casual street crime such as mugging, and being taken up by young British criminals in cities like London and Manchester.

It is up to workers to take responsibility and challenge this culture where it is being adopted. In Manchester last year, a group of women whose sons and boyfriends had died in shootings marched on the streets against the yardie gangs and called on their men to reject this liking for guns.

Backward culture

The disintegration of countries in eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union has led to other backward and dangerous cultures being brought into Britain. The widespread control of London prostitution by Kosovan and Albanian pimps is more threatening than what it replaces because of the complete power exerted which amounts to slavery. The eastern European prostitutes imported and then ruthlessly controlled by these pimps are forbidden to attend sexual health clinics, which has led to an

epidemic of sexually transmitted disease in London.

There is a tradition of control over standards of work exerted by skilled workers, which extends back in British history to the guilds of journeymen in the middle ages. Trade unions in industries such as engineering, railways and printing set the standards and ensured new apprentices learned them on the job.

Yet the “casual” economy fed when workers from other countries, with no history of organising in trade unions, are prepared to work for a pittance, creates a work culture of low skill, low standards and lack of safety awareness which is rife in industries such as construction and railway maintenance. These are important issues for trade unions.

Such practices must be challenged, yet there can be a fear of being labelled “racist” and intolerant of other cultures which leads people to shy away from doing so.

In London schools, children from eastern Europe who refuse to sit next to black children, and fathers who harass other mothers in the playground, show two aspects of a backward culture which has no place here.

Potential for disaster

Cultures cannot be lifted from one country and successfully bolted on to another. A case in point is the tragic case of Victoria Climbié, the 9-year old from Ivory Coast who died in appalling circumstances at the hands of a great aunt and her boyfriend.

This case highlighted the problems in social services in Haringey, north London. Yet one important aspect of the case was not commented on — the reason for Victoria leaving home in the first place. It is common practice in many African countries to send children away to be looked after by distant relatives in the hope of bettering their lives.

Perhaps in the context of a culture where extended families and networks are able to protect the child, this might work. But in the context of Britain, a

completely different kind of society, this cultural assumption failed utterly, with disastrous consequences for the child.

There are home-grown backward elements to British culture too. British workers’ independence of mind means they reject anyone who aspires to tell them what to do — often politicians or politicians. But if this positive attitude is not combined with the collective, organising spirit epitomised by the trade unions at their best, it can lead to cynicism and an unwillingness to take responsibility.

Long-term unemployment eats at our culture. Having to go to work every day imposes a discipline of mind and habit, a self respect which unemployment and living on “benefits” erodes.

Our working class culture is strong, but it is under threat, from within and without. The imported backwardness would be as nothing if we were prepared to challenge and fight it.

Our culture matters — it is about who we are as a people and what is progressive about our society.

Anybody who comes to live in this country must expect to have to change their culture to adapt to the ways of their adopted home — it is part of being committed to Britain and being part of the fight for its future. And all who live here must commit to and fight together for the best of its culture. If we want a decent future we need social action based on progressive culture, based on class.



Thriving culture: new arts centre, Manchester

Social housing built with public money can deliver the kind of quality people deserve, as the history of housing in Austria's capital shows...

A walk in a Vienna housing estate

HOUSING is a basic human need, though one that this government believes can best be served by pandering to the profit motive. And the way people are housed says a lot about that society.

A visit to Vienna can underline this point forcefully. For today's tourist one of the most remarkable — and popular — attractions is actually a block of council houses.

The Hundertwasser Haus in Vienna's Third District is full of innovative design and colour, a blast against the sterility and anonymity of the city's postwar public housing.

The architect is Frederick Hundertwasser, who had constantly criticised the unimaginative council houses in the Austrian capital. Finally — and to their credit — the city council voted in 1978 to give Hundertwasser the go-ahead to design 52 council houses on

a site near the Danube, not far from the city centre.

The foundation stone was laid 20 years ago, in 1983, and the project was completed in 1985.

In addition to the flats there is an adventure room for children, a children's playroom that can also double as exhibition space, a doctor's surgery, a cafe with a terrace, two storerooms for bicycles and prams and an artistically decorated underground garage for 37 cars.

Debate

In many ways Hundertwasser was reopening a debate on housing that had raged in the city decades before. In 1919 the war-weary citizens of Vienna got the vote. Inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia two years earlier, they elected a social democratic city

council (in the old, Marxist sense of social democratic).

So began the period known as "Red Vienna". In a short time the new councillors carried out numerous pioneering reforms — particularly in housing, education, health and transport. Many see the era as a forerunner of the modern welfare state.

The way the housing question was tackled was a beacon. The housing stock was shattered by war and needed to cope with a returning army, refugees and civil servants from all corners of the disintegrating Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The first stage involved simply putting roofs over heads. Old military barracks and huts were commandeered and by 1923 3,673 new houses had been established. This was followed by real progress with classic low-cost good quality public housing.



Right: Hundertwasser Haus in Vienna, near the Danube and close to the city centre — homes for the people.

quality that workers

On 1 September 1923 the decision was taken to build 25,000 "Volkwohnungen", or people's dwellings. Typical of these was the estate of 1,600 apartments built between 1927 and 1930, and known as Karl Marx Hof (Court).

Designed by the city architect Karl Ehn, the flats, no more than four or five storeys high, were built around good-sized gardens. There is an overwhelming feeling of spaciousness, with only 29 dwellings to an acre. This stood in pointed contrast to the density of many private estates being built in central Berlin, Paris and London, where speculators just wanted to get as many flats per acre as possible.

Fascism

The tragedy was that after just 15 short years the socialist progress was snuffed out by the rise of fascism. In 1931 the mayor was imprisoned and the artillery was turned on the workers. The army shelled Karl Marx Hof, but ironically the flats were so well built that they proved a good point of resistance for the socialists.

But the resistance was not enough, and the rest, as they say, is history and Hitler.

For a long time, the flame of good housing seemed as though it was extinguished. The author of a book on 20th-century European architecture put it clearly: "I remarked to an Austrian architect that it was difficult to understand how with the fine example of these [Red Vienna] houses, later architects could perpetuate such crudities.

"He agreed and said rather sadly that the good period in Viennese architecture ended in the early 30s."

But not completely — as Hundertwasser Haus shows. Today, questions are once again being asked, in Austria and in Britain.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

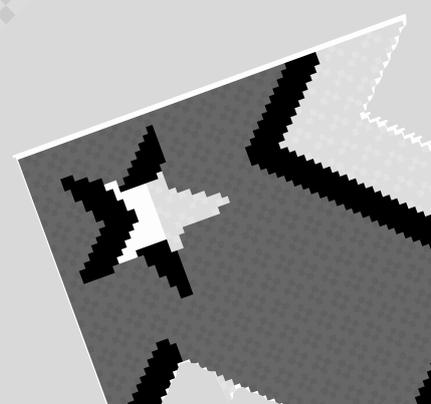
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Back to Front – It's simple, stupid

'Ask an ordinary person whether they want to be a citizen of Britain or of a United States of Europe? Now that's a simple question...'

IT IS HARD to argue against holding a referendum on the proposed European Constitution, but defending the indefensible has become a kind of badge of honour with this Labour government (not that honour rides high with them on any subject). So faced with calls to hold a referendum, they wheel out what passes for heavy political guns these days.

What they want to say is that democracy, for them, means that they rule. Our role in the process is to mark a grubby cross with a stubby pencil once every four or five years, then leave it to their wiser heads to decide what is best for us.

They can't put it quite like that, so we have Peter Mandelson and Peter Hain telling us that on the one hand the issue is very simple, a mere tidying up of existing treaties, and that on the other hand it is so complex that ordinary people simply aren't equipped to make a judgement on it.

So which is it? Simple or complex? Ask an ordinary person whether they want to be a citizen of Britain or of a United States of Europe? Now that's a simple question. Or do they want economic policy, foreign policy, defence, taxation and the legal systems to be determined from Brussels. That's a simple question, too.

The problem for these anti-democrats is not that ordinary people are too stupid and ignorant, it is that ordinary people are way too clever and knowledgeable.

Anti-democrats have a long and dishonourable tradition in British history,

and in general they end badly. The Rump Parliament was fittingly and physically expelled by Cromwell. Charles I, one of the very few people whose belief in his divine right to rule might have been as strong as Blair's, lost his head in Whitehall. Wellington had to ride around London in a coach with drawn shutters to avoid being recognised and stoned. Thatcher's reign ended in tears in the back of a car. How will workers bid farewell to Blair and his gang?

Side by side with this there is another long and dishonourable tradition in our working class history, that of opting out by voting for someone else to act on our behalf. That is how Blair got where he is today. It's even how Thatcher got where she did. And it's where the next anti-democratic name will come from if we permit change to be confined to ballot boxes and parliamentary seats.

You can see them all lining up, the heirs apparent, all autocrats to the core: Straw, Clarke, Brown, and all the other wannabees on the opposition benches.

What has to change is not who we elect, but how we give effect to our will. We must take responsibility, both for the present state of affairs, and their future direction. The British people cannot allow parliament to pass this constitution, which would transfer us, bound hand and foot, to the power of a United States of Europe.

Our future as a nation is at stake. We cannot trust parliament to consider it. In every forum where workers meet, we must demand a referendum.

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