

WORKERS

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HISTORIC NOTES

WHEN BRITAIN
INVADED RUSSIA

14



Taking on the privateers | 04



Brown's Euro-Budget | 06



The result of leaving it to Labour | 12

THE BATTLE FOR TRANSPORT



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE BUDGET should have been about full employment, about getting the four million unemployed into work. Instead we got the farcical Labour/Tory duet about poverty and benefits. When workers are in work, they can stop themselves from being poor. And their contributions can pay for improvements to public services.

At the last election, THE TIMES backed the Labour Party as the best way of “consolidating the core aspects of Thatcherism and extending them to fresh areas of policy”. This government wants only to strengthen capitalism, destroying our industries and privatising services even Thatcher did not touch.

Capitalism cannot be made good any more than a shark be made into a goldfish. We need a new politics, rejecting the social democratic belief that capitalism can be reformed so that it works.

In its economic policies, the Labour government supports capitalism in all its forms. As

Gordon Brown recently told the FINANCIAL TIMES, “The Labour Party is more pro-business, pro-wealth creation, pro-competition than ever before.”

In its foreign policy, Labour backs the European Union and the US government, never an independent Britain. Blair says: “We should be strong in Europe and strong with the United States. There is no choice between the two.”

Labour says backing foreign firms is fine, but opposing US warmongering is anti-Americanism. It says backing the EU is patriotic, but opposing the euro is “monetary xenophobia”. It says dividing workers through “faith schools” is fine, but that uniting workers by backing Britain is racism.

EU or US government? There is no need to worry whether to oppose one is to be for the other. We can oppose both because we are against the one thing — capitalism, in all its forms, because we are for the interests of the British working class.

Second opinion

THE RECENT on-again, off-again coup in Venezuela is a warning to all of us. A nationalist government that refused to kow-tow to the USA was toppled, and then reinstated — but under what conditions?

It is known that the US government had

dealings with the Army officers behind the coup. Once again the US state is interfering in the internal affairs of the countries of Latin America, trying to overthrow nationalist governments and impose military juntas willing to do its bidding.



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Contents – May 2002

News

Defending the naval bases, p3; Rally against privatisation, p4; University lecturers win, p5; News Analysis: The teachers’ conferences, p6

03

Features

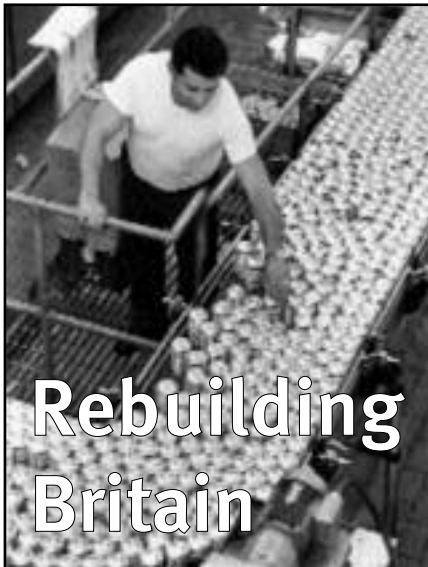
Behind the budget, p6; Taking back the railways, p9; Socialism and social democracy, part three p12

06

Historic Notes

Allied intervention in Soviet Russia, p14

14

**NAVAL BASE**

Defending jobs

EU

Don't tell the Irish...

GLASGOW

House wars

NORTHAMPTON

March against privateers

YACHTING

Back in the America's Cup

MANUFACTURE

Avon falling

LOCAL GOVT

Defending the union

UNIVERSITIES

Victory for lecturers

COMING SOON

What's on

NEWS ANALYSIS

Teacher unity vs factions

Defending defence jobs

LAST MONTH'S one-day strike by over 1,000 workers at the Faslane and Coulport naval base has boosted the Britain-wide fight to stop the government privatising MOD naval support. With workers at Portsmouth and now Devonport overwhelmingly supporting similar industrial action, naval bases in Britain are facing their first-ever national strike.

On Clydeside alone privatisation plans would mean the loss of over 500 jobs, and nearly 1,700 being transferred to private companies, mainly Babcock. It would also see the MOD's work further fragmented, which the unions point out could repeat the mistake of Railtrack, where a disjointed approach to the provision of a public service led to disaster. Poll after poll has shown that the public does not want the private sector responsible for overseeing the nuclear deterrent, which is maintained at the Clyde Naval Base.

A notable aspect of the Clydeside strike — and a warning of things to come — was the solidarity of the industrial unions. The strikers were members of the PCS and Prospect unions — but the nearly 2,000 TGWU and Amicus solidly refused to cross the picket lines, rendering redundant the anti-union legislation still on the statute books.

On 17 April a delegation of the Clydeside strikers was given a rousing welcome at the Scottish Trades Union Congress annual conference in Perth, and their leaflets spread quickly around the hall.

An emergency resolution supporting them was passed unanimously by the 450 delegates. Speakers reminded the government that in opposition they had pledged "no sane minister would privatise the Clyde Naval Base", and condemned the prospect of commercial interests profiting from the work of naval personnel — as well as the dangers to safety posed by mixing private profit with nuclear aspects.

Although the Scottish TUC has a long-standing policy against nuclear weapons, it supports the workforce and advocates industrial diversification into non-nuclear and socially useful production.

EUROPEAN UNION

Don't tell the Irish...

HAVING HAD the results of their referendum on EU expansion ignored by the EU, the Irish found in April that their government was not consulted about proposals for a European arrest warrant.

The news about the non-consultation has "staggered" Irish anti-terrorism experts. Ireland must implement the arrest warrant, which the Council of Ministers agreed last December, by the year 2003.

MOTOR INDUSTRY

Alliance with China

MG ROVER has entered into a strategic alliance and cooperation agreement with China Brilliance Industrial Holdings to finance, develop, manufacture and market world class cars. Neither firm is buying or seeking to control the other, but both will benefit from sharing costs. The decision keeps manufacture in both countries.

MANUFACTURING

Goodyear cuts back

WORKERS at Goodyear Tyres have rejected a plan put forward by plant unions calling for changes — mainly related to weaknesses in the running of production by management — without loss of pay to increase productivity and keep the plant open.

Despite the strong union recommendation, members rejected the plan by 596 votes to 511. The rejection reflects distrust of the management and a lack of confidence in the future — though it may mean future job losses or even closure.

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

GLASGOW

House wars

THE GOOD NEWS for housing last month was the vote by Birmingham tenants to reject privatisation of their council housing, with a 68% majority.

But the same week also saw the result of Glasgow's advisory ballot on the proposal to hand over the city's entire stock of just under 80,000 homes to the recently contrived Glasgow Housing Association Ltd.

Of those who voted, 29,126 were in favour with 20,863 voting no — but 27,800 did not participate.

The Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfers says it is clear that council tenants do not support the privatisation of their homes.

At a meeting of the campaign on 17 April tenants from across the city and some sympathetic home owners were angry but upbeat. They condemned media misrepresentation, and signed letters calling on potential investors in GLHA Ltd to remind them what a bad deal investment would be.

"The campaign is far from over," noted John Wright from UNISON.

One plank in the council argument was that it had a housing debt of £1 billion. Yet GLHA Ltd would still have a debt of £1 billion in year 12, with only 60,000 tenants left to fund paying it off.

The policy's promoters spent £7 million of taxpayers' money advertising their promises, including a "bounty" for mercenary tenants of £3 for every commitment to a Yes vote that they could obtain.

The No campaigners worked valiantly but on a shoestring budget. They are currently in need of £800 to pay printing bills. The campaign urges readers to contact WORKERS to make their donation — cheques should be made payable to The Glasgow Campaign Against Housing Stock Transfers.

YACHTING

Back in the America's Cup

IN RECENT YEARS Britain could not scrape together a crew or provide a craft to take part in the world's most prestigious yacht race, the America's Cup, which, despite its name, originated in Britain. Now, for a mere £22 million (less than David Beckham would cost) WIGHT LIGHTNING has been designed and built on the Isle of Wight, providing much wanted jobs for skilled local workers.

Competitive yachting may be a minority sport, but those who will crew WIGHT LIGHTNING are skilled professionals,



Rally against the privateers

WORKERS IN NORTHAMPTON have held a major protest against the privatisation of public services. A small meeting organised by Northampton Trades Council snowballed into the biggest march and rally seen in the town for many years. Post Office workers from around the Midlands were joined by NHS workers, teachers and many other public sector workers.

The main speaker at the rally was Billy Hayes, the General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union, who spoke against the government's attack on the monopoly of the Post Office. He demolished the myth that the industry is in decline. The number of items carried has risen dramatically since 1980 and a tiny rise in the cost of a stamp would stem the losses.

The union also claims the move to privatisation in the UK is being used as a testbed to speed up the process throughout Europe. It is calling upon the TUC to organise a national demonstration against privatisation.

A speaker from the health workers pointed out that their members were proud to work for the health service and that's where they wanted to stay. In education PFI will be used to reorganise local schools and could mean private control of school sites and other services.

The march is just the beginning of the campaign, which Northampton hopes will be

on a par with similar top sportsmen and women. The skills of British workers will be displayed around the world as she and her crew compete.

Not one penny came from the British government to back this marriage of British craftsmanship and sporting prowess. However, if they win, Tony Blair will presumably be there to welcome them home.

MANUFACTURING

Avon falling

NORTHAMPTON has been hit by the news that 465 manufacturing jobs are to go at Avon. Manufacturing of cosmetics is to be moved to Poland, where production costs are three-and-a-half times cheaper. The

remaining 2000 workers have been given vague assurances but no guarantees about future job security.

Workers are sceptical about the claim by the Head of European manufacturing that the British plant is the most expensive to run. They say they were shown charts last year that show Germany's costs were 30% more expensive. But German employment laws make redundancies far more difficult. To make matters worse, there are no unions at Avon.

The site could have considerable development potential. It is by the river Avon and property developers could pay between £35 to £65 million for the site should it be closed down completely.

Avon joins the growing list of manufacturing jobs lost in Northampton over the last three to four years.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Defending the union

LAST JANUARY WORKERS reported on the attempts of Newham Borough Council to smear six leading Branch officials. Now over 86% of Newham UNISON members have voted for strike action to defend their officers who are facing derecognition and possibly the sack. This follows almost 6 months of the employers trying to act

tough following their defeat in the social services dispute last year.

Now, with local government workers across London limbering up for a fight over London weighting payments, Newham management are still trying to play hardball, but so can Newham UNISON members. Two strike days have been set — 23 April and 1 May. Newham UNISON is giving a clear lead to trade union colleagues — defending the union is a collective issue.

Lecturers win at Middlesex

LECTURERS at Middlesex University have won a successful conclusion to their long-running dispute over compulsory redundancies. Since the beginning of the academic year Middlesex University has "lost" over 70 teaching staff through voluntary redundancy. Then, just before Christmas, the university management insisted that a further 10.5 staff had to go by compulsory redundancy.

No posts had ever been "lost" via compulsory redundancy in the university's history. Following a successful ballot for industrial action the lecturers' union, Natfhe, has been in dispute ever since.

The process of selecting the 10.5 from a "redundancy pool" was a degrading and discredited process. But even after the individual staff had been pinpointed, the union action continued, fighting on a case by case basis. All the time the union managed to sustain an assessment boycott, and clearly the intent to continue that boycott until the end of the academic year was a significant threat to the university management.

By the end of March, all but two of the identified staff had been found other work in the university or offered a retraining opportunity. Suddenly the university management gave way and said the remaining two could simply return to their former positions. A successful conclusion to the dispute and victory for the no compulsory redundancy position of the union.

EDUCATION

Teachers, please

TEACHER SHORTAGES in Britain are reaching crisis proportions, with vacancies currently running at over 5,000, twice as high as last year. And the immediate consequences are clear — disrupted schooling, lack of continuity in planning and delivery of lessons, and childminding, where teachers cover for absent colleagues with different specialisms or areas of expertise.

Less visible here is the damage done in other countries by the widespread expedient of recruiting teachers from abroad to plug these gaps at home. Last year, Jamaica lost 600 teachers, most of whom went to work in England or the United States. Jamaica's Education Minister, Senator Burchell Whiteman, has warned that this exodus is putting the island's schooling at risk.

Last year Britain issued 6,000 work permits to teachers from abroad. This year

the number will certainly be much higher. South Africa, India and Caribbean countries have all expressed concern about this drain on a precious national resource.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Estelle Morris has declared that the recruitment from abroad will continue.

EUROPEAN UNION

Fraud? Have some more...

TWO EU education schemes, the grandly named Socrates and Youth for Europe programmes, were launched in 1995 as an excuse for spending large amounts on youth propaganda. Between 1995 and 1998, these projects cost £685 million. Now the EU Court of Auditors has revealed "serious irregularities" in the schemes' finances — cost overruns, projects receiving money before they had even begun, unrecovered unspent money, and fraud.

So what will be done? A true EU solution. The schemes are to be extended until 2006 and have their budgets doubled.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

Wednesday 1 May

London May Day March and Rally

The march will assemble in Clerkenwell Green at 12 noon and proceed to Trafalgar Square, for a rally beginning at 2.30pm. See www.glatuc.org.uk

World in Danger — End Capitalism!

Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. Politics, food, drink and comradeship. All welcome. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

YOUTH WORKERS

Building plans

SMALL SPECIALIST unions are worth their weight in gold when they work closely with their memberships and assert power and control over their sphere of influence. The Community and Youth Workers' Union has proved that a tenacious commitment to its members interests and organised negotiations and campaigning pay off.

In late April the union's annual conference begins in Eastbourne against a background of quiet but successful struggles to save jobs and terms and conditions.

The union has more members, staff and resources than it has ever had in its 64 years of struggle. Its remit now includes the community, play, learning, mentoring and personal advisory services. Without it the modern Youth Service would not have been created and certainly not survived.

This year's conference will begin the process of extending the union's organisation and national terms and conditions to all these areas across Britain

On the agenda is a call for a new structure based on skill and occupation rather than special interest groups. The idea is that this will help it build campaigns over terms and conditions as well as professional standards. As the General Secretary says, "Alongside our commitment to workers' rights must go a renewed commitment to workers' responsibility to control our profession and every single workplace."

The union's influence over recruitment and selection into formal qualification training has led to non-traditional entrants going into higher education, drawn very much from local activists in community organisations. Over a third are from ethnic minorities and over half women. The union is committed to an inclusive structure and equal rights for all rather than separate organisations for a few.

Teaching unions: unity vs factions

THE OPPORTUNITY of the nation's teachers at their recent Union conferences to present a united front to the government was cynically undermined by factionalists in the two largest unions, the NUT and NASUWT. These factionalists are more concerned about the danger of losing their precious political identity in a merged union than they are about defending their own pay and conditions, and the future of their service.

While the NUT conference overwhelmingly agreed to pursue a single teacher union as a priority objective, it also succeeded in rejecting the joint union policy on winning a new salary structure for all teachers — which had been agreed decisively just a year before.

The same motion rejecting the joint salary position went on to call for joint union action on salaries, including joint rallies and industrial action — perhaps to give us the opportunity to air publicly the false divisions created by a combination of ultraleftists and old-fashioned reactionaries.

Meanwhile, at the NASUWT conference a larger number of delegates than ever attended the Professional Unity fringe meeting — but in an attempt to delay matters by at least a year conference rejected the discussion paper on unity and merger promoted by the union's new General Secretary Eamon O'Kane.

In the same week an independent survey published in the *TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT* showed an overwhelming majority of teachers throughout the nation are committed to a single union. The antics of their conference-going politicians will dismay them.

Membership wars

The road to unity was never going to be smooth. There are those in all unions who put first their infantile infatuation with being top dog in their own garden, and their love of growling and barking at their counterparts in the neighbouring gardens. They will now try to start a membership war between the unions on the basis of the events of the teacher conferences — with the real intent of undermining the historic opportunity for unity that still presents itself despite the policy votes.

Those for unity in each union must identify the wreckers in their own union and develop a strategy for preventing them from further undermining progress towards a single teacher union. No manoeuvring or fudging of issues will be successful — only genuine membership involvement will do the job.

The enemies of publicly funded and accountable state comprehensive education, the proponents of the break up of teachers' national pay and conditions, the privatisers and the deregulators will be pleased with the setback to teacher union unity.

But it is only a setback, and will be overcome — when the members assert their control again.

After the Chancellor's speech, what options are there for workers? Who pays? Who controls what happens? And what can workers do about it?

Behind the budget..

WHEN THE Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, delivered his budget speech on 17 April the headlines focused on health expenditure and tax increases. Many unions welcomed the proposals, and few people commented on the long-term implications of Labour fiscal and monetary policies.

Brown claims to be managing the economy in a new way. To some extent he is right, but the solutions he offers depend as much on the acquiescence of workers as any of those offered by his predecessors. And although he appears to be treading a radical road, his choices are limited by decisions and policies set by the European Union.

All public expenditure is paid for out of wealth created by the people of Britain. In the end it does not matter if we pay taxes on wages or sales, or our employers pay more national insurance contributions. But in the short term different ways of raising the money have different effects.

Some economists believe that wealth can be redistributed by a progressive taxation system. Others think that market forces and human behaviour are bound to thwart redistribution. All work within capitalist assumptions, that those who produce wealth will not control the surplus they create.

Poverty

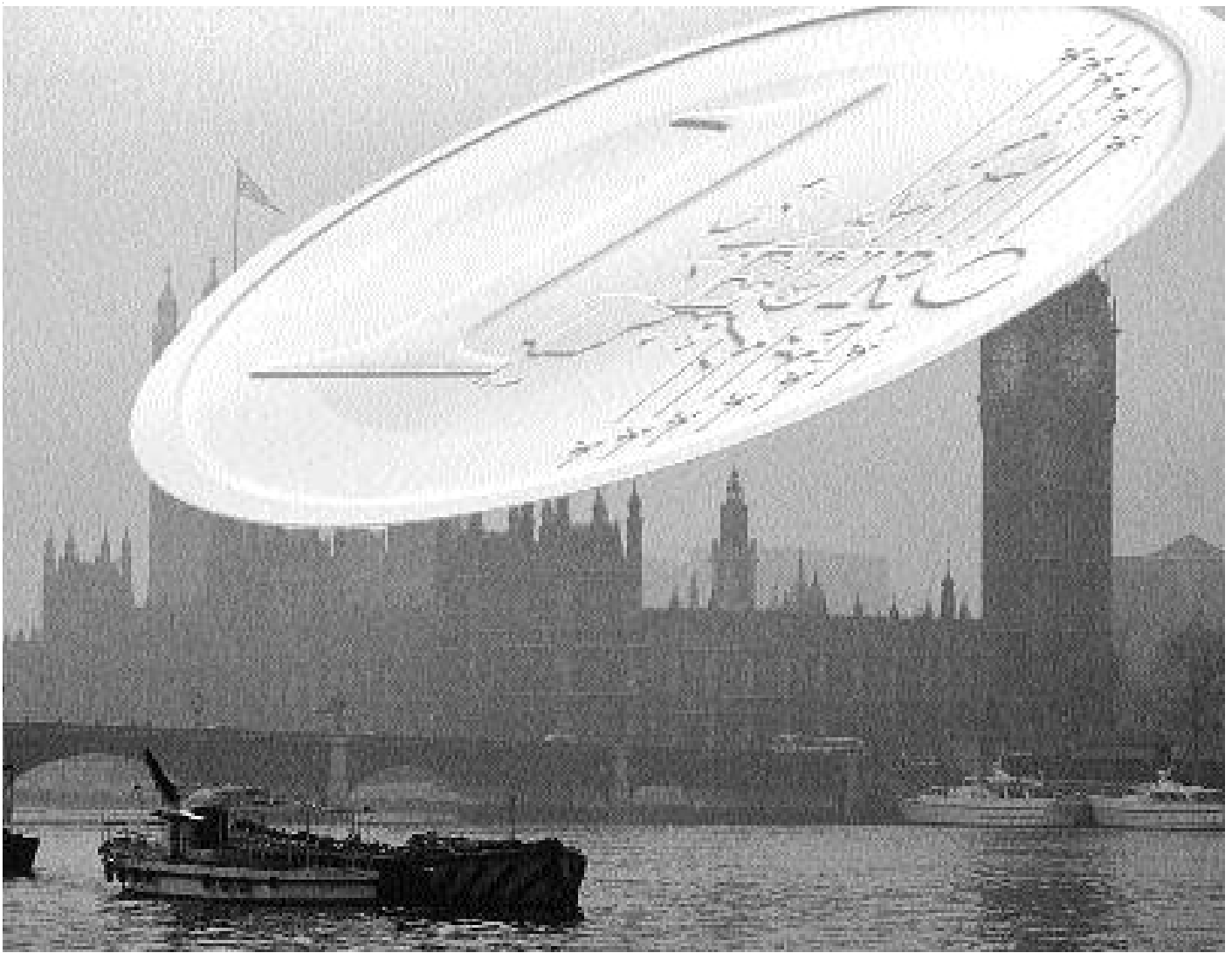
Brown has added another aim for fiscal policy. He seeks to eliminate poverty by introducing a comprehensive tax credit system. Again, some economists think that money in the end will not change behaviour. This budget edged closer towards welfare to work, and extended the Labour social control agenda.

In truth, none of this is new. Chartists argued for progressive taxation 150 years ago; some social democratic governments have tried to put that into practice. Tax credits were the theoretical Tory answer to high inflation and idle workers 30 years ago, although they never had the chance to put them in place. And the idea of making people work for benefits is older than capitalism. (Why not full employment? How many would need benefits then?)

Brown claimed to be addressing historic under-investment in public services, but concentrated on health, with some for education. He chose to raise the money by general taxation (in this case, NI), rather than a European-style social insurance scheme — a direct levy to pay for health services — or increasing user charges. His options are limited by Britain's involvement in the European Union (see box, opposite).

Despite raising tax, Brown is not spending all of it. A budget surplus of £11 billion for 2001/02, will reduce to a projected £6.7 billion in the following year. Central government departments do not spend up to their budgets. Britain will still follow the path to monetary union, whatever else happens. It

Continued on page 8



Brown's European instructions

The EU affects UK public spending in two main ways - the euro and tax harmonisation.

Firstly, levels of spending and debt are being aligned for entry to the euro currency zone. These are the 5 so-called convergence criteria in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, backed up later by the Stability Pact.

- * The budget deficit must be below 3% of GDP.
- * Total public debt, the amount the government owes, must be below 60% of annual GDP.
- * Countries must keep inflation down to within 1.5% of the 3 EU countries with the lowest rates.
- * Long-term interest rates must be within 3% of the 3 lowest EU countries.
- * Exchange rates must be kept within "normal ERM margins".

Taken together these measures limit the ability of national governments to borrow for investment, and force them to run large budget surpluses when economic conditions improve. They have to pay off debt, even if it is otherwise better not to do so. Governments tend to enter into PFI or similar arrangements simply in order to meet the Maastricht criteria.

Trying to manage public expenditure in this way results in economic distortions. It tends to tie public expenditure into long-term contracts with private suppliers, who borrow to finance the capital expenditure (at higher rates than the government would have to pay). The increased cost of servicing this debt and the profit of the contractor is paid out of taxes.

The expansion of the EU and greater concentration of power in European institutions have reinforced calls for tax integration. Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, is only the latest European politician to make such claims. There are two main reasons given for this.

Firstly, tax must be harmonised to eliminate "harmful" competition. In other words a true common economic market is not possible while different parts have different taxes.

Secondly, the present mix of indirect tax levy (VAT) and government subvention would not support expansion of EU institutions. In other words, EU bodies want their own funds to control their own spending. The overall effect is to limit the sovereignty of individual countries, whatever their own politicians might say or think.

Continued from page 6

is not clear how all of Labour's long-term aspirations will be fulfilled when decisions about spending will be made elsewhere.

The way that this government plans to build new hospitals and schools is open to question in the short term as well. In response to EU pressures, much of the spending will be under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or Public Private Partnership (PPP) schemes. Both of these variations on private sector involvement

have run into trouble.

The inherent structural problems with all of these plans are ignored. That is inevitable, given their purpose: in essence, public projects are to be paid for by paying private financiers to run services. The government trades higher current running costs for not making capital investment itself.

When the Labour government came to power in 1997 and revised PFI rules, some workers welcomed the relaxation. They believed that much-needed infrastructure projects would go ahead. Others saw PFI as a way of avoiding outright privatisation. These were reactions to the years of Thatcherite denial of public services, and both views are right in a way. But such "investment" comes at a price. Its proponents forget that the private sector does not create new resources out of nothing, it is only a way of channelling the nation's wealth, and the public sector pays everything ultimately.

Long-term problems

PFI and PPP are extremely complex to administer, and they store up long-term problems. Gradually the government loses control of those public services it wants to expand. Any worker who has been involved with service contracts knows that the end-user loses control of how work is done.

There are other disadvantages with PFI. Those working for the service company often have much poorer terms and conditions. Once in place the user (government) cannot rid itself of the parasite partner, or can only do so at a high price (and the contractor's staff then lose their jobs).

Much is made of the ability of private side employers to provide skills lacking to the public sector, as if they inhabit a different planet. In truth, there are skill shortages in certain areas, for example information technology, affecting all parts of the economy. Government ends up paying for illusory benefits.

At worst PFI-style deals do not look very different from privatisation. They

rely on squeezing working conditions. One of the less publicised aspects of the budget was that projected increases in productivity underpinned its favourable economic projections. Not only will workers have to pay through the nose for private finance, they will be working harder to do so.

The labour movement in Britain has remained mainly silent about possible alternatives. It is still haunted by the Tory Government 1979 to 1997, but also knows that things were not much better beforehand under the previous Labour administration.

Control

Inevitably some will blame waste, bureaucracy and misspending for the failure to deliver better service. Others will complain of tax loopholes and that the very rich do not pay enough. From different perspectives both views miss the point. Only the public sector can produce the enormous resources needed to provide public services. If better control is needed, workers delivering them have to be more involved, not less because decisions are made in the City or the EU.

On the same day that Brown revealed his budget, local government workers were planning to reject their pay offer as inadequate and fire service workers were discussing industrial action. They are only reacting to previous government budget decisions. With the emphasis on health spending, other services will be pinned down to small or zero budget increases.

Unions will only be able to continue in the same way over the life of this government if they become involved in the wider picture. For example, where are all the new workers in the health service to come from? Already many trusts try to recruit from overseas. That cannot be a long-term answer. Who is to build new hospitals and make the equipment they use? The budget offered fine words for industry, and some reduction in taxes. But it did nothing directly to promote manufacturing in this country.

Public finances 2002/03

	£ billion
Total expenditure	418
<i>Incomings</i>	
Borrowings (deficit)	11
Income tax	118
Corporation tax	33
National insurance	65
VAT	64
Excise duties	38
Rates & council tax	35
Other	55
<i>Outgoings</i>	
Interest on debts	21
Social security	115
Health	65
Education	54
Defence, law & order	48
Industry & agriculture	17
Environment	20
Transport	14
Other	64
Ten year changes	(% of GDP)
<i>Public spending</i>	
1992	44%
2002	40%
<i>Government revenues</i>	
1992	37%
2002	40%

Labour has failed to meet the transport needs of the country. Organised workers, not reactionaries and defeatists must fill the vacuum...

Taking back the railways



AFTER NEARLY FIVE YEARS in office and three major rail crashes, Labour has delivered a damp squib of a 'solution' to the problem of the crumbling network. The Strategic Rail Authority came up with a number of short-term feel-good measures, such as prettifying station waiting rooms and lavatories, improving security and information, and boosting punctuality. Admittedly, some locations will also finally benefit from improved track and signalling. But most of its report was a rehash of plans for work which was in the pipeline anyway, even before Hatfield exposed the entire infrastructure in meltdown.

Reality

The government has failed to get a grip on reality. They have lacked courage and radical vision for so long, that nothing, short of renationalisation or a massive injection of new money, is likely to appease the voters. Quite simply, Labour has failed to match strategy and

investment to the transport needs of the country. Until now, they have not even considered making an effort.

Excuses, excuses

They found one excuse after another. Naturally, they said, there could be no quarrelling with EU directives to deregulate. Most significantly, the limits on public sector borrowing required under the EU Stability Pact (pushed for by Germany and now rebounding on the German people) must be adhered to. This restricts borrowing to 3% of the national GDP.

Lack of investment and uncoordinated management — not driver error — was the real reason for the lives lost at Southall and Ladbroke Grove. Then came Hatfield, with more deaths and revelations of Railtrack's negligence and financial impotence. The game was up.

Pretending to be surprised and shocked made the government look foolish. Repeated union warnings of

danger had become common knowledge - the worn out track and equipment, the lapse of regular inspections, the use of uncertified contractors from the construction industry, the appalling building site safety records of contractors now operating in the rail industry, Railtrack's approval of faulty braking systems, and the lack of boardroom expertise.

The Selby crash highlighted not only the terrible cost of motorway drivers failing to take responsibility, but also the critical state of Britain's infrastructure. Structural engineers say 200 bridges are unsafe. Today there are as many as 3000 competing subcontractors in the rail industry, but there is a shortage of skilled maintenance staff.

It was Railtrack's failure to detect a fractured freight train axle that led to the death of one postal worker and serious injury to several others. The SRA draws

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

attention to Railtrack's ignorance about its own network. This has delayed the introduction of new rolling stock, as manufacturers were unable to obtain precise information, for example about the height of bridges.

The SRA is calling for a 'National Rail Academy', to address the problem of recruitment, to restore specialist and managerial skills lost through redundancies when British Rail was broken up, and to bring a more disciplined, professional, and systematic approach to training in the industry.

Training

A recent survey by the Rail Industry Training Council revealed a particular need for signal, track, and overhead line equipment engineers. These key workers must undergo lengthy training to an advanced level of skill. Recognition of their crucial safety role must now be matched by funds and investment, the lack of which has been a huge disincentive to setting up recruitment and training schemes.

Development work in hand includes the modernisation of the London-to-

Glasgow west coast main line, to be ready for the first of Virgin's 140mph 'Pendolino' or tilting trains this summer. The trouble is that they are only expected to run at 125mph because of "scaling back" on the original plans.

Large increases in freight and passenger miles are envisaged by 2010. Such demand will require platform extensions on Connex South Eastern, the completion of the Channel tunnel high-speed link and Thameslink 2000, and the modernisation of South West Trains. The London-to-Scotland east coast main line is to be upgraded by 2010, with a half-hourly service to Leeds.

There is positive news for London and the South East, which accounts for 70% of passenger journeys. The SRA confirms that commuter routes are to receive 1,700 new coaches to replace the old "slam-door" trains. The power supply will be boosted to enable 12-carriage trains to operate.

Promises, promises

The SRA promises to relieve overcrowding in and out of the capital; to begin to unify the structure by merging franchises; and to introduce the train protection warning system (TPWS),

'Full employment... could finance the best people's transport system in the world'

which stops the slower trains after they have passed a red light. With Railtrack now under administration, an independent safety body is also promised. A total rail budget of £67 billion has been drawn up over 10 years, of which the government hopes £34 billion will come from the private sector.

Limited though they are, these spending plans may mark a subtle shift. Following the Railtrack fiasco, private capital is nervous, and passengers have had enough misery. So the proposal is to put the balance of public money up front right away to get things moving, with private investors coming in only when projects are successfully under way.

Meanwhile, it seems likely that the state of Railtrack's finances will cause it to remain under administration for at least six more months. Administrators on

From guerrilla action to national struggle, rail

A WAVE OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION continues in the railway industry, as workers tackle the legacy of privatisation and fragmentation. Meanwhile, RMT members recently elected Bob Crow as General Secretary by an overwhelming majority. Bob Crow has made it clear that he is prepared to take on this government over their record on transport, and railways in particular. Drivers' union ASLEF continues to make significant gains on behalf of its members, and it is also notable that the white collar TSSA has taken strike action for the first time in 30 years. True to form, AEEU-Amicus General Secretary Sir Ken Jackson was condemning the RMT strike action in South West Trains while his own members in the company were being balloted for industrial action!

Since Labour were elected in 1997, rail workers have heard the government promise that the problems of privatisation would be addressed. Billions have been promised for investment. Yet the daily experience of rail workers is that things are now worse than they were in 1997, something even Stephen Byers has had to admit. Rail workers cannot easily

force the government to keep its promises, but what is within their power is to force employers to improve pay and conditions. It is this that lies at the heart of the current disputes.

The private railway currently receives massive state subsidy, which, as recent announcements have shown, are funding huge profits and dividends to shareholders. Like Railtrack did before Byers forced it into administration, companies are demanding still more state aid. The SRA has just increased subsidies to two National Express companies by £56 million. Arriva is demanding more money, and threatening fare increases if it is refused, whilst paying massive bonuses to its senior managers.

Pay

Yet these employers are refusing to pay increases to staff to bring them into line with others in the industry. As Bob Crow said with regard to National Express subsidiary Scotrail, "Workers are already subsidising the company, providing

£450 an hour may be in no hurry to speed things up!

Having told Railtrack that the state handouts were to cease, forcing it into administration, Byers seems less than keen to do what is the logical next step and put the railway infrastructure back under state ownership. He has been trying to entice the unions into accepting a 'not for profit' set-up.

Why the interest?

The authenticity of Byers' proposed 'not for profit' trust to run the railways must be called into question. Why, if it is as altruistic as they make out, would private companies, including German banks, be taking an interest? The government is seemingly desperate to examine any solution which keeps the track in private hands. Byers has sought EU permission to underwrite a £4.4 billion cash injection to keep afloat Railtrack in administration.

More passengers are using the railways than at any time since 1945. They are not using the railways because rail is an attractive option. The lack of a coherent transport policy is resulting in Britain's road network clogging up, and the railways are not far behind. Talk of

'road pricing' to force cars off the road is unacceptable when the public transport alternatives simply aren't there. Blair has said recently that the government should be judged on its record regarding the railways at the next election.

There is no mood to give in to government plans to privatise the London Underground. People realise this is inextricably linked to National Rail. Transport for London have said they are not opposed to a PPP on ideological grounds, and they may yet outflank the government with their own, more worker-friendly form of partnership, under which the Underground would at some point be returned to public control.

In desperation, Blair and Byers are to mount a road show to try to convince the public of their case; but they will meet with public anger, inflamed by the experience of national rail privatisation.

The government is uncertain, and lacking in direction. The meddlesome John Birt, a walking disaster area, has been appointed by Blair to do some 'blue skies thinking'. He is accountable to no-one, and has declined to appear before the transport select committee to explain what thoughts, if any, are in his head.

There is a vacuum, which organised workers, not reactionaries and defeatists, must fill. Workers will run the modernised railway, as bits of it come on stream. But their present work situation is chaotic.

If the government has the slightest confidence in its latest funding proposals, should there be any scaling back of development? Why should a London metro system, or schemes such as CrossRail, or the London to Scotland high-speed link, or new airport links to Heathrow, Edinburgh and Glasgow, be put on hold?

Having dared to dismiss Railtrack, why not go the whole hog? End the fudge, take it all back, be creative with our money, and build a well thought out network for every region of Britain, including feeder cross-country and light rail routes. Add to that, full employment at the end of the line, producing the wealth that could finance the best people's transport system in the world.

Investment in new railways, new trains and also decent rates of pay for rail staff are crucial to keeping Britain moving. As things stand, Labour's record will be judged by the electorate as a dismal failure.

Railway workers fight against privatisation

labour at a rate way below that paid by other operators." He has warned of a 'pay spiral' where pay settlements at one company trigger claims at others as staff seek parity.

In 1996, rail staff in British Rail were covered by national pay and conditions. Privatisation followed, with the creation of 25 new train operating companies. Since then, huge chasms have opened up in rates of pay in the different employers, and between different grade groups within those firms. Some rail staff are doing the same job as others working alongside them at the same station, but are paid vastly different rates of pay. The disputes now taking place are the result of this arbitrary division of what should be an integrated rail network.

ASLEF negotiators in National Express subsidiary ScotRail have called off their strikes having obtained substantial concessions, and members are currently being balloted on the deal. ASLEF are in dispute with freight company EWS over conditions, with strikes looking likely. Another National Express company — Silverlink — faces strikes from RMT conductors over pay, Arriva Trains Northern conductors and station staff in

RMT and TSSA continue a series of 24 and 48 hour strikes as they seek parity of treatment with the company's drivers, and with staff in other companies.

More disputes look set to follow.

Underground

London Underground has settled the most recent dispute after the direct intervention of the government, but now faces more action unless it improves its pay offer. It will be interesting to see if the government via the Strategic Rail Authority is prepared to grapple with the current problems in the mainline railways. Rail unions ASLEF, RMT and TSSA have called for a return to national pay bargaining as a solution to the current crisis. These unions also remain committed to restoring the railways to public ownership.

The next few weeks and months must see the rail workers' guerrilla tactics linked to a concerted effort by the whole trade union movement to take back our rail system, and run it as it should be run — for people, not profit.

In this final feature in our three-part series on socialism and social democracy, we look at the most backward creation of the trade unions: the Labour Party...and its opposite

Leave it to Labour?

AT THE END of the 19th century, labour history was rewritten and revised. Social democratic gradualism supplanted revolutionary aspirations and traditions. The Luddites and other illegal activists were described as mindless fanatics, illiterate pursuers of wild proposals. The new heroes became the compromisers like Samuel Bamford and the reformists like Francis Place.

The poor starving masses, powerless under the weight of laissez faire capitalism, were to be saved by the Labour Party bringing social justice through Parliament. The Labour Party popularised this falsification, but the strength of social democratic thinking has always resided within the class itself. Poor and patronised in its own mind-forged manacles, the working class permits the incompetent to govern.

Major Cartwright in 1816 saw his job as diverting workers' revolutionary aspirations into safe, constitutional channels. In the same tradition the Labour Party was founded to usurp the leadership of the upsurge of working class action in the years prior to World War One, but it was not imposed from outside the working class. A small elite has foisted nothing on British workers since the Norman Conquest.

Condescending

Among the first who called for an English Labour Party free of the condescending 'help' of the Liberal party, were the North of England Socialist Federation of Northumberland miners, Friedrich Engels, who encouraged Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, then working in East London, and Hubert Bland, a former colleague of the Fabians but disillusioned with working with the Liberals.

They were partly inspired by the success of the Irish nationalists who formed a united and active party in the House of Commons and also by the

example of the American United Labour Parties. The establishment of the Labour Party "striving to conquer political power by promoting the election of socialists to Parliament, local governments, school boards and other administrative bodies" emerged from the class, not from the brain of a deceitful usurper outside.

The resulting 'parliamentary democracy' has never done anything but misrepresent us. The 1945 Labour government spent more time trying to rebuild the Empire than to rebuild Britain; it put us in hock to the USA and helped to found NATO. More recently, when we eventually voted out those who ran down our industries and wanted to privatise our services, we found that we had voted in those who run down our industries and want to privatise our services.

'The Labour Party ethic is that running to your MP, and now to your MEP, can solve all problems'

In the mature, advanced 'democracies' of the West, what has capitalism delivered? At home, declining manufacture, agriculture and services, leading to the social evils of unemployment, homelessness, vast and growing inequalities, rising crime, corruption, social divisions and anarchy. Abroad, war, exploitation, pillage of natural resources and destruction of the environment, soaring arms and drug sales. In response to all these evils, many good people work with increasing despair to alleviate particular symptoms, but the

basic disease keeps breaking out, the root cause, unaddressed, produces yet more virulent effects.

The Labour Party has never betrayed its basic principles. It aimed to reform capitalism into a system that we could live with. Unfortunately, capitalism is not like that: its dynamic for profit breaks all reformist restraints.

Distance

Those who expect more of the Labour Party than it delivers are in many ways more deluded than the mainstream social democrats within it. It was never a party built to take on and destroy capitalism. Its main purpose has always been to get seats in local councils and parliament. To present this purpose in the 21st century it has decided to distance itself from the organised labour movement that created it. As it does so, workers leave it: 300,000 have left in the last five years.

The Labour and Tory parties are two faces of capitalism, not the same face. The Conservative Party is of, by, and for the employers. The Labour Party is of and by workers but is, in its parliamentary expression whenever a key issue arises, for the preservation of capitalism and imperialist wars against workers in other countries. It is against nation and democracy. This Labour government embraces the complete corporate takeover of all institutions in Britain. The fiercest attacks on 'Stalinism' and 'wreckers' come from those most committed to forcing us into the undemocratic embrace of the European Central Bank.

So much of our class history has been about opposing the policies of the Labour Party in power that it is surprising so many still view the trade unions as our economic arm and the Labour Party as the political arm. Communists have always fought against this false division in social democratic thinking. What can



The Industrial Relations Act, 1971: a fight that began against a Conservative government had to be finished against a Labour one. Pictured: demonstration against the act at Tower Hill, London, with AEU Executive Councillor and CPBML founder Reg Birch speaking.

be more political than taking on the employer over wages and conditions? What can be more political than taking action against the immediate exploiter? The economic struggle is always political for workers in Britain.

The Labour Party, as it brings the social democratic thinking of workers into an organisational form, sees workers as a passive electorate, constituents who 'constitute' an MP, who then thinks he thinks and acts on their behalf. Social democracy sees the class as a force to be harnessed, 'noble savages', uncorrupted because unlettered, victims, whose lot on earth would be improved by 'politicians' making reforms on their behalf.

The Labour Party ethic is that running to your MP, and now to your MEP, can solve all problems. It was at its birth, and is now, based on fear, contempt and hatred of the working class, decried as 'Sun readers' or 'vested interests'. The skill, the sheer professionalism, the creative potential in workers is what social democracy most hates and fears. It refuses to believe that workers from factory and office, dole queue and university department can consciously unite and control society and production in their own interests without the profit motive, without unemployment.

In 1848 the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO had presented workers as active, self reliant, able to think, speak and act for themselves, and thus capable of changing the world. It was based on faith in the working class. The vision of the Manifesto

was that it was written when only a very small minority of people in the world were industrial workers, but it recognised the beginning of an immense movement. Each day since has seen the creation of more and more workers as capitalism generates its own gravediggers remorselessly.

Communist ideas

Who has the power in our society? Who is still stopping our rulers from rushing us into the euro?

The task of the communist party is to change the ideological thinking of the working class, to assert Marxism and the revolutionary tradition of British workers and displace social democratic thought and action. You cannot purport to do this unless you are yourself fully immersed in the class struggle against the employer class. Neither is it possible unless your party is strongly committed to ideological education and learning. Ideological education and ideas must be constantly tested in the struggle.

This is why Marxism is referred to as 'scientific socialism'. This means that communist ideas only have any credence or relevance if they assist in changing real conditions in the interests of workers.

A real workers' party

You cannot have a communist party made up of 'clever' people who work full time for the party, who develop the ideas and tell others to carry them out. Nor a party endlessly devoted to 'activity' campaigns

and good causes without thinking. You need a contribution of ideas from all members, participating voluntarily, based on their experience of struggle as workers and their knowledge gained through collective communist discussion and study. You have to be prepared to speak your mind, but also to engage in honest debate, to listen to others, and you also have to be prepared to acknowledge that you can be wrong.

A communist party, although existing to ensure fundamental change in society, must ensure that internal discipline and security are always paramount. Lessons written in blood across the world stress the need for agreed thinking — the line — and unity of purpose. Discipline is ultimately dependent upon conviction and clarity of mind. You cannot so much join a communist party as actively build it. You 'join' because you see the need for this type of organisation. This type of organisation means you are in fact the organisation, without you there is no Party. There is no Politburo meeting somewhere else to sort out a line for you. There's no kneeling at anyone else's feet, or waiting for the 'star speaker' to persuade you with rhetoric.

As communists we believe that the only difference between other workers and ourselves is that we have reached certain conclusions slightly earlier. Unlike the career politicians who want only to run the capitalist state and its various unaccountable organs, we believe we have just as much to learn as to teach.

It is an episode in history that has disappeared from the textbooks: the time the British bourgeoisie organised and led a massive invasion force against a revolution...

When Britain (and 13 other countries) invaded

AFTER THE OCTOBER Revolution, the British War Cabinet snapped up a controlling interest in the main Russian banks, aiming to control Russia. But at the end of World War One, the Soviet government was still in power, defending Russia's independence and thwarting the British government's venture.

And so, in an episode in history that seems to have disappeared from the textbooks, the British bourgeoisie organised and led a massive invasion force, comprising armed forces from 14 countries.

Taking the lead, British forces occupied Archangel and Murmansk in North Russia. Here, they backed the local White Guard revolt, overthrew the Soviets and set up the fascistic "Government of North Russia".

The Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces, General Edmund Ironside, commanding 30,000 soldiers, later admitted, "We were actively engaged in the civil war." But as Ironside warned, "Once a military force is involved on land it is almost impossible to limit the magnitude of its commitments. Military expeditions cannot extricate themselves from a country they have invaded as a ship leaves a port it has visited."

Coup

And in an even less-remembered footnote, British forces aided the abortive coup against the new Bolshevik government in 1918 led by Admiral Kolchak, when his men slaughtered the last members of the Constituent Assembly. Lieutenant-Colonel Neilson, who led the British Mission, admitted that he told everyone "that Admiral Kolchak was the only man capable of saving the country" — and yet he denied that he ever interfered in Russia's affairs.

Churchill later wrote, "Were they at war with Soviet Russia? Certainly not; but they shot Soviet Russians at sight. They stood as invaders on Russian soil. They

armed the enemies of the Soviet Government. They blockaded its ports, and sunk its battleships. They earnestly desired and schemed its downfall. But war — shocking! Interference — shame! It was, they repeated, a matter of indifference to them how Russians settled their own internal affairs. They were impartial — Bang!"

even if they came in unarmed". The historian Martin Kettle noted White Russian General Denikin's "wholesale shooting of prisoners". A relief worker said that he "could find no evidence the Bolsheviks shot prisoners as did the Allies".

Allied Forces used poison gas shells and phosphorus bombs. Churchill tried to



The revolution begins: outside the Smolny Institute, revolutionary headquarters, in Petrograd (subsequently Leningrad, now St Petersburg) in 1917.

The war killed 1.35 million Russians and crippled three million. It also killed 14 million civilians who died from starvation, cholera and typhus. Yet the Soviet leaders, to their credit, never called for revenge, unlike the French bourgeois after the Franco-Prussian War and the German bourgeois after World War One.

The Allies and their White Russian friends committed war crimes on a vast scale, only ever matched by Hitler's later assault. The Allies' officers instructed their soldiers "to take no prisoners, to kill them

justify this by claiming that the Bolsheviks used gas, but as Kettle wrote, "there is no proof that the Bolsheviks ever employed poison gas in North Russia". Churchill accused his enemy of atrocities to excuse his own.

The leading American columnist Walter Lippmann wrote of the anti-Communist propaganda promoting the war, "Because these lies were the base of a policy of lawless invasion, disgraceful intrigue, bloodshed, devastation and famine, they have had to be established by every

and Russia

device known to panic and credulity." This set a pattern that would endure.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Sherwood-Kelly, DSO, VC, who served at Archangel, said, "The puppet-Government set up by us in Archangel rested on no basis of public confidence and support...I saw British money poured out like water and invaluable British lives sacrificed in backing up this worthless army and keeping in power this worthless Government and I became convinced that my duty to my country lay not in helping to forward a mistaken policy but in exposing it to the British public."

British workers

The war became ever more unpopular among British workers. They called strikes, refused to load war munitions and set up Councils of Action. The TUC set up a Hands off Russia Committee. All this helped to force the Allies to end the intervention. British troops left Russia in September 1919. Within five months, the Red Army had routed the White Army of the North.

Ironsides wrote, "No one realised the strength and determination of the Red leaders." The White Ministers "had no confidence in themselves, and there was not one of them who showed any white-hot patriotism to win through, such as the Bolshevik leaders seemed to possess in so large a measure." As General Sir Brian Horrocks admitted, "The Reds...did have the backing of the people." The Soviet Republic won its independence and freedom.

Yet in 1946, George Kennan, the US government's foremost expert on the Soviet Union, wrote that the Soviet belief that Western states would launch "wars of intervention" was "baseless and disproven — simply not true". He could not see that the War of Intervention and Hitler's invasion had proven the Soviet belief true. He could not even think that the Soviet Union was not an aggressor!

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

If you want to be a player in the political game, not a spectator, the politics of cynicism is not enough. But thinking about the mountain of work and the changes in attitude that will be needed to transform Britain is overwhelming if you are on your own. That's why British workers need their own political party, this party, to generate the ideas and effort to bring the changes we need.

Who are we?

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist was founded in 1968 by Reg Birch and other leading engineers. They identified that there were only two classes in Britain and that only workers could make the change that was needed. Birch pulled together a diverse crew, of workers, and turned them into a party with a difference.

In 1971, the Party's second Congress produced a piece of completely new communist thinking for Britain called THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND ITS PARTY. We call this our Party programme and it remains as fresh and important for today as it was then. You can find it on our website, www.workers.org.uk.

Dozens of political parties formed in the 1960s and 70s have come and gone, while the CPBML is alive, well, and welcoming new recruits. One reason for its success has been that every CPBML member must be a thinker and a do-er. There are no paid officials.

The party is made up of working people like you, who are helped by their participation in it to develop as leaders and earn the respect of fellow workers. The party vows never to put itself above the class which created it, but to serve the interests of the class.

Those who join us know we are in for a long haul, and most of our members stay for good. We leave it to the political Moonies to grab anyone, exploit them and spit them out. We don't tolerate zealots on the one hand or armchair generals on the other. What about you? If you are interested, get in touch. In the long run, the only thing harder than being a communist is not being one.

How to get in touch

* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet WHERE'S THE PARTY. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

- Subscribe to WORKERS, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. You can ask to be put in touch by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

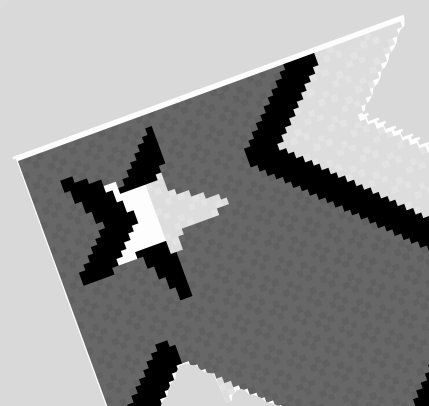
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Back to Front – Precursor of a wider war

“Arafat has shown a new generation that the only valid reaction to the mighty global forces that seek to destroy nation states and displace populations is to stand and fight...”

THE US SECRETARY of State has returned from Palestine after what his government must consider a successful mission. The Israelis are still massacring Palestinians. If the United States really wanted to stop the killing they could have done so without a visit. The dollar sustains the Israeli war machine. The threat of sanctions or trial for war crimes (normally used against enemies of the US) would have stopped Sharon in his tracks. The truth is that the United States is fully supporting his attempts to weaken the Palestinian people and their state. This is the precursor of a wider war against key Arab states.

In response, Arafat has shown a new generation that the only valid reaction to the mighty global forces that seek to destroy nation states and displace populations is to stand and fight. He refused to move from his headquarters and said he would only leave in a coffin.

This represents exactly the form of nationalism that is needed to repel imperialism throughout the world. Rather than isolating Arafat, the Israelis have ensured that he is associated with the spirit of the resistance that is needed to oppose the plans of capitalism throughout the world.

In previous periods the most terrible genocide against Palestinian refugee camps, usually led by Sharon, was met with organised, collective resistance and discipline. But now more irrational and counter-productive forces, notably Hamas, are active in the Palestinian cause and individual acts of terrorism against Israeli workers are common. These anti-worker forces give succour to imperialism by

spreading religious bigotry and promising a quick route to heaven through suicide bombings

The political purpose of terrorist attacks is to bring about an escalation in aggression against the whole Palestinian people — the very people the terrorists pretend to support. So, Palestinian ambulance drivers are shot by Israeli soldiers because Hamas terrorists use ambulances to carry their hardware. Hamas create targets out of their own people. Both Sharon and Hamas want to see Arafat deposed or, better, dead. The forces for peace and progress are under siege from both Israeli and Palestinian reaction.

The US-backed invasion of Palestine must be stopped. It is bad in itself, but it is also the precursor to the intended invasion of Iraq. Worse still, our Prime Minister, in our name, without a mandate, gives his support to this planned war.

He talks of weapons of mass destruction being pointed at us by Iraq, but can produce no convincing evidence, while the real mass destruction of homes and social infrastructure takes place before our eyes in Palestine.

Where is the voice of British workers? A march for Palestine in London was organised by Islamic organisations, rather like having a demonstration on Northern Ireland led by the Catholic Church. Workers must not allow this to become a religious issue. Unless we assert ourselves now, raise our demand for peace and stop the pro-US interventions of Blair, we will pay for and die in a series of imperialist wars in Asia and the Middle East.

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