

WORKERS

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LIFE AND SOUL

A website called
Jarama

14



THIS GOVERNMENT MUST GO



Against the euro at the Scottish TUC

03



How to get Britain moving

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WORKERS

First thoughts

“WORK TILL YOU DIE” — Not a slogan from a Nazi labour camp but the official government answer to the supposed pension crisis. The ridiculously styled “pensions tsar”, Adair Turner, ex-Director General of the CBI, believes workers should “slog on beyond their 65th birthday”. But we wouldn’t expect anything else from a “captain of industry”.

Carefully leaked Treasury statistics indicate that the state pension reserves are now only worth 25% of what they should be. Private company pension schemes are being looted on par with any scenes from Baghdad. Why?

Because Capitalism continually has to find fresh reserves of blood to consume and there can be no niceties such as looking after Mr and Mrs Smith into their dotage.

Put aside all the hype and barrage of economic data to support the government’s position: the wealth is there, it is created daily. What is lacking is control of its allocation and distribution. Naked, brutal, blood-red in claw and tooth capitalism of the early days of the Industrial Revolution has supposedly evolved into Blair’s Third Way. Keep wearing the rose-tinted glasses, but

Second opinion

THE OFFICE of National Statistics’ new report, “The Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Household Income, 2001-02”, shows how all taxes hit the working class far harder than the capitalist class.

The richest 20% of households paid 34.2% of their incomes in taxes; the poorest 20% paid 41.7%. The richest 20% paid only 10.4% of

their incomes in indirect taxes; the poorest 20% paid 30.1%. The richest 20% paid just 1.8% of their incomes in council tax; the poorest 20% paid 7.1%. The council tax is going up by an average 13% from this month, so the burden on workers will increase.

All taxes are now increasingly regressive — thanks to Labour.

WORKERS WOULD LIKE TO WISH MAY DAY GREETINGS TO ALL OUR READERS



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Scotland takes on the euro

APRIL'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) in Inverness at last saw opposition to the euro raised to a level where it can never be ignored again — indeed, condemnation of the whole euro project has become accepted as part of mainstream union thinking. With its 400 delegates from 46 trade unions and 32 trades councils (representing 628,274 members) the STUC is an essential part of the democratic life of the labour movement. So it was significant that no resolution during the whole conference called for joining the euro, and the speakers moving and seconding the motion opposing a European single currency were heard with respect and some enthusiasm.

The motion, moved by Clydebank Trades Council representative Tommy Morrison, urged the conference to oppose entry to the European Single Currency and called on the General Council to campaign for a 'No' vote in the referendum, bearing in mind the views of millions of Scottish and British trade unionists opposed to British entry.

Morrison warned delegates that the single currency was "not in the interests of the working class" and would be an attack on them and their values of public service and welfare, all for the benefit of big business. Jane Carolan, from Unison's executive, seconding, urged delegates never to forget the ERM [exchange rate mechanism] that led to over 100,000 businesses going bust and around a million jobs being lost in the 1990s as well as today's graphic effects of the EU in the form of, for example, Spain's 17% youth unemployment.

Even the General Council spokesman, Andy Baird, in calling for the motion to be remitted "for the sake of unity" and because some union delegations present had "not made up their minds", expressed no enthusiasm for the EU project, spelling out the STUC's concerns about the "limitations placed on public expenditure" and the lack of "evidence that membership of the euro tackles unemployment". The movers reluctantly agreed remission.

The mood of opposition was further confirmed in a lunchtime fringe meeting when a debate on "Should Britain Join the Euro?" attracted a standing-room-only attendance of nearly 50. While the pro-euro speakers were not from trade unions, those critical represented strong bodies of opinion within the labour movement, including Barry Camfield, the TGWU assistant general secretary currently campaigning to become General Secretary, Unison's Carolan and the chair, Eddie McGuire (Musicians Union, Glasgow).

Camfield pinpointed the dire effects of EU legislation on workers, warning that worse would follow from joining the euro. One example to watch out for, he said, was the EU-enforced "liberalisation" that was threatening the jobs of 1,000 workers at Felixstowe docks. Later, at the main conference, he demanded new strategic thinking to build Britain's industrial base back up again.

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

EUROPEAN UNION

Growing pains

THE 15 FOREIGN ministers of the EU have cleared the way to 10 new members, though the accession treaties have yet to be voted on in most candidate countries and then be ratified by existing members.

The EU in the meantime has suppressed critical reports on candidate countries. A confidential report by a Dutch judge claims that the Polish judiciary is not independent and that criminal cases are subject to political influence. His team concluded Poland was not fit to join the EU.

So anxious is Brussels to get Poland into the EU that it is playing down a recent declaration by the Polish parliament stating that its national laws on moral questions take precedence over European laws. This is intended to allay fears over the abortion issue. But the new draft constitution of the EU states that EU law trumps national law — a phrase the British government tried unsuccessfully to remove, realising just how unpopular this would be with British voters.

FURNITURE

South, then East

SOME 800 workers who produce beds and furniture are being made redundant as Silentnight relocate to the new neocolonies of Eastern Europe — Poland and Lithuania.

In 1985 over 500 workers in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, were sacked for seeking a pay rise. Subsequently Silentnight relocated their Lancashire production base to South Wales, Hampshire and Oxfordshire — the industrial North being replaced by the rural non-unionised South. Now the East beckons.

HOUSING**Privatisation costs**

THE COST of transferring housing stock from local authority control has been exposed by government's own National Audit Office. To meet the transfer target over the next five years will cost £1.3 billion more than if local authorities were given the money to improve homes themselves.

Defend Council Housing national committee member Alan Walter said the report vindicated the anti-transfer movement: "Set against a background where tenants have not been allowed to stay with councils, we have been right to say this is not value for money and is basically about ripping tenants off."

Lord Rooker, the Housing Minister, has tried to claim that the benefits outweigh the expense. He cites more tenant participation in decisions affecting their homes and a greater sense of ownership and involvement in local regeneration. Opponents say such local involvement can be encouraged in many different ways, none of which would need to involve the asset stripping of council housing stock. Cash-strapped councils have little choice but to go along with this.

Stockport council recently spent £1.5 million in a failed attempt to persuade tenants to transfer its 13,000 homes. This defeat is another blow to the transfer programme and shows that tenants can decide what is in their real interests.

TELECOMS**Union-busting backfires**

T-MOBILE'S ATTEMPT to stop union recognition by hiring the American union-busting firm TBG has backfired badly. At present just under half of the eligible staff are in unions, but now support is growing as non-members feel angry with the firm.

TGB has been active in T-Mobile, advising managers, drafting anti-union leaflets and leading presentations to staff. Employees have also been called in to speak to the union busters, either in groups or alone. An example of its propaganda is a warning that if the unions are recognised for collective bargaining, "You will have to accept anything the unions negotiate on your behalf"! It is also using smear tactics to suggest that employees will have to go on strike and comparing this with FBU action.

TGB advertises services for "union avoidance" on its website and is known for its strong-arm tactics. The CWU is confident that they will win the ballot on 9 May as workers recognise the benefits of a unionised workplace.



Against the war in Sheffield, one of the many regional centres that have seen large turnouts. See also "Iraq: Government and Parliament stand condemned", p6

Photo: Workers

BMA rejects imposed contract

BRITAIN'S SENIOR doctors are considering industrial action after the government announced last month that it would impose the contract that consultants rejected by two to one in a ballot in October. This contract would have meant greater government control over their work, including more flexible working hours, and more government control over clinical decisions, and so more government control over patients' waiting lists and waiting times, irrespective of patient needs.

In pursuit of its targets of cutting waiting lists and times, the government has already pressured some managers into removing patients from the system altogether.

After the vote, the British Medical Association called on the government to re-enter negotiations, but it refused. On 17 April, Health Secretary Alan Milburn announced that the rejected contract would be imposed anyway: he would allow individual hospital trusts to implement it locally.

The BMA reacted angrily: "Local implementation is the issue on which we have had most protests. It is not what consultants want." In protest at the move, it has called off all meetings with the Department of Health, and industrial action is possible. Paul Miller, chairman of the BMA consultants' committee, said, "This demonstrates once again that the Department of Health has no interest in engaging in constructive talks."

AGRICULTURE**Poverty for farm workers**

FARM WORKERS are still among the lowest paid in the country, despite increasing mechanisation and productivity. The Agricultural Wages Board award to run from July 2003 has done nothing to change this, at a time when pressure on housing and other facilities is driving workers away from the industry. The AWB imposed an inflation-only 15-month settlement.

This gives skilled farm workers £6 an hour, a rise of 23 pence. The standard rate will be just £5.15 pence an hour, with the harvest workers' rate at £4.50. That is barely above the minimum, in an industry notorious for casual and illegal labour.

The AWB is a body set up to reach agreement on wages without disputes. It includes supposedly independent members, as well as those for unions and employers. The Transport & General Workers Union

feels that its representations have not been considered seriously.

Workers in the industry have made many concessions during a difficult period. Foot and mouth may be over but price pressure from the processing industry and imports continues.

The TGWU is the largest union among the 150,000 workers covered by the AWB. Even so it recognises the need to recruit and organise to challenge the decision.

Peter Allenson from TGWU said, "The concessions we made have not been repaid. We do not want to see a drain of workers from the countryside but the feelings of anger and frustration cannot be underestimated. The T&G is determined to re-double our efforts to win the hearts and minds arguments and organise to win for our members."

The TGWU sees comparisons with the recent construction industry award of a basic £9 an hour. That represented a 23% rise in response to skill shortages.

PENSIONS

TUC challenge over figures

THE CBI and the TUC have clashed over the cost to employers of providing compulsory contributions to staff pension schemes. The TUC responded to the government Green Paper on pensions by suggesting that one element in producing long-term pension security for all should be through a compulsion on employers to contribute 10% of salaries to employee pensions.

The CBI claimed this would add £29 billion a year to company costs but the TUC has challenged the figures, pointing out that the CBI had used average earnings for their calculations, but most workers not currently in schemes are on lower wages, cutting the total to £11 billion. If the scheme were phased in the initial costs would be closer to £3 billion.

The TUC is also pressing for protection when schemes are wound up, with more consultation, solvency insurance and a new Pension Protection Fund. It will oppose any attempt to increase from 50 to 55 the age at which an individual can draw a pension.

CALL CENTRES

Anger over shift to India

BOTH THE Communications Workers Union (CWU) and Amicus are threatening industrial action over proposals to shift call centre jobs from Britain to India. The CWU are fighting 700 jobs losses at BT and Amicus are trying to prevent Prudential and Norwich Union moving 850 and 1000 jobs respectively.

With cost savings upwards of 80% of costs, employers want to transfer an estimated 100,000 British call centre jobs to India in the next 5 years.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

Thursday 1 May, 7.30pm
CPBML May Day Rally — "Peace, Jobs...and Power"

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Nearest tube, Holborn. All welcome. For more information, see display advertisement on back page, or

SIGN LANGUAGE

Official at last

ON 18 MARCH, after a campaign by Deaf people lasting over 20 years, the government finally announced official recognition of British Sign Language (BSL). In a statement, ministers said the government recognised BSL as a language in its own right. They also said careful consideration will be given to any proposals that the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages might make. This Charter protects minority languages such as Welsh and is considering how that might be achieved for sign languages.

Several European countries already recognise their indigenous sign languages. Importantly, the British recognition will be supported by £1 million funding. Initiatives will include projects to raise awareness of BSL particularly among employers and service providers, increase opportunities to study BSL to a professional level, and research Deaf people's take-up and experiences of accessing services.

The statement was welcomed by Deaf organisations, which have waged a determined campaign. The British Deaf Association said they were delighted to receive the news and commented, "There is still a long way to go before equality is achieved, but this is a milestone achievement for the Deaf community."

The BDA has rescheduled its annual conference, which had been based on the recognition campaign, so that it can be used to plan the next steps. To mark the recognition of BSL, the Deaf community, who use a capital letter to indicate their cultural identity, held a day of celebration on 12 April.

Use of British Sign Language was first recorded in 1575. It is a visual-gestural language with its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Around 250,000 people use BSL on a daily basis and it is the first or preferred language of 70,000 deaf people, but there are only 182 fully qualified BSL/English interpreters.

Chemists face high-street ruin

THE GOVERNMENT has just introduced legislation that will mean pharmacists will prescribe, not just sell medicines, in the next few years. This is said to be part of the government's modernisation drive, but many pharmacists are concerned that they might not be around to deliver that service.

The government announced at the end of March that it would respond to the Office of Fair Trading's study on retail pharmacies before the summer recess and publish a progress report at the end of June. Government statements have focused on better access, in particular outside normal hours, to community pharmacists, who are trained clinicians, able to give advice, information and services.

The OFT study argued for abolition of entry controls for opening pharmacies on the grounds that there would be benefits for consumers in terms of reduced prices, improved quality of services and better access if more were established, for example in supermarkets. But abolishing controlled entry will mean many of the high street chemists will go out of business in the face of increased competition, and many communities could see their local pharmacy close. This is a particular issue in rural and poorer areas, where access would worsen.

Government could lower costs for consumers by funding the clinical role of pharmacists properly, thus reducing their reliance on sales of more expensive medicines. Supermarket undercutting has been of cost benefit to customers but is part of the problem facing chemists, who cannot compete on price.

STEEL

Adding insult to injury

CORUS, THE Anglo-Dutch company formed from privatised British Steel, has added insult to injury for more than 3,000 British steel workers facing redundancy.

No profit has been made since Corus was established in 1999, so no bonuses to the directors have been paid. To remedy this gross inequity, a new bonus scheme based upon 60% of directors' salaries is to be introduced.

Losses of over £2 billion, job losses in excess of 13,000 and a wipe-out of company assets from £4 billion to less than £150 million — all achieved in just over 3 years — are to be rewarded by fatter cheques to the directors.

Steelworkers and their communities facing terminal closure and obliteration are amazed and disgusted. Three senior executives who have left Corus for their inability to deliver (sacked in any manual worker's terms) have picked up near £6.5 million in pensions and nearly £3 million in cash to go.

International action over asbestos

TRULY INTERNATIONAL ACTION by South African Trade Unions (the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Metalworkers), Britain's leading labour lawyers (Thompsons Solicitors) and trade unionists seconded from Unison plus links with US trade unionists, have secured a compensatory award for South African asbestos miners.

The trust fund, which figures nearly £40 million, will compensate over 4,000 claimants and dependants of miners during the next 30 years. The compensation fund was forcibly extracted from the South African mining corporations Gencor and Gefco, despite their attempts to "unbundle" their assets worldwide to disguise their tracks. The South African corporations were owned by US conglomerates who previously were protected by the apartheid regime for decades.

The South African companies essentially were the point of production – the asbestos mines – for asbestos production and distribution worldwide. The world head office being Turner & Newall, USA.

Asbestos dust produces many cancers. The most common is mesothelioma – cancer of the lining of the lung – is terminal. The unravelling of Turner & Newall commenced with US trade unionists pursuing negligence cases for dead and dying colleagues exposed to asbestos sprayed onto the concrete and walls during the construction of the Chase Manhattan Bank, Wall Street, USA in the mid-1980s.

Secret archives

The forcing of Turner & Newall to open its secret archives under the US Freedom of Information Act, showed that the company had sufficient medical research and data as early as 1942 to comprehend the devastating and dangerous impact which asbestos – blue and white – had on health.

The revelations in Wall Street then crossed the Atlantic to Armley in Leeds. The Turner & Newall factory, J. W. Roberts, had been closed in 1958. Campaigners in Leeds believed the plant was closed because Turner & Newall knew then that the dangers were so great that to avoid a public outcry, closure was better than public exposure.

The only difficulty was that the exposure of citizens of Leeds to the deadly fibres had already occurred. The symptoms began manifesting themselves anywhere up to 30 years later. Hence Leeds in the early 1990s had what health officials described as an "epidemic" of mesothelioma cases – over 180. All cases are terminal.

If production ceases it does not stop the passing on of the deadly symptoms spanning generations, the Armley area of Leeds being viewed as saturated with particles. If 180 was an epidemic, then what of South Africa with over 4,000 registered compensation claims? 4,000 only being the tip of the problem – those still alive – as the problem had been suppressed for decades by apartheid.

Though the South African mines have been closed, at the epicentre of production, for example Heuningulei, blue asbestos debris remains dumped and exposed to the elements. Schools are built from the ore; children play in asbestos ridden schoolyards. The mining may have ceased but the dangers remain for generations to come.

Genuine internationalism between British, US and South African workers have crossed three continents to expunge the killer industrial disease – from South African mine, to Leeds factory, to US office block – exposing the greed of the multinational companies and the regime which they maintained in power.

When Parliament, and the parliament, are unrepresentative of Britain, represent

Iraq: Government an

BRITAIN HAS NO RIGHT to be in Iraq. As a country, we have no legitimate interest there. Iraq has done nothing to us and is no threat to us. It may, however, now become one. We should never have joined the leader of a foreign country to invade and occupy another country. Bush's criminal war of aggression and occupation is against Britain's interests.

Tam Dalyell, Father of the House and a Labour MP for 41 years, says that Blair is a war criminal who should be sent to the Hague for trial. Blair indeed led us into this war, but he had the active support of the Labour Party and the British ruling class.

The entire parliamentary Labour Party is in the Clare Short position. It said it would not go to war against Iraq without explicit UN authorisation, and then it did. Just as in 1914, it reneged on its pledge to oppose the coming war. When Parliament, and the parliamentary parties, voted for war, in defiance of the popular will, they declared themselves unrepresentative of Britain, representative only of the capitalist class. When MPs listen in silence to Blair's serial lies, they show their complicity.

War abroad, war at home

Labour's war policy is a continuation of its domestic policy, of war against our industry, our NHS, our schools and colleges. Blair promises, "We will rebuild Iraq", when he won't rebuild Britain. How can workers any longer fund a party that has betrayed Britain's interests by backing an unnecessary, unjust and illegal war? We know that capitalism generates slumps and wars, and Labour is simply implementing that programme, but in the name of workers.

In prospect now is the military occupation of a hostile population, the boredom of attrition, and eventual ignominious withdrawal. It has happened before. After occupying Basra in January 1915 and Baghdad in March 1917, the British government constantly promised to set up an independent Iraqi government but never did. This provoked the Iraqi people to a full-scale revolt (June 1920-February 1921) in which 450 British soldiers were killed and 1500 wounded. On 7 August 1920, The Times asked, "how much longer are valuable lives to be sacrificed in the vain endeavour to impose upon the Arab population an elaborate and expensive administration which they never asked for and do not want?" Britain withdrew its troops in 1922.

This time it is the imperial delusion of the USA that they will show Iraqis the right way to run their affairs, and then a grateful Iraq will happily wave them goodbye and continue to supply the US consumer with oil. Iraqis have their own agenda, which does not include being ruled by the USA or in a pattern decided by the USA. The occupying forces will have to withdraw in the end. But who believes British ministers' promise to keep troops in Iraq for a maximum of six months?

Our soldiers are being given the most difficult and

liamentary parties, voted for war, they declared themselves representative only of the capitalist class...

and Parliament stand condemned



Photo: Andy Laithwaite/www.stopwar.org.uk

Public enemy number one: the front of the march against the occupation of Iraq held in London on 12 April.

'Just as in 1914, the Labour Party reneged on its pledge to oppose the coming war...'

dangerous jobs, like physically occupying cities inhabited by a hostile people. The best, indeed the only way to support them is to bring them back home safely as soon as possible. They should never have been ordered into an illegal war, at the behest of a foreign government.

And for what? US companies will

monopolise any post-war gains and the post-war governance of Iraq, forbidding the UN any role. The British government said that an Iraqi administration should be installed in Umm Qasr to show that after the war Iraq's resources will be used for the benefit of the Iraqi people; instead, the US government awarded the contract for running the port to a union-busting US company. The USA aims to install and run the future government, led by a retired US general reporting to the Pentagon, with an American running every Ministry. So much for Tony's "good influence" in Washington. His is more a bad influence in New York, where the United Nations struggles in vain to

Continued on page 8

THE LIES (1: before)

- Iraq threatens Britain — no, the Bush government threatens Iraq.
- Iraq has WMD — no, the USA has. No Iraqi WMD have been found or used.
- "Coalition troops" — no, 225,000 US, 45,000 British and 2,000 Australian only. At one press conference, Bush could not name one single member of his "coalition of the willing". Romania, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands backtracked on their earlier support; the Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia and the Ukraine denied being part of the coalition.
- It would be a short, bloodless war: Geoff Hoon said that Iraq's army would collapse under the Allied onslaught.
- Ken Adelman, Rumsfeld's former assistant, said, "I believe demolishing Hussein's military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk." "It was a cakewalk last time." (250,000 Iraqis were killed in the 1991 war, according to Colin Powell's autobiography).
- Donald Rumsfeld forecast on 7 February: "It could last six days, six weeks, I doubt six months"; he said that the Iraqis would be crushed with barely any resistance.
- 17 March: US Vice President Dick Cheney predicted that the Republican Guard will do 'the honourable thing' and not fight at all, and the US forces will be "greeted as liberators".
- 20 March: British Group Captain Al Lockwood said, "Hopefully we'll be in Baghdad in the next three or four days."
- Air Marshal Brian Burridge, CinC British forces, claimed that the most serious problem before US forces arrived at Baghdad would be how to cope with the large numbers of POWs.
- 19 March: Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz had defected — not so.

THE LIES...(2: after)

- 20 March: Saddam Hussein has been killed — no.
- A chemical weapons factory had been found — no, it hadn't.
- Geoff Hoon: protective suits were “categorical proof” that Iraq had, and intended to use, chemical weapons — claim withdrawn.
- Iraq had used Scud missiles — US General Stanley McChrystal admitted on 23 March, “We have not discovered any...there have been no Scuds launched.”
- Showing US POWs on TV breached the Geneva Conventions — the Red Cross noted that it didn't breach them.
- ITV journalist Terry Lloyd was “killed in crossfire” — actually, he was killed by US soldiers.
- Blair: US/British forces never attacked civilians — they bombed TV stations and telephone exchanges, and used cluster bombs.
- Blair: US/British forces are not using anti-personnel weapons — the Ministry of Defence confirmed on 5 April that Allied forces had dropped 50 cluster bombs, leaving up to 800 unexploded bomblets.
- Hoon: cluster bombs are not anti-personnel weapons — that is their only purpose.
- Blair: Iraq's oil will be held in trust for the Iraqi people — US: dream on.
- The British and US governments will give equal prominence to humanitarian and military efforts — Blair assigned £30 million of £3 billion for humanitarian aid. US put \$2.5 billion of \$80 billion war spending for rebuilding.
- The Iraqi people will run post-war Iraq — US: dream on.
- Two soldiers executed — their officers told the families that they were killed in combat.
- Uprising in Basra — no, there wasn't.
- 30 March: the overall war plan was “on track and on time” — 120,000 reinforcements had to be rushed in.
- US didn't kill the 115 civilians in the two Baghdad marketplace bombings, at Shulah and Shaab — US bomb casing found in Shulah; the patterns of craters at Shaab were too precise to be Iraqi anti-aircraft fire.
- 31 March: a timely warning shot was fired before 11 women and children were killed at a checkpoint — it wasn't.
- There is a “red line” around Baghdad within which Hussein will use WMD — never happened.
- 3 April — Baghdad's power and water supplies cut off after US bombing raids. US Brigadier General Brooks, for the US Central Command, says, “It was not us.” — The USAF bombed gas pipes and diesel stocks, crippling power stations.
- 3 April — USAF bombed a village near Baghdad airport killing 80 civilians and wounding 200. Adam Ingram, Britain's Armed Forces Minister, told the media to ignore these claims by a “lying regime” — a Reuter's correspondent confirmed the claims.
- 8 April, US tank fired at Palestine Hotel, killing two journalists and wounding three “after taking fire from the hotel”, according to the US military — journalists reported not seeing or hearing any shots from the hotel.
- 10 April, Rumsfeld: there is no widespread looting or destruction in Baghdad — there was, and we all saw it.
- 12 April, Jack Straw: US and British troops were doing everything they could to restore order — Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Blackman, Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, said of the pillaging, “It is absolutely not my business to get in the way.”
- The war is not about oil — MAIL ON SUNDAY headline, 13 April, “US troops guard oil as gangs ransack hospitals.”
- 15 April — US troops were fired on before they opened fire on a peaceful rally, killing at least 10 civilians and wounding 100 — not so: no reports of any US troops injured in the incident.
- 18 April, Blair: France put British troops at risk by sabotaging UN action against Iraq — why were troops there without UN sanction?

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uphold international law.

There is no evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction being found or used, but there is plenty of evidence of their use by the US. Donald Rumsfeld boasted of the US's “unprecedented brutality”: 18,000 sorties, 12,000 bombs, cluster bombs, giant MOABs, 2-ton “bunker buster” bombs, depleted uranium shells, at least 725 Tomahawk Cruise missiles. US and British forces have killed 1,254 innocent

civilians, and wounded about 5,103. Iraqi military casualties are more than 3,650; US are 123, British 30. Basra's water plant was bombed out of action. The US and British commands expanded the war to hit civilian targets, like TV stations and telephone exchanges.

Methods used and targets selected show clearly that the killing of large numbers of people was the aim, without thought of the thousands more future deaths resulting from unexploded bombs and bomblets, radiation, lack of clean water and sanitation.

North Korea, Syria, Iran — who is next on Bush's hit list? Anybody, it seems, now that the law of the jungle has replaced international law. And if targeted, they'd better have plenty weapons of mass destruction.

As the Foreign Minister of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea pointed out, “The Iraqi war shows that to allow disarmament through inspections does not help avert a war, but rather sparks it... Only a tremendous military deterrent force” can prevent US aggressions.

Labour has failed the transport industry. Only transport workers know what their sector needs, and they must make their voice heard...

Getting Britain moving again



Photo: Workers

AS TRANSPORT UNIONS prepare for the 2003 conference season, it is clear that the Labour government, with whom it seemed, fleetingly, they might have done business, has abandoned any attempt to rebuild Britain's crumbling and insolvent transport network.

The fine intentions of the 10-year plan lie in shreds. We have the laughable policy of cuts in train services to "improve reliability". The industry is in crisis, the government has run away, the unions are on their own.

In a curious way, this is a relief. The veil of government pretence is cast aside. The option to retreat and do nothing in the vain hope that one day — with different players — things will improve, is no longer available.

It has never been more obvious that only working class organisations using a working class approach to economics

'It has never been more obvious that only working class organisations using a working class approach to economics can get Britain moving again....'

can get Britain moving again.

A corresponding ideological shift is required to move transport and transport funding up the agenda. Transport must be at the heart of a strategy for Britain, both as an industry and as a public service. It is central to the TUC's stated priorities, and to the working and social

lives of all of us — to our health and safety and to the education of our children, as well as to the generating of industry and wealth, on which health and education and a sustainable future rests.

There can be no cheap and easy solution. Those who view transport as a soft social issue, a matter of bus passes, taxi concessions, 'car clubs' — useful or even necessary though these things may be under capitalism — duck the central question of investment in core rail manpower and infrastructure.

Crucially, they duck responsibility for the sort of economic strategy that would make investment possible.

Taxes may contribute to local coffers, but they are no substitute for infrastructure investment or proper funding for the local authorities which

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Photo: Workers

The Sheffield supertram system: investment pays

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have to provide the bus and light transport services.

The congestion charge in London has deterred so many people from taking their cars into the centre that the hoped-for rake-off of £130 million a year for transport has not materialised.

The failure of transport is a failure of economic policy, born out of a failure of political will to govern in the interest of the British people. It is not out of a shortage of money — we are repeatedly told that Britain is a rich economy and the strongest in Europe. So it must be a question of how to access that wealth

and put it to use.

Instead, as profits for private companies suck money out of the industry, £300 million is lopped off the transport budget. There is a return to road building paid for by tolls; the government's message is all cutbacks and abandonment of targets.

Connex holds out its begging bowl for £25 million and the Strategic Rail Authority (arm of government) hands over our money: costs for the West Coast Main Line spiral from £2 billion to £10 billion, and train speeds are reduced: the Virgin cross country improvements are abandoned, signal and points failures bring forth a daily tale of woe from

passengers, and the craziness continues of the London Tube having to run on the same track as the national network (Bakerloo line on Silverlink tracks), with conflicting safety rules for drivers.

The promised shift from road to rail is likewise abandoned, and groups of skilled design workers are disbanded. The halting of rail freight grants threatens to put an extra 12 million lorries on to British roads, and airports remain largely outside integrated transport planning. Indeed the very concept of an integrated network has been given the last rites, with the axe about to fall on chairman David Begg's Commission for Integrated Transport.

The EU's insistence on putting all work out to competitive tender is still a major block on integration. But as the ramifications of London Underground privatisation unfold, it is obvious that, despite competing interests, private companies are compelled to work in an integrated way.

The Tube could not be kept in one compartment, and the national rail network in another. There has to be unified signalling, for instance. Without cooperation, the south London "metro" providing more frequent rail services could not go ahead. Partnerships are set up to combat fragmentation, as between Transport for London and the SRA.

On the national system, Network Rail has had, out of sheer necessity, to find ways of circumventing the EU ban on renationalisation. For reasons of safety as well as cost, Network Rail is gradually taking contracts for maintenance back in-house, with greater control over inspections and workloads.

Directly employed

By December 2003, 85% of the track workforce will be directly employed by Network Rail's own contractors. Amey's Reading contract was the first significant step, to be followed by Balfour Beatty's Wessex area in 2004, and Serco's East Midlands contract by 2005. The next logical phase would be to bring it all back under direct control, not only maintenance, but renewals and new projects, too.

Under EU privatisation railways now deliver less, at a cost of up to five times more than would have been the case under British Rail. Over half the Train Operating Companies are technically insolvent, propped up by public money via the SRA. If bidders for franchises obey the SRA's call to cut costs by 10%-20%, the real cut will be in passenger services and employees' terms and conditions.

Successful pay negotiations backed up by RMT, ASLEF, and TSSA strikes

Driven to death: whose responsibility?

THE SELBY RAIL crash in 2001, caused by a car driver falling asleep at the wheel and his car falling onto the track, highlighted the dangers of driving while tired: 10 passengers and 4 rail workers died. Fatigue causes a road death on average almost every day of the year. It is especially dangerous for workers who drive as part of their job. In addition to drivers of trucks, vans, taxis, coaches, buses, emergency vehicles, company cars, motorcycles, and construction and agricultural machinery, this includes maintenance workers, refuse collectors, postal workers, breakdown services, social workers, and countless others. Night shift workers are particularly vulnerable.

In 2000 a delivery driver died when his car ran off the road. He had been working a series of shifts, some lasting more than 16 hours. During the 6 weeks before his death he had made deliveries all over Britain, in a vehicle that was not fitted with a tachograph. His bosses were fined a mere £2,500 for breaches of health and safety regulations.

Work-related road deaths are not reported in the Health and Safety Commission's annual statistics. The TUC's research suggests 1,000 workers a year are killed and 12,000 seriously injured while driving for work. Only asbestos is a bigger workplace killer.

The truck drivers' union, the T&G, says the risk to lorry drivers is exacerbated by low pay in the industry, forcing them to work long hours — 60 hours a week is normal and 80 hours not uncommon. Drivers are often coerced by threat of the sack, or induced by the incentive bonus system. The more miles travelled, the more money is earned. The T&G is campaigning for the "mileage devisor" to be outlawed and for pay to be high enough to ease the need to seek bonuses.

Deliveries often involve such tight deadlines that drivers cut corners to meet them, driving at breakneck pace, talking on mobile phones, and foregoing rest and meal breaks. Traffic congestion and other delays add to the pressure. Drivers for supermarkets are often expected to unload their own vehicles, and coach drivers must act as baggage handlers, risking permanent back injury, as well as cutting into break times.

The European Road Transport Directive will introduce a 48-hour week and stipulate the length of rest periods and holidays. The T&G wants to better the provisions of the EU Directive, to cut time behind the wheel to 8 hours a day. Current EU regulations allow for 9 hours driving for goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes.

The T&G also wants "transshipment" depots on the edges of towns, for affordable rest and refreshment, and to keep lorries out of town centres.

These initiatives of the T&G and the TUC, and their independent British stance, are to be welcomed. Employers must be forced to take responsibility for their workforce. They should carry out risk assessments for their drivers. Hours must be cut and pay increased. Road traffic incidents must be investigated like other accidents in the workplace.

One aspect seems not to have been considered — the responsibility of the workers themselves. It is not acceptable that drivers should regard themselves, or be regarded by their unions, as victims of their industry or employers. They have neglected their union organisation. They must now look to strengthening it for the future as the only way to make themselves masters of their own health and safety.

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have demonstrated the power of the working class to defend industry. The fight for a national bargaining system is central to recruitment and retention of skills — to our ability to build and maintain a railway system.

The last year has seen action on pay right across the transport unions — not only drivers, guards, and maintenance engineers, but clerical, administrative and call-centre staff.

That it is possible for workers to assert control in spite of everything capitalism throws at us was shown by the recent capitulation of government to union demands preventing the emergence of a 2-tier workforce on transfer from the public to the private sector.

Transfer will now take place on “no less favourable” terms and conditions, pensions, etc. This is privatisation on workers’ terms. Making privatisation unattractive to employers is an astute tactic, which has already succeeded in driving out some contractors.

The 35-hour week

The continuing campaign for a 35-hour week, with the T&G in particular refusing to be limited by superficially progressive EU legislation on working time, is also crucial to union power. Workers know that unsolicited benefits granted today can be taken away tomorrow; they are more likely to defend what they have struggled for themselves. The so-called “smarter” working hours in France, Germany, and Holland are likely to come under pressure as the Eurozone economy slumps.

The concept of Britain as a region on the periphery of Europe rather than a self-contained nation is a real hindrance to transport development. The brownfield regeneration of east London is explicitly at the service of European business rather than British workers and their families. So the Crossrail project is discussed at planning level as a business venture, linking international hubs.

‘We must demand that our money — the surplus value created by workers and lying around in pension funds, or exported elsewhere — be invested in a decent transport system...’

So, too, the Channel Tunnel high-speed link will terminate at St Pancras, with no thought of bringing industry to other places of high unemployment — Liverpool, Glasgow, Teesside, South Wales... Only trade union intervention brings an industrial dimension to the consultation process.

Manufacturing unions, especially Amicus with its maintenance engineers and electricians in garages and depots, must be key partners with the transport unions in developing an investment strategy for industry, transport and jobs. Under the Blair government the destruction of manufacturing has accelerated beyond Thatcher’s wildest dreams.

Rolling stock, buses and coaches, trucks, signalling and traffic enforcement equipment are now all shipped in from abroad to the detriment of British jobs and quality control.

The expertise of engineers and other transport workers has been acknowledged since the Potters Bar crash. The likes of Gerald Corbett and other board members ignorant of the industry have been replaced.

A safety board claiming to be a “new legal entity independent of any company in the rail industry and of any part of that industry” has emerged as suggested by Cullen, and the rail regulator has stated “the staff and knowledge of

Railway Safety will be at the heart of this new organisation”.

It has also been recognised that such a board cannot function effectively without the input of the rail unions, and an advisory committee has been set up for employees to make their views known.

Track safety is a major issue, since training standards slipped under privatisation. Four track workers died in 2001/2 — the most since 1992/3. This will continue, so long as railways are run for shareholders.

What is needed now is a broad-based campaign designed to take transport out of the hands of the EU and capitalism.

We must end the dependence on unreliable handouts from government, private companies, or the EU.

We must demand that our money — the surplus value created by workers and lying around in pension funds, or exported elsewhere — be invested in a decent transport system.

A transport campaign should aim to reverse Thatcher’s disastrous lifting of exchange controls. We must stop the flight of our capital abroad, whether to Europe or the US or the Far East.

Failure

Labour has failed the industry; this will doubtless be avenged at the ballot box. Only transport workers know what their industry needs. They are clearly more capable than the government of drawing up specifications and finding the cheapest methods of borrowing.

Transport workers might even yet persuade the Chancellor of the real needs of the country. If he truly wants to put an end to poverty, illness, truancy, crime, he must go in for some solid spending, not just juggling a percentage point here or there.

He must invest in jobs, in industry and transport, and decent pensions, to end the dependency on a multitude of demeaning benefits and vouchers. Or is he, in spite of his boasted independence, really just another servant of Brussels? Unions must put him to the test.

An integrated transport system is vital not only for getting around the capital, but also for people's safety, particularly at night...

Safety is not just a personal issue

EVERY TRAVELLER knows that safe travelling is more of an issue at night and in the early morning, when public transport is traditionally scarce. But two issues have conspired to make London less safe at these times. One is the congestion charge. This has encouraged even late-night workers such as hotel and catering staff and people working in the entertainment and tourism sector to leave their cars, which were their security, at home. The other is the obsession of the mayor and the business fraternity with turning London into a 24-hour rave-up.

As a result City Hall has, not surprisingly, been forced to come up with transport ideas to improve safety at night. On the positive side, they say 32 new Night bus routes have been introduced. All buses are to have CCTV cameras installed by the end of 2004.

Partnership

A partnership launched last year between Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police is intended to focus 24 hours a day seven days a week on enforcement along many of London's busiest bus corridors, targeting the blocking of bus lanes and bus stops, and illegal minicab activities. Around 9 or 10 other schemes are to be piloted over the coming months.

A consultation meeting with trade unions from the South East Region of the TUC (SERTUC) in March showed up the weaknesses as well as the importance of some of these schemes. The consultation was headed by the mayor's chair of Cultural Strategy and also by the mayoral adviser on women's issues. There was an initial bias towards treating safety at night as a women's problem, as though all assaults were of a sexual nature. Drivers of night buses know this is not the case.

There is a genuine issue about the exploitation of women in clubs and gambling establishments, but the point was made from the floor that the over-all changes in travel and working patterns in London affect men equally with women; the Suzy Lamplugh Trust takes the same view. Presumably men are still half of the

working class?

There was also an assumption that a solution could be found through various taxi schemes, in conjunction with best practice guidelines for nightclubs, casinos, colleges, etc. Certainly, if taxi services were subsidised to be free or available as part of a through-ticket, this might work.

But that is not what is being proposed. In fact the taxi tariff has been raised after 10 pm, along with an increase in minicabs, to boost supply. No one at the GLA seemed to have considered the cost to the average low-paid worker or student in London of taking taxis, and a tourist guide who made this point got all-round support from other trade unionists. The mayor's team, however, seemed taken aback by such a basic concern.

There is also a major worry over minicab safety and roadworthiness, which was publicised by the mayor's well-meaning campaign to license such cabs. It was always the case that the unlicensed minicab trade was a ready way for asylum seekers, migrants and other unemployed to scrape together an income.

Migrant work permits

But this is an elusive area to monitor, and will not be helped, either by the government issuing upwards of 20,000 migrant work permits per year, valid for only one year, nor by the mayor's gushing and indiscriminate encouragement to foreigners to seek work in the capital.

A more sensible initiative on which to build a night-time service is a new community bus — the so-called Hammersmith Snugbus — for patients, staff and visitors to Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals and residents of North Fulham to use on weekday evenings.

This is funded partly by government and partly by the local NHS Trust, extending a previously existing staff-only scheme, and provides some areas with a bus service for the first time. Staff travel free, while the usual travel passes are accepted from the general public.

Another sensible suggestion came from a T&G organiser in the hotel and

catering sector, who drew attention to the dangers inherent in having to walk along some of the godforsaken roads near airports. Staff needed door-to-door bus transport, something like the Hammersmith project. Travel passes for those working unsocial hours needed to span more than one day.

A fellow organiser was familiar with the Park Royal industrial estate, which operates 24/7, employing low-paid workers. They too, were desperately in need of bus services.

Unlit stops

Another tourist guide was concerned about unlit streets, and several of those present talked about long waits at unlit bus stops without surveillance, and the shortage of late-night staff on station platforms and trains. The unmanned Docklands Light Railway was a case in point. Guards were needed on trains, and conductors on buses. Clearly the concept of Safety at Work must be extended to include safety getting to and from work.

One thing, however, trade unionists were not supposed to discuss at the meeting — the Tube, and capital investment in a modern core transport system. They were told, "The ideas we are interested in are the ones that are cheap to implement."

Most SERTUC members were anxious to cooperate with it, too few wanted to acknowledge what a diversion this could become. Several thought safety was a matter of personal responsibility, like getting your house keys out well in advance, or not taking short cuts, or, as one GMB Private Hire branch secretary described the West End clubbers "not getting so legless you would try to climb into a wheelbarrow if there were one standing by".

Fortunately, those who responded early in the debate were able to inject the idea that no amount of cheap schemes can compensate for lack of a fully funded and integrated — and therefore secure — transport network for all. Which is, after all, the platform Ken Livingstone first stood on.

A new website preserves the history of one of the key battles of the Spanish Civil War, where the International Brigades were heavily involved...

A website called Jarama

Review of Jarama website:
www.comms.dcu.ie/sheehan/photos/jarama.htm
photos and text by John Corcoran
email: johngees9@eircom.net or
john.corcoran@lit.ie
web design by Helena Sheehan

IN FEBRUARY 1936, Spain elected a government of Republicans, Nationalists and Socialists. Spain's feudal landowners and military and Church establishments were outraged and supported General Franco's coup against the government. Hitler and Mussolini at once started to send Franco 30,000 German and 80,000 Italian troops and huge amounts of war materials, without which Franco would have lost. This foreign intervention made it a war of Spanish national defence against international fascist aggression.

The British Conservative 'National' government also backed Franco. Supported by France's social democrat government led by Leon Blum, it proposed the policy of Non-Intervention, which gave Mussolini and Hitler belligerent rights in the country that they were illegally invading, while denying Spain the right to defend itself. It equated the legal Spanish government, freely elected by its people, with a band of fascist generals who had risen, in league with foreign fascist governments, against this government. It had rigged the fight while claiming to hold the ring.

Never before had a government elected according to its country's laws and recognised by all states been put on the same level judicially with the rebels in revolt against it. Never before had supplying arms to the legal recognised government been seen as intervention in its internal affairs. Non-Intervention enabled Hitler and Mussolini's aggression to succeed.

Only the Soviet Union openly aided the Republic by supplying arms, supporting the International Brigades and defending Spain's cause at the League of

Nations. But the Non-Intervention blockade, enforced by the navies of Britain, France, Italy and Germany, gradually stopped the Soviet Union's supplies from getting to Spain.

Alone, the Spanish Republic had to fight the armed forces of Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spanish Morocco and Franco's fascist supporters. Yet Spain, supported by the volunteers of the International Brigades, fought heroically against overwhelming odds for three years.

This fascinating website displays John Corcoran's beautiful colour photographs of the battlefield at Jarama. He and Don Watson recorded the memories of many International Brigade veterans from the North East of England in their book, AN INSPIRING EXAMPLE: NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936-1939 (McGuffin Paperback, 1996, ISBN

187343467, £6.99). In the summer of 2002, Seve Montero of the Spanish Friends of the International Brigades showed them the remains of the British and Irish Battalions' positions on the Jarama front.

In February 1937, General Franco, having failed to take Madrid by frontal assault, gave orders for the main road that linked the city to the rest of Republican Spain to be cut. A fascist force of 40,000 men crossed the Jarama River on 11 February 1937. In the Battle of Jarama alone, 7000 Republican soldiers, including the writer and Communist Christopher Caudwell, gave their lives in the fight against fascism.

On 12 February, at what became known as Suicide Hill, the Republicans suffered heavy casualties. The British and Irish battalion was forced to order a

Jarama

On 11th February, at what became known as Suicide Hill (seen to the left of the picture), the Republicans suffered heavy casualties. The British and Irish Battalion was forced to order a

Where Caudwell died

Don Watson and John Corcoran recorded the memories of many International Brigade veterans from the North East of England in their book, 'An Inspiring Example' and in the summer of 2002 were privileged to be shown by Seve Montero of the Spanish Friends of the International Brigades the remains of the British and Irish Battalions' positions on the Jarama front. In February 1937 having failed to take Madrid by frontal assault, Franco gave orders for the main road that linked the city to the rest of Republican Spain to be cut. A fascist force of 40,000 men crossed the Jarama River on 11th February 1937. In the Battle of Jarama alone, 7000 Republican soldiers, including Christopher Caudwell, gave their lives in the fight against fascism.

On 11th February, at what became known as Suicide Hill (seen to the left of the picture), the Republicans suffered heavy casualties. The British and Irish Battalion was forced to order a



retreat back to the next ridge. The Fascists then advanced up Suicide Hill and were routed by Republican machine-gun fire; it is believed that Christopher Caudwell was killed while manning a machine gun in this phase of the battle. Coming under heavy fire, the British and Irish, now numbering only 160 out of the original 600, had to establish defensive positions along the "sunken road", which is off the road between San Martin de la Vega and Morata de Tajuna. The Republican forces won a vital defensive victory, preventing Madrid from being surrounded.

After the battle, the surviving British and Irish battalion members constructed a memorial. It was a block stone construction of a clenched fist and had a commemorative inscription in Spanish carved upon it. It would have been visible from the road when it was first erected. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the fascists bulldozed the memorial after their victory in 1939.

The only memorial plaque to the British writers who fell in defence of the Spanish Republic is in the historic Residencia de Estudiantes in the Pinar area of Madrid. Here Caudwell's sacrifice is commemorated alongside those of Julian Bell, John Cornford, Charles Donnelly and Ralph Fox. The Residencia's former guests include such notables as Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Federico Garcia Lorca and John Maynard Keynes.

LINKS

Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives,
www.alba-valb.org/index.html

Ireland and the Spanish Civil War
members.lycos.co.uk/spanishcivilwar/index.htm

International Brigades,
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SPinternational.htm>

Contacts,
www.international-brigades.org.uk/contacts.htm

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

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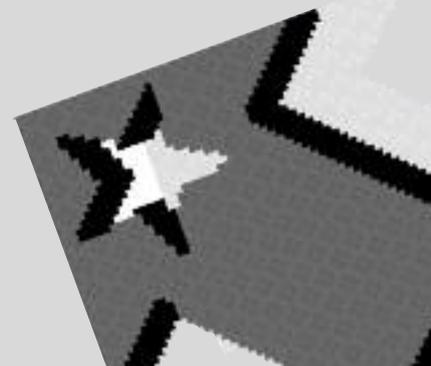
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Back to Front – This lot have got to go

‘These are people past compromise. They have abandoned the very concept of principle...’

IN AMONG all the lies and diversionary propaganda that have accompanied the war on Iraq, the leak that Jack Straw, Gordon Brown and probably even Blair had decided to resign in the event of a huge Labour backbench rebellion over the war probably takes the biscuit.

Resign? Over a matter of principle? They must be joking. All credit to those ministers and aides who actually did resign, but their morality is not reflected generally in the Labour Party. As a whole, the party has followed Claire Short.

It is not that they have compromised themselves. These are people past compromise. They have abandoned the very concept of principle, and will do anything to cling on to power, a prospect that they cannot envisage without Blair. The whole lot of them are not worth one of the Iraqi children whose death warrants they signed when they voted for war. There is blood on all their hands.

Other news at the end of April showed how far Labour has removed itself from its roots. The figures for manufacturing production were the worst ever, the results of a slump of such depth and duration as to make Thatcher’s first recession seem tame by comparison.

In its six years of power so far, this government has presided over an unprecedented haemorrhage of Britain’s industrial jobs, reducing our ability to produce for ourselves and making us

ever more reliant on imports.

At the same time, it has left our infrastructure to rot, leading to lengthening travel times in whatever conveyance you choose: our roads are clogged, our railways crumble, our cities are suffocating. Labour’s response is privatisation, or, to put it another way, its response is to absolve itself of responsibility. Instead of proper investment, we get toll roads, congestion charges and fewer trains (now in the name of increased reliability).

If Blair and his henchmen want to consider resignation, they have plenty of reason to depart the scene. Like the employers they so admire, they have lost all conception of a national interest. They have betrayed Britain.

All of this adds considerable poignancy to the government’s professed desire to help to rebuild Iraq. What do they know about rebuilding? Leave it to them, and Iraqis will shortly find their oil industry closed down on the grounds that it is uncompetitive, a water shortage on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, and dates being imported from California.

When thousands came to London for the first march after the end of the war – the first march against the illegal occupation of Iraq – the slogan at the head read “Blair must go”. Too right. He and all his government.

Blair out, Workers in. Don’t destroy the world, Rebuild Britain.

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