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WHY THE WORLD BANK WANTS YOUR PENSION



Coventry faces the Peugeot axe

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The truth about Labour Friends of Iraq

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WORKERS

“ Making the people pay

BLAIR, Cameron and Campbell agree that we should all fund their parties. Don't they get enough already?

Labour was lent almost £14 million in the run-up to the general election. The Tories were lent £16 million. Both are being probed by the police and the Electoral Commission. All the parliamentary parties get free postage and party political broadcasts during elections and the new £2 million policy grants from the Electoral Commission.

But public funding of political parties promises even more freebies. This EU idea and practice pays out big money: in Germany state funding of parties came to about £208 million

in 2003. In France, it was £55.5 million in 2002.

When the state funds political parties, it tells them what to believe. Parties in the European Parliament have to accept “the values of the European Union”. Parties would no longer raise money from members. (Members? Who needs members? Not Labour.)

Public funding would be a big step towards a corporate state. We would be forced to fund parties with which we do not agree and which oppose our interests – this is undemocratic and unacceptable.

Parties are voluntary organisations. If they can't survive through popular support, they should die.

Get the troops out now

THE CURRENT big lie about Iraq is that the war is being ended. But Blair will not willingly withdraw British forces because to do so would be to admit that the war was in vain.

Blair tries to soften opposition by continually saying he is on his way out. Similarly he tries to reduce opposition to the war by saying that the troops are about to be withdrawn.

But always this promised withdrawal is conditional, dependent on certain changes being achieved in Iraqi society – democracy,

security, stability, a properly functioning state, an independent government and an end to terrorism. Making withdrawal depend on achievements not within their control perpetuates the occupation. When withdrawal is contingent, every event may cause a veto. The government's policy promises not an end to the war but its indefinite continuation.

Our class must demand an immediate end to British occupation of Iraq and the complete withdrawal of all British forces.



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Airbus sale threat to industry

SOON A brand new Airbus A380 will touch down on its first flight into Heathrow. No doubt there will be celebrations and champagne – after all, the aircraft is worth celebrating. Although constructed through European cooperation, half of the A380 by value is made in Britain. The wings come from Airbus's main UK plant at Broughton, North Wales, and the engines are built by Rolls-Royce at Derby. And every British worker helped to fund its launch through taxation – the government provided a £530 million grant to get it off the ground.

The pride in British craftsmanship generated by seeing the A380 fly will be short-lived. BAE Systems, the company behind Airbus, and Britain's biggest defence and aerospace group, intends to sell off its 20% stake. The buyer is almost certain to be EADS, the Franco-German combine which already owns the other 80%.

The move will signal the end of direct British ownership of the manufacture of civil aircraft – and sever an engineering link that stretches from the A380 back through Concorde to the Comet and fleets of other aircraft that once made Britain top in aerospace.

It also threatens to rob Britain of one of its last large-scale, high-tech manufacturing operations. At its plants at Broughton and Filton, near Bristol, Airbus directly employs 13,000 in Britain, and by its own estimate indirectly supports another 135,000 jobs.

BAE will get about £3 billion from the sale. It plans to use the money to build up its defence industry interests in America. It is only concerned with making profits for shareholders, and thinks the best opportunity to do that is to uproot and shift capital to the USA, capital which only exists because British workers have created it.

Some might have expected Blair to step in and stop the sale. But three years ago Geoff Hoon, the then Defence Secretary, declared that British Aerospace Systems was not really a "British" company and therefore they would get no preference in contracts or treatment from the government. That crass abandonment of a company at the cutting edge of British manufacture, research and skill, set the scene for the current sell-off.

We have come to expect the complicity of this government in undermining and destroying Britain's manufacturing base. The workforce, through Amicus, has been quick to react. Its national aerospace officer, Ian Waddell, said, "The frustration we have is that Britain seems to be unique in not taking a direct interest in the future of such an important industry". He added, "You cannot imagine America allowing the sale of Boeing, but the British government is content to allow market forces to rule." That is a measured response, but only a start. What is needed now is united opposition from all workers, strong enough to prevent this sell-off of our manufacturing and engineering heritage.

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**Lying again**

THE 2005 UK Balance of Payments Pink Book says that our total net contribution to all EU institutions from 2000 to 2004 was £23 billion, i.e. £4.6 billion a year. Ignoring this, government figures only show our net contribution to the EU budget (excluding direct contributions to EU institutions), which was £13.9 billion from 2000 to 2004, i.e. £2.8 billion a year.

Lies, lies....

HEALTH SERVICE**Squeeze on student midwives**

THE ROYAL COLLEGE of Midwives has said, in its evidence to the pay review body, that one in five student midwives do not finish their training. One of the major reasons for this is the paltry level of bursaries awarded. The RCM is calling for a new level of £10,000, so training can be completed.

Now, an already stretched service will be further hit by government cuts in NHS spending. A recent RCM survey showed that 75% of responding units had staff shortages. The number of full time midwives has dropped by 6.2% over the past five years. It is estimated that 10,000 extra midwives are required to deliver a proper level of one to one care for all new mothers. Midwifery is a public health service which has a much wider role than just the delivery of babies.

The RCM has been critical of the recently awarded 2.5% pay rise. Karlene Davis, General Secretary of the RCM, said, "We don't want to see midwives forced to pay the price for NHS financial mismanagement."

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Less is more?

WHEN BELGIAN Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt was in Britain to promote his book, *UNITED STATES OF EUROPE*, he said, "Every European poll has shown that a clear majority of Europeans backs further integration." He went on, "I believe that the citizens' doubts and uncertainty, as for example reflected in the two referendums, actually constitute a plea for more Europe, a strong Europe, and not for less Europe."

In the beginning was the constitution...

THE PRESIDENT of the European People's Party, Wilfried Martens, has called for a reference to 'God' to be included in any revived EU Constitution. He bemoaned the fact that there is "not a single reference to God" in the Constitution, adding, "We can't accept this to be the case indefinitely."

EU=ID

A LEAKED Home Office memo shows that the Blair government's push for ID cards is in order to meet EU requirements.

A haven for fraudsters

THE NATIONAL Audit Office published its annual report into the European Union's accounts on 29 March. There were nearly 10,000 cases of fraud totalling £667 million in 2004, up 12% on the previous year. Meanwhile, the EU's internal anti-fraud group has begun investigations into irregularities in the payment of salaries by the EU's Committee of the Regions. An internal audit report stated, "The code of ethics of the CoR is remarkable by its absence."

Journalists for sale

SOME JOURNALISTS have been getting subsidies from the European Parliament to encourage them to cover its proceedings, especially during the monthly trip to Strasbourg. The funding includes travel to Strasbourg and enough for a good hotel, food and entertainment for two days. The programme has been criticised for appearing to pay journalists for propaganda, although the Parliament insists that it is not paying for any type of coverage, just any coverage. One journalist said that he had refused to write a story about MEPs' perks because of the perks he received himself.



Peugeot dealership in Coventry: soon all the cars will be imported.

Photo: Workers

Coventry faces Peugeot axe

COVENTRY HAS been one of Britain's foremost engineering and manufacturing based cities. In the early 1980s one in eight of the workers in the city had an engineering qualification and most people were involved with making things.

Yet despite their immense industrial skills, the people of Coventry have proved alarmingly unskilful in defending industry. Yes, there were the heady days of the Triumph Co-operative and Lucas Aerospace plans, and the poignant work of the trades council to argue along with other industrial centres for state intervention in industry. But one by one the factories closed. Once defiant Communist factory branches and joint shop stewards committees were purposefully destroyed. Rolls Royce was the last to go; now its Parkside site is the home base for the Lego-lookalike Learning and Skills Council, which is laying its workers off as Britain abandons a further generation of industrial workers.

One million industrial jobs have gone since Labour was elected. The leading industrial companies in Europe, whether Peugeot or BMW, have penetrated the British market in order to help run it down. The weaker Britain becomes, the better for them. Look at Birmingham and Rover and look at Coventry and Peugeot. Infiltrate and destroy has been the watchword of the European Union since its inception.

Unions that have supported the EU in a craven manner, especially Amicus, now complain that it is easier to sack workers here than in Europe. Their point is that if we were all in Europe we would be better off. The reality is that unemployment in the eurozone is double ours and all the so-called "social partnership" or pro labour laws in Europe have not stopped EU capital from weakening economies under their control.

Workers at Peugeot in Coventry knew three years ago that the new plant in Slovakia would produce many more up to date cars at a third of the wages and at the very least would threaten assembly work here. And when the Department of Trade and Industry took four years to process Peugeot's request for development grants and assistance and then turned it down, blaming the EU, the writing was on the wall: the closure of Peugeot Ryton with the loss of nearly 2,500 jobs. The Ryton workers ignored the warnings and let things go, agreeing to work harder for less and then accept redundancies. Draconian work conditions – such as 2.30 am finishes and shorter breaks – agreed by the unions enabled Peugeot to produce the last 206s and bring forward the closure date. Meanwhile under the ever tightening grip of the European Union, capital flowed east, labour flowed east and all of us suffered.

But so astounded did the union leaders claim to be when the eventual announcements to close came, that they pledged total commitment to "strike action". Strike action in this situation is like the condemned prisoner calling for poison instead of a last meal. What workers should be doing is taking over the plant for alternative production for Britain.

Coventry's whole architecture and town planning has been built around the illusion of surviving without making things. Industrialists will find it harder to reinvest in the city than sweet shop owners. Spivs raised their hats when the redundancies were announced because the thriving economy in gambling, retail and recreation demands all the locally based labour it can get, the cheaper the better. You won't even need to import Eastern European labour. Just sack a workforce and watch them compete for low paid jobs.

Following years of EU fanaticism in Amicus, and Labour Party cronyism in both the T&G and Amicus, the stage is set for a last resounding defeat. Workers have lost faith in their unions, which have failed to organise in manufacturing, and will choose hairdressing and curtain making as valuable alternatives to fighting for a boss who has absconded. The battle is on once again in Coventry, as it has been for 25 years, to see in this dilemma either a vibrant socialist future or another retreat by British workers.

ARMY**Court martial travesty**

A COURT martial panel has sentenced Flight Lieutenant Malcolm Kendall-Smith to eight months in jail for refusing to serve in Iraq. The panel said that Kendall-Smith could not "pick and choose" which orders he obeyed.

But international law rejects the "Nuremberg defence" in which the defendant claims they were only obeying orders. Nuremberg Principle IV states, "The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him."

That is, members of the armed forces are obliged to "pick and choose", to obey lawful orders and to disobey illegal ones.

Was the order to serve in Iraq legal? The UN Charter permits the use of force against a sovereign state only in self-defence against an actual, armed attack.

As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said of the war on 16 September 2004, "I have indicated it is not in conformity with the UN Charter, from our point of view and from the Charter point of view it was illegal."

Since the war on Iraq was illegal, the consequent occupation is illegal. As the Attorney-General wrote in his Confidential Note to Blair of 26 March 2003, "It must be borne in mind that the lawfulness of any occupation after the conflict has ended is still governed by the legal basis for the use of force." There was no legal basis for the attack, so the occupation has no "lawfulness". Contrary to government claims, Security Council Resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003 has not legitimised the invasion or the occupation: it merely called on the occupying powers to conduct the occupation in accordance with international law.

In other words, the Blair government's invasion and occupation of Iraq are illegal, so orders to serve in Iraq are illegal. This case is not over yet, not by a long way.

Miners challenge over claims

THE LAW SOCIETY is facing a challenge from the Legal Services Ombudsman over the handling of miners' compensation claims. The Law Society has been found to have "failed to act in an impartial manner" in dealing with complaints by miners against the solicitors representing them over "inadequate professional service". These cases which are estimated to run into millions of pounds of compensation against the legal firms involved are a direct legacy of the aftermath of the 1984-85 Miners Strike.

The scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers entered into arrangements with various legal firms to represent miners' industrial diseases claims. It is those arrangements and those firms which are under the spotlight and investigation. The government radically changed legislation post 1997 to address miners' industrial diseases. Some 580,000 claimants for respiratory problems and 170,000 claimants for white finger vibration cases, estimated at over £7 billion in compensation, have been registered.

The time window for claiming has now closed. The National Union of Mineworkers and its legal advisers are vigorously pursuing this final chapter in righting the wrongs inflicted on the miners and their communities during the past 20 years.

PROBATION SERVICE**Ministers back off...a little**

FACED WITH massive criticism and opposition to privatisation proposals for the Probation Service, the Home Secretary has backed off for the immediate future. Proposals to place the service in the hands of private companies and voluntary organisations have been shelved for 18 months while a "rigorous performance assessment" is carried out across the 42 probation authorities in England and Wales.

But this is not going to stop Charles Clarke introducing "intervention" programmes run by business-oriented

probation trusts, still in the public sector but being groomed for hiving off at a later date. The Probation Boards' Association registered 740 objections out of 748 responses received to the government's proposals.

The body swerve by the government has still left them talking of "contestability" – Blairite gibberish for selling off the service in 2008. Joint action by NAPO and Unison to resist the privatisation and introduction of a probation and prison service like that in the USA continues. The failure of the government's strategy over crime reflects in Britain's prison population reaching record levels – yet again – nearly 80,000, nearly 25% higher than when they came into power in 1997.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MAY**

Monday 1 May, London

May Day March – Assemble Clerkenwell Green 12pm, move off to Trafalgar Square 1pm for rally at 2.30pm.

This year's march has been designated by the TUC as a national march against anti-trade union laws.

Monday 1 May, London

CPBML May Day Rally and Celebration, 7.30pm.

Celebrate May Day with the CPBML. Speeches, refreshments. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube, Holborn. See notice, p16.

Saturday 13 May, Edinburgh

CPBML May Day Celebration, 2pm.

The Counting House, West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh. With music and song from Carlos Arredondo and Eddie McGuire. The event will also see the Scottish launch of the newly published book "The EU – Bad for Britain: a Trade Union View".

Monday 22 May, London

Defend Council Housing national conference, 11am to 4.30pm.

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. The next stage of the campaign for the "fourth option" – direct investment in council housing. For more details of the conference, go to www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk.

TERRORISM LAWS**Arrest 'conspicuously unfair'**

THE HIGH COURT has ruled that the Home Secretary's decision to arrest a British terror suspect and then subject his movement to strict controls was "conspicuously unfair". The Home Secretary had acted under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, which gives him the power to impose control orders on all terror suspects without charge or trial.

Mr Justice Sullivan said that the government had tried to apply a "thin veneer of legality" to cover the reality that its Act allowed "executive decision-making untrammelled by any...effective judicial supervision". The government intends to appeal and the Home Office said the judge's ruling would not affect the operation of the control orders laws.

The King's Cross land grab

ST PANCRAS International is due to open in 2007 – the London terminus of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, incorporating the adjoining King's Cross Station. Works at King's Cross will continue until 2015. It offers the opportunity to redevelop the 67-acre site behind the station, the last large open space left for redevelopment in Central London. It is Europe's biggest construction project, and the site of an attempted land grab that will devastate local communities and tenants.

The area is characterised by high unemployment and almost Dickensian conditions of overcrowding and crime. Victorian homes, bulldozed to make way for the railway, were replaced by mean tenements, which in turn gave way to council housing, which today's Labour government is reluctant to maintain.

For the past 20 years, tenants have scrutinised plans for their estates. Rightly suspecting the greed of capitalist developers would prevail unless challenged, they asked their representatives, the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, to draw up alternative, community-friendly plans, working closely with the Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning, University College London.

These plans have been largely ignored, and 23 community groups have accused the main developer, Argent St John Ltd, of breaking its promise of balanced mixed development, instead putting big business and profit before the needs of local people.

Residents said 3,000 new homes were needed. Camden Council, faced with thousands of families demanding a home, had promised 50% of the 1,946 homes eventually included in the £2 billion scheme would be "affordable" (a low proportion – but the percentage given in the Mayoral London Plan). Yet following a packed Town Hall meeting in March, Camden voted in private not to send Argent back to the drawing board, but to accept 42%.

Under Argent's plans, only 338 of the homes will be for families. The rest will be single lets for commuters coming in to work in the corporate high-rise offices which will dominate the area, shading the Regent's Canal, which the Mayor had promised to protect; 650 are described as "student units" – minuscule, presumably.

Rents are conservatively estimated at £100 a week, but the reality is that young people in Camden – as in many other inner cities – already either have to live with their parents, or be prepared to spend a whole month's wages on privately renting a one-room flat. Rents and house prices are

hiked deliberately to displace working-class communities.

There is no mechanism in the plans to reduce local unemployment or significantly encourage social cohesion; 116 local small and medium-sized businesses have already lost their premises, displacing 2,000 jobs. Argent is offering just 10 affordable business units. A unique industrial and historical heritage will also largely disappear.

Argent's Transport Assessment has also been denounced as inadequate. With rising numbers of workers using King's Cross on a dangerously overloaded tube system, residents want the reopening of the Piccadilly and North London Line stations. All that has been offered is a commitment "in principle" to improve bus services.

Campaigners have gained some improvements on the original offer, which was for even fewer homes. Some architectural heritage will be preserved. There will be limited sports facilities and green space, and a new primary school.

But Camden secondary schools are desperately oversubscribed, so residents are angry that their request for an extra secondary school has been rejected. They also want an Olympic-sized pool; elsewhere in the borough, swimming pools are being run down and closed.

Instead, Argent plans 120 retail outlets, rock venues, and a casino, saying that without such facilities, London would be "losing business from French, German and Japanese companies". It dismisses local people as a "minority impeding progress", threatening them with "no jobs, money, or improvements" unless they accept the plans as part of an "international mix".

Campaigners have vowed to fight on – housing is a fundamental right. But who will listen? The council decision is said to have been swayed by pressure from four cabinet ministers, the former leader (now created a dame for implementing Blairite policies), and the current leader. Labour calls Argent's plans "the best deal in London". And they have the Mayor's 24-hour international business policy stamped all over them.

Hardly surprising that the Mayor has rejected an appeal. It will now go to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and there are calls for a full public planning enquiry. Camden is considered to have lost its nerve under pressure. The argument has not yet been won, and there is time to take advantage of splits in Labour ranks prior to local elections, when councillors will worry about votes.

Round One of the action
still everything to play

Local government the battle starts

SIR SANDY Bruce Lockhart, leader of the employers' side of the Local Government Association in the pensions dispute, began the recent struggle as a humble knight and has since been promoted to a lord. This is something akin to the promotion of a German officer after fighting a losing battle on the Russian front in 1942.

The significance of every struggle is the unity of the workers, and the local government pension struggle has had a beneficial effect of getting the unions to work together more at local and national level. This is important, as a wave of fragmentation and privatisation is hitting, causing the same unions to launch a national campaign with others to assert public services over private profit. There will be a lobby of parliament on 27 June.

The largest union in the country brought together all the unions concerned including some of the smallest to organise negotiations with employers and the biggest strike for many years. A future strategy known as 'rolling thunder' was also devised which would have taken out key sections of workers, disrupted the local government elections and sustained the momentum created on 28 March.

Action

The action on 28 March was taken to bring obdurate employers back to the negotiating table, and it was successful in doing this. With the TUC playing its familiar pseudo ACAS role, a statement was drawn up with the employers which recognises a number of important things the unions were looking for. Firstly, any future changes to the LGPS should be made by agreement. Secondly, 50% of the savings arising from the abolition of the 85 rule and the provision for a 25% tax free lump sum will be made available to provide protection and scheme improvements. Thirdly, there is a commitment to urgent negotiations on protection including full protection for existing members alongside discussions on the new scheme. Lastly, there must be agreement to amend the existing

on is over. And there is
y for...

ment pensions: ts

regulations to reflect the outcome of the negotiations before the 85 Rule is removed on 1 October. Negotiations in Scotland and Northern Ireland also commence and the Scottish employers at least have indicated sympathy for the unions' position.

The unions viewed these commitments as sufficient to suspend the action but made it clear that if negotiations failed it would be re started. Only one union opposed the suspension of action but let us hope the other unions' faith in negotiations is not misplaced.

'Unions have faced an unprecedented attack led by the EU at a time when organisation and awareness has been low...'

Unions intend now to go back to negotiations confident in their list of demands.

They do so emboldened by the membership support so far and by the research of their own actuaries that shows the LGPS to be sufficiently funded to create improvements for future generations. They do so also with an increasing recognition of what we are up against, that is, a slavish agreement by the British government to kowtow to EU Directives to raise the pension age, lower employers' contributions, raise workers' contributions and diminish benefits. Until Britain abandons such commitments the pensions issue will not go away and all unions will have to go onto the offensive.

The railway workers are preparing for action to protect their pension scheme and local government workers have created a unity that should assist the next round of negotiations.

In any dispute there is a direct relationship between the technicalities of



Picketing the Chief Executive's office in Camden, north London, on 28 March.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

negotiations and the politics of industrial action. Having made strategic and embarrassing errors through the Public Sector Forum, unions have learned some new realities and found the local government membership prepared for action.

Awakening

The consequent campaign and action has wakened many dozing local government branches and involved a new generation for the first time in industrial action, making workers recognise their power and invent tactics. Funds to the Labour Party were withdrawn and the prospect of no open polling stations on 4 May concentrated a few minds.

So where are we now? Round One over, the employers back at the table for urgent negotiations with the unions

committed to collective responsibility and leading the work on costings. Workers will have to be able to leave the scheme in the future without loss at 60, and whatever the technicalities we will have to see if the national negotiations retain this principle or concede to EU diktat and the government's craven commitment to them.

Whether the suspension of the action has created a fatal flaw in the unions' ability to secure this also remains to be seen. We should bear in mind all the time that unions have faced an unprecedented attack led by the EU at a time when organisation and awareness has been low. But as always it is action that leads to growth and organisation and all unions involved report growth in membership and branch activity.



Photo: Workers

On the picket line at Tower Hamlets town hall

Out in force in east London

COUNCIL WORKERS in east London borough Tower Hamlets came out in force on the March 28th strike to protect their pensions. In an unprecedented show of unity, workers in Unison, GMB, TGWU, NUJ and NUT joined picket lines around the borough, then met to hear each other's news in a local rally before travelling to Westminster to the London-wide strike rally.

Many council buildings and schools around the borough were shut by the action. All the transport depots except one were closed. Helpfully, the employers sent round an email before the strike calling on workers who wanted to work to go to one depot which they would try to keep open on the day – so pickets knew where to concentrate their forces. In the event, only five coaches crossed the picket line.

At the Professional Development Centre for teachers all courses had to be cancelled, and 40 visiting American teachers who were to have been given a reception there were handed a list of London tourist sites to visit instead. One US teacher came to visit the picket line first to express sympathy – they are having trouble over pensions too.

Although strikers did not manage to close the Town Hall, less than a third of the normal 1,000 people went to work – many of them agency and contract workers who were not members of trade unions, a weakness which needs to be addressed. Nevertheless, deliveries were turned away,

The police, who had apparently been asked to come to check pickets were acting legally (probably by Labour councillors), came over to chat in a friendly way about their own pensions. In spite of the by-then large crowd of pickets in front of the doors, they declared they couldn't see anything illegal happening!

Bring out your badges

Do you have any old labour movement and political badges in odd containers and drawers? Put them to good use and send them to the CPBML – we'll sell them at labour movement events during the year to raise money for the Party. Please send them to:

Badges
78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

It seems like local gov
over pensions. But tak
by the European Union

Pensions: bring

BLAIR AND BROWN'S announcement at the beginning of April that they have a workers' consensus to go backwards to retirement at age 68 was little more than a show by paper tigers. The pensions day of action the week before had already put the lie to that, making the Turner Report's proposals of late retirement and the further privatisation of state pension benefits redundant. Very few workers are now taking seriously the arguments about living longer, dependency ratios and other such nonsense.

The sophistry that has been used to artificially pump up the deficits for occupational pension schemes has been analysed in previous editions of WORKERS. Now even the financial pages of the national newspapers are beginning to realise that the ground is starting to shift.

Deficits

For example on the question of pensions deficits, the DAILY TELEGRAPH in a recent article quoted a spokesman for Duke Street Capital (a capital markets' broker of immense wealth and power) as saying, "It's a structural distortion because people are being forced to make decisions due to regulations rather than investment reasons." He went on to say, "The long view is that current valuations are unlikely to prove accurate when we get there."

Similarly a director at accountants Smith Williamson has said, "The fact there are several bodies out there trying to purchase companies' pension liabilities and looking to make a turn on them (ie shifting them to make a profit) would suggest deficits are overblown." By the same token a spokesman for Barclay's Capital has said the government has created "the unedifying spectacle of financial markets gripped by an entirely self manufactured pension fund crisis". A worker on the 28 March day of action summed up by saying "the whole thing is a mess for everyone. If they get away with this, it's going to affect everyone at some point".

It would appear that the government's pensions trick of creating a problem and then pretending to solve it is beginning to fall apart. For example, when recently questioned about volatile gilt prices

Government workers are in a straight battle with the government
 Take a closer look. All the government's arguments are sponsored
 by the EU – and jointly scripted with the World Bank...

Busting capital to heel

causing pension deficits to swing wildly in the space of one month, a Treasury insider could only dismiss the situation as “absurd”. Yes – but you created the absurdity.

Absurdity

While dealing with absurdity, consider also the state pension scheme. Here the government's arguments as sponsored by the EU have been jointly scripted by the World Bank, using the benefit of their past experience of breaking other indebted countries' state pension structures.

The role of the World Bank in busting pension provision has been studied by Paul and Paul in their excellent 1995 paper published in the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HEALTH SERVICES. Among the examples they provide is the World Bank's “conditional” approach, which is to push the line that past pension levels are a luxury, at the same time as producing a flawed analysis of pension inefficiencies and inequities. For example the pensions programme that it foisted on Chile in the 1990s first started with the World Bank complaining that the state pension system did not take adequate care of the most socially vulnerable, that it short-changed the poor. Needless to say, under the new system designed by the Bank, the poor became far worse off. An all too familiar government safety net called *Pensión Asistencial* paid barely enough to keep a Chilean retired worker from starving to death.

The 1990s Chilean experience as well as the pensions experience of other South American countries at this time is

‘Very few workers are now taking seriously the arguments about living longer and other such nonsense...’

interesting because (not coincidentally) the attempted roll back of the retirement age in this country also started in the 1990s through the “sponsored” equal opportunities court case of Barber vs GRE. The case revolved around Mr Barber finding that his early retirement pension at age 60 was lower than the equivalent payable to a woman of the same age with the same contribution record. The case went to the House of Lords and then on appeal to the European Court of Justice. The European Court in 1994 found in favour of Mr Barber but recommended that to avoid potential “inequities” both males and females should in future “equalise” and retire at age 65.

This was the first time that the EU had been given the opportunity to pronounce on British occupational pensions, a trend that has since accelerated. Shortly thereafter the government stepped in and by 1997 was proposing that from 2010 women will only be able to receive the state pension from age 61, tapering down each year to 62, 63 and eventually to age 65 after 2015. Having implemented this, we now have the latest 2006 equality offering of the state retirement age

moving further to age 68 due to “longevity”, with occupational pension schemes attempting similar.

For clarity in dismantling the sugar coated veil of equality, it is best to use EU and World Bank speak, where the smashing of pensions is termed as “massification of privilege” – its contemporary description of decent pension benefits extended to ever larger sectors of the population. “What was financially viable for a minority,” complains World Bank expert Carmelo Mesa-Lago, “cannot work in the long run for the mass of the insured.”

Take control

This is their class vision for debt management implementation by the Labour government. But from our working class view we currently have a unique opportunity to wrest control from these “debt junkies” and use our pensions capital to build our country.

So in terms of trade unions negotiating with this bankrupt government, pensions should be taken off the agenda and instead we need to establish how much they owe to the international capital markets in secret loans and deals, for what purpose the money has been used and the attaching terms.

We should then dismiss the government and take matters in our own hands with trade unions dealing with the EU and World Bank direct, stating clearly that we intend to use our resources to build our country and that our pensions level is for us, the workers, to determine.

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Labour had a problem with Iraq. The solution: set up a bogus bo Friends of Iraq, and pretend that it represents the Iraqi working With friends like these, who needs enemies

THREE YEARS after the invasion of Iraq, with no end in sight to the resistance against the occupiers or to the opposition at home, how has Blair managed to manipulate opposition within his party and within trade unions? How has he managed to make a major foreign policy speech endorsing all of the worst features of the so-called US neo-cons and get away with it?

Ever heard of Labour Friends of Iraq? It is Labour's successor organisation to "Indict". Indict itself was set up by convicted fraudster Ahmad Chalabi, the CIA's man in Iraq, who has lived outside of Iraq for 35 years and was funded by the US government – \$2 million to Indict and \$100 million to Chalabi. Indict's chairman, Ann Clwyd, also chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party, is now Joint President of Labour Friends of Iraq. So what is it and where did it come from?

In the run-up to the Labour Party Conference in September 2004, Blair was concerned his attempt to launch his general election campaign at the conference would be overshadowed by events in Iraq and by trade union opposition to the war at the conference. There was a general trade union position calling for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

At the conference was a motion calling for an early date to be set for troop withdrawal from Iraq, and a statement from the Labour Party National Executive Committee calling for a very vague, distant and conditional troop withdrawal, which in effect meant absolutely nothing, even if the government took any notice of it. The problem for Blair was how to get the trade unions to vote against their own policies and for the meaningless NEC statement. Even more important, how could he

'Imagine if Germany, after invading Norway, had set up "Nazi Friends of Norway" to spread the values of the ruling party of the occupying power...'

neutralise their opposition to the war and persuade them to get their hands dirty by active involvement in it?

Organisations of Iraqi émigrés in London, in particular Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, the Pentagon's man Alawi and his Iraqi National Accord (INA), and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) had long been under the scrutiny and penetration of both British and US intelligence services and were actively involved in the plans for invasion.

The ICP, while not openly supporting invasion, wanted a piece of the action when it had succeeded. After the invasion, the US governor in Iraq's puppet 'Authority' included all three organisations and gave sole union recognition rights to the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), a creation of the INA and ICP, although established Iraqi trade unions continued to struggle on without this recognition.

Listen to communists?

Hardly surprising, then, that Blair should urge British trade unions to listen to Iraqi communists and trade unionists before deciding how to vote at the 2004 Labour Party Conference. Can you remember another occasion when a Labour leader urged people to listen to communists or trade unionists?

Ann Clwyd duly paraded the IFTU at the Labour Party conference (that's right, the conference of the ruling party of the occupying power) and they dutifully opposed the withdrawal of British troops from their country. According to one of the speakers, Abdullah Muhsin, "Foreigners came to our country without asking, why should they leave without asking?",

And now the lying starts again...

BLAIR'S SPEECH to the Foreign Policy Centre in London on 21 March on Iran presented a pretext for further military aggressions aimed at "regime change". As with his Chicago speech of 1999 before the attack on Yugoslavia and his speech to the US Congress in July 2003 before the attack on Iraq, he was trying to legitimise war, this time against Iran. And, in an echo of the false arguments used to justify the aggression against Iraq, Blair's speech implied that there are links between Iran and al-Qaeda.

British diplomat John Sawers has been trying to secure the support of others against Iran. In a confidential note addressed to his counterparts in France, Germany and the US he urged a united offensive to secure "a United Nations resolution that would open the way for punitive sanctions and even the use of force if Iran were to refuse to halt its controversial nuclear programme". Sawers set out Blair's proposals for upgrading the case against Iran so as "to bind Russia and China into agreeing to further measures that will be taken by the Security Council should the Iranians fail to engage positively ... We would not, at this stage, want to be explicit about what would be involved then."

Defence Secretary John Reid has called for wholesale changes in the international law banning aggression, demanding rights to carry out pre-emptive strikes and "humanitarian" intervention. This would tear up the UN Charter, which outlaws all aggression. Reid also wants to rewrite the Geneva Conventions, rewriting them so as to legitimise indefinite detention, international rendition and the barbaric treatment of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Bagram and other torture centres.

He has also alleged that we face a new type of terrorism which knows no constraints. "The enemy our parents and grandparents faced in the first and second world wars wore a different uniform to theirs, but had aims and, by and large, had conduct they could understand. The enemy fought much as we fought; his forces were structured in much the same way. And, by and large, they accepted the same conventions." An extraordinary statement to make in light of the scale and nature of Nazi brutality and slaughter!

ody called Labour class...

s?

although their own political organisations had been involved in strategic discussions on the invasion. This is tantamount to saying that the British people have no right to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Iraq!

According to Tony Woodley, General Secretary of the T&GWU, "It was the clear advice from Abdullah Muhsin which tipped the balance." The unions obediently supported the Labour Party NEC statement and this set off a new chain of events. Suddenly, there was a new missionary zeal. Labour Friends of Iraq was then set up by the Labour Party to spread the values of social democracy and an independent labour movement to the "grassroots of Iraqi society". Imagine, for one moment, if Germany, after invading Norway, had set up 'Nazi Friends of Norway' to spread the values of the ruling party of the occupying power. Or maybe a US 'Republican Friends of Vietnam'.

Now the invasion was redefined as "liberation from fascism". A TUC delegation visited Iraq (or at least just a tiny little safe part of Iraqi Kurdistan) including John Lloyd, Editor of the FT MAGAZINE, who has declared that he is not ashamed to be called a neo-con. He was one of a new breed of British neo-con journalists calling proudly for a neo-con British foreign policy to intervene against "oppressive" governments and to spread democracy as well as calling for support for Iraqi "trade unionists". One of them, Nick Cohen of the OBSERVER, described the 2 million who marched against the war in 2003 as "gormless". Opponents of the war have been accused of association with fascists.

The British government made £250,000 available for training Iraqi trade union reps in neighbouring Jordan. Unison duly obliged and began the training. Meanwhile, the US government watched this with envy. Faced with mounting opposition to the war at home, they decided to follow the British model. The US government set up a Solidarity Centre in Iraq funded by USAID. It too would train the Iraqi "trade unionists" to head off trade union opposition at home. Neither of these training operations could be undertaken without the oversight of both British and US intelligence services. This is, after all, a war. Eventually, but not



Blood spattered: marking the third anniversary of the invasion, London

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

surprisingly, the same "trade unionists" started to appear at both the British and US training sessions. You can hardly blame them. Most Iraqis would give anything for a week or two out of the country in a nice hotel in Amman. Anyway, there is no way of measuring the impact of the training, or, indeed, if any trade union work is undertaken.

Meanwhile Dave Anderson, a former President of Unison and current Labour MP, became Chairman of Labour Friends of Iraq. In the manner of a benign colonial governor, he recently raised his concerns in the House of Commons about the new Iraqi Labour Law that resulted in the confiscation of union funds, introduced by the Iraqi puppet government. Unfortunately, his party and government call the puppet government sovereign and say that they cannot intervene. (They are in fact probably jealous of that law.)

They could of course tell him that it's simply a question of democracy – the sponsors of the IFTU lost the "election" to Islamic fundamentalists. He has now been on a fact-finding tour of Iraq (all right, a tiny

part of Iraqi Kurdistan) as guest of the Kurdistan Workers Federation, part of the KDP/PUK alliance that marched alongside invading US troops in 2003, identifying targets for them as they went. British trade unions will no doubt be subject to some more neo-con rhetoric on his return.

Meanwhile, although US neo-cons have been in decline, and David Aaronovitch and Johan Hari have recanted their support for the war, the neo-con march goes on. They have now launched the "Euston Manifesto", in essence a pro market, pro military intervention, anti communist, anti anti-Americanism – yes that's two 'antis', anti anti-imperialism – again that's two 'antis', and pro rewriting history manifesto.

It is described as a "Renewal of Progressive Politics" and is being promoted on the Labour Friends of Iraq website. They appear to be trying to emulate the now discredited "Project for a New American Century", the classic US neo-con manifesto. In fact, the Euston Manifesto is remarkably similar to Blair's recent foreign policy speech. A good job nobody listens to them except Blair and the blogger...or do they?

Milosevic died before the kangaroo court at the Hague could finish its work. The world could not join NATO and the EU and become part of the Americans' new world order.

Slobodan Milosevic and the International Tribunal

THE NEWSPAPERS certainly had a field day with the death of Slobodan Milosevic. The DAILY TELEGRAPH, as usual in the vanguard of reaction, celebrated with malicious glee the demise of the man who they claim "achieved the break-up of Yugoslavia, the ruin of Serbia and the slaughter of hundreds and thousands of people". All were quick to remind us that Milosevic was the man the Americans called "the Butcher of the Balkans" as if that was all we needed to know about him and that, by repeating it often enough and shouting it loudly enough, it would obviously make it so.

The other lie that they all united behind was their avowal that by dying when and how he did, Milosevic had somehow cheated the justice that the Hague tribunal had been set up to deliver because a guilty verdict was all but inevitable. Not only was he clearly guilty but the evidence of his guilt was overwhelming and would be shown to be so once they had managed to shut him up with his inconvenient protestations of innocence.

The only surprise in this scenario was that the tribunal did not simply carry on without him and produce the verdict that everyone wanted and the closure that this would bring.

Milosevic's continued defiance of the tribunal and stubborn refusal to play the role of scapegoat allotted to him was what had made the trial such a long-drawn out affair when what was really required by the "international community" was a quick trial followed by a quick guilty verdict. Then, onto the next kangaroo court judging whoever stood in the way of American and British domination of world markets by proclaiming the independence of their country and their right to order things in the interests of the people who lived there.

As the Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponti pointed out, the only mistake the tribunal made was to allow Milosevic to defend himself and to allow the evidence to speak for itself.

An oversight indeed, for Milosevic was able to demonstrate time and time again

'Despite the obstacles placed in the path of his defence, the tribunal never even came close to proving their case against him....'

the indictment against him was based on lies and contradictions. He exposed it as a political show trial designed not to establish the true facts of the case but to reduce the complex situation in the Balkans to a simple story of good against evil.

The purpose of this, he maintained throughout, was in order to draw attention away from the very real crimes committed against Yugoslavia by Nato's illegal assault: the hundreds and thousands of people killed by their deliberate bombing of civilians. None of this, of course, was reported by the media in Britain who carefully ignored the detail of the trial while Milosevic was presenting his side of the story – leaving it until he was safely dead and his guilt could be proclaimed as a fact.

The real facts tell a different story. Despite the forces arraigned against him and the obstacles placed in the path of his defence, the tribunal never even came close to proving their case against him. It never proved that there had been a general plan to remove Albanians from Kosovo, the central claim against him and the reason given for the illegal bombing of Serbia, or that Milosevic had issued orders to that effect. It never even proved that genocide had occurred in Kosovo.

The massed graves that the media proclaimed over and over again at the time failed to materialise, like the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In all a total of 2,000 bodies of all nationalities have been found in Kosovo since NATO intervention, and many of those deaths were caused by NATO bombing.

Now that Milosevic is dead, these inconvenient facts can be safely ignored and history rewritten to suit the warmongers in America and Britain. So too can the fact that the initial secession from the Yugoslav Federation by both Croatia and Slovenia was illegal and that the initial order for the Yugoslav National Army to fight the secessionists was not given by Milosevic, who was not in a position to do so, but by Ante Markovic, himself an ethnic Croat, the federal prime minister. This did not stop the tribunal laying the blame squarely on Milosevic, but in order to do it the indictment against him was forced into a number of embarrassing contradictions.

Thus at one point, in paragraph 85, the indictment states that the conflict in Croatia was an international one from 8 October 1991 (in order to provide some legal cover for the illegal activities of NATO) while at the same time, paragraph 110 claims that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was still in existence as a sovereign state until 27 April 1992 (in order to further the case against Milosevic).

Web of lies

Both cannot be true, yet both happily sit together in the web of lies at the heart of the Hague tribunal. This contradiction is paramount for the whole case against Milosevic because the laws of war under which he was ostensibly being tried can only operate in conditions of international conflict which, right from the beginning, the wars in Yugoslavia never were.

The silliest of the lies is the claim that by dying, Milosevic somehow cheated justice – because justice is a commodity that the Hague tribunal simply does not trade in. In truth if he had lived he undoubtedly would have been found guilty anyway no matter how strong his defence or how little had actually been proved against him.

His death, however, provides relief for those who persecuted him, even when he was clearly ill and in need of treatment, from the embarrassment of a trial that was still going on in its unconvincing way years after it was supposed to have

d him guilty. And he was certainly guilty – guilty of refusing to
 world order...

War Crimes Tribunal



Photo: A. Ilic/reportdigital.co.uk

Supporters of Slobodan Milosevic hold up his picture as his body is returned to Serbia from the The Hague.

produced a quick, clean, guilty verdict. The trial was distracting attention, however fitfully, from that other trial designed to put a legal gloss after the event on the illegal, murderous activities of the Americans and British: that of Saddam Hussein.

For in these terms Milosevic was certainly guilty – guilty of refusing to join NATO and the EU and become part of the Americans' new world order, guilty of not delivering his country and the livelihoods of his countrymen and women to the rapacious threats of an uncontrolled market economy, guilty of not selling the riches and assets of his country to a clique of criminal oligarchs and their western money launderers as in the rest of the former Soviet bloc, guilty of trying to resist the total destruction of what remained of a public service and the

threat of mass unemployment, guilty of daring to maintain the word Socialist in the name of the ruling political party - guilty indeed.

The wars in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were not an accident of history waiting to happen but had been well planned for by American and British strategists in the long war against the Soviet Union. Hence the rush by the EU to recognise the new states of Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia in borders which could be accommodated within Federal structures. Hence the checks and balances that such arrangements provided but which had no basis for stability when those checks and balances had been destroyed. The multi-ethnic nature of Yugoslavia had to be abolished but yet the borders of the multi-ethnic statelets that replaced it were somehow

sacrosanct and had to be defended at all costs.

The Hague tribunal in its pursuit of Milosevic turned the concept of natural justice on its head and its judges violated almost every established precept of jurisprudence and international law while doing so. The fate of Milosevic and the seven others who have died when under the protection of the Hague tribunal serves as a reminder of the way the US and its servile ally Britain have rewritten the rule of law to provide cover for their illegal wars. His untimely death is being used to legitimise the activities of the tribunal but there is a much more important outcome. The wars in Yugoslavia led directly to the war in Afghanistan and then the war in Iraq and will lead to many more interventions until they are stopped. That is down to us.

WORKERS reviews the film **SHOOTING DOGS** at its world premiere in the Rwandan capital – and finds both a fine film and an exposure to Belgian colonialism.

How friends became killers

THERE HAVE been a number of reviews of **SHOOTING DOGS**, the film starring John Hurt which depicts the events of the Rwandan massacre of Tutsis by Hutus in 1994, and shot on location in Kigali using locals as extras. Some, such as the **GUARDIAN** reviewer, have described the film as a work of fiction, while most others have praised it.

However, watching the World Premiere of the film in a football stadium in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, along with thousands of survivors, makes it easier to assess the film and the events it depicts in which 800,000 died.

The story is set in a Catholic-run school in Kigali with John Hurt playing the priest and teacher. The school becomes a refuge for hundreds of Tutsis and Hutus opposed to the coming massacre. They are surrounded by hundreds of “Interahamwe”, the Hutu militia, waiting to kill them.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation is how ordinary friends and neighbours, such as the school caretaker, become killers in what was a pre-planned massacre. The film also describes how French troops eventually came to the rescue of only the handful of white victims in the school, probably a typical example of French colonial mentality.

‘That’s how it was’

The only comments from the audience watching the premiere were words to the effect of “Yes, that’s exactly how it was.” At the end of the performance, the audience left in complete silence, each one with thoughts of their own experience of survival.

So as a film **SHOOTING DOGS** (a reference to the only action the tiny UN brigade were allowed to take) deserves very high acclaim. Most survivors regard the film as highly accurate in its description of the events, and are highly critical of the other film, **HOTEL RWANDA**, which they regard as inaccurate and whose hero, the hotel manager, they despise, as he makes his fortune living off the proceeds of his speaking tours in the US.

What becomes clear, however, is that



Photo: Workers

As Rwandan prisons are full, killers tell where their victims are buried to receive “forgiveness”. containing 256,000 bodies..

before the Belgian colonialists came to Rwanda, Tutsis and Hutus were as one, intermarrying and displaying no differences. It was the Belgians, like the Nazis, who began to invent imaginary racial differences between them and declare the Tutsis more intelligent and therefore capable of becoming the Belgians’ civil service and colonial managers. It was the Belgians who introduced ID cards which identified Hutus and Tutsis, and it was the Belgians who lit the fuse for the massacres (1994 was not the first) in the way they handed power to a bunch of fascists at independence, trying to maintain their colonial influence.

Today in Rwanda, there is no free

health care for the population although Saudi Arabia has built a big private hospital for the rich returning Tutsis. There is free primary education, but thereafter schooling is provided only by the Catholic Church.

The country is awash with “guilt aid”, and at the Genocide Museum in Kigali, an attempt is being made to compare the “genocide” with that of the Armenians, Jews, Cambodians and some invented genocides – instead of putting it into the context of colonialism in Africa.

No mention is made of other mass killings in recent times in Africa – of the 1 million killed in Mozambique by the Rhodesian and South African sponsored

a football stadium in
re of the effects of



Bodies are still being brought to this mass grave

RENAMO (also supported by US Christian fundamentalists), for example. No mention of the 100,000 killed in Mozambique by famine while the US refused to provide food aid. No mention of the 4 million killed across the Rwandan border in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by mercenary militias (including Rwandans) seeking control of the diamonds and other resources. No mention of the millions killed in Angola, Algeria and other African colonies as they fought for their independence.

No one wants to make a film about these events that former colonial powers, including Britain, would rather were forgotten.

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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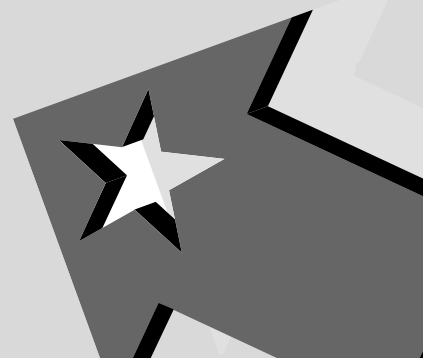
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