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BATTLEGROUND NHS: THE WAY TO THE FRONT



Can foreign policy be ethical?

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WORKERS

“Cul-de-sac

AFTER TWO one-day national strikes the Unison members employed by NHS Logistics have given up their token protest against privatisation to DHL. The TGWU members voted against the strike. GMB members sent a message of solidarity and went to work.

The two days of strike – one during the week of the TUC and one during the Labour Party conference – have as with all tokenism disappeared without trace.

The second strike day saw DHL announce it would disestablish the jobs of 3,000 existing staff – 500 of them to be made redundant, the others offered re-engagement on reduced terms and conditions as casual self-employed workers. Unison had walked into a cul-de-sac. The only solution was to retreat and prepare to fight another day.

The fight now is to maintain trade unionism within DHL and to resist casualisation. And it has to expose the wider, more sinister privatisation manoeuvres planned by the government.

Though NHS Logistics (now DHL NHS Supplies) delivered only about 10 per cent of NHS materials, the government is saying it wants to have only one NHS procurement and delivery company – a transfer worth billions of pounds of business to DHL and, behind the scenes, the US Novation company.

Novation used to be a partner of DHL, now it is a sub-contractor. The reason? Because of US Senate investigations into Novation's business practices. Those practices which seemingly would have put Enron to shame – and possibly Blair's government (if shame were something it were prone to).

The lobbying season

NOVEMBER sees two major lobbies of the House of Commons: on 1 November over the future of the NHS and health care provision; on 22 November about local government pensions.

The health lobby, part of the unique coming together of all health trade unions, be they TUC or non-TUC, as NHS Together, begins a protracted campaign for health care in Britain and is one of the primary challenges to government free market strategy.

The pensions lobby is the endgame in negotiations around pension marketisation. If the lobby cannot deliver a negotiated strategy, then the unions will ballot for further industrial action. But if industrial action is called and cannot be delivered, then the public sector unions will have caused greater damage to themselves than the nearly 30 years of draconian anti-union legislation.

Bluff or battle? The choice is ours to make.



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**IRAQ****ECONOMY****HEALTH****WATER****MOTORS****TRANSPORT****KOREA****EUROTRASH****WHAT'S ON****NEWS ANALYSIS**

Huge death toll found

Unemployment increasing

Victory at Whipps Cross

Thames Water sold again

Ryton closure accelerated

Canals under threat

Test sends shock waves

The latest from Brussels

Coming soon

The US and torture

Huge Iraq death toll found

THE MEDICAL journal LANCET has published research by a team from Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, in the US, which shows that far more Iraqis have been killed since the invasion than Bush or Blair acknowledge (Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey, by Professor Gilbert Burnham, Professor Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy and Les Roberts).

In international law, occupying forces are responsible for the protection of all civilians and for recording any deaths. The US and British forces have failed to carry out these duties, and the Bush and Blair governments are reduced to lying about the extent of the catastrophe that they have inflicted on the Iraqi people.

The authors judge that 654,965 people have been killed since March 2003, about 2.5 per cent of the population. Iraq's mortality rate was 5.5 per 1,000 people per year before the invasion; since then, it has been 13.3. The actual number of violent deaths, including those that resulted from coalition forces, has increased every year since 2003. The authors estimate that 200,000 violent deaths are directly attributable to the US and British forces.

Survey teams asked for death certificates for the 545 reported deaths in the sample they studied, and these were provided in 501 cases. The pattern of deaths in households without death certificates was no different from those with certificates. The fact that such a high proportion of certificates was available shows that the study is based on reality, not on the fantasies of Bush and Blair.

The authors write, "Our estimate of excess deaths is far higher than those reported in Iraq through passive surveillance measures. This discrepancy is not unexpected. Data from passive surveillance are rarely complete, even in stable circumstances, and are even less complete during conflict, when access is restricted and fatal events could be intentionally hidden. Aside from Bosnia, we can find no conflict situation where passive surveillance recorded more than 20 per cent of the deaths measured by population-based methods."

Four independent experts provided detailed comments and all recommended publication with minor revisions. One noted, "this is an important piece of research which should be published because it is possibly the only non-government funded scientific study to provide an estimate of the number of Iraqi deaths since the US invasion." She stressed the "powerful strength" of the research methods, a view supported by other reviewers. Indeed, this study adds substantially to the new field of conflict epidemiology, which has been evolving rapidly in recent years. Yet Bush says, "I don't consider it a credible report."

ECONOMY**Unemployment increasing**

THE OFFICE for National Statistics reports that unemployment is at its highest for seven years, up by 19.3 per cent this year to 1.7 million, 5.5 per cent of the population. The unemployment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds rose to 12.7 per cent

Unemployment in London is the worst in the country, at 8.2 per cent, its highest level in eight years. London also has the lowest employment rate, at 69.8 per cent, as against the national average of 74.6 per cent. Unemployment is now accelerating faster than at any time since March. Even the government's restrictive measure of unemployment, the numbers claiming jobless benefits, leapt more than 10,000 in September. The rise, said Reuters, confounded expectations.

ENERGY**Divers win large rise**

NORTH SEA divers have won a large pay offer after voting 640 to 2 to reject a 15 per cent offer spread over three years. Strike action by more than 800 divers and support crews was planned to take place from 1 November.

As a result of this unity, the RMT has been able to negotiate a significantly improved pay offer which now represents a 37 per cent increase over three years, with 20 per cent effective from 1 November. The previous offer had failed to address two decades of pay erosion. As WORKERS went to press, the improved offer was due to be recommended to the members – who must be wondering why they allowed two decades of erosion in the first place.

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

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

The constitution they can't forget

GERMANY WANTS a road map in place by the end of its EU Presidency next summer, with implementation before the next EU election in 2009. Foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said, "...we urgently need it, everyone has to move their position."

Italian president Giorgio Napolitano said, "...a renewed will and political unity at the maximum level of member states are indispensable, as are institutional innovations planned by the treaty." Spain's foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, insisted that Spain is not ready to "forget" the constitution.

German chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her view that the constitution should not be slimmed down to make it more acceptable to Europe's voters.

EU commissioner Margot Wallström gave the commission's view on the future of the constitution: "(we) would not like to depart too much from the Constitutional Treaty." She said that the "core" of the current text, including majority voting rules and an EU foreign minister, should be the 'departure point' for future negotiations and not be re-negotiated.

In fear of the voters

THE EU HAS criticised the results of a recent referendum in Switzerland. Some of the toughest asylum laws in Europe were backed by 68 per cent of those voting. The British government, for example, would not want to follow the Swiss example. The British working class is, rightly, against the Blair government's "open door" policy to new EU member states. A new poll found that Britain is the most sceptical country in Western Europe on immigration - 76 per cent say there are too many immigrants in the country.

About 14 per cent of Bulgarians wanting to migrate when Bulgaria joins would prefer to come to Britain, far more than any other country. Hundreds of thousands of workers from Bulgaria and Rumania will be seeking to come to Britain next year. The Blair government says that few will come. But remember: they told us in 2003 that only 15,000 workers would come here from eastern Europe in 2004 - and 300,000 came in that year alone.



Whipps Cross: now the battle is on to save the hospital

Victory sealed at Whipps X

SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS by Unison organisers following on the 8 days of strike action over the summer have seen the conclusion of the Whipps Cross Hospital dispute in London. The unified membership has delivered the goal of the dispute - the implementation of the 2003 Agenda for Change local agreement. They have increased Unison membership to more than 98 per cent among the cleaners, porters, catering and switchboard staff.

The Whipps workers maintained their unity and cohesion despite all the pressure and provocation from the employer. The battle now is to get the contract brought back in house and send Initial Hospital Services (Rentokil) packing. Unison has ensured that details of the successful outcome have been forwarded to all NHS trusts where Initial has contracts.

Meanwhile, the entire hospital is under threat of closure - not yet announced, but not denied - as the government scrambles for savings. A lively campaign to save the hospital, led by the unions, has begun in the north east London borough of Waltham Forest.

WATER

Thames Water sold again

THAMES WATER (until October owned by the German company RWE) has been sold again, this time to Australian bankers Macquarie for £8 billion. It's clearly big business, profiting from people's need for clean water.

RWE took £1.5 billion in profits and dividends during the six years it owned Thames Water, and will net £3.2 billion profit from this sale. And during five out of those six years it failed to meet the Regulator targets to prevent leaks. RWE was said to be facing a fine of over £140 million by the Water Regulator for such poor performance.

It is estimated that over 2,744 million gallons of water leaked from the Thames Water system during the first two weeks of October 2006 - more than 196 million gallons a day. With such staggering losses it is no wonder London faces drought and standpipes in 2007.

While Thames has made billions

milking the people of Greater London, it has announced the possible loss of up to 1,500 jobs - to boost profits still further. These jobs are predominantly for highly skilled support workers. The company has already put out to contract any part of the business which could be outsourced, for example repairing leaks.

Privately Thames Water had admitted to the trade unions - Unison and GMB - that owing to previous staff cuts the company could not meet any major crisis affecting the network or leak repair targets. The job losses are a sweetener for potential buyers. And given that Macquarie has paid over the odds, the ploy would seem to have worked.

On the same day as the sale to Macquarie there was more robbery - the Institute of Civil Engineers forecast that water bills in London would have to rise by 30 per cent to pay for investment and replacement of Victorian pipework. And the response from the government? Londoners were advised to move to Manchester or Wales, where there is rainfall in abundance.

MOTOR INDUSTRY**Ryton closure moved forward**

PEUGEOT-CITROEN'S Ryton car plant in Coventry is to close in January 2007. The closure decision has been brought forward by six months and follows the vote by Ryton workers not to resist job losses and closure.

Peugeot justifies its early closure decision on the basis that the remaining 800 strong workforce are seeking earlier redundancy. The redundancy packages on offer and the company's claims to have assisted its workforce to relocate and find alternative employment mean in practice that the responsibility for the closure rests as much with the workers as with the company's pursuit of profit.

If British workers are not prepared to defend their industries – the Ryton plant has

been working for over 100 years – then the question has to be asked whether this is suicide or whether British workers have forsaken their responsibility to control their own destiny and ability to produce.

TRANSPORT**Threat to canals**

THE GOVERNMENT has cut £9.1 million from the budget of British Waterways, the public corporation responsible for Britain's 2200 miles of navigable canals and rivers.

British Waterways has now threatened to sack 180 workers, which would probably force some of our canals to close. Unison, which has around 1,000 members at British Waterways, has called an emergency meeting of stewards to draw up plans to fight the cuts.

Bomb test sends shock waves

THE DEMOCRATIC People's Republic of Korea's Central News Agency announced on 9 October that it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test under secure conditions. It came, said the announcement, "at a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great, prosperous, powerful socialist nation".

The announcement, which caused shock waves around the world, continued: "It has been confirmed that there was no such danger as radioactive emission in the course of the nuclear test as it was carried out under a scientific consideration and careful calculation. The nuclear test was conducted with indigenous wisdom and technology 100%. It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the KPA (Korean People's Army) and people that have wished to have powerful self-reliant defence capability. It will contribute to defending the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in the area around it."

The test follows the USA's failures to give security guarantees to the DPRK or to carry out its promise of providing two light-water reactors and nuclear fuel. The DPRK has long warned that the US state was preparing to attack it and said that developing its own nuclear deterrent was the only way to prevent this.

Britain and the US have led the charge in condemning this "breach" of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which the DPRK is no longer a signatory (it withdrew quite properly and in accord with the treaty's articles in April 2003). Britain and the US, however, are signatories to this treaty, which was agreed in 1968 with the aim not only of stopping nuclear proliferation, but also (Article VI) of nuclear disarmament on the part of the nuclear states. Time for sanctions against them?

TRANSPORT**Thames boatmen step up fight**

FOLLOWING ON their lobby of the House of Commons in August over threats to safety on the River Thames, Thames boatmen stepped up their campaign on 17 October. A large passenger boat with banners, Thames skippers, crews, health and safety campaigners and trade unionists brought the campaign noisily to the river side of the Commons.

The problem is a new European Union Directive, which will reduce qualifying

service for mariner's licences from five to two years, slash qualifying times for local river knowledge work from two years to six months, scrap mandatory college-based training, and reduce qualifying ages for holding licences for pleasure boats over 40 yards long from 21 to 18.

With the Mayor's Office and the Greater London Authority as well as business all seeking further investment and passenger usage on the Thames as a major way of reducing congestion on London's roads, plans to reduce safety and skill on Britain and Europe's longest tidal river are insane.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****NOVEMBER**

Wednesday 1 November, 12pm, London

Stop cuts, closures and privatisation: lobby of parliament, rally in Central Methodist Hall, march to join the lobby.

Called by NHS Together, the alliance of all the health unions, including for the first time the BMA and the Royal Colleges. Join the lobby of parliament, and raise the alarm about what Labour is doing to the NHS. The National Pensioners Convention has called a march to join the lobby – 11.30am for 12pm start, Forum Magnum Square, York Road, SW1 (Westminster Bridge end). More info from www.nhstogether.org.uk

Thursday 2 November, 7.30pm, Al Badr Hall, Lea Bridge Road, London E10

Save Whipps Cross Hospital

This huge general hospital, the only one serving a community of 225,000 people in Waltham Forest, is under threat. Discussion and speakers including local BMA and Unison leaders and local MPs, plus Dot Gibson of the National Pensioners Convention.

Thursday 9 November, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Who Owns Water – Us or Them?

Drought orders all around, but floods of profits. A public meeting organised by WORKERS and the CPBML. All welcome.

Saturday 11 November, 10.45am for 11.15am start, Leeds.

Keep the NHS Together: March and Rally

Led by Unison, the march and rally will highlight the plight of NHS workers and services. Meet at Wasteland old access road next to the Leeds Playhouse car park, rally in pedestrian precinct at Briggate. For more information, email sharon.hamilton@leedsth.nhs.uk.

Tuesday 14 November, 6.30pm, International Centre for Life, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Defend the NHS! Northern Rally

Another key event in the NHS Together campaign. Keynote speaker Dave Prentis, general secretary, Unison.

Wednesday 22 November, London

Mass Local Government Pension Scheme lobby of Parliament.

The fight continues. Details from your union.

White House – torture centre

THE USA continues to run a global system of secret CIA prisons that have operated, on executive authority, since the start of the war on terror. And it has fought in courts and Congress to preserve executive prerogatives of arbitrary arrest, unrestrained interrogation, and endless incarceration.

There are 41,000 detainees in Iraq, 1,100 detainees are being systematically tortured at Guantanamo and Bagram, and there have been at least 150 extraordinary renditions to, for example, Uzbekistan and Morocco. At least 94 detainees have been killed.

This is not abuse by “rotten apples”, but government-sanctioned systematic torture. As THE NEW YORK TIMES wrote in an editorial on 18 March 2005, “The atrocities that occurred in prisons like Abu Ghraib were the product of decisions that began at the very top, when the Bush administration decided that Sept. 11 had wiped out its responsibilities to abide by the rules, including the Geneva Conventions and the American Constitution.”

Torture is illegal, immoral and impractical. It is also counter-productive: a regime that tortures people loses support. Tom Parker, a former MI5 agent, pointed out, “The US is doing what the British did in the 1970s, detaining people and violating their civil liberties. It did nothing but exacerbate the situation. Most of those interned went back to terrorism. You’ll end up radicalising the entire population.”

Failure

The USA’s National Intelligence Estimate recently concluded, “the American invasion and occupation of Iraq has helped spawn a new generation of Islamic radicalism and...the overall terrorist threat has grown since the Sept. 11 attacks.”

Bush senior’s National Security adviser, General Brent Scowcroft, warned that attacking Iraq would be a priceless gift to Islamic terrorists. Blair says this is enemy propaganda. These wars against Iraq and Afghanistan are traditional colonial wars for power and resources, not a rerun of the Second World War, as Blair and Bush would have us believe. 64 per cent of Americans now think the attack on Iraq was a mistake.

In September, 776 US soldiers were wounded in Iraq, the fourth highest casualty rate for a month since the spring 2003 invasion, the highest rate since the November 2004 attack on Fallujah. Overall in this war, 21,600 US soldiers have been wounded and 2,741 have been killed. In January US forces encountered 1,454 explosive devices, in July 2,625.

The Iraq Study Group, chaired by former US Secretary of State James Baker, is calling for the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. William Buckley, editor of the conservative magazine The National Review, admits, “The US objective in Iraq has failed.”

The Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, said of Iraq, we should “get ourselves out sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems. ... I don’t say that the difficulties we are experiencing around the world are caused by our presence in Iraq, but undoubtedly our presence in Iraq exacerbates them.”

Nearly a decade after Robin Cook invasion and subservience to the

Can foreign policy be

THE LATE Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary in the 1997 Labour government, promised an “ethical foreign policy”, raising a few wry smiles. Nine years later it sounds like a sick joke. Britain is involved in military adventures across the globe and has effectively subcontracted its foreign policy to the US.

The government now believes in the following:

Pre-emptive nuclear and non nuclear strikes against those nations it thinks may be a threat;

Military intervention in sovereign nations whose policy the government does not approve of on “humanitarian” grounds;

Spreading “democracy” throughout the world to strengthen capitalism; reforming the United Nations to ensure tight control by the USA and its allies;

Regime change in Iraq and elsewhere;

Undermining governments in Eastern Europe using government funding through NGOs to bring changes favourable to capitalism – e.g. Belarus and Ukraine;

Breaking up countries to make them easier to control;

Replacing Trident nuclear weapons with expensive US new generation weapons while preventing other countries having the ability to defend themselves;

Applying sanctions to those sovereign nations that don’t meet its standards of ‘democracy’;

Supporting Israeli military attacks on its neighbours;

Supporting extraordinary rendition, the US policy of using torture in prisons around the world.

Blair outlined the strategy in his Chicago speech earlier this year. Today, it is known as neoconservatism, but really it is just good old colonialism and imperialism.

But it’s not just a strategy; it has been put into practice. There was the bombing campaign against Iraq in 1998 eloquently named Desert Fox and used by Alan Milburn, then Health Secretary, to publish his PFI plans for the NHS in the hope no one would notice (“a good day to publish bad news”).

Bombing

Then there was the 1999 bombing and invasion of Yugoslavia with Blair presenting himself as the messiah saving the poor Albanians, resulting in a gangster statelet occupied by EU/NATO and Serbia as a US vassal state.

Then in 2000 it was Sierra Leone, the only former British colony that attracted Blair’s intervention. Perhaps it was because his father once worked at a college in Freetown and so there were already contacts there. This was followed by Afghanistan in 2001 (although only seriously pursued this year) and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Labour Party members and trade union affiliates may well ask when these principles of foreign policy were discussed within the party – or within government. We learned from the “Blunkett Tapes” that defence secretary Hoon agreed to the US use of Fylingdales as part of their new “Star Wars” defence system without consulting anyone at all. We are told that there will be an EU Foreign Minister, moving responsibility for foreign affairs to Brussels.

This foreign policy has gone hand in hand with moves to control

... promised “an ethical foreign policy”, we have oppression, US...

ethical?

us at home – attacks on pensions and health, more privatisation, EU immigration to undermine wages and jobs, plus laws to make it practically impossible to have a legal strike.

Blair even refuses to notice that things are changing in the US as Bush desperately seeks to avoid defeat in Iraq. The Baker Commission is suggesting asking Syria and Iran if they will help the US get out with grace. Even Bush has now made the comparison with Vietnam.

The head of the British Army says that the presence of British troops in Iraq has exacerbated the security situation there, around the world and at home. He calls for withdrawal from Iraq, where British troops are now effectively held hostage in bases across the south of the country while the Iraqi police are taken over by religious militias.

A target for terrorists

British Intelligence, as if to back up the general, says that Britain is now the main target for al-Qaeda terrorists and will be so for an entire generation. But Blair denies everything. He has been best described as resembling a provincial governor of the Roman Empire in some remote garrison: surrounded, under attack and waiting for orders to come from Rome (or in his case Washington) before deciding what to do.

Is an ethical foreign policy possible in a capitalist country? A capitalist government is there to serve the global and local needs of capital, a very unethical economic system that seeks only to increase itself. Blair's foreign policy serves the global needs, just as his domestic policy serves the local, where his job is to attack and control the working class at home.

Can it be done?

But what may constitute a genuine “ethical foreign policy”? Is such a thing possible? Supposing the British government declared it would recognise the sovereignty of all nations, respect their right to choose their system of government, not interfere in their internal affairs, and encourage trade on the basis of mutual benefit? That might be a start. We could then withdraw all our



Marching in London to stop the war, 19 March 2003: Blair's Iraq war showed that ethics resides in the people, not the government – the war began the next day.

Photo: Workers

troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and former Yugoslavia.

Why do we still need an army in Germany? We could close all foreign bases including those in Cyprus. We could then close all US bases in Britain. Then we could address those colonies that still exist – the Falklands or the Malvinas could be returned to Argentina, Gibraltar to Spain, and Diego Garcia to its people (or more properly, its people to Diego Garcia). We could join those seeking to reform the UN to make it reflective of the individual member states and not the US. We could define exactly when our troops may be used overseas, for example to assist in disaster work, or on special agreed UN missions that were clearly intended to help workers rather than capitalism.

Of course, if we were to do all this as a sovereign nation, it would be incompatible with our membership of NATO and the EU. So we would leave both of them. The issue of Trident would no longer be relevant: the US would not even think of selling a replacement system outside NATO.

Our arms industry is an important part of British manufacturing and is central to

defending our own borders. Sovereign nations have a right to defend themselves. If the arms industry were a monopoly controlled primarily by the US or Russia, nations such as Venezuela and Cuba who are threatened by the US and subject to an arms embargo, would be unable to defend their territory and their people. This is where our arms industry would help out internationally. The products of an arms industry could be exclusively defensive and exclude weapons such as cluster bombs and “dime” weapons intended to maximise killing and maiming.

Goodwill

Just think of the resources that such a policy would free up and think of the goodwill this would create around the world! Think of the debate that could be had in Britain about these options. It might even restore the confidence in British politics destroyed by this government. Think of the lives that would be saved. If Britain really did pursue such an ethical foreign policy, it would not only change the world but really make Britain a leading force for good.

The government has made it clear where its intentions for the battles to be fought, and won. Which way to the front?

Battleground NHS: the challenge for the w



Photo and cover photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Joy from Unison delegates to the Labour Party Conference in September as the platform is overturned in a vote condemning the sale of NHS Logistics. Yet nothing was won. Raising the profile cannot form the core of a fight – disputes have to really hurt the enemy.

UNDER THE banner of reform, the government is pursuing more and more frantically its unpopular, tired old agenda for the health service, already shown to fail in other public services.

That agenda includes contracting out services from the NHS to private companies motivated solely by profit, and putting financial straitjackets on the foundation trusts. Each trust is then required to stand alone and balance its books each year, proclaiming financial crisis at every opportunity to justify further interference.

Political profile

Meanwhile, the political profile of the National Health Service is being raised left, right and centre. Parliamentary political parties in their conferences have wittered on about its state without much import, but more importantly the trade

unions representing people who work in the service are now gearing up for battle.

Or are they? And which way to the front? On 1 November, health unions are organising a lobby of Parliament (with an open meeting of lobbyists at 11 am in Central Hall, Westminster – see What's On, page 5). But what is really going on?

The current difficulties in the NHS are not described, as they would have been 20 years ago, as “cuts in service” but instead as a “financial crisis”. The objective overriding all others is to balance the books by the end of this financial year (31 March 2007).

Everywhere within the service priorities are being drawn up with that one sole aim: balance the books. So why was it “cuts” then, and “overspending” now?

Some three years ago when the government was proposing foundation

trusts as the future model for NHS provision, there was much opposition from both inside and outside of the trade unions. Most of the opposition focused on the “freedom” which was to be given to foundation trusts either to adopt the new NHS pay and conditions, Agenda for Change, or not to. Or “freedom” to buy and sell property, largely only of interest to London foundation trusts. But the real spectre that the establishment of NHS trusts as foundation trusts had raised was to do with finance.

At a meeting with trade unions at University College London Hospital, the chairman of the trust, Sir Peter Dixon, was asked by the lead union full-time official, “What will be the effect on brokerage?” As might be imagined, this apparently boring question went pretty much unnoticed at the time, although a lively debate between the two

HS lie. Unions are gearing up for battle. But how are those

working class

protagonists ensued.

Brokerage is in fact the system whereby the NHS, via the NHS Bank, balances its books at the end of a financial year, so that those trusts that have not had sufficient resources allocated to provide services receive, on an accounting basis, funds from those who have received too much. Or, in latter-day Labour-speak, those who have overspent receive funds from those who have underspent.

What happens to the surplus?

The significance of the question of brokerage in the establishment of foundation trusts is that they are able to keep any "surplus" that they make. So that if applied across the country, brokerage would end. Those trusts with a "surplus", would simply keep it; it wouldn't go back to the NHS.

More importantly it would mean that trusts with insufficient funds that could not "balance the books" could go out of business. In other words, hospitals would close. And given that there are several hundred separate trusts which historically have gone into the red occasionally, the significance of brokerage and its destructive effect become clear.

It was thought that the government policy to ensure that all trusts became foundation trusts by 2008 would occur at the same time as the brokerage system described above would be coming to an end. In fact, the government acted even more dangerously and applied the new payments system across the NHS several years before all hospitals become foundation trusts.

This new system, called Payments by Results, is the embodiment of the destruction of brokerage and it is that which is having such dire consequences across the NHS. That and one other thing.

When Thatcher started to sell off bits of the British economy, she didn't try to flog off much of the NHS, apart from the very damaging policy of competitive tendering, which led to wholesale privatisation of hospital ancillary services (porters, cleaners, domestics, catering).

"It is clear that should Brown ever take over from Blair (not due to go till next May), we can expect more of the same..."

What Blair and his lieutenant Hewitt are now doing exceeds anything Thatcher proposed.

There are a whole host of important functions that the NHS needs to ensure are carried out but which are not directly related to the provision of care to patients. These could range from the delivery of supplies to hospitals to providing legal defences against patients' claims. All of these services are provided by what are known as NHS Arms Length Bodies.

Jobs slashed

Two years ago the government undertook widespread reviews of these bodies, halving them in number to 21. Several thousand jobs were also slashed and many of these organisations are in the process of relocating some or all of their staff away from London.

In an additional and more sinister move many of these bodies were grouped together into an organisation called the Business Services Agency. These included NHS Logistics (the people who supply hospitals with everything from gowns to sticking plasters), the Prescription Pricing Authority (responsible for working out the messy prescription system) and the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (doing pretty much what it says on the tin).

Blair's idea is to sell off some or all of the parts of the Business Services Agency to the private sector, wholesale. The first such sell-off has been announced in the NHS Logistics organisation, and this has already led to strike action.

NHS Logistics is to be sold

(technically probably already has been sold) to a consortium of two companies which are themselves of interest. Neither is British.

The first is DHL, formerly US-owned but now a German private postal delivery company (which we are encouraged to be friendly towards as they have good relations with German trade unions!) and Novation, an American company currently under investigation by the US Senate for anti-competitive practices.

There was, encouragingly, an immediate response proposing firm industrial action in the form of strikes. Such a response from organised labour facing these sell-offs is long overdue. But there are many danger signs emanating from this dispute. The first is that one of the unions involved, the TGWU, actually voted against strike action, leaving Unison exposed. Second, the proposed industrial action was telegraphed miles in advance. This is, of course, partly a result of the draconian, near-fascist anti-trade union laws, which render effective industrial action virtually impossible, but it is also a reflection of a deeper malaise.

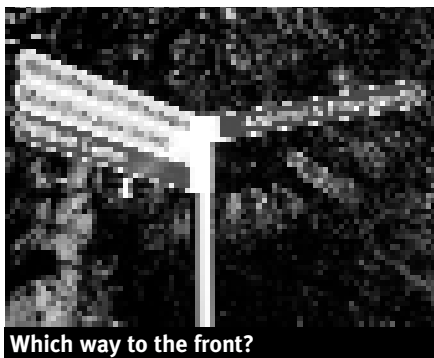
Real struggle

A dispute is a real struggle between workers organised in their trade unions and their employer. Often what precedes the dispute is a campaign, in essence an attempt using publicity to get the employers to change their minds. Sometimes, and mostly during the past 20 years, campaigns of this nature have completely supplanted disputes between employers and workers.

One of the worrying things about the NHS Logistics dispute – now essentially over (see "Cul de sac", page 2) – was that it showed all the signs of being a campaign. The two days of strike action were targeted to take place, the first at a meeting of the Trade Union Congress and the second at the Labour Party Conference. The conferences came and went, and there were no further planned

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9



days of strike action.

What then was to be the effect of industrial action if its objective was solely to “raise the profile of the dispute” as appears to be the case here? Any such dispute has to have as its core the objective of hurting the enemy, the employer. If it doesn’t then it may as well not be embarked upon. This necessary steel was absent from this “dispute”.

This was a difficult situation, as both sides, especially the government, were looking at the situation in NHS Logistics as a precursor to what happens in the far larger and more vulnerable Business Services Agency. If the Logistics organisation can be effectively flogged off, then many, many thousands more

staff will face the same fate.

Far too much effort is being put into changing the minds of people who are beyond the reach of rational argument. If that were not the case, it should have been easy to demonstrate that NHS Logistics, an organisation which, in strict economic terms, is making a profit for the NHS of several million pounds a year, should not have been sold off. There was simply no business case for it, contrary to all government argument.

So the objective of the dispute had to be to hurt the government, not to provide a sound-bite opportunity at a Labour Party Conference.

Unison worked very hard to ensure that the Labour Party conference adopted a motion against this kind of sell-off – so hard and effectively that it was adopted close to unanimously. At the Labour Party NEC’s subsequent meeting this decision of the more broadly based conference was overturned in order that the sell-off could go ahead. Who led the charge to overturn the decision? One Gordon Brown, erstwhile saviour for some in the trade union movement.

More of the same

It is clear that should Brown ever take over from Blair (not due to go till next May), we can expect more of the same.

More sell-off, more stand-alone book balancing.

So, yes, the NHS does face serious difficulty. (“Crisis” is perhaps a word that should be reserved for matters of actual life and death, rather than potential.) And part of the danger lies within the work force. More particularly, there are trade unions that at present are tiptoeing around the edge of the problem. They don’t want to break with the tradition that has got us into this mess in the first place.

Don’t leave it to Labour

Leaving decisions of this magnitude (or of any magnitude) to the Labour Party is clearly not the solution. It began over 100 years ago and there has always been an argument about it, but the view of those who had prevailed throughout the period – that we send members of our own unions into Parliament via the Labour Party to carry out our objectives – was and is seriously flawed.

Something new needs to be done: dialogue and exchange within organised labour must be its precursor. It is important for there to be a good turn-out on 1 November. But it would be a dangerous illusion to think that convincing your MP to vote in a particular way will solve the problem.

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Will Podmore

The government is doing what the Tories failed to do – forcing through its expensive academies programme...

Academies: who's sponsoring whom?

ANYONE WHO imagines there is any such thing as a “free” market ideology being promoted in education by government needs to look at its current plans for schools. There never has been anything free about the market. It's about capitalism pushing through its agenda, exercising its power. At present it is doing that courtesy of the Labour government in a most brutal fashion, and it is meeting minimal opposition either from within its own party ranks or from workers. For education, education, education read profits, profits, profits.

Take a look at the academy and trust schools programme. This is presented as being about “choice and diversity of provision” to raise educational standards. Actually, there will be no choice about it – and there is no evidence that it improves standards either.

History

In 1986 Kenneth Baker, the Tory education secretary, announced a radical new City Technology College programme for schools. Any private or religious sponsor with a spare £2 million would be able to own a state school. Government would pay the rest of the start-up costs – at that time about £10 million – to open the new school, and in addition cough up the running costs and subsequent capital costs. In return for the £2 million, sponsors would be allowed to name the CTC after themselves and control what was taught. There was outrage from the Labour opposition, particularly Jack Straw.

Later, the programme was quietly dropped. The target of 30 CTCs was never reached. Not enough profits in schools for big companies, even when you only have to spend £2 million. In fact Straw pointed out in 1990 that the only sponsors Baker could scrape together were “second-order companies whose directors were interested in political leverage or honours”.

Private education promoter and businessman Cyril Taylor was appointed as Chairman of the CTC Trust. As Sir Cyril Taylor he resigned from the Tory Party in 1997 when Blunkett appointed him

government adviser on specialist schools. He has now acted as adviser to 10 successive education secretaries.

When Straw's government came to power in 1997 it proceeded to put every one of Baker's education policies into practice. Now we have the academies programme, with a target of 200 by 2010. Spot the difference. Sponsors still have to pay £2 million to sponsor an academy, although it currently costs around £25 million to build a new school. It was recently revealed that quite a few sponsors haven't actually handed even this paltry sum over yet in spite of the fact that they now effectively own an academy, appoint its governors, hire staff, dictate pay and conditions, and determine the curriculum.

A National Audit Office report recently found that just two academies have cost more than £101 million to run, over three times the original estimate. Bexley Business Academy, whose sponsor is “cash for honours” scandal-mired Sir David Garrard, has cost £58.2 million to run, and it is still failing. The Unity City Academy in Middlesbrough, infamous for teaching creationism in science lessons, sponsored by evangelist Sir Peter Vardy, has cost £43.6 million. It also is still failing.

Local education authorities have no say or powers over academies, although they are run using public money. Government claims that this programme is about improving “failing” schools have

been exposed as a sham. Many of the schools forced into the programme have been shown to have been highly successful at the time of closure.

So we the taxpayers supply the funds, and the “sponsor” spends it as it wishes. And our money is being poured into this scheme – you only need to visit a new academy and compare it to a secondary school down the road to see the contrast in funding. When government claims a big increase in public spending on education it is true, with a great deal of it pouring straight into these state-sponsored, effectively private schools. They are called “independent, non-fee paying schools”. Actually, we are all paying the fees.

Profits

It is not surprising that there has been a massive growth in private companies out of providing “educational services” to all schools, not just academies – profits that come directly from public money. Between 1995 and 2004 there was an 850 per cent rise in management consultancy fees from the public sector in general.

Schools already spend £120 million more on exam fees charged by the private exam boards than they do on books, and those fees are set to rise by 11 per cent this year.

Normal financial regulations that govern council and state school spending don't apply in academies. If the sponsor wants to spend the school's money on buying goods and services from its own

Promote trusts, says new legislation

The new Schools Commissioner will “promote and support the development of Trust schools . . . and Academies, by identifying suitable partners and sponsors, and by facilitating the matching up of these with schools. He will also work with local authorities to develop their capacity in their new role as strategic commissioners of school places, and to ensure that their duties to promote parental choice, greater

diversity and fair access are fulfilled, both when commissioning school places and when planning for major capital investment in their school estate. And he will be responsible for working strategically with a small number of high priority local authorities in discussions about reorganisation, and more widely advise on solutions to improve standards in failing and the lowest attaining schools.”



Photo: Workers

Two steps to heaven: first the government took control of education out of the hands of Waltham Forest council – then control of McEntee School was transferred to the United Learning Trust to run the renamed Walthamstow Academy. The United Learning Trust is run by the United Church Schools Trust, which is now involved in 11 academies in England.

company, via its control of the governors, that's fine. Unsurprisingly, it often does. Born-again Christian Sir Peter Vardy's academy schools paid £111,554 to his second-hand car dealership Reg Vardy plc for "support services such as marketing and recruitment". They also handed over £14,039 to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to pay for Vardy's brother's time on academy business. No tendering or Best Value process necessary.

Enforcement

Arm-twisting still goes on. Sponsors are now offered a "four academies for the price of three" deal. In April this year, head teacher Des Smith, one of Sir Cyril Taylor's team at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, was arrested and questioned after an undercover reporter recorded him apparently offering a peerage in return for academy sponsorship. Arrests over the subsequent "cash for honours" investigation have now included Blair adviser Lord Levy.

But for Blair et al this is still not enough. Only 46 academies have opened, and the target of 200 academies won't be met unless new, tougher rules push through the policy. Not enough schools have been closed and turned into academies, and many councils have managed to fend off the development of academies for local children. So forget

choice and diversity, government is now to force its programme through.

Under new education legislation due to become law, "underperforming" schools will be taken over as part of a trust by schools which are members of Sir Cyril Taylor's Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (their head teachers are apparently all for it). The definition of underperformance has now been widened to include both "failing" and "the lowest attaining schools".

Government guidance on "Schools Causing Concern" currently out for consultation makes it clear that new School Improvement Partners (who will replace local authority employed advisory services and be directly employed by the DfES) will be empowered to make recommendations about whether a school is underperforming. If this happens, or a school fails Ofsted, and it does not make sufficient improvements after 12 months, the local authority will have 10 days to draw up an action plan, but there will be "a strong presumption...that the schools should be replaced" and become academies/trust schools.

Councils will provide the money for schools but will no longer provide education. Instead they will become "commissioners" of education. In fact, the term "local education authority" has been quietly dropped in government

publications. A government enforcer, called the Schools Commissioner, has been appointed at the DfES (see box, page 12) to do the government's dirty work.

Obviously we should not rely on MPs to safeguard schools – they won't do it and anyhow the new legislation has been approved by parliament. It is in the schools themselves that our power lies. Tony Blair chose "Trust School Pathfinder" Quintin Kynaston School in Westminster to make an announcement about Trusts in October. He was met at the gates by crowds of students from the school shouting and waving placards opposing the move (and the Iraq war). Teachers, governors, parents and students will need to organise together to make an even bigger noise.

Union opposition

The NUT is campaigning vigorously against the academies. And unlike the government, the union takes research seriously and is basing its campaigning activities on the work carried out by NUT members Dr Richard Hatcher and Professor Ken Jones in two neighbouring boroughs in London to investigate how the campaigning can be done most effectively. An example of an effective campaign can be found at www.cadpag.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk.

A recent book exposes just how much of our money is being thrown away while services starve...

Blair's (seventy) billions for the consultants



While wards close, the government has spent over £50 million on a failed NHS IT system.

Plundering the public sector: how New Labour are letting consultants run off with £70 billion of our money, by David Craig, with Richard Brooks, paperback, 264 pages, ISBN-10 1-84529-374-6, Constable, 2005, £9.99.

David Craig, a management consultant with 20 years' experience, has written an outstanding book together with Richard Brooks, a tax inspector for 16 years and now a journalist with PRIVATE EYE. They show how the Blair government helps

consultants to loot and wreck our public services and take our hard-earned tax money. This relationship is increasingly corrupt, as the authors show in their detailed account of the government's relations with accountancy firm Arthur Andersen.

Consultancy is basically a rip-off. As a recent book, BUSINESS CONSULTING by Toppin and Czerniawska, admitted, "\$200 billion a year is spent on business consulting, much of it ineffectively." Yet the Blair government has given £70 billion to these

useless mercenaries to "modernise" our public services. The effect? Between 1997 and 2004, public sector productivity fell by 10 per cent, while spending on consultants rose by seven times.

The Private Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnership policies have both meant giving huge sums of public money to private contractors. By the end of 2005, the government had signed PFI contracts worth £50 billion, which committed us taxpayers to paying consultants £7.5 billion every year for the next 20 years – £150 billion overall.

The government has wasted billions on worthless IT systems, for example £50 billion on the NHS's Connecting for Health programme and £19 billion on ID cards. An all-party committee said that the government's record on IT consulting projects was "an appalling waste of public money which Whitehall was trying to conceal behind a cloak of commercial confidentiality".

These consultants' projects are almost always over budget and over schedule. They produce only administrative chaos and huge increases in management costs, leading to cuts in services.

Operations cancelled

In our NHS, they have closed wards, sacked staff and cancelled operations. Three-quarters of hospitals are cutting patient care due to budget constraints, while shareholders in the early PFI hospital schemes got returns of over 100 per cent.

Consultants have also damaged the

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'Three-quarters of hospitals are cutting patient care, while shareholders in the early PFI hospital schemes got returns of over 100 per cent...'

Criminal Records Bureau, Customs & Excise, the Child Support Agency, the Passport Office, Inland Revenue tax credits, National Air Traffic Services and local government. The Department for Work and Pensions has just scrapped a new computer system, which was supposed to streamline benefits payments, at a cost to the taxpayer of £141 million.

The government hired the accountants KPMG to review tax havens in British overseas dependencies, just before a US Senate Financial Committee exposed KPMG's involvement in "the largest criminal tax fraud in history". The MoD spent several hundred millions on PricewaterhouseCoopers and £53 million on McKinsey, yet the Public Accounts Committee reported that the MoD's "cost overruns in 2003 and 2004 are worse than at any time in the last decade".

Consultancy journals crow, "Consultancy fees have risen to their highest level", and "Consultants toast feast of work from Whitehall." A management consultant advises his fellows to vote Labour because "Labour have been reasonably consultant-friendly."

On the book's cover the publishers quote Nick Cohen of the OBSERVER: "Gordon Brown and Tony Blair should invite Craig into Whitehall to reveal the many ingenious ways taxpayers are being compelled to provide welfare for the wealthy." But Brown and Blair know the effects of their policies. The problem is not their ignorance, but our unwillingness to act against a failed system, which plunders the many to enrich the few.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside, Capital. It's our turn now.

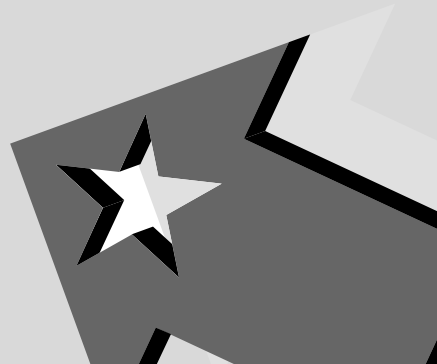
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Back to Front – Unions, incorporated

‘There’s only one piece of advice the TUC should be addressing to migrant workers in Eastern Europe, or anywhere. Stay where you are, organise where you are, build your own country’

GIVEN THE TUC’s less than glorious record in defending workers’ rights in Britain, it’s hard to avoid a feeling of irony in the news last month that TUC experts were heading off to Warsaw to advise Polish workers on what rights and wages to expect in Britain.

The TUC makes no bones about it. It says that migrant labour is good for Britain. Really? Unemployment is rising towards 2 million, and average wages are falling. That’s certainly good for employers. But good for Britain? Good for the working class?

The advice was dispensed at a jobs fair in the Polish capital, organised by Jobcentre Plus, the Department for Work and Pensions agency charged with “supporting people of working age from welfare into work”. It is also supposed to “help people facing the greatest barriers to employment to compete effectively in the labour market and move into and remain in work”.

Just how it does this by encouraging thousands of migrant workers to come to Britain is not clear. Some 10,000 Polish visitors were due to attend the jobs fair, with jobs on offer from Tesco, hotel group Jurys Inn and others. Their arrival in Britain will not encourage anyone into work: it will depress wage rates still further and deprive British workers of work.

There’s only one piece of advice the TUC should be addressing to migrant workers in Eastern Europe, or anywhere. Stay where you are, organise where you are, build your own country.

What the TUC did not say in its announcement of its Polish trip was who was paying for it. On past form, the British taxpayer will be footing all or some of the bill, via the government.

There seems to be a huge slush fund of money available to British trade unions to support government policy abroad. Take the National Union of Journalists. It produces a glossy bulletin called Global Action funded entirely by the Department for International Development (though that fact is not announced in the bulletin). The bulletin lauds the DfID’s latest white paper, and gives support to the government-endorsed UN Millennium goals.

Fancy a weekend at a retreat in Oxfordshire, all expenses paid? Just sign up with the NUJ. You can swan around the world on government and European Union money telling workers abroad how to organise rather than doing it here.

In fact, the government, through the DfID’s Strategic Alliance Agreements, is attempting – with some success – to incorporate trades unions and other bodies into its own agenda.

In Iraq, the British government has been boosting the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (a tame voice arguing against British withdrawal). It even gave Unison £250,000 to train selected Iraqi trade union reps in neighbouring Jordan. The US watched this with envy, finally – to head off trade union opposition at home – following Britain and setting up a Solidarity Centre in Iraq funded by USAID to train Iraqi “trade unionists”. Neither training operation could be undertaken without the oversight of both British and US intelligence services. This is, after all, a war.

Some in the unions have always been prepared to do the government’s bidding for free. Now they are doing it for money. It’s not a good development. Unions must be independent – in thought and finances.

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