

WORKERS

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ON THE ROCKS: WHY CAPITALISM ISN'T STABLE



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WORKERS

Pay your way, capitalist-style

TUESDAY, the day before the Russia v England European Championship qualification match and leading up to the three o'clock news on TalkSport, presenters Hawksbee and Jacobs link with the radio station's correspondent in Moscow. Mike Parry is setting the scene and speaks fulsomely of how the city has changed from the cliché grey of communism into a metropolis made vibrant by rampant free enterprise.

A striking feature of this vital new culture, Parry declared, was prostitution. On almost every street corner, along nearly every street indeed, even emerging from the room next to his in the four star hotel, there were prostitutes. This is, he asserted, an acceptable way for young women to pay their way through medical school. At least, it occurred to one correspondent to WORKERS, they'd be able to treat their own sexually transmitted diseases.

What a trick the Cubans have missed turning. Mired as they resolutely are in those dreary socialist principles, they insist on training doctors freely, and not only for the

benefit of their own country. Brigades of them are sent abroad to minister to some of the most hard pressed people in the world when they could be more gainfully employed servicing the sexual whims of four and five star visitors.

Worse still, they invite young people from impoverished backgrounds where crime and prostitution are often rife into their country and train them as doctors for free. They then return home, each one blighted by STI (Socialist Transmitted Internationalism), to serve the communities from which they've emerged.

Some of those invited into Cuba are from the USA which, given the opportunity, will render Havana into what Moscow has become. Perhaps, should that happen, a future England team will play in Cuba and a radio reporter can then confirm the widespread re-emergence of young women who may be paying their way through medical school.

If not, if Cuba can hold firm, such journalists will have to settle for the delights of present day Moscow's Red Light Square.

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CWU on the front foot

AS WORKERS goes to press, the future shape of the dispute between the Communication Workers' Union and Royal Mail remains unclear. The union has used imaginative tactics to maximise the impact of the strike and has exposed an apparently uninterested management and government.

But what may have passed for senior Royal Mail management's lack of interest in the strike concealed the fact that they were simply waiting for a High Court judge to grant an injunction declaring the strike illegal over technicalities in the balloting process. We can expect this to happen in every dispute because it is virtually impossible to conduct a ballot of large groups of members and strictly comply with the balloting provisions of this government's anti-trade union laws. Royal Mail and the government would like nothing better than to take the CWU through the courts and destroy the union.

The CWU has made some important gains. The front-loaded 6.9 per cent pay rise over 18 months is an improvement on what Brown has tried to enforce in the public sector. The referral to local level of negotiations on changes in working practices could be a mechanism for continuing through guerrilla struggle.

But the attack on pensions, similar to what is happening in other sections of the public sector, could create a new generation of impoverished elderly forced to work into their seventies and eighties. Think about the new entrants to the postal service who will be prevented from joining the existing pension scheme. They will have no security to look forward to when they retire. This is all part of the process of deconstructing the gains we have made over decades, in order to destroy the working class.

In the circumstances faced by the CWU, with an injunction hanging over them and a hostile employer, they must consider how to defend the union. To call for more national strike days would inevitably lead to legal action, fines and ultimately sequestration. On the other hand, the membership have looked and acted solid during the dispute. It may be that it is time to regroup and consider continuing the dispute locally whilst trying to take steps to protect the union nationally. Workers use their imagination in these situations and can usually be relied upon to make the right decisions.

CURRENCIES

Catch a falling dollar



SINCE SEPTEMBER 2003, the US dollar has lost about a quarter of its value against sterling. It has fallen even more sharply since the US Federal Reserve cut rates from 5.25 per cent to 4.75 per cent this September. It is also at record lows against the euro.

The falling dollar pushed up spot gold prices to \$739 an ounce, the highest since 1981. The euro's rise is hurting exports and could lead to job cuts in manufacturing across Europe.

This follows a summer of turmoil in the world's credit markets, sparked by record loan defaults in the US sub-prime mortgage sector. The US property slump is now spreading to the wider economy, and key international investors are losing confidence in the US economy. A record \$163 billion has exited from all forms of US assets, led by unprecedented levels of US bonds sales by Japan, China and Taiwan.

Oil prices have quadrupled since 2002 because of strong demand from fast-growing economies such as China and India.

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

EUOTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Propaganda

THE INDEPENDENT'S front page article on 18 October, "10 Myths about the reform treaty", was a word-for-word reprint of a Foreign Office briefing note, without any attribution that this was the source. THE INDEPENDENT has refused to comment.

Meanwhile, the EU is planning to spend over £593 million of its 2008 budget on supporting "European institutions and associations active in the field of European integration". The Labour government will spend millions funding EU programmes in justice and home affairs, fundamental rights and the common foreign and security policy, despite its claim that it has opted out of these areas.

Timetable

ON 18 AND 19 October, the final draft of the European Union Reform Treaty was agreed at the EU Summit in Lisbon. During the European Council meeting in Brussels in December heads of government will fly to Lisbon for the formal signing and then back again – so that it can be called the Treaty of Lisbon.

EU leaders hope that all members will ratify the treaty during 2008, so it is in force by January 2009. Member governments want their respective parliaments to make the decision – apart from Ireland, which a court ruled is legally bound to hold a referendum.

Polls

YOUNG VOTERS show that few British voters share their government's views. Only 6 per cent believe that the Reform Treaty is different from the EU Constitution. In one poll 69 per cent thought there should be a referendum on the revised EU Constitution, including a majority of voters for each parliamentary party. Elsewhere in Europe polls show similar results.

No choice

BROWN could not risk losing a November election a few weeks after the EU agreed the Treaty, with the Tories committed to a referendum. The ruling class wants Parliament to ratify the Treaty by March 2008. The Treaty would have been ratified for 18 months by the time of a general election in 2009: by then they hope it will be a done deal.



Postal workers on the picket line during their strike – the first national strike in over a decade – over pay and jobs

Photo: Andrew Wiard / www.reportphotos.com

School buses 'not fit for road'

ALMOST HALF of all school buses pulled over by police in the London Borough of Barnet in an October inspection were found either not fit to be on the road or driven by people who should not have been behind the wheel.

Snap inspections carried out by flagging down buses carrying children found major defects including faulty breaks, defective steering, emergency exits that did not work and broken seat belts. One vehicle was so dangerous it was impounded immediately while four more were impounded because the drivers did not have the correct licence or insurance. One driver was not wearing his glasses despite clear DVLA instructions to do so.

All 21 buses surveyed had been hired by private schools, which says a lot about these schools' safety standards and the amount of London traffic associated with taking children to private schools.

It is clear that teaching unions and parents need to request similar snap inspections across the country. Teachers under the government's Every Child Matters policy are exhorted to help children "stay safe" – a good start would be ensuring they don't die getting to school.

SCHOOL MEALS

Council backs down

SCHOOL MEALS in Waltham Forest, north east London, will continue to be kept as an in-house subsidised service until 2009. This victory was achieved after a local campaign fought to prevent the reduction and privatisation of the service, with many local people signing their petition for a properly funded service. This culminated in dinner ladies, cooks, teachers, parents and children marching to the town hall armed with kitchen equipment such as wooden spoons, saucepans, and tin lids chanting "If you want to keep school dinners, bang a pan!"

School dinners have deteriorated since government nutritional standards for school

meals - seen as a key protection for child health - were abandoned by Thatcher (this was by no means her only attack on children - she was also known as "milk snatcher" for doing away with children's entitlement to free school milk). During the Labour years the service has been in crisis, with many local authorities doing away with hot meals altogether, substituting sandwiches for children for whom this might be the main nutritious meal of the day. In Waltham Forest, where child health is a real concern, jobs and standards were threatened by the council's move.

The fight has forced the council to back down. It has now promised to subsidise the school meals service until 2009, to bring schools which opted out back into the service, and to encourage schools to remain with Waltham Forest Catering.

Big win in hospital fight

CAMPAIGNERS fighting to stop Whipps Cross University Hospital in Waltham Forest, northeast London, being downgraded were celebrating in October after a key National Health Service report concluded that there was no alternative but for it to stay as an acute general hospital.

The fight began over a year ago, after an NHS London review process, "Fit for the Future", threw the whole future of the hospital into jeopardy. The local health chiefs in charge of the review now stand accused, in the report by NHS Director of Clinical Excellence Professor Sir George Alberti, of putting financial systems ahead of clinical need and patient care – precisely what the campaigners, from Save Whipps Cross Hospital, had been saying.

Driven by budget deficits and the need to ensure a steady supply of lucrative contracts to a new PFI-built hospital, Queen's in Romford, the health chiefs hatched a plan to strip Whipps Cross of a number of its patients and move them across northeast London to Queen's. This would have resulted in downgrading Whipps from its current status as a District General Hospital, leaving it, perhaps, just as an Ambulance and Emergency centre.

Once it was clear what was going on, local doctors, consultants, nurses and other health professionals joined with residents and trade unionists to begin a united campaign to save their hospital. With united support across all political parties – nominally at least... in fact the Labour Party took no part in campaign activities – the Save Whipps Cross Hospital campaign organised a string of public meetings, and staged the largest demonstration seen in the borough for decades.

But campaigners warn that the fight is not over. Whipps still needs £100 million to modernise its buildings, and health workers are seeing continuing cuts in the local health service, as well as moves by the local Primary Care Trust to privatise services. "Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust appears to be retreating from the direct provision of healthcare services to a commissioning model – and local community services are being decimated," said a statement on the campaign's website.

Campaign Secretary and Whipps consultant Alan Hakim said, "Whipps will only be able to deliver the first rate service that local people deserve if it is fully funded and working with properly resourced community health services."

Management consultants Meridian are recommending £750,000 cuts in district nursing. Campaign Chair Charlotte Monro urged, "We need to be as active in defence of our community services as we have been in defence of our local hospital."

IRAN

Blair calls for war

IN BLAIR'S first major speech since leaving office, at a Roman Catholic charity dinner in New York on 18 October, he called for a new war, against Iran. This might be considered merely the raving of an ex-Prime Minister, had not Brown agreed with Bush in July that Britain would back air strikes on Iran if it could be justified as a "counter-terrorist" operation.

Blair claimed, "This ideology now has a state – Iran – that is prepared to back and finance terror in the pursuit of destabilising countries whose people wish to live in peace." He went on, "There is a tendency even now, even in some of our own circles, to believe that they are as they are because we have provoked them and if we left them alone they would leave us alone. I fear this is mistaken. They have no intention of leaving us alone."

Who is it that won't leave whom alone?

What about the MI6–CIA coup in Iran, Operation Boot, which in 1953 overthrew Mohammad Mossadegh, the popular, democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, and reinstated the country's exiled monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah? Never happened. The recruitment of CIA asset Saddam Hussein to attack Iran in 1980? Never happened. Selling arms to Iraq for its eight-year assault on Iran? Never happened. At least in Blair's view of world events.

Iran has never attacked another country and it has not been implicated in any act of terror against a Western country since 1996. Iran is not a threat. It is not about to attack anybody. There is no reason to attack it.

But there are threats to attack Iran. The USA and Britain have stationed troops along Iraq and Afghanistan's borders with Iran and the USA is building a base on the Iraq–Iran border.

Any attack on Iran would be illegal, a breach of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Saturday 3 November, London, 11am.
March to celebrate and defend the NHS

Called by Unison. Sets off from the Embankment (Temple Place) at 11am and marches to rally in Trafalgar Square.

Wednesday 7 November, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1, 7.30pm.

Revolution! Remember Russia 1917 and Look to the Future! 90th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. All welcome. Celebrate humanity's greatest achievement so far. Nearest Tube, Holborn.

EDUCATION

Northern Ireland strikes

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT members of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance began a successful campaign on pay with a one-day strike on 26 September, then 3 days the following week and then on to indefinite strike the week after. All 26 special schools in NI were closed and all 3,000 NIPSA classroom assistants remained resolute and disciplined throughout. After the first one-day strike the employers attempted to buy out their historic pay and conditions by finding another £15 million but this was rejected by angry classroom assistants. One of their major concerns was to retain recognition of their NVQ3 qualification to stop the employers deskilling this area of work.

The employers finally agreed to go to arbitration at the end of the week of all-out strike action. After intense negotiations the employers backed down from their intransigent position, and meetings took place across Northern Ireland on whether to suspend the strike while the negotiations went on. They voted to suspend action until 30 October to give the employers time to make a better offer. But only a much improved offer will stop further strike action after the half-term holiday.

A vital part of the classroom assistants' campaign has been a fight for proper funding of special needs education. Teachers in special schools supported this action by standing on the picket lines with the classroom assistants, recognising that this was their fight too. They too will soon have to take up the struggle for a properly funded service.

OBITUARY

John Kelly-Chandler



IT IS WITH great sadness and loss that the death of Comrade John Edward Kelly-Chandler is announced. John had been suffering from terminal lung cancer during the last 12 months and though stoically bearing through the treatment and ravages of the illness, he succumbed while on holiday in Ravello, Italy, on 9 October 2007.

John, who had been a Party member for nearly 20 years, was a larger than life character both physically and in generosity of human spirit, whose working life had spanned numerous occupations. From flour milling to merchant marine, from baker to selling cosmetics, from shoe salesman to the Electricity Generating Board, John had been there and done it.

His employment with the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) saw his involvement with the white-collar union Nalgo, later Unison. From being a shop steward at West Ham Power Station he rose to become Branch Secretary, then a member of the National Electricity Committee and finally Nalgo's National Executive Council – the picture above shows him in action at a meeting. In 1991 he became a member of the union's staff, a position he held as Regional Organiser in Greater London until his death.

John maintained a loyalty and discipline to his union and members, ranging from fighting for a remote working allowance covering the then power stations on the Thames in the 1970s, to leading solidarity work in the CEGB during the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, through all the convulsions of trying to resist the privatisation of the electricity supply industry under Thatcher and Parkinson. In recent years he worked predominantly with Unison health branches in southeast London and built a stewards' network which has consistently produced new leaders and activists in and for the union. Grudgingly respected and feared by the employers as "that bearded grumpy bastard from Region", he was known as a negotiator who delivered and seen as a friend and mentor by members and stewards alike.

Born in Hastings, adopted by Hartlepool becoming a staunch and dedicated Hartlepool United fan, lifelong resident of London, latterly Charlton, buried in his beloved Ravello, our condolences reach out to his wife Jean and family.

He came, he saw, he surrendered. Lisbon ready to hand over British

EU Constitution – Brown

WITH HIS now trademark combination of bluster and bottle, Brown signed the Reform Treaty in Lisbon establishing a conveyor belt to ship power out of Britain and over to Brussels. First the bluster: no need for a referendum, he said. Then the bottle: he stayed away from the champagne celebration that followed, suspecting, rightly, that it wouldn't play well in front of his home crowd.

Earlier, Labour's wish to sweep the EU Reform Treaty out of the headlines took an unexpected blow. Though Brown wants Parliament to decide instead of holding a referendum, he may have opposition there too.

The House of Commons Select Committee on European Scrutiny reported in October: "Taken as a whole, the Reform Treaty produces a general framework which is substantially equivalent to the Constitutional Treaty. Even with the 'opt-in' provisions on police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, and the Protocol on the Charter, we are not convinced that the same conclusion does not apply to the position of the UK."

This contradicts the government's feeble claim that the two are so different that it can tear up its manifesto commitment to a referendum.

The committee said, "We do not consider that references to abandoning a 'constitutional concept' or 'constitutional characteristics' are helpful and consider that they are even likely to be misleading in so far as they might suggest the Reform Treaty is of lesser significance than the Constitutional Treaty."

BBC Europe Editor Mark Mardell described the report as "damning", arguing that it "questions, perhaps even undermines, just about all the government's main claims for that controversial text ... it's rare for a Labour-dominated committee [9 out of 16 members] to produce a report quite so unhelpful to the government."

Picking apart the detail

Not only was the committee unimpressed with the main thrust of the government's position on the treaty, but it also picked apart the detail on which Brown's claims are made.

It noted, "Article I-6 of the Constitutional Treaty provided that 'the Constitution and law adopted by the institutions of the Union in exercising competences conferred on it shall have primacy over the law of the Member States'. This provision will not be taken over in the Reform Treaty but will be replaced by a Declaration. As the Declaration will provide that 'in accordance with the settled case-law of the EU Court of Justice, the Treaties and the law adopted by the Union on the basis of the Treaties have primacy over the law of Member States, under the conditions laid down by the said case-law', no substantial difference from the effect of I-6 of the Constitutional Treaty seems intended, or is likely to result."

The committee also said, "We wish to emphasise that the proposals in the Reform Treaty raise a serious difficulty of a constitutional order in as much as they appear to impose, whether by accident or design, a legal duty on national parliaments 'to contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union' by taking part in various described activities. National parliaments, unlike the European Parliament, are not creations of the Treaties and their

As promised, Gordon Brown turned up to the EU summit in sovereignty. But even then he couldn't do it with a straight face

n's shamefaced betrayal of Britain



Photo: Council of Europe

Why can't they look people straight in the eye? Gordon Brown at the Lisbon summit where he signed away British rights. Right, Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates.

rights are not dependent on them. In our view, the imposition of such a legal duty on the Parliament of this country is objectionable as a matter of principle and must be resisted."

It noted that the Treaty contains a "ratchet clause", allowing member states to agree that decisions currently taken only by unanimous vote can in future be taken by majority vote. It also contains provisions allowing the EU to amend the objectives of most EU policies without any more controversial treaties. This is the basis of Brown's claim that the treaty is good because it ends structural arguments.

The report also warned that despite the government's claims that it had defended its "red lines" on foreign policy, labour legislation, the common law and the tax and social security systems, Britain

may find itself effectively signed up to the provisions set out in the old Constitution.

The committee's chair, Labour MP Michael Connarty, said, "We believe that the red lines will not be sustainable. Looking at the legalities and use of the European Court of Justice, we believe these will be challenged bit by bit and eventually the UK will be in a position where all of the treaty will eventually apply to the UK." He added, "If they can't get these things firmed up, we think they will basically leak like a sieve."

Europe Minister Jim Murphy claimed, "the Charter does not create any new rights in the United Kingdom or other member state." But many of the rights in the Charter are either completely new or derived from documents to which Britain is not a signatory. Murphy claimed that the government had "very strong legal

advice that the protocol on the Charter is watertight legally".

But, oddly enough, the government is refusing to publish this legal advice. Connarty noted, "The Charter of Fundamental Rights, on which the Government claimed originally to have an opt-out, is actually going to have effect in the UK."

Connarty also criticised the secretive nature of the drafting process for the Treaty, saying, "The European Council claims it wants to provide EU citizens with 'full and comprehensive information' during the IGC. However, the essentially secret drafting process conducted by the Presidency, combined with texts produced at the last moment before pressing for agreement, could not have been better designed to marginalise the role of national parliaments."

The banks tried to hush things up – and then came Northern Rock. The fact is, things are going to get even worse...

On the rocks: why capitalism isn't stable



Photo: Workers

Canary Wharf: still building, but how solid are the financial foundations?

THE RECENT volatility in Britain's financial markets was first sighted in May when the debt from the Boots Chemist sale was offered as a yield-bearing product by investment banks. The offer had to be pulled within days, as there were no takers, meaning that the £10 billion debt had to remain on the investment banks' own balance sheets.

Hitherto such debt had easily been sold on but investment banks were suddenly unable to do so, meaning their available liquidity for the next deal had disappeared. The lack of take-up on the Boots debt was so worrying that the banks tried to hush things up but the news crept out and the jitters had set in.

For the past seven years the ability to raise capital for such deals as Boots had been straightforward. Interest rates worldwide had remained at forty-year lows

but the cycle started to change at the beginning of this year. For example Japanese interest rates that had previously been at levels of 0 per cent to 0.25 per cent moved to 0.5 per cent and the Japanese yen soared on the currency markets.

The reason why this had a significant impact was because of a practice called the "carry trade". This is where capital at say 0.5 per cent interest is borrowed in Japan and then converted into for example sterling to invest for a rate of interest of 5.75 per cent. Much capital for private equity is raised this way not only in yen but also from other currencies, such as the Swiss franc for the same interest rate benefits.

But deals of this nature only work when interest rates are low. What is less well understood is the risk that if the currency

that has been borrowed against revalues, the relative value of the original sum borrowed mushrooms. A rise in the value of the yen means the huge-scale "carry trade" borrowers will have to pay back a lot more than they thought. Will they be able to pay? Wondering, the markets catch the jitters; banks hesitate to loan money or, as it is now often called, "buy debt".

Currency wars

Currency risk is also inherent in the little-recorded battle that has been taking place between the USA and China. China has built up a \$1,400 billion trade surplus but the US has allowed the dollar to slide against other currencies with the aim of devaluing China's dollar-denominated surplus. At the same time the US has been trying to force the Chinese yuan currency to be revalued, which in turn would further erode China's surplus when repatriating its dollars back into yuan. The EU ambassador to China, Serge Abou, has also joined the attack by saying, "Apparently China's trade surplus has no limit and we do not see efficient measures. These facts are considered with a certain bitterness in our leadership." In fact the risk of worldwide currency volatility is at present considered so great that gold prices have soared due to gold being considered the only safe haven.

All this sheds some light on the Northern Rock situation, where pictures of people queuing to get their money out of the bank were having such an effect on sterling that international financiers were also beginning to think that a run on British institutions might prevent them from exiting with their wedge of cash.

The interesting thing about the day Alistair Darling at 5pm announced the government guarantee on Northern Rock, is that the pound had slid quite significantly against the euro. Those pictures of the British people queuing needed to be taken off the screens as quickly as possible, because suddenly the exchange rate was at risk. We are now heading for even more difficult times with Britain generally being viewed as a previously rich uncle who has yet to work out where all his former wealth has gone.

The Iraqi people understand why their country has been reduced from an advanced country in their region to one from which 60,000 flee their homes each month...

Smash and grab in Iraq

BRITISH MILITARY officers are sometimes a source of insight into the failures of US tactics in Iraq. Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, Deputy Commander of the Office of Security Transition in the Coalition Office for Training and Organizing Iraq's Armed Forces, has written in the journal *MILITARY REVIEW*, "U.S. Army personnel were too inclined to consider offensive operations and destruction of the insurgents as the key to a given situation," without due regard for protecting the population.

The brigadier certainly has a point, but the implication given in such criticisms is usually that if only British army tactics were followed the dire military situation there might be saved.

Strategic failure

It is at the much higher level of strategy that we must look for the reasons for failure, and Britain is at the heart of that. Take the key issue of Iraq's oil. Remember when Blair told us, "the very reason we're taking the action we are is nothing to do with oil"? Remember when he told Parliament that "people falsely claim that we want to seize" Iraq's oil? What has actually happened?

Iraq has proven reserves of 115 billion barrels, 10 per cent of global reserves, the world's biggest untapped market. The multinational oil companies only own 4 per cent of the world's oil, and there is a growing trend towards nationalisation, from Venezuela to Kazakhstan. So in 2004, the Foreign Office held talks with Britain's oil companies. Then BP and Shell, together with Chevron, Exxon, Total and ENI hired Washington-based corporate lobbyist the International Tax and Investment Center. Unsurprisingly, the ITIC, advised by the Foreign Office and the Treasury, said that production-sharing agreements (PSAs) were the only way forward for Iraq. The PSAs are like colonial-era concessions, giving the companies virtually unlimited profits.

None of the top six OPEC countries uses PSAs. Instead they have service contracts, which allow the state to keep full authority over all production decisions and consign the companies to the role of



Photo: US Army

Just like home: corporate power and multinationals everywhere.

contractor. The British Ambassador to Iraq himself sent the ITIC report to Iraq's Finance Minister. Now the oil companies, the US and British governments and the International Monetary Fund are trying to force through a law allowing 100 per cent foreign ownership of all Iraq's oilfields. It would allow foreign companies to explore, develop, produce and sell Iraq's oil under exclusive contracts lasting up to 30 years.

Call for oil in public hands

However, the 26,000 members of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions want a unified oil industry in public hands. They organised a meeting in September, "Oil wealth belongs to the Iraqi people".

The Iraqi government, reapplying Saddam's laws banning unions in the

public sector, has ruled the union illegal and wants to shut it down, breaching Iraq's Constitution, which endorses the right to form unions. The oil minister has refused to recognise it. Yet it is strong enough to force Iraq's Prime Minister to meet it to discuss pay and the oil law.

In June, the government issued arrest warrants against the union's leaders and Iraqi troops occupied the oil fields to foil strike threats. The TUC has condemned the government's thuggish tactics and called for recognition of the union and negotiations.

The Iraqi people understand why their country has been reduced from an advanced country in their region to one from which 60,000 flee their homes each

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month. They see an average of 62 violent deaths a day. Four million people regularly cannot buy enough to eat and 70 per cent are without decent water supplies. And the British government and military talk about the importance of winning “hearts and minds”!

Take the question of Iraq’s children, who represent the future for Iraqis. What has the Iraq war – which Brown has supported without reservation from its outset to the present day – brought to them?

Iraq’s Ministry of Health estimates that half of the country’s children suffer from malnutrition. According to a recent study by UNICEF, 10 per cent of Iraqi children under five are acutely malnourished, while another 20 per cent are chronically malnourished. 260,000 children have died as a result of the occupation, according to one estimate.

Less than a third of Iraq’s children now attend school, compared with 100 per cent attendance before the March 2003 invasion. A recent survey of Baghdad primary schools showed that 70 per cent of those who do go to school suffer symptoms of trauma-related stress, due directly to the destruction, mass slaughter and chaos caused by war and occupation.

‘Four million people regularly cannot buy enough to eat...And the British government and military talk about the importance of winning “hearts and minds”!’

The war has orphaned countless Iraqi children and, as the United Nations reports, “Thousands of homeless children throughout Iraq ... survive by begging, stealing or scavenging garbage for food. Only four years ago, the vast majority of these children were living at home with their families.”

The virtual collapse of the Iraqi health service – once the best in the Middle East – has been particularly tragic for Iraqi children. Earlier this year, 100 prominent British doctors wrote an open letter to Blair expressing their extreme concern over the impact of the occupation on Iraqi children: “We are concerned that children are dying in Iraq for want of medical treatment. Sick or injured children, who

could otherwise be treated by simple means, are left to die in their hundreds because they do not have access to basic medications or other resources. Children who have lost hands, feet and limbs are left without prostheses. Children with grave psychological distress are left untreated.”

Hearts and minds, indeed. It is a totally hypocritical, morally bankrupt operation in Iraq, doomed to pull us all down with the Iraqi people while enriching the oil companies and others involved there.

Meanwhile the Bush-Brown campaign in Afghanistan is beginning to unravel with potentially even higher costs. One British military officer has put it quite bluntly, without merely trying to blame US tactics. Brigadier John Lorimer, commander of British troops in Helmand province, recently said, “There is no military solution to this.” He also said, “This is a counter-insurgency operation which is going to take time. It could last a decade. The counter-narcotic problem, which is huge, could take another 25 years. The British Ambassador has said it will take 30 years. He has often said that this mission is a marathon, not a sprint, and he is absolutely right.” He admitted that the Afghan government might eventually be forced to negotiate with the Taliban if peace was ever to be achieved.

BADGE OFFER – Nationalise water. Reclaim our most vital resource!

BRITISH WATER supplies are in the hands of foreign owned monopoly companies who are enjoying a cash bonanza while our infrastructure crumbles. If the ridiculously high profits made by these companies in the last few years had been channelled into developing a national water grid and other infrastructure projects we would no longer be facing a water shortage.

As it stands, if there is low rainfall in the South East in any winter, then by the following summer much of South East England will be using standpipes.

Severn Water, for example, has seen an 18 per cent rise in profits as complaints against the company rose by 55 per cent and it was investigated for providing false data to OFWAT. And since it acquired Thames Water in 2000, RWE (its German parent company) has extracted over £1 billion in dividends to shareholders!

FIGHT BACK with a Nationalise Water! badge, available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.



Why does the TUC do the government's bidding over Burma but ignore identical situations in countries that are capitalism's allies? Is it already an arm of the Foreign Office?

TUC: chasing shadows



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Why is the government encouraging demonstrations over Burma?

SO A HIGH Court judge has declared the CWU postal strike illegal (on technicalities). Any union activist who has been involved in organising an industrial action ballot knows that it is now virtually impossible to conduct a legal strike, again on technicalities. Add to this the self inflicted wound in the form of legal advice requested by the Universities and Colleges Union leadership to torpedo a policy that could have led to a boycott of Israel. Getting legal advice on this implies lawyers will decide what we can discuss in union meetings.

With all this going on, you could be forgiven for thinking that the TUC and the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) would soon be off to the International Labour Organisation to argue for the right to withdraw labour and to have right of association in Britain.

Wrong. Both bodies have nailed their colours to the mast of free market capitalism, the deadly enemy of organised labour. The ITUC sees one of its roles as "spreading democracy" in the world. Where have we heard that before? For example, it applauds the EU trade sanctions on Belarus, imposed because of a "lack of trade union rights". (When did

the EU ever support workers?) The ITUC hit list of countries mirrors that of the EU and US. It tries to interfere in other countries in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Meanwhile, the TUC and most of the big British trade unions meekly adopt the British government's line on immigration and on most international matters (the notable exception being Cuba). Union leaders grovel to agree, at Brown's request, not to rock the boat at Labour Party Conferences while union officials, both lay and full time, scramble over one another to get a Parliamentary seat.

Who's influencing whom?

The new Unite union plans to abandon Britain to spend its time lobbying the European Parliament and to merge with US unions. The executive says because it is so big, and has appointed Brown's old PR guru as its Political Officer, it can influence Brown and the EU. Who are they kidding?

The TUC has echoed Brown's call for strong EU sanctions against Burma. OK, Burma is ruled by the military, but so is neighbouring Thailand where a military coup overthrew the elected government last year, and so is neighbouring Pakistan whom the US and Britain lavish with

military hardware and aid.

Why does the TUC do the government's bidding over Burma but ignore identical situations in countries that are capitalism's allies? Is it an arm of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

In fact the British media would have us believe that General Musharraf in Pakistan has just been elected President by a landslide when, in truth, only 252 of his cronies were allowed to vote out of a population of 165 million. The US-sponsored deal for a Pakistani power sharing pro-US government with ex President Bhutto was done in Britain.

Why the double standards over Burma? Are Buddhist monks there a force for progress? Those, for example, who call for the separation of Tibet from China and the return of the Dalai Lama seek the restoration of feudalism? The situation in Burma is a matter for, and can only be resolved by, the Burmese people.

The TUC parrots Gordon Brown's call for Zimbabwean President Mugabe to be banned from attending the Africa-EU conference in Portugal in December despite all African countries and the Commonwealth insisting that it is up to Zimbabwe to decide who represents it.

And the TUC supports the concept of "smart" sanctions on Sudan over Darfur as if there were only one side to this dispute, and it opposes Chinese loans to Africa that are made without conditions. Instead, it prefers the strings of World Bank and IMF loans that had led to such suffering.

What Burma, Zimbabwe and Sudan have in common is that they have not bent their knee to American imperialism. That's why they are singled out. It's become almost normal to assume that European and US governments have the right to interfere in any country's internal affairs. This is increasingly becoming the view of the TUC and many unions.

Are they sleepwalking into a corporate relationship with the government, or are they already there? Whatever happened to the independent trade unions that we were so proud of? Is the TUC chasing shadows internationally to avoid the reality of issues facing British workers at home?

London's children haven't given up on progress. They aren't yet capitalism to solve even the basics of life in London. But there a

Growing up in London – the challenge for c

THE UNITED NATIONS recently published its report into children's lives. British children didn't come out too well – at least, their quality of life didn't. The picture corresponds roughly with press reports, and you wonder how much the children asked about their quality of life were influenced by what they had read or heard in the news.

In London, all the news reports seem to be bad in relation to young people. There is a constant stream of accounts of violent attacks, knifings and shootings perpetrated by young people in our capital city. These are real and the perpetrators need dealing with, no liberal doubts required. What has to be remembered is that muggers and gangsters and so-called "foot-soldiers" are a threat but they're not typical of London's children. But how have we got to this pass and how do children view the existence we have forged for them?

What children say

Southwark Council regularly surveys the youngsters in its schools. The "Pupil Voice" shows, among many things, the following views of children growing up in some of the poorest and richest areas in the country.

- 66 per cent of secondary children and 80 per cent of primary children felt secure and safe at school.

- 18 per cent of pupils said they had been bullied quite often at school whereas 47 per cent said they'd never experienced bullying; 35 per cent had been but not often.

- 47 per cent thought that their secondary school acted against bullying and 69 per cent thought primary schools did.

- Somewhat surprisingly, 78 per cent of primary and 71 per cent of secondary children said they had not been the victims of crime. More worryingly, 27 per cent of secondary children claimed to have been the victims of crime. In Southwark, that represents around 2000 children.

- Only 1 per cent of primary children go home for lunch.



An estate in Tower Hamlets: the percentage of people living in poverty is not declining in the central London boroughs, where 48 per cent live in poor households.

- 28 per cent of students didn't play computer games; 12 per cent spent more than 5 hours a day playing on their computers.

- 72 per cent of youngsters would like to go on to higher education when they leave school.

While there are some negatives in the responses, the children seem surprisingly optimistic and well motivated. They haven't given up on progress. They aren't yet sucked into the negativity spawned by the inability of capitalism to solve even the basics of life in London. But there are major realities we have to deal with as a class, if our next generations are going to be able to build a future, here.

The conditions of life for many of the capital's children are not good. In inner London, 50 per cent of children live in overcrowded accommodation. This means that at least 150,000 children are living in poor conditions.

The situation is exacerbated by the speculative building that's going on, regardless of the needs of the population. Land is at a premium. Developers try to

cram as many flats as possible into the smallest space. Hence, an explosion of expensive and small flats and very little family-sized accommodation at affordable prices. One-bedroom flats in the East End are now selling at just under £300,000. Families are being driven out or driven into hopelessly unsuitable accommodation. Meanwhile, rents are going through the roof and it's called a "boom". The 4000 who shared the City bonuses at Christmas fuel 'buy-to-let', whilst 14000 families are in temporary accommodation at an average cost in rent of £300 per week.

Households without work

A third of children in Inner London are brought up by a single parent and though that is not necessarily a problem for the individual, in general terms, two parents tend to be better than one. What makes life more difficult in London is that 40 per cent of single-parent households do not have income from employment and over 60 per cent of single-parent households are living below the poverty line.

sucked into the negativity spawned by the inability of
are major challenges ahead for them...

Children

Contrary to anecdotal evidence, it's harder for people to find part-time work in London compared to elsewhere in Britain. There is a real shortage of work that enables people to work around school hours. So we are witnessing massive degrees of poverty amongst children and young people in the capital.

Across London as a whole, the percentage of children living in poverty has fallen to about 35 per cent. However, in the central boroughs it hasn't moved from 48 per cent of all children living in households with income below 66 per cent of the average.

Again, this means that as well as living in poor accommodation, hundreds of thousands of London's children are existing below the poverty line.

Easy to import labour

London's secondary-age children do better than the national average. However, a third of London's jobs are going to require pre-degree-level qualifications and 50 per cent of our children are still not approaching those levels. That means it's easy for employers to encourage cheap foreign labour to come into the jobs, putting further pressure on the workers and their children already here, regardless of their origins. Because of inward migration from both abroad and from the rest of Britain, London's children experience high levels of mobility. This puts a massive strain on London's schools with over twice the national levels of pupil mobility and twice the levels of teacher turnover. It is hard for children to settle in such circumstances and whilst it is predominantly a problem in the central boroughs, nonetheless it is having a knock-on effect throughout the capital.

The so-called Mayor's London Plan, if it were ever to be enacted, would start to ameliorate many of these problems, especially around housing. If the proposals of the London Housing Associations were to be taken up, again, the capital's children would have a better start in life. Is that likely?

Gordon Brown's eco-housing,

Children in the capital

Poverty

Over 40 per cent of all London children and over 50 per cent of Inner London children are living in poverty. Poverty is closely associated with unemployment.

Education

London children do less well at GCSE (marginally) than do children nationally. At other stages, London's children are some 10 per cent behind the rest though this masks wide variations in performance.

Housing

England's 10 most overcrowded areas are in London. Overcrowding is closely linked with childhood illness and injury.

Road traffic accidents

In 2004, there were 4200 child casualties on London's roads although this shows a decrease since the early 1990s.

Infant mortality rates

Inner London rates generally are higher compared to Outer. Overall, 2001-2003, the rate was 5.7 per 1000. Stillbirth is often associated with small birth weight.

Health

Children self-reporting on their own health compare with national rates.

Around 90 per cent think they are in good health. However, young people's sexual health is the worst in the country. Conception rates amongst the under-18s are 21 per cent higher in London than in the rest of England. Rates of gonorrhoea are twice that of the rest of the country. The rising trend of sexually transmitted diseases amongst the young continues.

Mental health

Disorders among children and young people, particularly young males (11-15), are higher than the national average.

Diet

Children in London eat more fresh fruit and vegetables than in the country as a whole (most primary schools subscribe to the Fruit for Schools programme).

Youth and crime

Southwark, Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham have the highest incidence of youth crime. In 2004-05, young people accounted for 21 per cent of all those accused of crime. Westminster, Bromley, Haringey, Lewisham and Croydon were the areas with the highest numbers of youth accused of crime.

mentioned in his "election address", can be safely ignored. We know it won't happen and the allocation to London wouldn't even scratch the surface. But being cynical isn't enough. The knowledge in our class of what is necessary to guarantee every youngster the "world class citizenship" we're told is their birthright, is second to none. We have plans for housing; plans for schools; plans for health and plans for recreation. They may be entitled "The Mayor's", but we researched them and we wrote them. But plans are precisely what they will remain unless we grasp the nettle and act as a class to get them implemented.

London's children are more likely to have respiratory health problems; less likely to commit suicide but more likely to be attacked and be the victim of violent crime than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. They are also more likely to suffer mental health problems and in some parts of the city are less likely to be in education or in training or work.

Most of our children have high aspirations for themselves and their country and their city. We must look at and decide how those dreams can become real. Recognising how vibrant and positive most of our children are is a start.

Fed on a diet of Braveheart tosh, it's perhaps little wonder many think the Act of Union was just an English conquest. The truth is some

The Act of Union and the birth of Britain

THE 1707 UNION between England and Scotland was made in a period of state building and wars between rival empires when England was at war with France.

After the 1688 revolution had deposed James II of England (James VII of Scotland) many members of the Scottish parliament searched for a union to secure the revolutionary settlement. In 1688–89, the Scottish Convention ratified the revolution, listing the offences committed by James. They resolved that he had violated “the fundamental constitution of this kingdom and altered it from a legal limited monarchy to an arbitrary despotic power”. Building on this, the Scottish parliament of 1706–7 progressed towards the Act of Union.

Economic arguments

The economic arguments for union were strong. Before the Union, manufacturing was weak, agriculture backward and trade scanty, all stifled by the mercantilist system. As Scottish MP William Seton said, “This nation being poor, and without force to protect its commerce, cannot reap great advantage by it, till it partake of the trade and protection of some powerful neighbour nation, that can communicate both these ... By this Union, we will have access to all the advantages in commerce the English enjoy.”

Commissioners from England and Scotland negotiated for months. The English commissioners conceded the Scots' request that in return for agreeing to a single British parliament and to the Hanoverian succession, they should have “full freedom and intercourse of Trade and Navigation within the ... United Kingdom and Plantations thereunto belonging”. By insisting that the Union should work to Scotland's advantage, the Scottish parliament provided Scots with unprecedented opportunities for personal and national achievement.

Curbing religion

There were other good reasons for Union. Many Scottish presbyterians urged their countrymen to support the Union to save

England and Scotland from the joint threat of Catholic France and the deposed Stuarts. Englishmen and Scots united against ‘Popish Bigotry and French Tyranny’.

In 1706, King Louis XIV of France sent funds “to bribe our Parliament ... as to hinder the two nations from being united”. An English MP warned that without Union, “You will always find a Popish Pretender intriguing amongst you ... Embarrassing your Affairs ... Jumbling you into Confusion [to] open a door to his own designs upon you.”

States, but not churches

The Union was a revolutionary novelty because it was a Union of states without being a union of churches. The Act of Security for the Kirk established the Church of Scotland as independent of the sovereignty of the British parliament, winning Presbyterian support for the Union. The Union forbade the Church of England to establish Anglicanism in Scotland, as Charles I had tried. Equally, it forbade presbyterians to establish

Presbyterianism in England, as the Solemn League and Covenant had tried. Britain became a single state, with two established churches, but in effect no dominant church. The union meant an end to wars of religion in Britain.

The Union also guaranteed the independence of Scottish law and education. It was no one-sided dictation, no simple incorporation. The vigour of the Scots' existing traditions and institutions ensured that they shaped the Union too.

There is no basis for the simplistic and insulting view that “the Scots were bought and sold for English gold”. The Union was a genuine choice, albeit from a position of weakness (as Seton pointed out), but brilliantly negotiated. Rather than a product of English expansionism, it was based on mutual benefit.

The Scottish parliament discussed the Act of Union clause by clause from 12 October 1706 to 16 January 1707. In England, by contrast, the Act was rammed through a Commons committee in a single sitting. It came into force on 1



The Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh: support for separatism is falling in Scotland.

y in Scotland think
ewhat different...

May 1707.

France tried, too late, to undo the Union. In 1708, the Royal Navy foiled a French invasion force of 6,000 troops, accompanied by the pretender James Stuart.

Separatism again

Now, 300 years later, some raise again the cry of "blame the English" for Scotland's ills. It is harder, but more accurate, to blame capitalism. The Scottish Executive wrongly calls itself a 'Government'. There can be two churches in one state, but not two governments. Its recent White Paper "Choosing Scotland's Future" included a question and ballot paper for a referendum on Scottish "independence".

But a referendum in Scotland alone on the break-up of Britain is to assume the point at issue, and would not meet the needs of democracy. Democracy demands that all British citizens, being equal before the law and equally entitled to a vote, should be asked whether they want to break up Britain, by changing the nature, form and size of the nation to which we belong.

Even in such an undemocratic setup as the White Paper proposes, the separatists look increasingly unlikely to win: support for separatism fell from 51 per cent in January to 31 per cent in August. More people in Scotland are realising the phoney nature of so-called "independence".

The Scottish National Party's goal is not "independence for Scotland" but "independence within the EU". That is, not independence, but dependence on the EU, Scotland as a province of the EU state.

A proposed formal change to the independent state of Britain by transferring power to a separate Scotland is just as certainly grounds for a referendum across all of Britain as the proposed formal change by transferring power to the EU.

These represent a two-pronged attack on our greatest historical legacy: an independent, united Britain.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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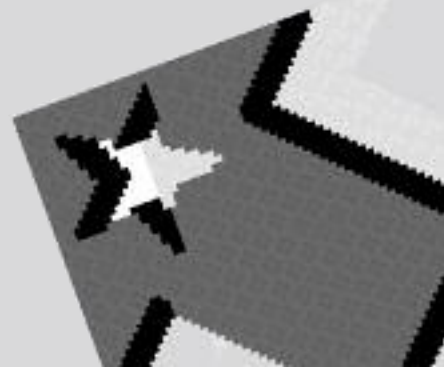
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Back to Front – Fraudulent, and phoney

‘Any illusions that British workers may have had about a break with the past were rudely dismissed by events in September...’

SO GORDON BROWN promised us a new type of politics. No spin, more inclusiveness and honesty. Any illusions that British workers may have had about a break with the past were rudely dismissed by events in September. As an early election was hyped up during the Labour Party Conference, crucial announcements were brought forward to persuade the British electorate to vote Labour in a November poll. An increase in the National Minimum Wage, the Comprehensive Spending Review and a visit to Iraq during the Tory Party Conference with the false announcement that 1000 British troops would be home by Christmas were all part of Brown’s attempts to deceive British workers.

But he was forced to back off when people saw through his deception and spin and Labour consequently spiralled out of control in the polls. We were then treated to the bizarre spectacle of the Labour Party stealing policies from the Tories, and even complaints from the Liberal Democrats that the Tories had stolen them from their party – though since no one really knows what the Liberal Democrat policies are, that’s hard to prove.

Certainly the pre-Budget announcement by Brown’s poodle, Alistair Darling, showed that Labour is second to none when it comes to transferring wealth from the poor to the rich. And the idler the rich, the greater the transfer.

Any of the myriad of buy-to-let scum now infesting our cities who sells a house at a profit of £100,000 this year will pay £34,000 in tax. But wait until April when the budget comes into force, and the tax bill goes down to £18,000. Basic rate

taxpayers – many of them struggling to get a foot on the housing ladder – are now to subsidise those who produce nothing.

After the unedifying tax handout, Brown went further. He called on the EU to be even more “liberal” in its market economics, calling for more privatisation, while saying that there was no need for a referendum on the new EU Constitutional Reform Treaty which institutionalises just this “liberalism”.

British workers have been exposed to the real nature of the phoney democracy that is bourgeois democracy. It does not represent the will of the people. It is simply a mechanism for maintaining capitalist control. There is no difference between the parties because they all represent capitalism. They really are the same. Are we to be faced with an election costing millions that would only give us the choice of exactly what level Inheritance Tax will kick in?

Working class democracy is about involving workers in decision making at all levels in mass organisations, such as our trade unions, and in developing policies to advance the interests of workers. It is incompatible with the interests of capitalism and does not rely on phoney competition and rivalry between political parties.

We could make a small start on the road to working class democracy by not playing the game of Brown’s capitalist democracy. We could boycott the next general election as a positive act. Not just by not voting, but as a voters strike, because to stand a chance of moving to working class democracy we must first deny the legitimacy of this fraudulent and phoney democracy.

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