

WORKERS

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PEACE, JOBS,
POWER:
statement from the
14th Congress of the
CPB(ML)

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TUC: DON'T DELEGATE – CONTROL!



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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

First thoughts

BRITAIN, as presently constituted, is not working. Parliamentary democracy has always been about maintaining the rule of capitalism, and it is now clearer than ever that parliament is failing to represent the will of the British people. We do not support Bush's foreign wars, but parliament does. Most of us think that the attack on Iraq was wrong, but parliament voted for it.

Most of us wouldn't trust Blair as far as we could throw him, but parliament still backs him. We do not want the euro here, or the EU Constitution or foundation hospitals or tuition fees for students, but parliament votes for all these things. We want to rebuild Britain, but parliament doesn't. Parliament is not working: it doesn't do what the people want.

The British constitution clearly does not work, even according to its own convoluted rules. The fabled checks and balances — the separation of powers, parliamentary representation, the supposed democracy of the parliamentary parties, EU membership, the new

assemblies, regional powers — all fail to control an over-mighty executive.

They have not stopped Blair taking us to war, against the will of the people. They have not stopped Blair trying to take us into the euro, against the will of the people. They have not stopped Blair trying to sign us up to the EU state's shiny new Constitution, against the will of the people. They have not stopped him ramming through foundation hospitals and tuition fees, against the will of the people.

The Labour Party is not doing what we want, but then it was never its job to deliver us from capitalism. Its sole aim is to provide an alternative government through parliament, as part of the state, within the constitution. It has always faithfully served the employing class.

Recognising this, ever since its foundation, some members have tried, futilely, to reform it into something useful. Many have ridden it as their primrose path to fame. But it has always remained on the side of the employers. No party can serve two masters.

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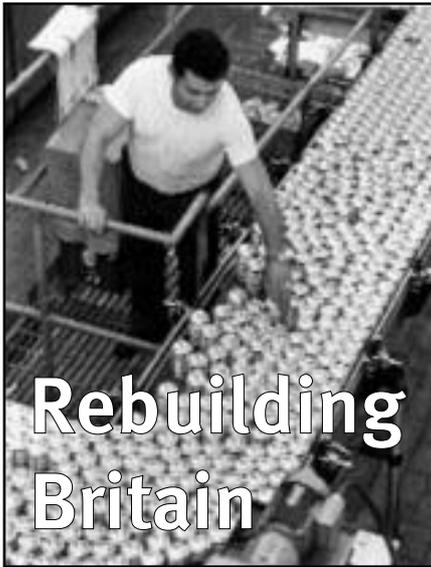
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Bringing power to its knees

DRAX, BRITAIN'S largest coal-fired power station, has been bankrupt for over 12 months with debts of over £1.3 billion. It has been brought to its knees by a combination of factors, including the insolvency of its previous owners, TXU Power, the uncertainty caused by bids and counterbids, and EU-driven government energy policy.

Goldman Sachs, the US-based banking firm, is bidding for Drax. Banks, both British and international, now own 40% of the electricity generating industry. BHP Bilton, the third largest mining company in the world, is putting in a counter-bid. BHP Bilton intends to ship over 22 million tonnes of low-cost coal from Colombia to fuel Drax, while the power station itself sits on top of the Selby coalfield, which is due to close next year with the loss of 2,000 miners' jobs.

Bilton's plan could sound the death knell for British coal. UK Coal, Britain's only deep-mine coal producer, is currently seeking a subsidy from the government of £79 million to preserve the future of 4,000 miners. UK Coal mined just under 11 million tonnes of coal last year. Its open-cast pits have reserves of over 100 million tonnes.

In the past, before privatisation, Britain led the way in mining and producing coal in a clean and environmental way. Clean coal technology is expensive in the short-term due to the investment needed in plant and skills, but it is cheap in the long run. With such an investment some of Britain's coal reserves of over 1,000 million tonnes could be mined to fuel power stations such as Drax in the future.

- The trustees of the combined miners' pension scheme, which is worth nearly £20 billion, have indicated a possible shortfall in funds of £559 million. Since the privatisation of the pits governments have 'top-sliced' any pension surplus — and since 1997 alone this government has taken over £1.3 million.

This scam is a backdoor method of clawing workers' wages back, based on the 'guesstimates' made by actuaries of probabilities and life-expectancy. Any money handed back is simply money the government has already pinched.

INVESTMENT Steepest fall for manufacture

IN AUGUST 2003, investment collapsed to its lowest level since early 1998. Manufacturing investment fell by an astounding 10.1%, the steepest drop since records began in 1994. This failure wrecks the prospects for future growth. Low interest rates have brought not more investment, but only ever rising levels of household debt (£880 billion — £15,000 per man, woman and child, July 2003 figures) and of public sector debt.

The grim news followed revised figures from the Office of National Statistics showing that last year's trade deficit was much bigger than previously thought, at a record £46.3 billion. The deficit with the EU was £20.8 billion.

Other figures show that 13,000 manufacturing jobs are destroyed every month. At this rate, all four million manufacturing jobs, our entire manufacturing industry, would be gone by 2028.

EURO Stewards' survey

AN INTERNAL union survey over attitudes towards the euro involving 1252 GMB stewards has resulted in a 67% return hostile to the single currency.

This response flies in the face of the GMB's support for the single currency. As with Amicus, once the membership is actually consulted over the issue of Europe, a great void appears between the interests of the membership and those who look to instead Downing Street for political leadership.

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

FINANCE**Delivering nightmares**

THE ACCOUNTANCY group KPMG International and the think-tank CREATE have produced a report on how the British fund management business operated in the 1990s, its present state and its future direction. Entitled *REVOLUTIONARY SHIFTS, EVOLUTIONARY RESPONSES: GLOBAL INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT IN THE 2000s**, it is based on the views of the senior executives of 185 investment management firms from 20 countries.

The longest bull market in 70 years ended when the dot.com bubble burst in March 2000, followed in quick succession by the Enron and WorldCom scandals and the destruction of Marconi. As a result of the stock market crash, "millions lost billions". European company pension funds now have a shortfall of £350 billion in their assets, and individual investors lost £175 billion. Now, there is the longest bear market — slump — since 1945, which will continue "at least until 2005".

The report says: "The 'sacred cow' of pay and bonus is long overdue for a radical rethink; greed can destroy the economy of any business." Quick, aren't they! Managers said that firms must change or "face terminal decline" and "it's all insane".

The report sums up: "The results have been catastrophic... Never have so many lost so much in so short a time. The breadth and depth of the resulting disillusionment amongst investors have no precedents in the post-War period. It was a crushing end of a dream for a generation who had been enticed to believe that stock markets had the magical power to do what governments could not: deliver decent retirement pensions."

Capitalism indeed cannot "deliver decent retirement pensions". One of the authors, Professor Rajan of Exeter University, said: "Governments encouraged people to plan for their retirement without ensuring that their funds had the capacity to deliver."

As one manager admitted, "We sold dreams and delivered nightmares." Capitalists dream of value produced without workers: worship of the stock market is a modern version of the cargo-cult. Another manager admitted, "everyone is praying for the markets to recover".

If workers are going to ensure that we have adequate pensions, we will have to take responsibility for the wealth that we produce, and make sure that enough of it is used to provide security for our old age.

*The text of the report is available from www.kpmg.co.uk.



Victory at Heathrow

HEATHROW AIRPORT check-in staff, mostly women, won a significant victory in August when they walked out in protest at the imposition of a swipe-card clocking on system as part of a 3% pay deal. Given the lack of consultation about the cards, the workers suspected that they would be used to implement changes to work patterns in the name of efficiency contained in management's so-called "integrated Airport Resource Management". Computer-generated changes to shift patterns could be brought in with 24 hours notice rather than seven days. Flexibility on days off, arranged by mutual agreement and vital to workers with families, was at risk.

BA management have been taught a timely and, for them, costly lesson. The action, described as "wildcat", cost BA an estimated £50 million. But victory could hardly be achieved had the workers continued to work with the cards during a lengthy ballot procedure. The fact that they wanted to strike was shown clearly when they all went out together and remained solid. They balloted with their feet, and won "everything we set out to achieve", according to Amicus spokesman Paul Talbot. The company removed the imposition of the swipe cards and agreed the pay deal with no strings attached. Efficiency measures are to be considered by a joint working party.

AUTOMOBILES (1)**Depressed by the euro**

SUPPLIERS of components to the automotive assembly plants across Europe experienced a common theme during the summer months. The relative strength of the euro has been having an adverse effect on manufacturing in this sector.

Allied to this, the European and US carmakers both experienced under performance of the share prices.

There is no surprise that the auto sector in both continents continues to feel the effects of the current price wars and the ever-growing competition from Asian producers.

"There would be no benefit to the automotive manufacturing sector of UK industry if Britain joined the Single Currency," according to a worker in the polymer industry supplying into the car companies when asked whether it would be positive for Britain if it entered the Euro, and whether this would help stem the flow

of imported vehicles from Asia.

Companies do not see the single currency as particularly important in their long-term planning, but the fact that they can move operations to whichever country offers the lowest labour rates is most significant.

AUTOMOBILES (2)**Aston Martin strike**

THE FIRST EVER strike in the 80 year history of Aston Martin luxury cars, occurred in early August. The strike, by Transport and General members, affected production at both Aston Martin plants in Newport Pagnell and Bloxham.

The dispute is over proposed new shift rotas and working practices. Workers who produce the £120,000 cars for Aston Martin, a subsidiary of Ford, are looking at parity with other Ford subsidiaries — Jaguar and Land Rover — for hours worked and wage rates.

POST OFFICE**Ballot on pay**

THE COMMUNICATION WORKERS Union (CWU) is balloting its members after the Post Office management effectively collapsed the talks by refusing to discuss union proposals or move above the current offer of 4.5% over 18 months, paid in two stages. As the CWU points out, this is only worth 3% on an annual basis, and is below both the current rate of inflation — 3.1% — and the going rate in the public sector, calculated at 3.5%.

The average Post Office worker earns £262 a week with basic pay rates 40% below the British average. In comparison, pay and perks for Royal Mail's senior executives have rocketed by 320% in the past two years, with chief executive Crozier earning £500,000 a year or £9,582 a week.

The CWU has rejected an offer of 14.5% because the extra money was to be tied to the completion of all major change programmes both at local and at national

levels.

Key changes would be the loss of up to 30,000 jobs and attacks on the national pay bargaining structure.

CHEMICALS**Strikes over pensions**

WORKERS at Rhoda, a French-owned chemical company, have begun a series of rolling strikes over plans to scrap the final salary scheme for new employees. The company's plan comes after it has taken substantial and lengthy "pensions holidays" (where the employer makes no or reduced contributions) over a number of years. GMB and Amicus members are taking action at plants in Widnes, Cheshire and Oldbury.

The workforce has seen through the company's tactic of trying to split the old and new workers by offering them different terms and conditions. There is unity across all age groups and the understanding that solidarity will protect workers both now and in the future.

Two-year deal for higher ed

EMPLOYERS in higher education, represented by the University and College Employers' Association (UCEA), have offered a two-year agreement for all staff in the sector as part of a complex "Framework" package which also includes a new pay spine, new grades and job evaluation.

The trade union negotiators have achieved some victories with pay rises of up to 15% for some manual workers. In the academic grades there has also been some improvement in the appallingly low grades paid to researchers. Unison and Amicus are recommending acceptance of the deal.

The academic unions NATFHE and the AUT have expressed concern that the pay rise to academic staff, 3.44% this year and 3% next year, does not address issues of recruitment and retention. Both academic unions will enter an intense period of consultation with special conferences in the autumn and a ballot of the membership in late October.

HEALTH**Beware statistics**

ALONG WITH many justified criticisms of our National Health Service we often hear comments about too much money being spent on administration and not enough on "front line services". A recent incident illustrates the need to be cautious about such comments — and official statistics.

A patient at St Mary's Hospital on the Isle of Wight had to be referred to a specialist on the mainland. After a month he asked whether St Mary's had the relevant telephone number so he could chase up his appointment — only to find

that his papers were still in medical records on the Island and the letter had not yet been typed!

Shortage of administrative staff was blamed. This delay will not appear in the Government's "waiting list" figures, of course.

If a crucial part of hospital administration is virtually at a standstill because of lack of staff, hospital specialists and skilled technicians are unable to provide a proper service either.

The lesson is clear. All hospital staff are a team; all need each other. Nothing is to be gained by mutual recriminations when the real need is for a properly resourced health service.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****SEPTEMBER**

Sunday 7 September

Burston Strike School Rally-cum-Picnic, Burston, Norfolk, 11am – 4pm

The annual rally, this time with added picnic: A mixture of politics, marching, history, entertainment, plus bar and food.

Monday 8 September

"Spot The Odd Ones Out: Manufacturing, Public Services, The Euro, The European Constitution", Trade Unions Against the Single Currency (TASC), meeting at the TUC, Quality Hotel, West Street, Brighton, 12.30pm – 1.30pm

Ian Davidson MP (Labour Against the Euro) and Doug Nicholls (General Secretary, Community and Youth Workers Union) on the growing campaign against the euro.

Saturday 27 September

Demonstration and rally: End the occupation of Iraq. Assemble 12 noon, Hyde Park, London

Jointly organised by the Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Muslim Association of Britain. For more information, transport, plus any late details, see the campaign website, <http://www.stopwar.org.uk>

AEROSPACE**Major contract goes to Britain**

IN A VICTORY for British industry, the government has awarded BAE Systems the £800 million contract to build up to 48 Hawk training jets for the RAF.

This reversed the earlier Treasury-inspired ruling that the contract would be put out to foreign tender, as demanded by European Union policy. (Reported in WORKERS, July 2003.)

Now the government is in two minds over an even bigger decision — who is to produce up to 2,000 new generation tanks at a cost of between £2 billion and £6 billion?

The Ministry of Defence wants to appoint BAE and Alvis as joint prime contractors, but the Treasury has intervened to urge an open auction that would let US defence contractors bid for the work.

Workers in the industry are concerned to ensure that these tanks are made in Britain.

Work till you drop

THE BRITISH culture of long working hours and short holidays will be a major topic at the TUC this year and will form the focus for Work-Life Balance Week 2003*, which will run from 1 to 5 September. The Work-Life Balance Trust, which is coordinating the event, says that over two million workers from some of Britain's largest employers will be taking part in events.

Unfortunately it often takes more than this to convince politicians and employers. The government is trying to extend its opt-out from the EU working week ceiling of 48 hours. The opt-out meant working hours could be extended if staff agreed, which may happen when wages are low, the workplace concerned is short-staffed, or workers are forced to meet unrealistic targets. Unions want to end the situation where British workers work the longest hours, have the shortest lunch breaks and fewest holidays in Europe.

Various unions are gearing up for a tougher approach on hours. As reported on p4, Aston Martin workers are taking action against so-called "Martini" shifts requiring work "any time, any place, anywhere". The TGWU is taking a tough line over loopholes in new government regulations which may impact on bus workers. The PCS is launching an "Our Time" initiative with the Inland Revenue and is encouraging members to campaign on the issue.

Long hours and stressful working conditions are literally a matter of life or death. HAZARDS magazine and its website** have plenty of statistics to back this up. They cite TUC research to show that workers exposed to stress for at least half their working lives are 25% more likely to die from a heart attack and have 50% higher odds of suffering a fatal stroke.

Long-term work-related stress is worse for the heart than ageing 30 years or gaining 40 lbs in weight. Blue collar workers are more prone to these illnesses than executives, because of excessive overtime, night shifts and work with high psychological pressure and low reward.

Stress can literally "break your heart" and the Japanese have termed death from overwork "karoshi", an official occupational disease, and will compensate dependants if the worker was doing over 80 hours a month overtime! However, over 45 hours a month is considered significant in terms of risk, and thousands of British workers fall into this category.

DTI research has shown 1 in 6 workers (16%) work over 60 hours a week, a rise from 12% in 2000. 19% of men have visited the doctor because of stress, rising to 23% of the over 40s. TUC figures also show a big rise in compensation claims due to stress, which now account for about 10% of all personal injury cases.

The issue of long hours is inextricably linked to wages and conditions of service. Higher wages and a good pension scheme mean less necessity for overtime. Longer breaks and lunchtimes reduce stress and can make workers more productive in the long-term! Whatever the issue, a strongly unionised workplace is a good starting point for action and recruiting around health and safety can kick-start the process and become the basis for a wider discussion about control of our workplaces.

*Work-Life Balance Week: phone 0870 165 6700 for details.

**www.hazards.org/workedtodeath

Trade unions at the TUC Congress event seeking to prepare Labour new life and rebuilding...

Independent thinkers

THE SHEER NUMBERS of workers who are members of trade unions indicate the potential political power of organised labour in this country, with 7,750,990 workers belonging to 199 unions, 76 of which are affiliated to the TUC. Nearly six and a half million members are in those 14 TUC-affiliated unions with over 100,000 members in each. Three of these are teacher unions, which, if they joined together, would form the third largest in the TUC. Two very well organised large trade unions, the Royal College of Nursing and the British Medical Association are not yet in the TUC, but should be. It is the large unions, most with close Labour Party links, which dominate the finances, General Council and politics of the TUC. But it has not necessarily been the larger trade unions that have led the re-growth of trade unionism, or the culture of control over the workplace and skills development so essential for power at work.

Power at work

Much of the bedrock of British trade unionism is still within small, specialist trade unions. With fewer than 100,000 members, they are able to give close personal support and organise on a wide range of issues, which affect their members' lives. Such unions are bringing new life to the trade union movement because they appeal to a new generation of stewards. On the other hand, some small unions are an anachronism and are only surviving until their general secretaries can arrange a golden handshake for themselves. A range of recent elections in large and small unions indicates a welcome commitment by members to clear out the sloth of thinking and in many cases outright corruption that have plagued their organisations for so long. Despite this, the 'buggin's turn' syndrome on the TUC General Council means that for the second year running another former trade union general secretary, recently 'prematurely' retired with a fat pay off, will become the President of the TUC.

Great strengths, embarrassing weaknesses

When the Trades Union Congress meets it represents the most comprehensive assembly of workers in Britain. As such, it displays all of the contradictions, confusions, great strengths and embarrassing weaknesses of our class. British workers remain the most class conscious, but least politically conscious, of any. The weaknesses all relate to the unique historic relationship between trade unions and the Labour Party. The party, while it requires union money to bail it out of a £10 million funding gap, and union support to get elected to government, once in power it always rules on behalf of capitalism. It joins in with, or leads, imperialist war ventures. It is no worse today than it ever was, except now it wants us to give up control of parliament altogether.

The combined wealth of all billionaires created since 1997 far outstrips even the government's deep coffers, let alone Labour Party finances. Yet the tail begins to wag the dog, the child gives its parents orders. Instead of being determined by the

ss in Brighton must prevent it from becoming a stage managed
r for a third term — rather than preparing the trade unions for

— independent trade unions



Photo © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

TUC Glasgow, 2000: three years on, Brighton beckons, but problems remain

needs of workers, the TUC becomes a stage managed event seeking to prepare Labour for a third term rather than preparing the trade unions for new life and rebuilding. The spectre of an anti-union Tory government casts its exaggerated shadow over the Congress to stifle genuine demands for peace and social progress. In reality the choice between Tony Blair and Ian Duncan Smith is a false choice. It is an insult to the intelligence of those who create all wealth, science, art and public services and who gather at the TUC to assert their skills.

Fault line

Trade unions are divided by several destructive splits that flow from this confusion and upside down politics. There is a fault line in the trade union movement that says the Labour Party does the 'politics' while the trade unions do the 'economic and industrial work'. This line results in the workplace being taken out of its central role in politics. Some in the movement now argue for trade unions to completely reorganise away from the workplace and to follow

labour markets across Europe in vast AA-type organisations!

Political funding

Tension with 'politicians' then leads to battles over 'political funds' and legislation created by Thatcher to further demean the real political funds of trade unions. Why should a union pay money to people who use it to oppose them and their demands? Why sponsor an MP when you could sponsor yourself more effectively with the money? Many calls to withhold Labour Party moneys are shortsighted or corrupt attempts to get that money diverted elsewhere from the unions' core purposes.

But who created whom, who serves whom and who is ultimately more important — a trade union representing those in Britain who work for a living, or a small Labour Party that works against them?

With the entire wealth of the whole trade union movement equivalent only to a small fraction of the wealth of Britain's richest individual, unions could really do with spending all of their funds on organising themselves to reach out to the

two-thirds of workers who are not part of the movement. Organising every workplace should be the main aim of unions. It is the Labour government that is seeking to break the link with the unions, and the Electoral Commission is currently looking at an EU-style state funded political party system in which union funding will have no place.

Playing to the gallery.

Trade unions also lose their independence of thinking at Congress by engineering false unity to avoid negative headlines in the press. No wonder few workers bother watching the TUC debates anymore on television.

Compositing debates and arm-twisting to avoid public disagreement is a sign of cowardice and fragmentation. It reveals the lack of authority of the General Council within the movement.

There can in reality be no progress without proper debate and arguing through differences. Once a decision is reached the movement should act together. In reality at the moment there is little appetite for collectivity and the unnatural competitiveness between unions is still a problem. This reflects the lack of real solidarity between the unions since the outlawing of secondary action by Thatcher. Until we restore through action our right to take solidarity action in support of other workers we will be disunited.

Stage management

The need to 'stage manage' for Press and Party leads to the often daft divisions between self-styled left and right. It becomes a question of scoring points in elections and on motions and things are judged by which slate or camp they advance, not whether they benefit workers as a whole.

We get wrongly named 'awkward squads' representing their members and 'little leagues' representing Tony Blair and the mysterious 'X factor' by which the ever-present MI5 infiltrators help to select

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key people for election. Ironically this mix of sectarianism is fiercest in the grouping of small unions where there is a fight for seats. It takes place without hustings, canvassing and arm-twisting of course!

There is a danger in all of this that the independence of mind needed to elect capable General Council members will be lost. Most unions get on the General Council automatically, again contradicting the culture of the democracy of the Movement. No wonder the last communist on the General Council, Reg Birch, properly elected of course, called it a 'pit of slime'.

Manufacturing first

Giving political power up to a party, or a government, and potentially to state funded groups means you can forget how to struggle for yourself. With the notable exception of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), many of those manufacturing unions now complaining most about the lack of government support for their industries, have done the least to stop factory closures and the most to support the globalisation of production through the EU by advocating the euro.

Steel, clothing and textiles, ceramics, metal bashing and key sections of engineering are in ruins. The only solution of their leaders is to advocate more of the same, but in the euro please, and by the way, support the war on Iraq and condemn the Cubans for defending themselves!

Listen to the quiet ones

Those workers' representatives who have silently won good wage rises, prevented industrial run down and defended conditions over the last year have done so by applying low key, but sound united tactics. They do not show off at Congress. Those who have genuinely come to terms with the need to struggle a bit more astutely tend not to pose like generals on the fashion parade of the rostrum.

Overall though, trade unions came to Congress having allowed a year of the most intense run down of industry we have seen for decades. The miners warned consistently that the end of their

'It is easy for the TUC Congress to break the world into issues and themes, to take a false "left" or "right" position on each issue. But the world isn't like that..'

industry meant the subservience of Britain to unstable powers overseas pumping their gas and oil across. As the Institute of Civil Engineers has recently pointed out, this is now the case. Our energy supplies are imported from shaky regimes abroad.

For independence

When delegates seek to assert the rebuilding of British industry and manufacturing, strong domestic energy supplies and comprehensive public services, 'politicians' will tell them we no longer have the independence as a nation to do this.

Global capitalism, they say, is all-powerful, a domestic industrial policy is impossible, and our public services must be opened up to the international private market under the terms of the Amsterdam Treaty. For the government to procure British-made products for its contracts, whether planes, or uniforms or sheets, or scientific equipment would be to break a hundred global treaties designed to enable capital to come and go where the pickings are greatest.

Controlling capital flows is illegal, so they won't bother trying. So what starts as a lack of independence of thought in managing your own affairs in your members' interests, ends up as an acceptance of the lack of independence of the nation within the EU.

Reject the rock and hard place

Accepting your lot doesn't come easy to trade unionists, who can only live with it for so long. But the principle that trade unionists make of pragmatism can so easily become a kind of permanent lowering of the horizons of achievement.

It is like an occupational hazard.

Trade unionists negotiate every day in circumstances usually not of their making, between a rock and a hard place, and accept deals that usually fall short of their demands. This inevitability of compromise determines the culture and thinking of trade unionists by and large.

It is easy for the TUC Congress to break the world into issues and themes, to take a false "left" or "right" position on each issue. But the world isn't like that: it must be seen in its entirety.

Capitalism's plans for Britain are more than obvious: privatise everything that moves; break up any institution that has some form of democratically accountable and elected governance; divide the nation into toothless devolved parliaments and then regional assemblies; break up national collective bargaining; destroy manufacturing; keep trade unions largely under the Thatcherite legislative regime; support US warmongering and secede the political power of the independent nation state three quarters to the European Union and a quarter to the United States.

Self-determination

Either the trade union movement will have a full and comprehensive response to these obvious attacks or it will shrink into irrelevance and be seen by workers as voluntarily giving up power and commitment to an independent Britain which respects the self-determination of all nations.

Some trade union leaders and to some extent trade unionists in general have often put up the argument that trade unions should not involve themselves in politics. This is not only a naive view but also totally incomprehensible.

Trade unions were set up to maintain and advance the working conditions and wages of employees; they cannot do this in a political vacuum. The members themselves have to take the political debates into the workplace to end the false division between economics and politics.

This step is a precursor to workers taking control of their own destiny rather than leaving it in the hands of a political party and those who have time and again shown themselves to be on the side of the employers.

PEACE, JOBS, POWER



Political statement from the Communist Party

14th Congress, London



21/22 April 2003





Absolute decline

The situation facing workers in Britain today is as grave as at any time in our history. Capitalism, the social system which replaced feudalism, was born here, and now, five hundred years later, is dying before our eyes. British workers made Britain the workshop of the world, and made capitalism seem synonymous with manufacture. That capitalism is now in terminal decay, unable to feed, clothe, house, provide work for or meet the needs of the people of this country. From seeming synonymous with manufacture, capital is now its antithesis.

Against such a backdrop, the workers of Britain bear an awesome responsibility. Go down with the ship or construct something new from the wreckage and strike out for a future.

For there can be no doubt that the ship is holed below the waterline. The veneer of capitalism is cracking, exposing a rotten and corrupt interior. The squandering of profit which could and should be used to re-tool and re-equip industry is a daily scandal. The dividing line between business and criminality has in many areas ceased to exist.

The slow, steady decline of capitalism was given impetus by Thatcher with a premeditated, all or nothing onslaught on British industry. Now we have a Labour government which has taken the onslaught to a new level. "Tough on industry, tough on the causes of industry" might well be their epitaph. And with that comes a second generation of decimation — of Britain's pioneering and indigenous industry, and of its agriculture. Capitalism, an absurdly over-inflated system based on the notion of economic "confidence", has itself no confidence in its own future. Witness the robbery and destruction of pension funds nationwide, with the proceeds exported out of our country and guaranteed pensioner poverty. The clock is turning back 100 years.

International

Internationally, the situation is dire. The long anticipated financial crisis underlines the reality of capitalism's demise, not just here but around the world. The United States, once a byword for capitalist health and vigour, is now reduced to striking a pose as leader of a world crusade. Not, as Bush and Blair would have it, against terrorism, but against any country that dares assert independence, integrity, sovereignty. Top of the most wanted list are those countries that put the needs of their own people first.

US industry is in crisis; the US financial bubble is

bursting. Increasingly, these are things that capitalism can no longer fix, so it goes to war because it no longer knows how to do anything else.

What our Party called in 1994 "the irrationality of decaying capitalism" now finds a truly terrible parallel: religious fanatics who would drag us back to feudalism by the use of terrorist murders of workers, striking at random anytime, anywhere. Both are by-products of reaction unleashed by the collapse of workers' power in the Soviet Union. The Afghan communists brought more civilisation to Afghanistan in ten years than had been achieved in the previous thousand. And the Taliban dug up their graves because they knew this.

European Union

Closer to home, the war clouds are also beginning to roll as a predatory EU lurches towards its ultimate objective, the unpicking of the post-WW2 settlement and the dissolution of the nation state. European dictat has decreed that the various regions of the EU may have only the industries that suit the pan European model. Hence the apparent inability of successive comprador governments to do anything to arrest the decline of industry here. The greater good of the EU as a concept overrides the needs of member nations in reality. The Labour Party presses on with its mission to be a key player in the "New Europe" — for which they have offered to deliver Britain bound and gagged.

The whole notion of a structure which can exercise power beyond national level needs careful consideration by workers in all the countries concerned. The EU is not a nation. It lacks a common language, a common culture, anything that binds a people together historically. It does not even have a fixed territory. It has no power except that yielded by the member states, who produce everything. Hence the key significance of the single currency, giving the semblance of unity and integrity to a disparate collection of countries, locking in member nations to subservience to Brussels.

In this process the internal and democratic structures of nations are broken up to conform to the shape of the new centralised European state. For Britain this means regionalisation, devolution, a subordinate legal system and less power to local government.

What authority the EU has corresponds directly to the extent to which workers have handed over their capacity and willingness to shape their own destiny. The EU stands before the workers of Europe as a monument to their own timidity and backwardness. It is nothing more than a life support machine for the



body of capitalism — why the reluctance to switch it off?

The triumph of the British working class in not as yet succumbing to the blandishments of the single currency needs to be appreciated. More class conscious than our neighbours, we have not yet accepted that Britain is finished as an independent, sovereign, modern nation. But the pressure to do so is immense.

Class ideas

The ideas that wrought us as a class are daily, routinely challenged. Industry, the transformation of nature, made us what we are. An essential component of our class understanding is that because of industry, because of production, we have power. We can change things. Side by side, of course, has been the long established belief that we can live with capitalism, perhaps persuading it to evolve benignly. Hence social democracy, the thinking shaped by the power to change things and the simultaneous desire to have someone else direct that power on our behalf. Social democracy could be summed up, “We can change the physical world, but not the social world.” Such an inadequate mode of thinking for a great working class now faces a challenge. The status quo, standstill, is not an option. We can either go forwards or backwards.

Presently, the forces to take our thinking backwards are on the rampage. The attack on industry has moved to an attack on the necessity for industry. “We don’t need to make things, someone else can do it better/cheaper.” Absence of industry breeds a new mode of thought, “We cannot change things.”

The assault on the power of workers is evolving from a repudiation of industry to a repudiation of science itself. Hence ‘new variant’ social democracy presents itself – “We can’t change the physical world or the social world”. A new way of thinking for a working class going backwards. Thus the promotion of an old, ‘flat earth’ perspective on scientific development. Look at the debate on gene modification, global warming etc. “Best not tinker with forces beyond our control.” The spurious concept of multiple human races, a lie blown wide open by the unravelling of the human genome, still leads the class to chase its tail and divide in the name of opposing “racism”. The land that gave us Darwin now boasts schools which repudiate evolution and the theory of natural selection. Dark days indeed.

Trade unions

And it has to be acknowledged that the response of

the trade union movement, the ‘official wing’ of the working class, has been woeful. Indeed, the rush to servitude in the Euro has been led by the TUC and once mighty unions within. The reality for British workers is that their own institutions are dominated by the past, hence fondly backward looking, hence backward. The public face of trade unionism in Britain is rejected by younger workers who do not wish to revisit old stamping grounds nor relive past glories.

Whatever the public face, the assessment of trade unions and their strength depends on activity in the workplace. Backwardness in national unions is a consequence of inactivity amongst the membership. Involvement of young workers in trade unions at the workplace is both the challenge and a real gauge of union strength.

And here perhaps the greatest challenge of all, and certainly the greatest opportunity. How to harness the optimism, the will to live, of the young.

Younger workers have rejected the posturing and backwardness of the trade unions and their structures. The responsibility rests with them to take that rejection back into the movement. Shake it up, reclaim it, make its structures work again.

Young workers want a future. But a future as part of the migratory labour force of Europe is no future at all. Not when responsibilities are acquired and roots put down.

The heart of the matter is the acceptance or not of responsibility.

Responsibility

Denial of responsibility in many ways characterises the present situation.

The notion of migration, both internal and international, is embraced by many as a means of escaping present difficulty (but only if you can afford it). It produces a weak, disorganised and rootless working class prey to the capitalist market beloved of Thatcher, Blair, EU. The moving out of businesses from Britain — especially to the countries of the old Soviet bloc — is matched by a brutal trade in human beings into Britain, legal and illegal, which robs desperate countries of their skilled workers and imports new criminal fraternities.

Britain’s wealth was created by generations of workers. Now others, from other abandoned countries, want to have some of it, young men prepared to pay and risk their lives to come here. The destruction of skilled teams of workers in industries such as railways replaces them with



migrant workers from eastern Europe who do not speak the language and lack the traditions in skill and safety, prepared to work for a pittance. Why do we permit it?

Migration leaves the difficulty unresolved and creates new difficulties elsewhere. It can never be a class response to a problem. As a class we have nowhere to run. We are stuck with Britain and Britain is stuck with us. We are Britain — all of us who live and work here and see our future here. If we must take responsibility for our nation, others must do the same for theirs, the task is the same, stay where you are and fight for a future for your country.

Workers' nationalism and internationalism

Being patriotic is often sniffed at now as an outmoded sentiment, tainted with imperialism. The derision fostered by the conceit that we have outgrown the nation state. Well, capital can certainly cross and re-cross national boundaries but we can't. We can and should be proud of Britain because it means being proud of what workers have achieved. Health and education, industrial advance, the flowering of science, are the achievements of workers. So not a rose tinted nationalism, a love of structures, but a workers' nationalism, built on pride and optimism in what workers can and will achieve.

This workers' nationalism provides the basis for a true internationalism — how can we profess to care about the world if we allow our own sovereignty to be handed over, whether to EU or US? On the world stage, real effective internationalism can only be based on the coming together of sovereign nations to decide on those issues which transcend the individual nation, on the basis of non-interference in the internal affairs of others and mutual respect. The UN could be such a forum — not the Security Council but the whole body with every country having an equal voice.

The young of Britain represent our best opportunity to break with the past. They desire neither narcosis nor slavery. They want a better world, and as they come to assume responsibilities, come to understand that this starts with a better Britain.

Democracy

For those not in the first bloom of youth, this is not a call to leave the stage. Many young workers are yet to be convinced that people can change things in their own interests. There is a genuine debate to be had, and all sections of society can and must participate. The present disenchantment with active politics is

potentially a positive phenomenon. Why should young trade unionists want to attend a branch meeting dominated by the passing of endless empty motions and false arguments between so-called left and right (which usually come to the same thing)? Why should people care which bourgeois party carries out the wishes of capitalism? Political parties are reinventing themselves to try to cater for the victim culture. We do not want to be victims.

Who is this Blair, and what does he represent? Does he restrain Bush or simply make him more palatable? Has universal suffrage distorted to become universal suffering? Representative democracy is completely devoid either of real representation or real democracy.

British workers have a proud history of struggle against the employer, but also a less admirable tradition of opting out by voting for someone else to act on our behalf. The truth is that nobody else can do it for you, whether it is a trade union leader, a politician or a political party, including this one, the communist party. Cries of betrayal or disillusion are simply cowardice. Workers must decide and do for themselves what is needed; we have nobody to blame but ourselves for the situation we find ourselves in.

Debate

In all the forums and arenas in which workers meet, the grumble "What has happened to our country?" should be turned around — "What do you want to happen to our country?" To all who would listen, workers should say "Is your industry or service good enough? If not, what are you going to do about it?"

Shake off laissez-faire thinking, fatalism, resignation. It is our class that is the only real superpower, and if we as a class don't show a bit more naked self-interest, capitalism will take us down with it. They envisage the end of Britain as a sovereign nation, becoming a region like any other, devoid of its own industry or agriculture. No modern nation on Earth can so exist. A second stone age in the 21st century. It's only unthinkable if we put our minds to the job at hand. The working class must rebuild Britain; the responsibility is ours. We say to our class, those of you who are not prepared to join the rebuilding must get out of the way of those who do. Start to ask questions and the answers will come.

No to the capitalist abandonment of this land and its people.

Yes to Britain.

Yes to science and industry.

Yes to a future, and it's in our hands.

When it comes to understanding the importance of national sovereignty, we could take some useful lessons from abroad...

Referendum yes — annexation no

WHY IS IT that many of our class, many class conscious workers, can understand the issue of national sovereignty for far away countries like Cuba, Vietnam, Iraq, Palestine, Angola and even Ireland, but cannot get their heads around the issue of British sovereignty? Even those posing as nationalists in Scotland and Wales now argue for “independence within the European Union” — as if such a thing were possible!

Do some of us identify Britain with its imperial history, or confuse Britain and capitalism, as if they were synonymous? As workers we want a future without imperialism, and with a different economic system. But only by exercising sovereignty within our own country can we achieve our goals. That means upholding Britain's right to national independence, whether from the EU or the USA. British workers have every right to be proud of their history, their skills in manufacturing, their creation of trade unions, their military defence of Britain against fascism, and much more. We have the basis for a Britain in which our class could and should exercise political and economic control.

We now face the most serious threat to our independence and survival as a class and nation, along with many other workers in other countries. As capitalism desperately seeks new ways to survive, to deal with its terminal decline, a clear pattern is emerging that should be a wake up call for the British working class. Not only do we have the European Union, that project designed to destroy nation states in Europe by creating a new Fourth Reich from the Atlantic to the Urals, but we have FTAA, the Free Trade Area of the Americas sponsored by the US, and the US proposal for a Middle East Free Trade Area based upon occupied Iraq. There is also talk of a US free trade area in Africa.

These are the new life support systems to attempt to keep capitalism alive at the expense of the working class. Our job surely has to be to switch off the life support system. For us, in Britain, it means taking on the issue of the EU squarely and head on.



Patriot: Cuban union leader Alba Portela speaking at this summer's Durham Miners Gala

Dr Alba Portela, Santiago de Cuba Provincial Secretary of the Cuban Health Workers Union, spoke to *WORKERS* about this issue, while visiting the North East to address the Durham Miners' Gala.

“We will not accept any interference in our internal and external affairs by anyone, whether the US, or now the EU. We fought for our independence from Spain over 100 years ago and from the US 44 years ago and we are still fighting for our national sovereignty and independence.”

When asked about the Free Trade Area of the Americas, Alba was emphatic: “We will not bow to interference in our economic affairs. FTAA/NAFTA/EU all have one thing in common. They try to control the economies of other countries for the gain of the supranational capitalists, imposing a single currency of their choice. In the FTAA it will be the US Dollar, in the EU, the euro...”

“Patriotism, workers nationalism and internationalism are all derived from the same working class root. We started in 1964 with our position on internationalism in Algeria, helping them consolidate on their national independence. Today we have over 5000 specialists giving assistance globally in the fields of health,

education, sports and more. We can only provide this solidarity if we can maintain our own independence and sovereignty. This is about independent nations mutually supporting one another, workers supporting one another”

The Cuban government response to the FTAA has been consistent: “Plebiscito si — anexo no” (Referendum yes, annexation no). So the Cuban workers are very clear about the need to defend national sovereignty. But what about us? With one notable exception, her fellow speakers at the Durham Miners Gala, most of them union leaders, spoke only of the need to reclaim the Labour Party — for whom and by whom? NUM President Ian Lavery alone spoke of the need to defend his industry — coal, defend the Selby coalfield, defend one of Britain's greatest assets.

But from others, no mention of the defence of national assets, no mention of the EU, no mention of the need for a referendum on the new EU constitution, no mention of the annexation of great swathes of Eastern Europe into the EU - let alone annexation of British sovereignty. Perhaps we should echo the voice of the Cubans: Referendum yes, annexation no — always onto victory.

A new law makes it illegal to perform in even the smallest venues or in the open-air without a costly licence. Resistance has already begun...

Defying Labour's licensing law

Photo © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com



Musicians present the largest ever e-petition to No. 10 in June this year

MUSIC IS such a part of the fabric of life in Britain today that it is often taken for granted. For most it is a very welcome antidote to the stresses of work (or unemployment) and an essential ingredient of hard earned leisure time. The government's new Licensing Bill contains strictures extremely detrimental to the public performance of every kind of music. So it will come as no surprise that a vigorous campaign has grown over the past year — led by the Musicians Union (MU) — to oppose it.

The new law, now passed, will severely restrict grassroots music-making. It will probably be illegal to perform in even the smallest venues or in the open-air without a costly licence obtained through the time-consuming bureaucracy of the local council. This will be particularly hard on pub, club, folk, dance and fund-raising events. This law will take about 18 months to start to bite — by then many will feel that to defy such legislation en masse is the only course of action.

A legal advisor to the campaign pointed to the passing of the bill being a “black day for English constitutional principles, democratic principles, legal principles, and culture. Many cultural activities, both traditional and modern, that are constitutionally protected or

unregulated in other places (even parts of Britain) will become illegal without local authority licences, and may be subject to prohibitively expensive conditions. Yet other activities known to be sources of disturbance and public concern, which may well be more likely adversely to affect safety, will go unregulated.”

The coalition against this Public Entertainment Licensing Bill was widely based. As well as the MU and Equity, it included the Association of British Jazz Musicians, the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), TRAC (Folk Development Organisation for Wales) and representatives of musical instrument makers and manufacturers.

In supporting the campaign, the actors' union Equity called for “the right environment for working musicians to perform, entertain and maintain the high standard of performance music in this country. Without these opportunities, not only are the livelihoods of musicians and opportunities for audiences to experience a wide range and variety of music threatened, but the next generation of British musical talent could be cut off in its prime, including the many singers and performers that Equity represents.”

This law will adversely affect the employment of musicians such as solo

pianists in hotels. Manufacture and sales (already precarious) of musical instruments would suffer too.

A statement of support from PA and amplification firm Carlsbro noted that it was “one of the oldest and last remaining British manufacturing companies in the music industry. It will suffer greatly if Parliament votes for a bill that could kill live music in small venues. It will damage exports and threaten jobs in manufacturing, shops and distribution. Britain used to lead the way in music but, unless amended the bill would kill the breeding ground for new talent, discourage children from learning music, close music shops and deter tourism.”

Intense lobbying by the EFDSS won a concession on public folk dance events. And a number of complex partial or temporary exemptions were introduced while the bill went through parliament. But the worst aspects remain, and in the end many once-supportive Labour MPs deserted the campaign once the bill was seen to be on its way to becoming law. The government had not expected such a long and vigorous campaign — the biggest since the 1981 BBC orchestra musicians' strike and supported by the largest online petition so far organised (110,000 signatures).

Loud, amplified sound can, of course, be objectionable, but there are adequate penalties controlling this at the moment. But this law is a threat to all performance, from the brass band to the guitar playing folk singer without a microphone in hall or pub. Ironically big screen sports and jukebox entertainment — no matter how powerfully amplified — are exempt.

Powerful influences can be seen at work here. Murdoch seeks control of sport in public media and international GATT agreements prevent interference in the rights of international media corporations. Meanwhile, the right to have one or two musicians free of licensing restrictions will be lost. Even the provision of one unamplified guitarist, paid or unpaid, once a month in a restaurant, for example, would

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

become a criminal offence unless licensed. This would affect over 100,000 bars, pubs, clubs and halls in England and Wales where workers spend their leisure time or work in live music.

Five thousand registered members' clubs will lose their licensing exemption for live music. Thousands of private events, hitherto exempt, would become licensable — including private performances for charity. Licenses would have to be obtained for trade union or anti-war fundraisers, for example. Musicians could be guilty of a criminal offence if they did not check first that premises held the appropriate authorisation for their performance. Even buskers become potential criminals. The maximum penalty for unlicensed performance is a £20,000 fine and six months in prison.

This law should not be confused with the long-standing and widely supported Performing Rights Society system of licensing premises for live music performance. This operates to distribute to composers adequate returns on their compositions, and safeguards copyright. In contrast, revenue from the new law will go straight to the government.

The law does not extend to Scotland, but MU members there are expressing disquiet that some leading government supporters in the Scottish Executive are keen to fall in line.

The new MU general secretary, John Smith, regretted the passing of the bill, emphasising: "While we will co-operate and work with the government on the implementation of the Licensing Act, in the interests of our members, the MU cannot endorse laws that penalise small-scale live performance while other popular entertainments that pose similar or greater noise and safety risks are exempt. In the meantime we will continue to ensure, as far as possible, that existing employment for MU members is protected and increased."

• For further information see:
www.musiciansunion.org.uk
www.efdss.org/licensing/
www.abjm.org.uk

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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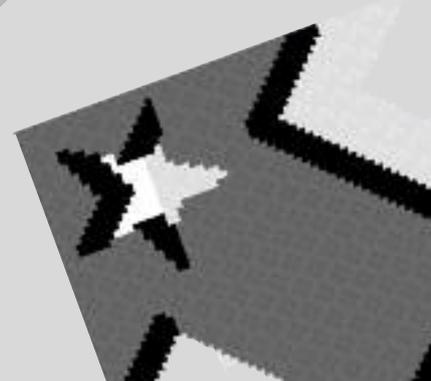
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Back to Front – The limits of spin

‘Workers are not sheep, a fact that for a long time has confounded those who wish to manipulate them...’

WHEN BLAIR finally leaves Downing Street, as one day he surely will, you can be sure that the people who earn their living from commenting on politics will date his demise from the departure of Alistair Campbell. And they will be wrong.

The myth has grown up that all the spin doctoring of Campbell, Mandelson, and others, was the reason why Labour was elected in 1997. It’s a myth assiduously cultivated by those who believe they direct events in society, and worse still believe that they are responsible for how people think.

The truth is that people are a lot more clever than spin doctors and politicians give them credit for. People think for themselves, and judge for themselves, even if they can often give the appearance of not doing so.

Take the issue of the euro. Nothing has been subject to greater spinning from ministers, their aides, and their “friends” (a strange term, that, in a world where stabbing in the back is part of the normal way of life). All kinds of lies and deceptions have been wheeled out, leaked out, spun out to tell us how vital it is for Britain, how we will fade away without it, how we will find the Eurozone countries speeding away from us. Yet the spin seems to be having no effect.

And this is no isolated phenomenon. When the Danes were urged to abandon their own currency for the euro, a referendum was fought in which the entire establishment of press (every television channel and national

newspaper) and major parliamentary parties, plus the trade union confederation, urged them to vote for the euro. And they refused, rejecting it in their referendum in 2000. Of course, the Danish government will try again, but it is now wary and talks about “some time in 2004”.

The Swedes are currently experiencing a similar propaganda bombardment ahead of their referendum on the euro on 14 September, but according to opinion polls are ungraciously rejecting the advice of their press and politicians.

Workers are not sheep, a fact that for a long time has confounded those who wish to manipulate them — including those on the so-called “left” who believe that they can use captured moribund union branches as levers to transform the thinking of union members. Workers are thinking beings. They will not make a revolution because someone tells them to, and quite rightly so.

Workers have already rejected (if, indeed, they ever accepted) the Blair mantras of the euro, subservience to the US, and privatisation. His stock was slumping well before Campbell left or the Hutton inquiry started. Let the spinners spin, and believe they are changing the world; they do not have a fraction of the influence they think they possess.

Those who truly wish to see thought transformed in this country, and play their part in transforming it, should start by listening to the thinking that is already out there. They will learn a lot about the limits of spin.

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