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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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WORKERS

“ The drums of war

THERE'S NO sabre rattler like a Labour sabre rattler. To listen to Foreign Secretary Miliband, you'd wonder why we aren't sending an expeditionary force to Georgia to fight the Russians. He and Bush (and others) are turning the world into a very dangerous place.

The government of Georgia would never have launched its surprise attack against the capital of the Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia on 8 August without previous coordination with Bush who, last month in Bucharest, committed to support Georgia's admission to NATO; that is like plunging a sharpened dagger deep into Russia's heart.

And that is almost certainly the intention. Russia is no longer socialist, but it does represent a huge and effectively closed market that will not "open up" to free trade and seeks to control its own vast energy resources. Bush and Labour are determined to make it pay for that crime against globalisation.

Many European states that are NATO members are concerned about the irresponsible manipulation of the nationalities issue, fraught with potential conflict, which could result in the disintegration of Britain itself. This is how Yugoslavia was dismantled: Tito's efforts to avoid it proved useless after his death. Here Russia too needs to exercise caution.

What need was there to light the powder keg of the Caucasus? If Russia today is no longer a "Communist threat" and it no longer has more than 400 nuclear launching-pads directly aimed at

Europe's military and strategic targets since they were dismantled after the demise of the USSR, why does the USA seem determined to surround it with a nuclear shield? The old continent also needs peace.

Yet the USA is pressing its European allies to deliver initial sanctions against Russia by deciding to suspend the six-year-old NATO-Russia council. Britain, Poland and the Baltic states are pushing for a response which would include "severe consequences" for Russia.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner has warned against issuing ultimatums against Russia. Yet French President Nicolas Sarkozy says, "Russia must immediately withdraw from Georgia", and that if it does not, he will convene an extraordinary European Council meeting "to decide on the consequences". He also claims, "If the Lisbon Treaty, which is in the process of being ratified, had already been in force, the EU would have had the institutions it needs to cope with an international crisis."

After the USA and Britain, Georgia is the country with the most soldiers in the Iraq war, and not out of internationalist sentiment. What are Georgian soldiers doing in Iraq, supporting a war which has cost that people hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of victims? What ideals are they defending there? It is only natural that people from South Ossetia do not wish to be sent as soldiers to fight in Iraq or in other parts of the planet at the behest of imperialism.



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Disarray in local government

THE TWO-DAY stoppage of Unison and Unite members in England and Wales local government – 16 and 17 July – has come and gone. In most regions, according to the employers' figures, those who took strike action were less than 10 per cent of the workforce. Even with the greatest mathematical wizardry employed by Unison head office it was very hard to get a majority of Unison regions into double figures. Both the employers' and Unison's figures are too embarrassingly low to print!

Two Unison regions dominated by the ultra-left rushed motions for escalation of the action to the respective national lay committee – the National Joint Council (NJC), numerically dominated by Unison. Meanwhile, the largest Unison region, the North West, threatened to declare independence and withdraw from the NJC agreement if such motions were tabled.

National bargaining and undying loyalty to the NJC terms and conditions have always been a feature of Unison and its old Nalگو (National Association of Local Government Officers) local government core. To make such a threat reflected how dire the action was perceived to have been.

Later, the Unison and Unite members of the NJC unanimously signed up to a joint statement with the employers which reopens negotiations, an action seen by many activists as the running up of a very large white flag very rapidly. And in classic Nalگو style the failure to have taken the members with the vocal minority clamouring for the dispute in the first instance becomes a campaign of more newsletters, more lobbying, more recruitment, more consultation and the ultimate weapon of industrial struggle – another meeting of the committee!

But those who mindlessly argued for this dispute without engaging or listening to the members, without any concept of strategy and tactics other than a national, now totally discredited, strike can take succour. Their ultra-left comrades in the Public and Commercial Services Union are balloting for three months discontinuous action and the NUT may even ballot again.

Industrial action is not delivered by weasel words put through a blog site or painted on the side of Lambeth Town Hall or any other town hall in the hours of darkness. Industrial action is delivered when the members, through their own tactics and ingenuity, decide to take on the employers. What is clear in local government – abundantly in England and Wales – is that there is no such mood despite all the grumblings.

- See article, right, about the action in Scotland on 20 August.

SCOTLAND

Local government strike

ON 20 AUGUST members of Unison, the GMB and Unite were on strike for 24 hours in Scotland in protest against a 2.5 per cent pay offer, which given the rate of inflation is effectively a pay cut.

Local services including schools, libraries, daycare centres, bin collections and ferry crossings were disrupted, though the level of disruption differed between council areas. Unions and employers, as in England and Wales (see left) have now reopened talks over the pay deal.

The fact that Scottish local government workers have separate pay negotiations, separate ballots, and separate disputes from counterparts in England and Wales arises from devolution and represents a weakness for the whole. Unions agreed to this split in the fond hope that Scotland would fare better on its own, but where will the money be found?

MEXICO

No to privatisation

THE PEOPLE of Mexico have voted decisively against the proposal to hand over the national oil company PEMEX to private companies. On 17 August, 400,000 Mexicans in seven states of the country voted on the proposal: 91 per cent voted 'No'. This was the second stage of the national referendum on the proposal to hand over the national industry to private companies

In the first stage of the referendum, held on 27 July in ten states and in Mexico City, more than 80 per cent of the 2.5 million Mexicans who went to the polls opposed privatising the oil industry.

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

Nobody loves them...

THE LATEST Eurobarometer poll asked people in Britain if they thought that EU membership was a good thing. The result was about evenly divided between yes, no and don't know. And 50 per cent of us think we have not gained from EU membership, the highest since 1983.

Denial and deceit

FRENCH PRESIDENT Nicolas Sarkozy believes Ireland must hold a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. "The Irish will have to vote again", he said. Polish President Lech Kaczynski said he will not create obstacles to ratification following a "chat" with Sarkozy after having previously suggested that it was pointless for him to sign the Lisbon treaty following Ireland's No vote.

Irish still say no

IRISH OPINION about the Lisbon treaty is hardening in the face of external pressure, according to a new poll. This found that 71 per cent of Irish voters are against a second referendum and that if a second vote was held, the No lead would increase from 6 to 24 points. In the same poll, 61 per cent disagreed that Ireland has to change its mind and support the treaty if all of the other 26 EU countries ratified it.

Immigration good for you, says EU

THE FRENCH government is drafting a European Pact on asylum and immigration for adoption at the EU Summit in October. The EU would impose a "common immigration policy for Europe", controlling all aspects of immigration and asylum policy. Its scheme is pro-immigration, calling immigration a great opportunity for the EU.

The European Commission is already preparing a directive ordering the mass legalisation of illegal immigrants, which would only encourage further waves of illegal immigration.

Bid to hand EU Olympic glory

AN ORGANISATION styling itself as the Young European Federalists has called for the countries in the EU to pool their sporting teams and present just one EU team at the Olympics, in order to top the medal table and combat nationalism. Presumably EU flag-waving is OK.



16 July, City Hall, London: Tube cleaners campaigning for a living wage, a return to direct employment by rail companies and an end to "third party sackings" by sub-contractors without a disciplinary hearing or right to appeal. Due to strike for 48 hours from 21 August, they called off the action on 20 August after management promised to pay the "London Living Wage" of £7.45 an hour – up from £5.50 an hour.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

How Labour loves the rich

THE LABOUR government has embraced the super-rich, making Britain their tax haven. It allows 25,000 non-domiciled multi-millionaires to pay no income tax. When some MPs briefly suggested taxing the non-doms this summer, the interests of the 25,000 easily defeated those of the 50 million. In 2006, 54 billionaires paid a total of just £14.7 million in income tax. So, unsurprisingly, inequality has reached record levels.

Brown cut capital gains tax (40 per cent under Thatcher) to just 10 per cent on gains made on assets held for two years, the same rate that private-equity partners paid on the "carried interest" they gained from the sales of the companies they had bought.

In 1997 Brown ended the dividend tax credit, grabbing billions from our occupational pension funds (and forcing higher contributions). The government then encouraged the City to push our pensions savings into ever more dodgy financial instruments. In 1997, savings were 9.5 per cent of income; they are now just 2.1 per cent. Overseas investors fund private-equity companies whose profits rob our pension funds of the gains.

Private equity companies borrow hugely to fund their purchases. Interest on debt is deductible from profits, so these companies load their businesses with just enough debt to wipe out their tax liability: the taxable profits disappear, and so do their taxes.

The rest of us subsidise these pirates through our taxes. Since 2000, the tax paid by giant corporations has risen just 4.7 per cent, the tax paid by the big banks has risen by 27 per cent, but the tax paid by small firms has risen by 132 per cent.

Debenhams, under private-equity ownership, got £22 million in tax credits in just two years. The AA, under private-equity ownership, stopped paying tax and the Inland Revenue owed it £67.5 million by the end of 2005. Saga, under private-equity ownership, claimed a tax refund of £18.7 million. The global financial markets have become a machine for enriching the few while loading debt on to the many. The interests of hedge funds and private equity are completely opposed to the interests of the vast majority of us.

COASTGUARDS

Striking for more money

OVER THE BUSY August Bank Holiday, Britain's coastguards went on strike for better pay. Over 700 workers for the Maritime & Coastguard Agency want a better settlement than the offer made by the government.

The two-day strike followed five days of action earlier this year, and comes in

the wake of other strikes by civil servants. Inflation is heading for 5 per cent a year; basic costs such as fuel, food and utilities are going up faster. It's no surprise that workers in government offices are not satisfied with the prospect of pay rises of 2.5 per cent or less.

This government's public pay policy is no different to any of its predecessors. Pay must be "fair and affordable" says Gordon Brown – clearly those working for him have a different idea of what that means.

PRIVATISATION**Outsourcing surges**

THE LABOUR government has speeded up Thatcher's privatisation programme. A Review of the Public Services Industry, published on 10 July, found that outsourced public services have grown by 130 per cent since 1995. The industry is now second in size only to the USA's, and has a £79 billion turnover. It accounts for nearly 6 per cent of GDP and directly employs more than 1.2 million people.

But the Review revealed that the PSI's growth rate has been slowing and the costs of bidding are rising with an increasingly complex commissioning process. Growth

was 6.8 per cent a year in real terms from 1995/96 to 2003/04 and has been 2.9 per cent a year since then.

Health was the largest sector of PSI spending in 2007/8 – £24.2 billion, followed by social protection (the new term for social security, tax credits, etc, £17.9 billion), defence (£10.1 billion) and education (£7.3 billion). The fastest growing sectors in the PSI over the last 12 years have been education, environmental protection and health.

The report concludes with a threat, "government departments and local authorities should seek to introduce competitive challenge into areas of service delivery where it has not yet been tried."

Karadzic taken to Hague

THE FORMER Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic was arrested on 21 July. He is to appear before the US-sponsored and largely US-funded International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 (ICTY) in The Hague, Netherlands, charged with war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

Radovan Karadzic will be duly convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity, and he will not come out of jail alive. The verdict is already written, but the trial will be neither fair nor just nor public. As with Saddam Hussein's trial, the US will fix it and censor it.

Atrocities were undoubtedly committed – but by both sides. In June, the ICTY found the Muslim wartime commander of Srebrenica, Nasir Oric, not guilty of any responsibility for any of the killings – even though Yasushi Akashi, former UN Representative in Bosnia, admitted in the WASHINGTON TIMES of 1 November 1995, "the Bosnian government forces have used the 'safe areas' of not only Srebrenica, but Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Gorazde for training, recuperation and refurbishing their troops." Mujehadin forces were allowed to attack out of these areas, but the Serbs were not allowed to pursue them back in. Between 1992 and 1995, these forces killed more than 3,000 Serbian civilians. The ICTY on its website tells us, "By holding individuals accountable regardless of their position, the ICTY's work has dismantled the tradition of impunity for war crimes and other serious violations of international law, particularly by individuals who held the most senior positions."

In 1999, NATO forces (primarily the USAF and the RAF) bombed Serbia for 78 consecutive days, ruining the economy and killing thousands of people. Shouldn't Clinton and Blair be tried for war crimes, as called for by the Tribunal's own statute?

But Louise Arbour, the court's chief prosecutor, said at the time, "I am obviously not commenting on any allegations of violations of international humanitarian law supposedly perpetrated by nationals of NATO countries. I accept the assurances given by NATO leaders that they intend to conduct their operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in full compliance with international humanitarian law."

CONSTRUCTION**Lay-off sparks site strike**

HUNDREDS of building workers walked off the Langage Energy Centre site in Plymouth on 7 August after 16 men hired the previous Sunday on six-month contracts were told that there was no work for them, amid rumours that cheaper Polish labour was being brought in.

The men had travelled from all over

the British Isles and were expecting to live in accommodation provided by Alstom, but were left stranded with their belongings and nowhere to live. The 16 men included Unite rep Brian Mills. Rapid negotiations the following day led to a settlement, with agreed compensation.

Langage is the first power station to be built in Britain for five years. The gas-fired station is being built by Alstom, the French company, for Centrica, formerly the production arm of British Gas.

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

Sunday 7 September

Burston Strike School Rally 2008,
Church Green, Burston, near Diss,
Norfolk.

In April 1914, Kitty & Tom Higdon, loved and respected teachers at Burston Village School, were sacked for their socialist and union views. The pupils walked out in support and from then until 1939, the villagers and the Higdons ran the "Strike School", providing an education for local children. The annual rally commemorates the strike and celebrates those who continue to fight for trade union rights. The rally kicks off at 11am, and ends at 4.30pm. Speakers and music.

EDUCATION**Marking fiasco**

ETS EUROPE, the private company which turned this year's SATs tests into a fiasco, has been sacked. The US-owned company, which had a five-year £156 million contract to mark the tests for 11- and 14-year olds, has apparently agreed to pay back £19.5 million of the first year's fee.

It has since emerged that ETS already had form in this area, having previously caused similar mayhem in the United States with teacher exam marking.

Thousands of children still have not had their results, and many schools which did eventually receive back marked scripts late last term found no mark sheets collating the results, so had to employ temps to enable them to do it themselves. In many cases, the quality of marking was appalling.

Experienced markers told stories of organisational chaos, with students being drafted in to help out (this is against the rules). There will be many appeals (cost £6.50 per script) to add to the considerable costs of the mess to schools.

A new contract will be put out to tender in September, but existing experienced exam boards are not likely to rush. Two of the big three refused to bid last time, and the other one, Edexcel, argued against the tests at a parliamentary enquiry.

Even Ofsted's Chief Inspector has now spoken out against the tests.

The attack on Somalia

ON THE RARE occasions when the media mention the conflict in Somalia, they focus on US attempts to hunt down al Qaeda, or on the West's alleged humanitarian motives. But the US political weekly *The Nation* called Somalia 'one of the most strategically sensitive spots in the world today: astride the Horn of Africa, where oil, Islamic fundamentalism and Israeli, Iranian and Arab ambitions and arms are apt to crash and collide.' It is also critical for its deep-water ports and strategic location for future military bases.

The key fact is that some 30 per cent of the USA's oil will come from Africa in the next 10 years. The US has plans for nearly two-thirds of Somalia's oil fields to be run by the US oil companies Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Phillips. As Mark Fineman of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "Far beneath the surface of the tragic drama of Somalia, four major U.S. oil companies are quietly sitting on a prospective fortune in exclusive concessions to explore and exploit tens of millions of acres of the Somali countryside." ('The oil factor in Somalia,' 18 January 1993.) Bush's new warlord-friends in the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) are willing to pass a new oil law that will encourage foreign oil companies to return to Somalia.

On 20 July 2006, US-backed Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia. USA TODAY reported that the USA had given Ethiopia nearly \$20 million in US military aid since late 2002. Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of UK aid in Africa and is an important regional ally. (The US and British states ignored the fact that Ethiopian security forces killed 193 people who protested against election fraud in 2005.)

On 4 December 2006, General John Abizaid, commander of US forces from the Middle East to Afghanistan, travelled to Addis Ababa to meet Ethiopia's prime minister, Meles Zenawi. Heavy fighting began on 20 December, when more Ethiopian forces crossed into Somalia, accompanied secretly by US Special Forces troops, and Washington launched a series of supportive air strikes and naval patrols. On 9 January 2007 the United States openly intervened by sending Lockheed AC-130 gunships to attack positions in Ras Kamboni.

The invasion has had appalling consequences. 8,000 Somali soldiers have been killed and 5,000 wounded. 8,636 civilians have been killed and 11,790 injured. About 1.9 million people have been made internal refugees, and the UN food security unit has warned that 3.5 million people, nearly a third of Somalia's population, are facing famine. Fighting has turned the capital Mogadishu into a ghost town. About 700,000 people have fled – out of a population of up to 1.5 million.

Soaring food prices have driven thousands of protestors onto the streets of Mogadishu. A kilo of rice, which previously sold at around seventy US cents, now costs \$2.50. The average day's income for anyone fortunate enough to have a job is less than a dollar a day. The gap between incomes and the cost of food mainly imported from overseas means that millions of people cannot afford to eat.

The most fundamental divide of all – class – is the most ignored concept within the TUC...

TUC: Back to basics

THE ANNUAL CONGRESS of the TUC rolls round this month and it is time to take stock again of the health of the labour movement. The TUC agenda will deal with all the supposed pressing and politically correct agendas of the activists (not the members) who will be present.

Be it the green agenda, migrant workers, vulnerable workers, race, equalities, agency workers, individual rights, new rights etc., it will be given plenty of attention. Division over race, gender, and discrimination will continue to be highlighted and promoted – another import from the USA. Worthiness and do-gooding will spring from every photo call, press release and stunt, let alone the nightmare appearance of Brown or some other Labour Party leadership aspirant. Trade union mergers will dominate not as a strategy of growth but as one of managed decline – ever fewer huddling together, ever fewer approaching an average age of 50 years.

Though the trend is slowing, trade union membership continues to decline. Density – the percentage of union members in an industry – hovers around the 36 per cent mark with all sorts of panaceas, recruiting philosophies and organising challenges giving rise to doctorates that purport to remedy this decline. Ironically all these solutions emanate from the USA where density of the fractured and split trade unions is less than 15 per cent.

Sadly none of these panaceas has worked since 1979. The TUC Organising Academy continually pushes the statistic that the 75 per cent of Britain's 28 million workers who are not trade union members (bear in mind though that around 6 million workers are in non-TUC organisations, staff associations, professional bodies etc. – a similar number to those in TUC affiliated unions), have never been asked to join. A further 54 per cent would join if asked.

Show the relevance

Such statistics are all rosy and refreshing. But they ignore the fact that Britain has some of the most draconian anti-worker and anti-union laws in the world. It also ignores the most fundamental ideological conundrum: workers are not joining unions because they do not see the relevance, role or strength of unions that have yet to recover from the Thatcher counter-revolution.

Likewise all the partnership working, corporatism, state funding for union work, cosy individual human rights and legalistic hogwash pushed by the Labour government (most emanating from the anti-worker, anti-collectivist European Union) has been about undermining the very basis of the trade unions as class organisations.

The prettiest leaflets in the world, technological remedies, whizzes of email, YouTube, text, blog and website, photo calls and media stunts, all of which promote individualism, will not remedy the fact that the concept of collectivism, of class, of the commonweal, have been damaged to the point of being near terminal. Organisers of trade union education for stewards, learning reps, health and safety representatives, all the battery of foot soldiers who deal with the employer on a day to day basis in the workplace – all report the lowest level of political consciousness and class awareness for decades.

Along with wholesale destruction of industry, the class consciousness generated by the workplace from the early days of the Industrial Revolution through to 1997 has also largely been destroyed.



Photo: Andrew Wiaard/www.reportphotos.com

TUC 2007: all smiles then. And it will be all smiles at TUC 2008 in Brighton from Labour leader Gordon Brown and TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber. But neither man has anything to be happy about.

Ironically, having more workers employed in Britain than ever has not seen class consciousness re-emerge in an organised form. The most fundamental divide of all – class – is the most ignored concept within the TUC.

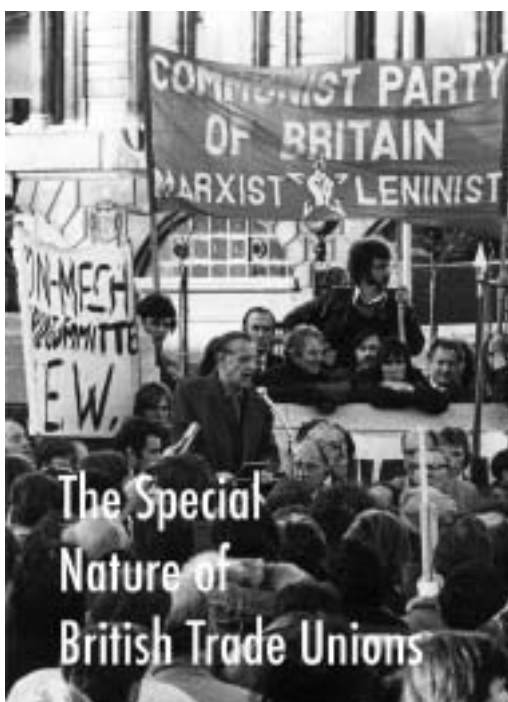
The pay differential between employers and employees in 1996 was 39:1, in 2006 that had risen to 98:1. Income, wealth distribution and inequality bellow from every workplace but the trade

unions seem unable to grasp or grapple with it.

To re-emerge we have to return to fundamental basics, the ones that built union strength in first place: every worker in their union; every workplace organised; every union to relate to and reflect the real workplace; every union to be organic; and a required growth from the workplace.

The unions are not a business justification in themselves, though too

many employed by them see them as a lifestyle better than working. They are not all suited to a merger strategy such as Unite's, nor to a mantra that one size fits all. It is a monumental task to rebuild what are effectively defensive organisations of class power and influence, and the reluctance of workers to join trade unions indicates that we are in need of a new unionism of a new type to meet this grave situation.



New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the CPBM-L, this pamphlet publishes – for the first time – an analysis of the British trade unions by founding Party Chairman Reg Birch. Available now, price £3 including p&p, from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB. Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.

In Britain, the trade unions were created, uniquely, as the “weapons of a working class”. They were an “organic coming together of a class out of the conflict of class relationship” – a necessary tool for survival, built for defence not attack, against the employer in an economic system based on class exploitation.

This is the starting point for this speech, given by Reg Birch in 1982, which goes on to outline the history of our trade unions – tracing them back to at least the 14th century – and to analyse their development, peculiar to Britain.

The CPBM-L is re-issuing the text of this important speech by its founding Chairman, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Party, not as an academic exercise or a historic curiosity, but because Reg Birch's analysis raises important questions for us today.

Read it, consider it, and discuss it with your fellow workers.

When the NUT recently called a one-day strike, with the possibility of others to follow, the demand for an adequate pay rise was the main focus but not the only cause...

The politics of 'failure': Education is not just

HOW IS IT possible for a school to be rated "Good" by OFSTED, be in the top 10 per cent of improved schools, to receive commendations for those improvements and then be branded a "failing school"? The government's National Challenge programme has produced such a contradictory position by identifying 638 schools nationally deemed to be failing, the criterion for failure being less than 30 per cent of students achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs including maths and English. No matter that a school has significantly improved its performance, or that it is meeting student needs that are not statistically quantifiable. There seems little by way of objectively assessing a school within its own economic and social context. It may well be that some schools are indeed failing their students and those shortcomings need to be addressed.

Not a proper measure

An arbitrary percentage of examination passes cannot be a proper measure of an individual school. Why 30 per cent? Why not 29 or 31 or 25 or 35 per cent? Why not 100 per cent so no school passes if one child fails?

Anyone who has been active in their trade union knows that when a dispute becomes critical and industrial action is taken, the headline demand is rarely the sole cause. So, when the NUT recently called a one-day strike, with the possibility of others to follow, the demand for an adequate pay rise was the main focus but not the only cause. There is a general dissatisfaction going beyond pay demands and the contradiction questioned above is one example of this.

The remarkable thing about the NUT day of action was the overwhelming support of its membership. This did not reflect the ballot which, although returning a majority in favour of taking action, had only a minority of members who completed their ballot papers.

To state the obvious, this means a clear majority did not vote in favour of going on strike and yet the vast majority of members supported the strike call and large numbers actively came out for



Victim of politics: McEntee School in Walthamstow, northeast London, was forced to become an academy – but despite big improvements, including a special award for pupil improvement, found itself branded as failing in June this year.

Photo: Workers

rallies and demonstrations. A major element in this was that the ballot, the formal legal requirement, was not crucial. It was followed by the good trade union practice of workplace meetings and open discussion. There, members were galvanised.

The poor return of home ballot papers does not mean the teacher is apathetic; it can mean that at home as an isolated individual, he or she feels confronted by what are seemingly opposed demands - the justice of his/her case as espoused by the union on the one hand conflicting with the very real sense of commitment to the job on the other. The end result is that the decision to take action or not doesn't get made and the ballot paper sits uncompleted behind the clock on the mantelpiece until the final date for return has passed.

Meeting formally with your

colleagues, a group activity, allows issues which are the subject of many informal staff room discussions, to be fully explored. The use of the plural is deliberate, for while the main issue would be the derisory pay offer by the government, below inflation and therefore a pay cut, other factors are raised.

Constant manipulation

The constant manipulation of education by the state and its propensity to "blame and shame" those teachers working in the most challenging conditions are major elements of contention. Even for those teachers who are not in schools officially under threat the message is clear: you're under surveillance, it could well be you next, even, it seems, if the government's attack dog Ofsted has judged you to be a good teacher, a good school – for the moment.

ality of others to follow, the demand for an adequate pay rise

st an academic question

The government is determined to drive through its policy of converting schools into academies. Its purpose is illustrated by the Walsall Academy, sponsored by the Mercers' Company of London, in Bloxwich, West Midlands, which is offering its teaching staff a pay rise of 10 per cent.

This seemingly generous offer is in return for teachers agreeing to work 10 hours more lesson time per week, a reasonable condition at first sight. Except, it's not. A standard secondary school week is 25 one hour lessons (there are variations, but they are minimal). An individual teacher does not teach each and every lesson because there is also some preparation time. But even if he or she did, an extra 10 hours would constitute a 40 per cent increase in the work load. That 10 per cent pay rise now looks rather less generous.

Ignoring agreements

Even more important are the longer-term implications. For the Walsall Academy to be able to propose such changes means that it assumes national agreements and contractual arrangements can be ignored. Indeed, this is the purpose of academies – they become freestanding schools in which union organisation and protection of members becomes dramatically more difficult.

The NUT, for example, would have to negotiate with each school in turn, and a national strike day, never mind any more sustained action, would be virtually impossible to organise. Effectively, teachers would have their contracts torn up and their unions neutralised. Their interests would then become almost entirely the concern of that other educational lapdog, the General Teaching Council. This already operates a protection racket in that every teacher has to pay a statutory tribute annually just to be allowed the privilege of going to work. A report written for the think tank "Reform" by Richard Tice, chair of governors at Northampton Academy, states that low teaching standards are the result of teaching unions becoming too powerful. He goes on to say that

"Teachers can expect increasing attacks on their pay and conditions..."

unions have become blockers of reform by pursuing national pay deals, rather than supporting teachers who are doing a good job, as other organisations are doing.

Can there be any doubt that with the neutralisation of unions, increasing workloads will continue without even the pretence of "generous" pay rises. Undoubtedly, the "other organisations" such as the GTC will play their part in praising, perhaps even having national awards for, those teachers whose self sacrificing dedication means they have simply acquiesced.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families judges that about 35 local authorities presently require particular intervention. This could entail local authority (they are LEAs no longer, apparently) schools being handed over to interim executive boards or becoming part of a trust or federation. They then could be transformed into academies or simply closed down.

The chief schools adjudicator, Philip Hunter, has proposed that schools catering for a high share of an area's pupils eligible for free school meals should be closed as their intake makes improvement so difficult. This doesn't mean those pupils will as a result become much better educated – after all, if poverty is the major influence on their educational prospects a change of school alters little fundamentally.

They are still poor. But as statistical elements they will be less significant, lost among the overall performance figures of their "better school". It also begs the question of why so many children have their life chances blighted by poverty. The answer to that raises profound questions about the very nature of capitalism. Governments, especially the Labour government, have no intention of addressing those.

A feature of capitalism is the individualist consumer attitude. Present educational policy is predicated on this with league tables being the shopping list of must have (or must avoid) schools. Like the teachers' ballot the effect is to isolate individuals, in this case families, so decisions are made with poor information.

There is no involvement in education with all concerned actively discussing the purpose and methods of education. "Education" means "to lead out", not "to meet government determined targets driven by the requirements of capitalism". This, though, would mean active social engagement, aiming for a very different kind of economy. Until then, the move towards ever greater numbers of academies will continue to be the state's solution and teachers can expect increasing attacks on their pay and conditions. Let there be no doubt – this is what the state intends, ignoring the fact that, embarrassingly, many of the "failing" schools are academies!

Every school a failing school?

Such is not quite the situation yet, but the prospect of it is the answer to the opening question. Ultimately, if unchecked, every school that is not an academy will be deemed a failing school as it won't be maximising the potential of its workforce.

However good a school's examination results are they would be so much better if teachers weren't bound by outdated union practices. That will be the argument.

The head teacher of Walsall Academy has called for the same freedoms as enjoyed by her academy to be given to all schools. Freedom to work 40 per cent longer for 10 per cent more pay. If ever the influence of capitalist ideology on education needed an illustration, then that surely is it. And such freedoms lead to more stressed teachers who are less able to perform well. So there need be no conflict between personal and professional standards.

• Unison has just negotiated improved pay and conditions for its teaching assistant members in academies.

**Menwith Hill is at the centre of a US network spying on the world
mislead the public about what purpose it is serving...**

North Yorkshire, American style



Photo: Workers

Menwith Hill, North Yorkshire: once a 250 acre farm, now in US hands and the largest electronic monitoring station in the world.

US INDEPENDENCE Day, 4 July, this year saw a large-scale demonstration outside the largest spying base in the world, Menwith Hill in North Yorkshire. Organised by the “Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases”, the “Independence FROM America” event has been for 20 years an annual feature in the calendar of those concerned with US belligerence around the globe and British acquiescence in it.

Menwith Hill has long been a focus for protest against American bases on British soil. It hosts dishes for the Echelon espionage system and is reportedly able to intercept two million telephone calls

and emails an hour from around the world. It pinpointed Iraqi positions and guided troop movements during both Gulf wars, and has been implicated in commercial espionage.

It starts with a farm

The story starts over 50 years ago, with the purchase of a 250 acre farm by the Ministry of Defence on behalf of the Crown. Under the terms of an agreement between the US armed forces and the British War Office, the US Army operated a high frequency radio monitoring station on the site, called 13th USA Field Station. It was renamed RAF Menwith Hill in 1959,

presumably to deflect attention from the fact that this is an American enclave serving American interests.

Since 1966, control of the station has been assumed by the National Security Agency of America (NSA) set up by Truman in 1952 without any debate by Congress. From its inception Menwith Hill has grown and expanded its range of activities. It is now acknowledged as the largest electronic monitoring station in the world.

For half a century this bristling array of domes, dishes and masts, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has been a reminder that the so-called special

ld. For half a century, British governments have connived to

relationship is a decidedly one-way affair. And for half a century, British governments have connived to mislead the public about what purpose it is serving. There have been notable attempts to force the issue in Parliament, inevitably met with the “not in the national interest to disclose” mantra.

One year ago, at the beginning of Gordon Brown’s premiership, and with the phrase “respect for parliamentary democracy” ringing in our ears, this Government cynically slipped in a statement about Menwith Hill among a series of policy announcements made 48 hours before the summer recess, when MPs’ thoughts were on warmer climes.

Announcement

Without discussion or consultation, defence secretary Des Browne announced that Menwith Hill would be used by the United States for its Ballistic Missile Defence system (BMD). Falling over in their haste to follow the Bush administration from one military catastrophe to another, Labour had knowingly embraced yet another.

George Monbiot, writing in the Guardian on 31 July 2007 saw through this charade, writing: “...Des Browne’s note asserted that the purpose of the missile defence system is ‘to address the emerging threat from rogue states’. This is a claim that only an idiot or a member of the British government could believe. If, as Browne and Bush maintain, the system is meant to shoot down intercontinental missiles fired by Iran and North Korea (missiles incidentally, that they do not and might never possess), why are its major components being installed in Poland and the Czech Republic? To bait the Russian bear for fun? In June, Vladimir Putin called Bush’s bluff by offering sites for the missile defence system in Azerbaijan and southern Russia, which are much closer to Iran. Bush turned him down and restated his decision to build the facilities in Europe, making it clear that their real purpose is to shoot down Russian missiles.”

The US BMD system, claimed by Bush

“It was renamed RAF Menwith Hill in 1959, presumably to deflect attention from the fact that this is an American enclave serving American interests....”

as a necessary defence, is a global network of bases that will detect and shoot down missiles launched against the United States. Russia has some 5,700 nuclear warheads. The proposed silos in Poland will house 10. They can only be envisaged as part of a mopping-up programme to neutralise the few “enemy” missiles not destroyed in a pre-emptive strike.

And there we have it. The Pentagon’s blueprint for missile defence, “Joint Vision 2020”, has as its central principle “full

spectrum dominance”, the ability “to defeat any adversary and control any situation”. Not only do we have, with Menwith Hill and related facilities such as Fylingdales near Whitby, the eyes and ears of American aggression, we learn that Blair had been actively lobbying for missile bases here also. It goes without saying that any nation threatened by America would seek to disable the beast by knocking out these facilities. Small wonder the government would rather we didn’t discuss this.

A dangerous world

The likelihood of such a scenario coming to pass is a matter for conjecture. There are fortunately few governments in the world with both the capacity and the gung-ho recklessness of Bush and his allies. But there are some such as our own who applaud like cheerleaders the nonsense coming out of Washington and make the world a more dangerous place.

If we wish to counter American warmongering, we start by opposing British warmongering and by exposing the role of our government in doing America’s dirty work for it.

Protestors who won’t give up

ANTI-WAR protestors come in all shapes and sizes. For many years now, a number of determined individuals and organisations have kept the spotlight on Menwith Hill. Braving intimidation and often imprisonment, they see the bigger picture and put many of us to shame by never giving up. On any given day you could find a Quaker service against the base, a carnival with clowns and balloons, a barbecue, anything to capture attention. Three examples from this last year serve as a glimpse into the wide spectrum of protest.

Outside the base, Lindis Percy hops from one foot to another accompanied by an accordion player. A serial peace campaigner, this pensioner, who has been arrested hundreds of times for trespassing in what the government has

defined as a piece of America, was detained the previous night and a condition of her bail was not to be found stationary near the perimeter fence. Hence the jiggling!

A consultant doctor justifies his placard which reads “STAR WARS – A TRAGEDY FOR ALL NATIONS – WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY?” and defends his presence here. “I was trained as a doctor to prevent harm, and these weapons systems take money desperately needed for the world’s health.... This base is the gunsight for the biggest weapons system in the world.”

At last year’s Independence FROM America event, writer Alan Bennett added his support to the protest: “...if there’s dirty washing to be done, we should do our own.”

There are no gleaming multi-million pound hospitals, no state of the art medical equipment, no modern fleets of ambulances with up-to-the minute pre-hospital care kits on board, But they do have

The NHS: We don't know how lucky we are



Photo: Workers

Ambulances in Havana

A reader who works in the London Ambulance Service sent the article below. – Editor

I HEARD ON the radio the other day that, per head of population, Cuba had more people who were 100 years old than anywhere else in the world. The report also stated that the general life expectancy had risen to 80. Those two facts are remarkable, and would be remarkable in any other country, even incredible in most, but taking into account the context of life in Cuba with people struggling against the backdrop of the American economic and material blockade (a blockade which also includes medicines, hospital equipment, ambulances and health related paraphernalia that we take for granted)

those achievements have much more significance. Before the revolution in 1959 life expectancy was 55. By 2000 it had risen to 76. Eight years later it is 80. They even have something called the 120 Club, which certainly makes the 18-30 club sound a bit feeble!

Health in Cuba is sacrosanct. It can't be bought, it can't be sold, it can't be betrayed, it will not be privatised, it will not be 'Foundation Trust-ised' and it will not be starved into submission by a powerful neighbour.

People are at the heart of health in Cuba: it is outcomes that count there – not targets. A fully free health service (yes, including prescriptions and dental care) is an absolute right under the Cuban constitution, guaranteed by the state.

This is not to say, of course, that

everything is a utopian dream. The reality couldn't be further from it. There is a vast difference between the Cuban health service and the NHS here in the UK for instance. There are no gleaming multi-million pound hospitals, no state of the art medical equipment, no modern fleets of ambulances with up-to-the minute pre-hospital care kits on board, no fast response vehicles, no motorbike paramedics, no cycle paramedics (ironically in a country that could use them far more than us), no ambulance helicopters and yet – and yet – everyone supports, defends and is very proud of their health service no matter what!

Everyone appreciates the ambulance service, even if resources are sparse, control rooms are stuck in a 1950s time warp for lack of money, modern

of the art medical equipment, no modern fleets of ambulances do have pride in their health service...

technology, telecommunications and crews who lack the most basic pre-hospital care equipment that even the most modest of private or volunteer ambulance services in the UK have an abundance of.

Health, the health service and the people who work in it are not used as a political football, taken for granted or abused by sections of the public.

And this got me thinking! Here we are in Britain, the fifth biggest economy in the world with a National Health Service that is the envy of all the developed countries. It has: ultra modern hospitals springing up (with the help of private money); state of the art equipment; millions of pounds spent on research and on drugs; modern ambulances (in most services) able to reach every part of the UK; a free emergency 999 service that is available to all without any, or very few, limitations and high-tech computerised control rooms able to deal with a 24-hour demand that seems to grow year on year.

Thousands upon thousands of people use the service and are helped by health workers, treated by ambulance workers, seen by doctors and nursed by professionals every day of the year and yet – and yet – disappointment is in the air. People grumble and complain about the NHS, about ambulance services, about health workers, about ambulance workers, about their treatment, about their waiting times, about their hospitals, about their doctors etc etc etc.

Taken for granted

Why is that? Do we take the NHS for granted? Have we got short memories? Don't we understand that things could change on the whim of a political decision or a political reactionary force? Have we dropped our guard and become tired of defending our services? Ever since the NHS was founded, enemies of it have been chipping away day by day, night by night, week by week. The enemies are not just outside the NHS, but also inside.

Sometimes, as staff, we unwittingly play into the hands of those who would take us backwards by complaining and

“Health, the health service and the people who work in it are not used as a political football...”

grumbling and failing to support or defend our own service. Instead of offering constructive criticism or helping to resolve the things that may be wrong, we sometimes find it easier to snipe, attack or throw “hand grenades full of negative cynicism” from the sidelines out of harm's way, not caring where they land or the damage they do.

Are we sleepwalking into American-style health provision based on “choice”, competition and the ability to pay? Have we fallen hook, line and sinker for the sleight of hand deception of the apologists who say, “as long as we don't pay when we are treated it is still a free health service at the point of delivery”?

Our ambulance services and NHS are not perfect – far from it. The things that are wrong need to be put right. The people who hold us all back need to go. We have to find a better way of dealing with the ever-increasing call rates so that ambulance staff are not constantly pushed from pillar to post and suffer “burn out” at a younger and younger age.

Most ambulance services are now starting to get to grips with alternative responses so that those people who dial 999 in good faith, because at the time of calling they honestly thought they needed an emergency ambulance, can be dealt with in the most appropriate way. We have to deal with the usage of the 999 system. It is no good on the one hand having limitations on funding in Ambulance Services, yet no limit whatsoever on people's rights and responsibilities in regard to calling an ambulance. The theory of ‘supply and demand’ goes out of the window when it

comes to this difficult issue.

The NHS celebrated its 60th birthday in July of this year. That is still a very short length of time within our country's history. The Health Service is still fragile. An oak tree takes hundreds of years to put down solid roots so that no amount of turbulence can push it over. Likewise, the NHS needs to have solid roots so that our children and their children's children do not look back and blame us for a lost opportunity.

Ambulance services as we know them within the NHS are even younger. They are constantly changing as they, and we, try to find the most comfortable fit. We are all part of it. There cannot be a “them and us”. We all have to find real alliances, meaningful partnerships, and true visionaries from both sides of the union-management landscape to build and improve on what we have been given by those that went before us. Successful public services are in everyone's interest.

What can be done

It still amazes me (although I know it shouldn't) that a country like Cuba with its shortage of so many things can put its heart and soul into providing healthcare and that the staff, patients and people not only support, defend and struggle to improve it but also feel immensely proud to be part of it.

Contrast that with Britain with all our treasures, privileges and comforts. The NHS is taken for granted. Ambulance Services are overstretched to the point where some have to force staff and vehicles to rove around the streets in the mistaken belief that targets are everything, although the introduction of Call Connect will most probably not save one extra single life. This needs challenging.

Although some targets are important we seem to be forced sometimes to focus on the wrong ones. How can we work differently to relieve pressure on staff and managers and still focus on patients and get away from “the final push” mentality?

All that is wrong notwithstanding, we really don't know how lucky we are.

Our eighth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, T month: The long fight to displace Thatcher...

1979: Thatcher Out!



Following the 1979 General Election, our Party quickly reassessed the political situation facing workers and concluded that it was not just business as normal for capitalism, that in fact the post war bourgeois consensus had been ditched and that Thatcherism was a dangerous governmental stance which was set to undermine and destroy the organised working class. We changed the basis of our line from 'Don't Vote, Organise for Revolution' to "Thatcher Out".

Typical of our swift response was the arresting call of the headline in *The Worker* produced on 29 November 1979: "Thatcher Government Must Go!" The article commented:

“Government policies have but one rationale. All resistance must be crushed. They are prepared to gamble everything on the slaughter of the organisations of the working class of Britain. Central to that policy is destruction of industry, while the ruling class decamps and seeks to shroud itself in the newer and more congenial institutions of the EEC. Every form of Government holding in industry is to be sold off at rock bottom prices to the carrion of the City and the international money markets. What remains of British industry is to be butchered and the workers taught to be humble.”

In the same issue's editorial, we wrote:



“The Thatcher gang came to power on the promise of increasing incentives all around and using sound monetarist policies for creating an economic climate in which industry would thrive. There would be no need for an incomes policy and wages could be left to a ‘free’ system where the market was in control, and there was no need for interference by the central government.

This whole thesis was patently false from the start. It pretended that capitalism had departed from the pure laissez-faire system of Adam Smith out of some arbitrary whim and not because it had been forced to by its own internal contradictions. The nationalisation of industries which were necessary but not profitable enough to be left to the private sector, the intervention of the government on the side of employers to impose wage limits, the attempts to encourage by government action investment at home and to discourage the export of capital were all efforts to shore up a failing system and not the

result of some misunderstanding about how the system was supposed to work.

What this Government has actually done is to effect a severe wage cut by introducing soaring inflation and then, by applying strict limits on monetary growth, to bring about a sharp downfall in productive output. A major world-wide recession was on the way in any case and government action here has not only made it certain but also exacerbated its seriousness. Whatever faint hope there might have been that cuts in taxation would stimulate industrial investment has been completely swamped by the enormously high cost of borrowing money – the highest in Britain's history.

Are they mad then? Committed to increasing profits, everything they have done has led to a decline in output, to closures and bankruptcies of the small firms they were supposed to be helping and to a severe economic depression. No, they are not mad. They know that the main threat to profit is an organised working class which is strong enough to

Looking at the past THE WORKER. This

resist paying the whole cost of capitalism's decline. What we are seeing is an all-out attempt to destroy the will and the ability of the working class to resist by destroying production and creating even more massive unemployment, by eroding the value of wages with swingeing inflation and attacking the trade unions to break their strength.

The CBI recognises the strategy and even though the immediate effects are bad for business they know that the organised working class has to be smashed if capitalism is to survive in Britain.”

The editorial ended by warning of punitive actions to come:

“We had better be prepared for it with everything we have learned from two hundred years of class struggle, plus what we think through now about ending a system which can only continue to exist on the basis of our complete fascist enslavement.”

How did it happen?

Thatcher's government drove unemployment up, even on conservative official statistics, from 1.3 million in 1979 to 2.4 million by 1981, and 3.5 million in 1985. Monetarist dogmas cloaked an assault on production because our working class was absolutely entwined in industry. Draconian anti-trade union legislation was pushed through. National assets were sold off cheaply.

Why did it all come to pass? The essential explanation lies in the fact that workers were ideologically ill-prepared to fend off the assault and many workers actually voted for her government and agreed with its views.

We are still circumscribed by the past to this day. We desperately need a resurrection of class thinking if we are to fend off new ruling class attacks and find our path to a better form of society, socialism.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

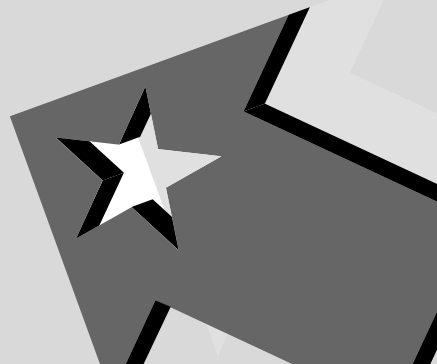
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Back to Front – People are such a burden

‘There is no shortage of workers in Britain, as confirmed by the rising numbers of those officially out of work, up to 1.67 million in July..’

OH DEAR! Disaster – or so the newspapers would have it. The reason: there are now more pensioners in Britain than under-16s, according to official figures (about which, as ever, there needs to be some caution).

What, though, is the problem? Surely it’s a good thing that adults are living longer, and not being wiped out by disease or war. It’s a tribute to the progress in medicine and healthcare that workers in Britain have made, despite governments.

Capitalists are appalled, seeing older people as a burden. (Except themselves, of course: life expectancy is 7 years longer for the rich than the poor. But then, capitalists have never seen themselves or their system as a burden.) The CBI promptly called for more people to work past the current retirement age of 60 for women and 65 for men.

The problem for capitalists is the prospect of shrinking numbers of the available army of the working class. Now, there is no shortage of workers in Britain, as confirmed by the rising numbers of those officially out of work, up to 1.67 million in July following the biggest monthly rise in 16 years. Millions more are of working age but not working. Capitalists, though, want something different: they need even more people actively seeking work, what Karl Marx 150 years ago called the “reserve army” of the working class – the unemployed and partially employed.

What Marx observed then can be seen now: increase the numbers seeking work, and you can lower the wages of those in work. And, as he also observed, not just lower the wages but get people working longer and longer hours.

That is precisely what has been happening in Britain since the attack on trade unions, initiated by Thatcher, continued by Labour and characterised by the most restrictive laws in industrialised nations. Come in early, work

through your lunchtime, stay late, check your email at home. Go part time, but still put in a full week’s work.

For decades now, the birth rate in Britain has been below 2 children per woman – implying a declining population. It now stands at 1.91 per woman. Hence the wholesale importation of labour from Eastern Europe.

The crucial thing here is that there are plenty of British workers available for work – just not enough to create a large enough reserve army of unemployed and create the downward pressure on wages, and upward pressure on working time that makes capitalists even richer.

That’s the odd thing about a capitalist economy. It creates impoverishment for workers even as it creates piles of profit for the capitalists.

The figures on population released in August indicated that “the immigration tide was turning”, according to one pundit quoted in THE GUARDIAN, although the figures count only those from Eastern Europe actually registering for work in Britain and so miss thousands. For THE INDEPENDENT, in an editorial, the figures show us “why we should be sceptical about scare stories concerning migration trends. Economies tend to find their equilibrium unless interfered with by politicians.”

Equilibrium? For the employers, that equilibrium is achieved by having millions out of work so that those in work can be suitably exploited. And as workers in all sorts of industries have discovered over generations (though some seem to have forgotten the lesson), making profits for your employer does not make your wages automatically higher, nor does it make your job any safer.

The truth, as Marx pointed out, is that the only automatic consequence of making more profit for your employer is that it makes the employer more powerful.

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