

WORKERS

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BOMBING ABROAD, DESTRUCTION AT HOME

HANDS OFF LIBYA!

STOP MAKING

WAR – WE NEED TO

REBUILD BRITAIN!



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WORKERS

“ Reaching for the bombs

ANOTHER PRIME minister, another war: British imperialism is unable to conduct its business without reaching for missiles and bombs. Much better than wasting money on hospitals and schools or investing in industry.

After Thatcher's adventure in the Falklands, John Major took us to war in the Gulf for the sake of oil. Then Blair joined in the military dismemberment of Yugoslavia, followed by the (second) Iraq war and Afghanistan. While heroic Japanese workers were fighting to save lives in their devastated country, Cameron received the backing of a supine and cowardly parliament for military action against Libya.

As usual in such interventions, TV and newspapers play up the monstrous character of the "enemy". Gaddafi, we are told, is a brutal dictator. But if we are to go to war against every brutal dictator, we will have to invade more than half the countries in the world.

Gaddafi's offence in imperialism's eyes is not the suppression of democracy but the fact that under him Libya has maintained its independence. It won't do as it's told. To imperialism, that's the biggest crime of all. Hence this ragbag alliance of desperate leaders (Cameron, Sarkozy and of course Obama) and oil-rich dictatorships.

A war for democracy? Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are countries where "one man, one vote" means literally that: only the

ruler's vote really counts. Qatar has not had a national election since 1970 – and even that was only partial; its single (advisory) chamber is appointed by the amir. The UAE holds peculiar elections to its (again, purely advisory) Federal National Council: in the first and so far only "election" in 2006, there were 6,600 voters (82 per cent of them men) – just 1 per cent of the population, and all nominated by the rulers of the seven emirates of the UAE.

Another peculiar aspect: all this to protect a Libyan "opposition" about which no one knows anything – except that it appears to be calling for the return of the monarchy. It would be nice to have an opposition in Britain. Instead of opposing, Labour took the coward's route, backing the no-fly zone and uniting with Tories and LibDems. They do not speak for Britain.

There were cowards elsewhere, as well. Brazil, China, Russia, India and Germany – countries representing the majority of mankind – did not back the resolution, but their governments abstained in the Security Council. Russia and China could have vetoed the resolution; now they are shedding crocodile tears about the remit being exceeded.

We say no to war, no to intervention. Our struggle for democracy and dignity needs to start at home against this people-hating, bank-loving, war-making government and its friends. ■



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FDA challenges tax policy

UNIONS REPRESENTING tax officers are challenging government policy on reducing the current account deficit. They say it's not possible to increase tax revenue at the same time as closing offices and cutting staff in Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Senior tax inspectors belonging to the First Division Association (FDA) union say that the coalition government is focussing too much on spending cuts and possible economic growth and not enough on collecting all tax owing. Their sister union, the PCS (Public and Commercial Services Union), has been campaigning to keep offices open and to draw attention to the tax gap which damages the provision of public services.

The inspectors launched a campaign titled "Tackle the Tax Gap: Defeat the Deficit" last year and stepped up publicity and lobbying in the run up to the Budget. A joint meeting in the House of Commons on 16 March with tax accountants, MPs, and Lord Oakeshott, the former LibDem Treasury spokesman, publicised the latest estimate of the gross tax gap at approximately £52 billion for 2008/9, an increase of £4 billion on the previous year.

Every developed economy has a "tax gap", the difference between taxes due under the law and the amount paid voluntarily. It is never closed, but the approach of governments to tax evasion can make a big difference.

The FDA believes that an alternative to spending cuts and increased taxes is to ensure that everyone in Britain pays the taxes they owe. HMRC action managed to bring in an extra £12 billion last year, but still the gap went up overall. The union claims that an investment of £250 million over four years in resources particularly to tackle corporate tax avoidance, could recoup £6 billion of the tax due. That's comparable to all the spending cuts for the last tax year announced in the Budget last June.

As a result of its spending review the government told HMRC to deliver savings of 25 per cent – more than £1 billion by 2014-15. That represents a further loss of 13,000 staff over the 30,000 cut since 2005. The government promised to "reinvest" £900 million of the savings made into "targeted resources" but the union says that does not go nearly far enough and does not represent new resources. Workers in HMRC know it is not possible to make the level of staff cuts at the same time as closing the tax gap. ■

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email to rebuilding@workers.org.uk

SCHOOLS**East London teachers strike**

TEACHERS IN Tower Hamlets, east London, are set to strike on 30 March, following a ballot in which on a 39 per cent turnout, 85 per cent voted for the action. The strike is in protest against the cutting of 200 centrally employed education workers. Of particular concern are cuts to the Support for Learning Service, which gives help to children who have special educational needs. ■

CHILD POVERTY**Focus on London**

THE RECENTLY published local government "map" of child poverty in England shows that 60 per cent of child poverty resides in London: 8 out of the 10 boroughs with the worst indices for child poverty are in London.

Many of these are Labour boroughs where poor wages, bad housing, poor schools and poor health all contribute to systematic and institutionalised poverty. ■

UNEMPLOYMENT**Record youth joblessness**

UNEMPLOYMENT HAS now topped 2.5 million, a 17-year high. Youth unemployment is at record levels. The number of 16- to 24-year-olds out of work has increased by 30,000 to 974,000 – a rate of 20.6 per cent!

The number of "economically inactive" – hidden unemployment – now stands at 2.3 million people. The number over 65 years old returning to work rose by 56,000 to over 900,000 as older workers have come out of retirement to survive. ■

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Immigration: EU rules

FOREIGN SQUATTERS who broke into and occupied a house in London have been given hundreds of pounds of taxpayers' money in legal aid to fight eviction because they are EU citizens and unemployed.

The number of eastern Europeans coming to work here has risen for the first time in four years, mainly due to an increase in arrivals from Latvia and Lithuania, which are suffering deep slumps.

The number of nurses from other EU states working in the NHS has almost doubled since strict checks on their competence, including language skills, were scrapped five months ago because the checks breached EU rules.

EU hand-outs

THE FAMILY of Conservative Environment & Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon received £2 million in EU farm subsidies between 2000 and 2009. His ministry recently blocked public access to all information about how much farmers had got in subsidies, in order to comply with a European Court of Justice ruling on data privacy.

Ireland's deficit funding

FINE GAEL'S Enda Kenny and Labour's Eamon Gilmore have bowed to EU diktat to cut Ireland's deficit through public spending cuts and tax rises. The IRISH INDEPENDENT called it "the most barefaced breach of election promises ever perpetrated by an incoming Government ... while an attempt will be made to dress up the programme as a new plan by a new Government, when it is analysed it will be seen for what it is – the continuation of the economic policies of Fianna Fail and the Greens, as laid down by the EU-IMF."

Referendum poll

The cross-party People's Pledge initiative aims to name and shame MPs who are not prepared to back a referendum on whether Britain should quit the EU. Voters are asked to sign a pledge on the website www.peoplespledge.org to promise they will only support MPs at the next election who back an 'in or out' referendum on Britain's EU membership. A YouGov poll carried out for the campaign found that 61 per cent would support a referendum. ■



26 February, London: UK Uncut demonstrators protest outside NatWest, Marylebone High Street, against "tax avoidance, reckless banking, and unjust cuts" by British banks.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

BMA savages Coalition

ON 15 MARCH the British Medical Association (BMA) held a special representative meeting for the first time in 19 years. It did so to draw the attention of the profession and the country to the Health Bill currently before parliament. Dr Hamish Meldrum, the Chair of the BMA council, described the Bill as "... the same basic ideology – of competition and choice – that the previous Labour administrations believed would reform public services, but it goes much further, much faster, with no heed to the massive risks it brings to all that is good about one of the best health systems in the world."

He then went on to tell the meeting why the BMA had called the special meeting, stating: "Our position has hardened and intensified further since publication of the Bill, partly because the government showed little sign of listening to us – or anyone else really, regardless of how vehemently or how completely we criticised it. But also because the legislation is massively permissive and, in many parts, ambiguously drafted – opening the door to even more radical consequences and greater contradictions than the original proposals."

The special representative meeting called on the Secretary of State to withdraw the Bill, laying to rest any government claims that their attack on the NHS has the "support" of the medical profession. The next day the BMA council agreed to step up its campaign against the Bill and in particular to highlight the destructive role that competition and in particular Monitor – as the economic regulator – will play in planning and running health care.

Meldrum said, "Ministers can no longer continue to cite the often reluctant and pragmatic decision by GPs to get involved in commissioning groups as endorsement of their NHS reforms. Following yesterday's SRM, the government should not be left in any doubt about the strength of feeling among the medical profession." ■

ACADEMIES

Staff ballot wins turnaround

TEACHERS AT Heanor Gate Science College in Derbyshire have won an important first-stage victory against their secondary school applying for academy status.

A strike ballot was held after governors announced in February their interest in becoming an academy. Members of the NASUWT at the school were due to take strike action on 15 March, but called off the action when governors agreed to

postpone the decision process.

And NUT members at Tile Hill Wood School and Language College in Coventry have voted to take industrial action over their governors' decision to apply to be an academy. On a 75 per cent turnout in the ballot, 100 per cent voted to strike.

Academy schools effectively leave the local authority and become directly funded through central government. They are generally run by private companies, charities or private companies masquerading as charities. Ark, one of the largest, is run by an evangelical Christian multi-millionaire hedge fund manager. ■

Lecturers in pensions strike

AS WORKERS went to press the University and College Union (UCU) was preparing for strike action across the country in defence of their pensions following a 72 per cent "yes" vote in its recent ballot. On Thursday 24 March lecturers in further and higher education will be on strike with picket lines outside colleges and universities across Britain.

Meanwhile, actions continue across all of Scotland's universities and colleges, with hundreds of members of the UCU walking out on 18 March over pension changes. In what is becoming a rolling series of strikes, the walkout a week later – part of nationwide action – will have the focus on wages and cuts as well as deteriorating pension prospects.

The UCU estimated that over 135,000 students in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee, Stirling, Strathclyde and Heriot-Watt universities had been affected by the 18 March action. Many students – who are engaged in ongoing campaigns over grants and cuts – supported the lecturers' strikes.

From the picket line at Glasgow University, the UCU general secretary Sally Hunt pointed out that the actions had "highlighted the strength of feeling amongst staff when it comes to their pensions.... The employers have to drop their ridiculous approach of refusing to sit down with us and work towards a resolution."

In a parallel action at Glasgow's Caledonian University, joint action by all the unions on the campus has resulted in rallies to protest over plans to axe nearly 100 administrative jobs.

Lecturing staff are very clear that their pensions are deferred wages and the attack is designed to be a lifelong pay cut. They are also very clear that the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is not in crisis and the proposals are driven by the government's desire to attack the education sector as a whole.

As recently as 2006 the unions agreed reforms which made the pension scheme sustainable in the long-term. Recently David Willets, the Minister of State for Universities and Science, has spoken of his desire for one major institution in higher education in London to "fail" in order for the private sector to have the opportunity to take it over. However no private institution would be keen to "take over" staff in a pension scheme and therefore the attack on pensions is interwoven with the wider attack on public funded education.

UCU are running the first leg of a relay race in a fight which could build and build. These changes will not only affect UCU members; school teachers and heads will also be affected.

UCU members are being asked to pay more and work longer to receive less pension. The government wants staff in further and higher education to:

- Pay more for their pension schemes: for a typical FE lecturer this could mean paying an extra £88 a month. For a university lecturer it could mean an extra £124 a month. (Could this be a tactic to encourage staff to leave the scheme altogether?)
- Work longer, moving the retirement age up to 65 in line with state pension age.
- They also want to use a lower measure of inflation to measure how much pensions should rise each year. The union has calculated that this would mean the loss of £36,000 over the course of the retirement of a typical FE Lecturer and closer to £65,000 for the typical lecturer in HE.
- And if the government implements what the Hutton Report recommends, then the intention is to abolish final salary pensions for existing staff and replace them with a "career average". This would lead to loss of many thousand pounds more of deferred wages for many staff. ■

UNIVERSITIES

Dependent on foreign students

INCOME FROM students outside Britain and even the EJU studying at British universities has more than doubled in the past decade. It now accounts for almost 10 per cent of universities' total funding.

In 2009-10, universities' total income was £22.2 billion. Over the 12-month period the amount of money received from

foreign students went up by almost a fifth, from £1.8 billion to £2.1 billion.

Non-EU foreign students are charged fees up to eight times as high as British students. One university recorded 48.5 per cent of its income from foreign students.

British universities' duty should be to educate and train British students. But universities are increasingly reliant on fees from foreign students to boost their finances, according to the Higher Education Funding Council. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

May

Sunday 1 May, Saturday 7 May

"Plan for Britain: Make it and grow it here"

May Day meetings organised by the CPBML in London, Edinburgh and Leeds.

For more information, see page 10

CUBA

Visit from Yorkshire

ON A DANK March night in deepest West Yorkshire, some members of a local youth group were talking about Cuba. They had been to an international camp near Havana the previous Christmas, and were showcasing a film they had made, documenting their visit.

The film itself reflected the young people who had made it, brash and vibrant with a relentless, loud score, full of the scenes and images which had made an impact on them.

There were the smiling faces of their new Cuban friends, the football match, the inventively patched up classic American cars, the wonderful colonial architecture of Havana. And of course the audience, (mums and dads, brothers and sisters, councillors and youth leaders) cheered and whooped whenever their loved one appeared on the screen.

The voiceover commentary, also recorded by the young people, indicated a keen curiosity at the contradictions that shape Cuban life. "How can life go on in the face of such a crushing blockade?" "What makes Cubans our age so passionate and proud about their country?" And the inevitable, "Why are they so much better at dancing than we are?"

But it was when the film ended and the young people answered questions, that the meeting came to life. All spoke of the warmth and friendship they had met everywhere. And get this. How the speeches and talks arranged for them by older Cubans were quite interesting!

One councillor, making little attempt to conceal his dislike of Cuba, asked..."Tell us the best thing and the worst thing about this trip."

After a brief group discussion a spokesman stepped forward. "The worst thing was cold showers every morning. The best thing was generosity of people". ■

NEWS ANALYSIS

Hutton report on public sector pay

THE COALITION government asked Will Hutton, head of the Work Foundation, to examine public sector pay principles – a so called “Fair Pay Review”. He reported on 15 March, but attracted far less attention than his namesake’s report into pensions. Public sector workers were underwhelmed with this report, and have little hope that there will be any positive outcome.

Hutton praised the critical role played by public services in ensuring the quality of life for all British citizens and said it supports economic growth rather than being a burden. His views may not appeal to the prime minister, who declared a few days beforehand that civil servants were “enemies of enterprise”.

Unfounded perceptions

Hutton found that much public perception on pay levels is unfounded. He said that public sector executives are not paid more than those in private organisation for comparable work. The government meanwhile continues to characterise the public sector as overpaid. It uses false comparisons and ignores how most of the very high salaries are paid to people recruited from the private sector.

The government also ignores the low pay levels for many public jobs. Hutton concluded that there was no point in setting a ratio to govern the highest and lowest pay. In fact the current ratio of 12 to 1 is lower than the ratio of 20 to 1 suggested by Cameron last year, and far lower than in many large private companies.

Hutton believes that “transparency” is a good thing – a view shared with Frances Maude, Cabinet Office minister. Maude has already done that for senior civil servants. His aim was to apply public opinion to keep down senior pay levels and not much to do with any ideals about good citizenship.

The one idea the government may take from Hutton is to penalise senior staff for not hitting targets, which are set by ministers. This is described as “earn back” – where up to 10 per cent of basic pay must be earned afresh each year by meeting previously agreed objectives. The First Division Association, which represents senior staff, said this will be demotivating; “Setting targets and measures at the beginning of the year that will stand the test of time until the end of the year and can be measured in a fair way is very difficult to achieve in practice.” And the history of pay systems is that bad ideas soon find their way to more junior levels. ■

With our retirements under attack from the complete transformation to a system restructure of Britain – for an industrial

Planned by Labour, adopted

ALONG WITH pension deficits that have been deliberately overblown, reductions in inflation protection and false concerns over longevity, comes the proposed introduction of the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST).

NEST is a state-sponsored personal pension scheme that was planned by the Labour Government in 2007. It has since been adopted by the Coalition and is set to start from 2012.

Pensions commentators have described NEST as “well-meaning in its aim to provide work-based pensions for low earners” but flawed inasmuch as it will result in the “unintended outcome” of further encouraging employers to close quality occupational pension schemes.

In fact there is nothing surprising about NEST. The whole thing has been previously designed by the World Bank as a template that governments can use to destroy their state and occupational pension provision.

The design was first applied to South American countries during the 1990s (for example it was called Pension Asistencial in Chile). It was then introduced to second-string EU countries such as Hungary from 1997 onwards.

Stakeholder pensions

In fact the Labour Government first considered NEST in 1997. But it fudged the attempt by instead introducing stakeholder pensions – only to revisit the idea again in 2007. Now in 2011 the Coalition view is that one of the beneficial outcomes of Britain’s capitalist slump is that meaningful pension plans can be removed – a view wholeheartedly endorsed by employers.

So disarming comments regarding the “unforeseen consequences” of NEST that will appear in the press from the usual bunch of tame commentators should simply be ignored. Make no mistake: the



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

November 2010: NUJ pickets at BBC Television

destructive intent of NEST is fully understood by the Coalition.

The hope is that it will be much easier for employers to end their own pension plans during the launch of NEST – undoubtedly accompanied by a blaze of government publicity on the new pensions deal that will provide only a tiny fraction of the pension produced levels under the final salary schemes they want to close.

As previously outlined in WORKERS, the role of the World Bank in pensions busting has been studied by the economists Paul and Paul, and their

employers and governments, we have to make the demand for reform of state pensions in conjunction with a thoroughgoing revolution...

led by the Coalition: the next pensions scam



Protesters in White City during their strike over BBC changes to the final salary pension scheme.

findings have been published in the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HEALTH SERVICES*.

The design, as further refined by the EU, is to first push the lie that past pension levels are a luxury, at the same time as producing a flawed analysis of pension inefficiencies and inequities.

This is known as the “conditionality approach”, where for example complaints are voiced that the current pension system does not take adequate care of the most socially vulnerable and that it is divisive.

What then follows under the veil of equality is what is called “massification of privilege”. The argument here is that what

is financially viable for a minority cannot work in the long run for the mass of the insured.

Needless to say, the outcome under the replacement arrangements, using the all-too-familiar concept of a “safety net”, is that pensioners become far worse off and receive barely enough to keep them from starving to death.

There are many examples of this approach that can be gathered from the day-to-day pension announcements from the Coalition and its supporters (they all go to the same seminars). But a clear recent example of the World Bank/EU

template is Michael Johnson’s report from the Centre for Policy Studies, published in February 2011.

Well-rehearsed “worries” are aired in this report such as “disproportionately high pensions paid to high earners”, “looming generational inequality [that] manifests itself as a rising tax burden on today’s workers”, along with proposals “to help protect lower earners”.

Johnson’s report concludes that public sector workers must be weaned off their “gold-plated final salary pensions” to avert a “fiscal calamity”. More of the same came from Lord Hutton when he presented his delayed “pensions review” in March.

Unique

Of course Britain’s industrial history is unique and our pensions system although under attack can still be turned around through coherent trade union actions. No other government elsewhere has attempted what is proposed for Britain. Where other governments such as Chile, Hungary or Australia have introduced schemes similar to NEST it has been done without a significant occupational pension sector (though some public sector workers have stopped paying into their final salary schemes already).

Compare this to Britain, where the occupational wealth, created by past and present generations of British workers, has been put aside into collectively based funds to pay present and future pensions.

In terms of value, these funds are the equivalent of well over 80 per cent of Britain’s annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Germany and France, by comparison – even though they have higher state pensions – occupational pension funding represents only 16 and 7 per cent of their respective GDPs.

That we in Britain have a massive collective fund of approximately £1,400 billion is a worry to our enemies. For example, the Centre for Policy Studies as far back as 1986 described our collective funds as “a cryptic form of socialism, masquerading as benevolent paternalism”.

Continued on page 8

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Instead in 1986 the government brought in the Financial Services Act, pushing personal pension plans and encouraging naïve workers to opt out of final salary pension contributions by making membership no longer a part of the contract of employment.

Now look at the disastrous consequences in 2011. The problem has been that many private sector workers have allowed their company schemes to be broken. Many only ever saw pensions as part of a grace and favour offering from the employer, rather than understanding that final salary pensions were the result of hard-fought trade union actions that were by and large conducted in the public sector.

But simply retaining the pensions system as it stands is not enough. We need something better. Although more investigative work needs to be done and levels of awareness need to be raised, the primary question around the ability to pay better pensions rests on the basis of being able to generate economic growth.

Better pensions will require a change in the political philosophy.

Governments and employers have always opposed the replacement of pre-funded occupational funds by what is known as a “pay as you go” state pension. The reason: our pension funding is considered a useful source of capital, to be used either for City speculation or to buy government debt (gilts).

Feeding the banks

Funding and using capital this way cannot generate wealth – but it does take capital out of the hands of the working class and feed it into the hands of the investment banks and governments.

The idea that all pensions should be prefunded, rather than relying on one’s pension being paid from the wealth generated from the next generation, can seem superficially attractive to those worried about “sound finance”. Yet this outlook is really only another example of the type of naïve “nest egg” thinking that has been exploited by successive governments and flunkies.

The reality is that the actual cost of

pensions only arises when they are paid out, irrespective of whether they have been funded for or not. The working population can easily provide for its dependants out of the wealth created each year without having to first build a fund – annual pension payments can simply be made as an agreed deduction from annual wealth.

A move to a “pay-as you-go” method would represent a massive leap that would allow us to free up the £1,400 billion held in our collective pre-funded occupational pensions and apply this to our labour power to generate the necessary wealth that Britain needs.

Such a step, though, will require us to hold out against the government strategy of using our past pension funding either to cover government debt or to continue to make our capital available for useless speculation.

Rejection

The beginnings of rejecting this process are already occurring, and the government is getting worried.

For example a pensions consortium including the BT Pension Plan and the Public Sector Pension Investment Board was prevented from buying the London rail link to the Channel Tunnel in November 2010. Instead the bid went to two Canadian pension funds one of which was the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan. This was despite the British pension funds making the higher bid, more than the £2.1 billion offered by the Canadians.

An appeal has now been lodged but a Treasury spokesman has said that “we are sure that the sale was conducted in a fair manner which secured the best deal for the taxpayer”.

What is not being admitted is that the government is frightened that British pension funds (our capital) are seen to be used for socially useful profitable infrastructure and capital re-tooling projects – because this would begin to set workers’ minds towards a future without capitalism. To prevent such thoughts the Coalition would prefer to facilitate the foreign ownership of our resources. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain’s new series of public meetings in London began in the autumn and continues into spring 2011. Except on May Day, all meetings are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn.

M The next meeting date will be Thursday 23 June 2011 (theme to be announced nearer the date), 7.30pm. Interspersed with these public meetings, the Party runs regular political study and discussion groups for interested workers.

M The Party’s annual London May Day rally will be held on Sunday 1 May 2011, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings in Edinburgh (Sunday 1 May) and Leeds (Saturday 7 May). For full details see page 10.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk



They wouldn't let us vote on the Lisbon Treaty. They won't let us vote on EU membership. Now they want to change the electoral system to keep themselves in power...

No to the Alternative Vote!

ON 5 MAY the British people will be asked to vote in a national referendum. About time too, you might say. Let's really see what people think about all those ConDem policies never mentioned by campaigning politicians before the general election – on student fees (debt), free schools and academies, the wrecking of the NHS. Or even more important, that referendum we have never been allowed to have – on whether we should leave the EU and its utterly polluting effect on our lives (because they know how we would vote).

But no, we won't be given the chance to vote on any of these compelling issues. The May referendum will be about whether we want to change the voting system for parliament from First Past the Post (FPTP) to the Alternative Vote (AV), and at the same time reduce the number of MPs and constituencies.

Under AV, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If the favoured candidate fails to secure half the votes on the first count, the second choices of those voters who voted for the least favoured candidate are redistributed. This process continues until a candidate wins 50 per cent or more of the votes.

So why on earth are we troubling ourselves with this at a time of national emergency? Answer: the Liberal Democrats want it. In return for propping up this brutal money-loving, people-hating government (remember that Cameron's Tories didn't win the election), they have been thrown a sop in the form of this referendum. The LibDems have always supported proportional representation as the only way they are likely to gain any kind of political power (as not enough people vote for them), and although AV is not that they see it as a step on the road.

So Clegg and his little gang of crooks in government want us to vote for a system which they hope might keep them in power for longer. The Labour leadership supports AV too, Eds Miliband and Balls campaigning for it on the grounds of "fairness", like condemned men calling for a fairer length of rope! Labour MPs are less convinced, with over half having signed an ad calling for a No vote.



A much bigger question for British democracy is that there is hardly anybody you would want to vote for in parliamentary elections. AV is a pathetic attempt to give a democratic gloss to the whole sorry spectacle, when the party that "won" in the past three elections got fewer people to vote for it than those who did not vote at all.

Embarrassment

Mass abstention in British general elections is an embarrassment to politicians who want to wield power "in our name". In the last election over a third of the electorate effectively abstained, whereas with AV politicians can claim the winning candidates won over 50 per cent of the vote even if two-thirds of voters do not vote at all! At least FPTP is clear, in that whoever gets the most votes wins, and it is obvious how many votes each candidate secures. And talking of fairness, FPTP only allows one vote per voter, whereas AV effectively allows some voters more than one (if your preferred candidate comes last).

Australia is the only country in the world with an AV system. In 1967, in the state of Victoria, the Liberals won fewer first preference votes than the Labor Party but got three times as many seats. In 1990,

Labor won 39 per cent of the votes, but 53 per cent of the seats; the Democrats got 11 per cent of the votes, but no seats.

So claims of AV's "fairness" and "proportionality" fail. As the Jenkins Commission concluded in 1998, "AV ... in some circumstances ... is even less proportional than FPTP."

The LibDems and their supporters who back AV think that if they can win the 5 May referendum, the next election, run on AV, would result in a hung parliament. This would bring another coalition and another deal, leading to a referendum on proportional representation. That system encourages special interest parties, divisive ethnic minority parties and regional parties – hardly what we need to progress politically in Britain.

Coalition creates a necessity of breaking promises, and an excuse for it, so that the electors can never know where they are or what they are voting for. It is not so much government as democracy that is damaged by coalition. Under AV, and PR, party leaders, not the voters, choose governments.

Add to this voting con the proposal in the referendum to reduce the number of MPs by changing constituency boundaries. The fewer the better, you may well think. But the Cabinet will not be reduced, so there will be fewer backbench MPs to challenge ministers – a significant increase in their hold over parliament. And consider the loosening of the local link between constituents and their MPs as constituencies grow larger, and you will see the true intentions behind the proposals.

AV is an effort to breathe life into the corpse. If it were carried out, it would damage Britain and limit democracy by making it more difficult for us to kick out a despised government.

We want more referendums, which take power away from discredited politicians; so we must seize this chance to reject their schemes, even on this little matter. But even more, we need a referendum on the life-and-death matter of the membership of the EU.

No to AV! ■

MAY DAY MEETINGS



Sunday 1 May, 2 pm

Speakers and refreshments

**Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL
(nearest tube: Holborn)**

Sunday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Speakers, music and discussion

Word-Power Books, 43 West Nicolson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Saturday 7 May, 12.00 pm

Speakers and discussion

Fox and Newt pub, 9 Burley Street, Leeds LS3 1LD

PLAN FOR BRITAIN: MAKE IT AND GROW IT HERE

Every economically successful nation has a national plan. Britain is one of the few not to have one. Capitalism cannot plan for our country's future because it sees nothing but grabbing profits whenever and wherever it can. The god of the free market renders economic planning impossible. Financial capital does not create wealth. It is the working class which will need to take responsibility and plan for Britain.

There is a wanton savagery about the government's attacks. It is moving with unparalleled haste to undo much of the progress that the British people have managed to win over decades, and to dismantle the real national economy, our industry and agriculture.

The challenge now for all thinking workers is to understand what is going on. What can be done?

The first step must be the understanding and acceptance of the fact that the speed of proposed change would be impossible had the Labour government not laid the basis for it so impeccably. In health and education, for instance, the legislation and thinking were put in place by Labour. Now the ConDems can pick them up and run away with them. Labour's adoration of City speculators and contempt for production allowed a free for all buying and selling of British industry and land for massive profits, assets sold abroad, farmers squeezed to bankruptcy by the big supermarkets – with no attempt to protect the interests of the people.

In its decline, capitalism has turned its back on Britain.

Finance capital is in charge in Britain, but it recognises no nation. It is happy to invest in commodities one day, move the money to bonds the next, from country to country, from industry to industry.

What sort of Britain do we want? What do we need to do to get it? First, a commitment to manufacture – making the things we need, and ensuring we have the skills and knowhow to service our own industries. And we need a plan for agriculture, deciding what we can grow and produce here to feed our people. An independent British industry and agriculture will create real wealth, the basis for a sound economy in which we can export to other countries and import those goods and food which cannot be produced here.

Ours is the authentic voice of a Britain that wants to live in a civilised society and plan how it will work, and is prepared to fight for its country. We have nowhere else to go.

We invite you to attend our forthcoming May Day meetings – London, Edinburgh and Leeds – for one unified national working class.

**Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party
All welcome**

When they talk of a health market they mean health chaos. That, and a nice little earner for someone. We should begin by understanding what is being proposed...

The calculated ruin of the NHS



THE GOVERNMENT'S broad attack on the National Health Service is on several fronts, all aimed at introducing chaos to replace planning.

Firstly, the object is to replace planning with control of capital expenditure and the continuing Private Finance Initiative, PFI.

This article is an edited version of a speech given in March at a public meeting in London organised by the CPBML.

Well-named too – an initiative well and truly for private finance, bankers in particular. It used to be called “the only game in town” because it was, and largely still is, the only way to get a hospital built, so many managers who wanted new facilities had to use PFI to get them.

Hospitals built using this discredited method of financing currently have a capital value of £59 billion. But they won't cost us that. You and I and our children

and our grandchildren will actually pay a minimum of £229 billion for those self-same hospitals. We'll have to pay 4 times the already-inflated cost just to put more money in the pocket of the profit-mongers, mainly the bankers. And that's the overall picture – many individual examples are even worse.

Just one of these schemes, the oddly named Princess Royal University Hospital in Bromley, cost £118 million, but the contractor will be paid a staggering £1.2 billion – a built-in profit of more than 10 times. Nice work if you can get it. (Why do I say oddly named incidentally? Well, is there a Princess Royal University? Is there a University at all in Bromley?) And that's only in building costs; it doesn't touch the continuing profits made out of the transfer of staff to the private sector with - unless we're vigilant - lower pay, longer hours and non-existent pensions.

Money from chaos

In PFI lies the ruin of the NHS, as we have always predicted. They can make far greater money from chaos than they can from planning. That's why they hate planning and fear it so much. They want to see how they can line their pockets most effectively, not how you train the next generation of medical specialists. It's this incompatibility that is at the heart of class struggle; or it would be if our class would only struggle. We want improvement through planning; the PFI-mongers want profit through chaos.

The second line of attack is directly upon the planning bodies of the NHS. When the last government introduced restructuring of the NHS based on research by Professor Ara Darzi, some brave trade unions welcomed it. Why do I say brave? Well because most change is ritually opposed without examination these days, especially within unions.

A leading academic said that it represented “the re-introduction of planning, at least on a limited scale”. That was true, so it was always a given that Lansley et al would make it their first

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

target, and such it was. Of course they began with a great big lie. They said they wanted, “no top-down reorganisations”. They proceeded to launch precisely a top-down reorganisation to abolish Darzi’s reform process, Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities into the bargain.

Target London

Actually their first target was the destruction of Healthcare for London, a ten-year programme to improve health standards and care in the capital, only made possible by the professionalism of the London Ambulance Service workforce. Its demise led to the unprecedented resignations of the chair and the majority of the non-executive directors of NHS London. If nothing else proved that support for the limited Darzi reforms in London was correct, then the speed and venom of their destruction by little Lansley should.

The brazen manner in which they say one thing whilst doing the opposite led one ACAS official to compare their propaganda methods to those of the Nazis: make the lie a big lie and keep repeating it. This from ACAS, in which “C” stands for conciliation! He was referring to the way in which blame for the financial mess of their system has seemingly been transferred from bankers to, apparently, public service workers, whose “gold-plated pensions” and exorbitant pay have caused the crisis.

The third line of attack is based on as big a lie: that they are decentralising control in the NHS by giving it to GPs. They say that GPs are close to patients and therefore in the best position to run the NHS. That Lansley’s wife and ex-wife are both GPs is entirely irrelevant. It’s a big lie because most GPs don’t agree with it or want to do it, so they’ll engage Kaiser Permanente, or McKinsey or KPMG or Tribal – whoever it is, it won’t be GPs.

A big lie! And it’s repeated over and over again. The truth is that instead of your friendly neighbourhood GP running the show, they’ll either need to get support



Unison demonstration in Glasgow, April 2010

from a commissioning agency (that’s what PCTs do, so why abolish them?) or a private company. Either way, it’s not what they said they’ll do, it’s the opposite.

Manifesto

And while we’re on the subject of them lying, never forget this – no party’s election manifesto, nor the coalition agreement they cobbled together afterwards, said they’d do this. In fact, what the Liberal election manifesto said was that PCTs would be strengthened by having elected members added to their Boards!

PCT and SHA abolition means the sacking of nearly 2,000 workers in London alone, 15,000 across Britain with twice as many to come, and it has absolutely zero democratic mandate. So think about that the next time someone suggests that the way to resolve these problems is to vote for someone standing for election for parliament. Who but an idiot would believe ANYTHING any of them ever say again?

What else are they up to? Fourthly, they’re proposing that Foundation Trusts become the sole NHS structure for

providing healthcare in the public sector. In other words, every hospital has to become an FT (a very apt acronym don’t you think?) by 2014. What’s the significance of this? Well, it’s that FTs can keep any “surplus” they may make. What counts as surplus in the NHS you might ask? Well it’s the difference between what we taxpayers give the managers of the hospital to perform its functions and the amount they can perform them for. So they can take what we give them, pare the service down to what might be called a ‘profitable’ level, and pocket the difference. At present they’re supposed to re-invest it in the NHS, usually with new building schemes, but the new legislation would revoke that responsibility.

There are already stories of FTs thinking of lending to the private sector. FTs being listed in the FINANCIAL TIMES. Or even GP consortia. Just like a bank. The ultimate capitalist transformation must be to turn a hospital into a bank, which this Health and Social Care Bill is well on the way to doing. Very interesting – in Cuba, the Revolution turned the biggest bank and stock exchange into Havana’s biggest

hospital! You couldn't have a clearer example of the priorities of capitalism and of socialism.

Some of you may recall that a big hoo-ha was made out of the unions wringing from the last government a pledge that the NHS was the "preferred provider" of health services. This was paraded as one of the great victories of social democracy, but actually it was a scandal. Why wasn't the NHS the only provider of health services? Is that how low we've sunk? This new mob have replaced all that namby-pamby Labour tosh with "any willing provider"!

Roll on the Harold Shipman GP Commissioning Consortium...if ever a man has missed his moment it was Britain's biggest mass murderer! He ticks, or rather ticked, all the government's boxes. Shipman knew how to stay close to his patients. He certainly knew how to cut waiting lists. And he was a good Tory to boot. It would be like having Dracula running the National Blood Service or Sweeney Todd the meat pie industry.

And the really good thing about this "any willing provider" farrago is that it

neatly removes Britain from the regulations which up until now have put the NHS outside competition laws. In other words, now that HMG has declared the NHS to be subject to untrammelled competition, all the barriers must go down.

EU-wide competition will not just be possible – it will be obligatory. As will competition from over the pond – and we know how good the Yanks are at providing health care for their people. Well, apart from the 60 million who haven't got any at all.

Purchaser-provider split

Thatcher created a thing called the purchaser-provider split, whose purpose was not only to introduce private capital into public services but also to make it far more difficult for workers to control those services. This split necessitates the employment of people to do a thing called "purchasing".

This was then called commissioning in New-Labour-speak and what started off as an administrative function in the finance department of a Health Authority will now

be transformed into full-blown private provision, quite possibly by American-owned multinational companies.

At this point of degeneration, the people who have their hands on the levers of control will not be British workers at all but foreign-owned finance companies run by bankers. So the degraded mantra "free at the point of need" will not be worth the invoice it's written on.

So much for describing our plight: what we might call the working class in disarray. There is, though, much about which to be positive. Stroke care in London is now the best of any city in the world. The public attitude towards the NHS recently tested in opinion polls is twice as positive as it was in 1997, and in the first 10 years of the new millennium life expectancy for men in Britain improved by 3 years.

This is no mean feat and is the result of the diligence and creativity of health and other workers. But now, if we come back in 10 years' time the odds are ten to one that we'd find life expectancy had not improved over that decade, and had probably reduced. ■

Change Britain,
Embrace Your Party



Change Britain, Embrace Your Party

This pamphlet brings together the statement from the Party's 2009 Congress with those from two former Congresses in 2003 and 2006. Also included is a statement on the European Union: "The fascist dream of a united Europe resurrected".

The pamphlet represents a decade of thought and analysis of the situation in Britain, and considers how to move forward as a British working class.

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As Britain and France attack Libya with no-fly zones and military force, it is instructive to remember the disastrous consequences of an earlier attempt by the two countries to intervene in another Middle Eastern country...E

1956: Britain, France and the Suez Canal crisis

THE SUEZ Crisis and ensuing war saw a fundamental change in both imperialist alignments and nationalist movements in the Middle East.

The Suez Canal had opened in 1869, immediately becoming strategically important, as it provided the shortest ocean link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, eased commerce for trading nations and particularly helped European colonial powers to govern their colonies.

In 1875, the Egyptian ruler was forced by debt to sell his shares in the canal operating company to the British government, giving it a majority shareholding alongside mostly French private investors. With the 1882 occupation of Egypt, Britain took control of the country as well as the canal.

The importance of the canal as a strategic intersection was apparent during the First World War (when Britain and France closed the canal to their enemies' shipping) and after the Second World War (as a conduit for the shipment of oil).

By 1955, petroleum accounted for half of the canal's traffic with two thirds of Europe's oil passing through it. The canal was described as the "jugular vein of the British Empire".

The economic potential of the Middle East, with its vast oil reserves, as well as the Suez Canal's geo-strategic importance, prompted British imperialism to consolidate its position throughout the region, including a vast garrison of 80,000 at Suez, one of the largest in the world. But this presence led to increasing hostility, particularly when the British army caused the death of 41 Egyptians in Ismailia, leading to anti-Western riots.

By July 1952 a military uprising by the "Association of Free Officers", led by the young Gamal Abdel Nasser, established an Egyptian republic, overthrowing the more compliant king.

Nasser's Egypt grew concerned at Britain's behaviour in the region. Its creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 (Britain, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan) seemed to confirm Nasser's fears that

Britain was attempting to draw the eastern Arab world into a bloc against the likes of his republic. Egypt negotiated an arms deal with Warsaw Pact Czechoslovakia in September 1955, thereby ending its reliance on Western arms.

Britain looked towards the United States for support but found it was not forthcoming, as the US was keen to increase its own influence in the region and turf out the old colonial powers.

Nationalisation and war

On 26 July 1956, Nasser, now President of Egypt, nationalised the Suez Canal, following the withdrawal of a British-US offer to fund the building of the Aswan Dam, a long-cherished engineering project designed to construct a three-mile-wide dam, create a 300-mile lake, generate eight times as much electric power as before and increase fertile land by a third.

Egyptian forces seized control of the Suez Canal, and Eden decided on military intervention against Egypt to avoid the complete collapse of British colonial prestige in the region. (The Labour opposition under Hugh Gaitskell was just as bellicose.)

But as overt military intervention ran the risk of angering America and damaging Anglo-Arab relations, Britain made a secret military pact with France and Israel (the Sèvres Protocol) aimed at regaining control over the Suez Canal.

The parties to the pact agreed that Israel would invade the Sinai; Britain and France would then intervene, purportedly to separate the warring Israeli and Egyptian forces, instructing both to withdraw to a distance of 16 kilometres from either side of the canal; the British and French would then argue that Egypt's control of such an important route was too tenuous, and that it needed to be placed under Anglo-French management.

Both Britain and France wanted Nasser removed from power, to stop his growing influence on colonies and protectorates. Both also were eager to ensure their oil supply route was kept



Knocked-out Israeli military vehicles, Sinai, 1956

open. Israel wanted to reopen the Straits of Tiran to its shipping and weaken an Egypt growing stronger through its procurement of Soviet weaponry.

Resistance sprang up at home with large numbers demonstrating on British streets against going to war. Even some reservists refused to be called up. Washington disagreed on the use of force.

On 29 October, Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt. From a military point of view, the operation, aimed at taking control of the Suez Canal, Gaza, and parts of Sinai, was successful for the invaders, yet was a complete disaster politically, resulting in international criticism, ostracism and unyielding diplomatic and financial pressure. Also, Nasser's Egypt actually blocked the canal by sinking 47 ships filled with concrete.

The United States put financial pressure on Britain to end the invasion. The USA would not agree to a British treasury request for an immediate standby credit from the International Monetary Fund until Britain adhered to a cease fire agreement, and was also preparing to sell part of the US's Sterling

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crisis



Bond holdings. Saudi Arabia, their prime ally in the region, started an oil embargo against Britain and France.

On 2 November, the UN General Assembly adopted a United States proposal for an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of all forces behind the armistice lines, an arms embargo and the reopening of the Suez Canal. Britain and France agreed to withdraw from Egypt; later Israel agreed too. Egypt's sovereignty was protected.

Aftermath

The Suez War ended in humiliation for the British and French empires. Anthony Eden lost his job as prime minister, replaced by Harold Macmillan. By 24 April 1957 the canal was fully reopened to shipping. The imposed end to the crisis signalled the definitive weakening of Britain and France as colonial powers, the strengthening of US imperialism in the region and the increased standing of Nasser and other nationalists in the area.

The crisis also hastened the process of decolonisation, as many of the remaining colonies gained independence over the next years.

FINANCE CAPITAL

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

The history of capital since the Industrial Revolution shows that increasingly it is sucked into the realm of financial speculation. Ever since early manufacturing capitalists had to move beyond self-generation to a stage where they needed to raise more capital to be able to fund their expansion (via the creation of joint-stock companies or closer relationships with banks and financial organisations), then initiative and power started to slip away from manufacturers and was handed over to pre-eminent finance capital.

Finance capital began to view the rate of return of profit from the real industrial economy as both too low and too slow, seeking instead higher and quicker returns from speculative, non-industrial operations. More and more new financial instruments have been designed to absorb this capital. Over time, this flaw in the accumulation process of capitalism produces a baffling contrast: 'a speculative bubble' squatting on and suffocating 'a sluggish real economy', before eventually it concludes with a spectacular, speculative bust undermining and destroying much of the real economy. We have been subjected to this recently.

Financial instability is an inescapable, inherent part of aged capitalism. As the trend towards satisfying the speculative orgy of finance capital grows within the capital accumulation process, there is even a possibility that the rising mountain and mind-boggling obligation of debt develops so far that it is beyond the capacity of capitalist governments to intervene effectively as "lenders of last resort". If such a financial avalanche occurs then it will be a catastrophe for capitalism, pulling everyone down with it. We have come close to this nightmare (eg Iceland and Ireland) and it still swirls around in the background but so far these have been absorbed.

The supremacy of finance capital is not a distortion of capitalism, merely an expression of its highest stage of development. When you consider what has happened in the current depression and in previous capitalist depressions, finance capital is now the ultimate fetter on production. Finance capital, which does not produce or contribute anything to society's wealth creation or well-being, behaves like an unwelcome vampire sucking the life-blood out of the real economy. You cannot factor finance capital out of the equation of capitalism because it is now the controlling entity. So long as you stick with capitalism, then the processes of financial speculation will continue, likely on an ever-deepening scale. We don't have to wait for the catastrophe to act.

We need to create a society where economic policy advances the real productive economy, where social wealth is generated. In socialist society, banks and financial institutions would exist to re-allocate wealth to industry and social infrastructure. Economic crises and financial instability would become distant, fading memories.

Interested in these ideas?

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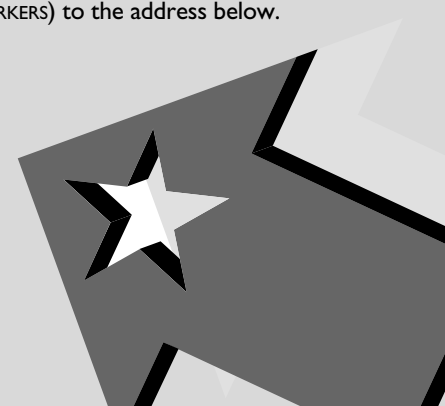
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Back to Front – Good decisions

‘That the cases even had to come to appeal shows how far the right to strike has been shackled in recent years...’

AT LAST, at last. A court decision has gone in favour of the right to strike. In fact, two decisions, reached by the Court of Appeal on 4 March.

In the first, the High Court had ruled that a ballot of 605 train drivers working for London Midland, members of ASLEF, was unlawful because it had been sent to two drivers who were not entitled to vote.

The ballot had a turnout of 472, and 87 per cent of them voted to strike. So the inclusion of two drivers could not materially affect the vote. But the High Court slapped an injunction on the union.

In the second, involving the RMT, the judgement of the High Court in favour of Serco Docklands was bizarre. Read this explanation from the RMT: “The only reason why the injunction was granted was because of a technicality. Serco couldn’t convince the High Court that the RMT’s detailed lists and figures for members was inadequate. But the High Court held that the union’s explanation as to how it had arrived at those figures was inadequate.” The Court of Appeal disagreed.

In case after case judges have tightened and throttled legitimate attempts by trade unions to use strike action in pursuance of trade disputes. To legally strike in Britain is almost impossible as every potential strike has endless hurdles to pass.

So the Appeal Court, in possibly the most important legal judgements supporting trade union rights in the past ten years, found the lower court’s decisions unreasonable and discharged the injunctions.

The result has been hailed by the media as the green light for industrial action. Not so. It has simply stopped

courts banning strikes for utterly trivial and technical reasons. But the basic legislation remains, and still represents a formidable obstacle to struggle.

ASLEF, the RMT and their lawyers, Thompsons, have seen to it that some level of sanity has been brought into the matter. They clearly stated that this was a small step towards bringing balance and fairness into the heavily weighted anti-trade union legislation all workers face as soon as they try to defend themselves.

The RMT and other unions also have cases coming up before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

That the cases even had to come to appeal shows how far the right to strike has been shackled in recent years, how far from democracy our crisis-ridden capitalism actually is.

That we are reduced to appealing to the courts in London and Strasbourg is also a measure of our weakness.

And lest we forget, the legislation in question may have been put in place by the Conservatives, but it was, deliberately, never repealed by Labour.

The respite brought about by the Court of Appeal decisions may not last long. Already, employment lawyers are signalling that they expect employers to approach the government directly with their concerns over the judgements.

Since workers first combined to challenge the power of employers, they have faced laws, fines, transportation, sequestration and harassment of all kinds. The employing class has never been happy living with an organised working class.

Time, then, for us to decide to stop living with the employing class. ■

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