

WORKERS

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LIFE & SOUL

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

14



West Midlands fight against PFI

03



Crisis on the railways

19



And so to private beds...

12

HOW SOCIETY BEAT THE FLOODS

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE COMMON MARKET was supposed to be just that, a market. That's what we voted to join, or rather to stay in, in 1975. Those, like the CPBML, who opposed membership then, constantly warned that capitalism in Europe wanted more than a market, just like it does in all the separate countries in which it operates.

Just as every market-driven economy has its own political structure and armed forces, so it is logical for a Europe-wide capitalist organisation to have these things. We are on the way to having an EU political superstructure, underpinned by a single currency, and now we have an armed force, the beginnings, whatever they say, of the EU's own army.

One hundred thousand troops (12,500 from Britain), 400 aircraft (70 from Britain) and 100 ships (17 from Britain) apparently doesn't constitute an army, and certainly doesn't

constitute anything upon which we should be consulted. No referendum on this!

If anyone's opening a book, the CPBML's money goes on 3 May as the election date, with a short, three-and-a-half week election campaign (don't ask us how we know!). All of this means that the British people have a limited time to make their voices heard about the future of their country.

We will not be able to vote in favour of independence, sovereignty, industry at the election, because these things will be in no one party's manifesto.

We can, and must, press to ensure that a referendum will take place on the proposed single currency, and we should press for that referendum to include the question, "Are we in favour of British troops for the first time in history being in someone else's army?"

Second opinion

William Hague revealed to the House of Commons what Tony Blair's real tests for joining the euro are: "They are: does Peter

want it, will Gordon let me, will the French like it, will Robin notice, and can I get away with it?" Cited in THE TIMES, 26 October.

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WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist),
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB
ISSN 0266-8580
www.workers.org.uk

Issue 38, December 2000

Contents – December 2000

News

What's on the Nice agenda, p3; West Midlands fight against PFI, p4; Teaching unions unite over pay, p5; News Analysis: The price of pills, p6

03

Features

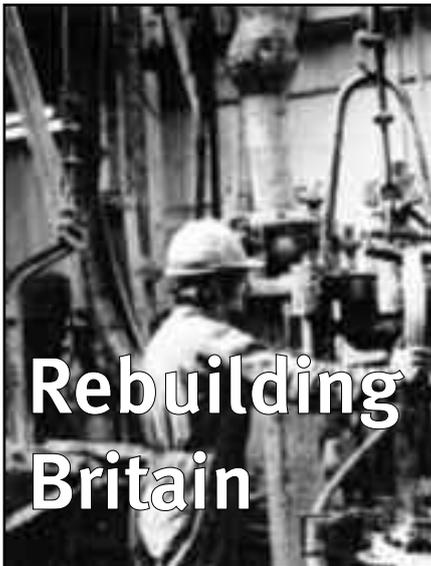
How society fought the floods, p6; Crisis on the railways, p9; NHS concordat with the private sector, p12

06

Life & Soul

The body beautiful, p14

14



| | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| EU | The end of the veto? |
| NHS | Going private |
| SOVEREIGNTY | March against the euro |
| HOSPITALS | Fighting the PFI |
| MANUFACTURING | Bye, bye, buggy |
| JOBS | Mass protest in Stoke |
| UNIVERSITIES | Action in universities |
| SCHOOLS | Uniting on pay |
| COMING SOON | What's on |
| NEWS ANALYSIS | The price of pills |

The end of the veto?

HEADS OF STATE from the European Union meet in Nice this month in order to agree a treaty that will finally end the member states' national veto. The EU's leaders want qualified majority voting to be the rule in an enlarged Union. They want "comprehensive reform" of all EU institutions, and the renegotiation of all the EU Treaties. They want more powers for the President, for the European Commission, and for the European Parliament. They want a new European Constitution.

While British ministers seek to play down the proposed agreement, the draft of the Treaty includes proposals to end national vetoes in the Council of Ministers over at least fifty areas of policy, including all national vetoes on taxation and social security, social and cohesion policy, immigration and asylum policy, visa control, external trade, justice and home affairs, agriculture and fisheries policy, budgetary, fiscal, economic and monetary policy, and the system of financing the EU.

One of the key provisions is to be found under the Treaty's Section 19.1. This would make the co-decision procedure, or qualified majority voting in the Council, the general rule for decision-making in the legislative sphere; the cooperation procedure, the unanimity requirement which gives each nation a right of veto, would be abolished.

The results could be far-reaching. Under Section 19.2, the co-decision procedure is to be extended to those legislative areas not yet under it: visas, asylum, immigration and other policies related to free movement of persons, agriculture and fisheries policy, budgetary, fiscal, economic and monetary policy, competition and cohesion, certain aspects of environment policy, harmonisation measures adopted pursuant to article 94 of the EC Treaty and secondary legislation under Title VI of the EU Treaty.

And Section 14 even proposes to set up a European Public Prosecutor, establishing an EU criminal jurisdiction with an EU-determined criminal law.

If Blair signed up to this, he would be endorsing Britain's dissolution into a new European state. But Britain still has a national veto over every new EU treaty. The Labour Party's manifesto for the 1997 election recognised this, promising, "Retention of the national veto over key matters of national interest such as taxation, defence and security, immigration, decisions over the budget and treaty changes." Clearly, this pledge completely conflicts with the draft Treaty: the pledge obliges him to veto the Treaty.

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

NHS Going private

THE GOVERNMENT has signed up for the National Health Service to use beds in private hospitals. As the notice on the Department of Health's website puts it: "There should be no organisational or ideological barriers to the delivery of high quality healthcare free at the point of delivery to those who need it, when they need it."

The website says that the government will ensure that any relationship between the NHS and the private sector should represent value for money. But hospital trusts will not get any extra money from central government.

Critics point out that critical areas such as intensive care and casualty are not covered by the private sector anyway (see article, page 12).

NHS Identity crisis

NEW NHS identity guidelines have been issued by the Department of Health, intended to portray a single national health service with a corporate identity.

From now on, every trust and every published document must carry the official NHS identity, and convey the values and principles of the NHS (which are duly listed in the guidelines).

Cynics will despise such moves as marketing. Some will object to the loss of separate identities for the trusts. But there is also a view that the Government is doing well to stop wasted effort and time on variety, with each trust paying for its own corporate logo.

SOVEREIGNTY

Marching out of the euro

'STOP THE EUROSTATE' was the message of the march and rally organised by the Democracy Movement in London on 28 October — exactly 29 years to the day after Britain was first signed up to the euphemistically named Common Market.

The protest brought together many of the groups which have since sprung up — largely, but not exclusively, outside the trade union movement — to oppose the Euro, and to defend, among other things, British trade and small business, agriculture and the countryside, fishing, pensions, and the legal system.

The whole spectrum of political parties was represented, from every part of the UK and Ireland, as well as abroad.

But mostly it was the ordinary people, young and old, from up and down the country — some 8,000 of them — who defied the rail chaos and drenching rain to demand freedom from the EU.

A worried pensioner, unaccustomed to addressing politicians, showed WORKERS a letter he had written to Hague, telling him in blunt terms to come clean; there could be no circumstances, now or in the future, in which it would be right to hand over his country to a foreign power.

One topical banner from South Wales read: "We will be broken rails on your 'superpower' railroad."

An urgent petition was circulated to stop the Treaty of Nice. Every demonstrator understood that this attempt to replace the whole apparatus of the British state was intended to finish us off as an independent country. There should be a referendum now.

"We are the people. We do not consent," said the placards.

The protesters at the rally that followed the march cheered as ex-Labour MP Lord Stoddart called today's government "lick-spitting lackeys...servants of the EU". They applauded as the new Charter of Fundamental Rights was compared to the Social Charter — yet another deceptive un-nutritious carrot to entice the unions.

But the most heartfelt cheers were reserved for Labour's Lord Shore. Perfectly in tune with the patriotic mood of the rally, he denounced the Blairites for their treachery and ignorance of history. The true custodians of the nation's future were not in Downing Street, but wherever people were prepared to say No to the EU and Yes to British sovereignty.

• A longer version of this article is available on www.workers.org.uk



Striking hospital workers take to the streets in Dudley, West Midlands

NHS fight against privateers

SIX HUNDRED hospital workers in Dudley have been taking strike action in opposition to their employers' decision to transfer them to a private sector consortium which is negotiating a Private Finance Deal to build a new hospital. Under the deal the private companies would build the hospital and then rent the buildings and services to the Trust for the next 30 years. In this way Public Sector money for vital investment will not be counted against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. This enables Labour to meet the European and World Bank rules on borrowing.

A nationally supported regional conference and demonstration on the issue were held in November in the West Midlands to raise publicity and support for the ancillary workers on strike at the Dudley group of hospitals.

Margie Jaffe, UNISON National Policy and Research Officer detailed how research results submitted to the National Bed Enquiry showed a huge loss of beds due to PFI. Angela Thompson, branch secretary for the Dudley group of hospitals UNISON branch gave a spirited speech giving reasons for the fight and making plain the workers' determination to win on their terms.

UNISON National officer Steven Weeks explained the UNISON twin strategy of long term public campaigning and political pressure at a national level together with local support and industrial action in branches and regions. Already changes to legislation have been achieved, most notably that PFI deals now do not have to include the transfer of staff. Some at the conference called for national industrial action, but many others who have been involved in the campaign against PFI for years recognised that this is not a single battle but a war. The Dudley workers are playing their part in what will be a long haul.

MANUFACTURING

Bye, bye, buggy

MACLAREN, the producer of baby buggies, has just announced that it is to transfer production from Long Buckby in Northamptonshire to China and Eastern Europe to reduce labour costs. It will mean the loss of 150 jobs. The AEEU called the announcement a disgrace and locals have expressed their anger.

The baby buggy was invented in 1965 by Owen Finlay Maclaren who was a retired aeronautical designer and former

test pilot. His design folded like an umbrella and weighed only 6 lbs. The first commercial sale was in 1967, and production moved to Long Buckby in 1972.

Other innovations were introduced, such as balloon foam tyres, developed in conjunction with ICI and designed to give a more comfortable ride. The company had an excellent safety record, both with its products and employees.

By 1987 it doubled its production with a new factory. But since the late 1980s it has been subject to several takeovers, most recently by the Sunleigh group.

JOBS**Mass protest in Stoke**

STOKE-ON-TRENT workers held a mass rally on 23 November in protest at the wave of job cuts affecting all sectors of work. The City Council was planning to cut £4.25 million from its budget, threatening the jobs of many public sector workers.

Jim Cessford, President of the North Staffs Trade Union Council, said: "We want all the unions to come together to fight to defend these workers and the economy of North Staffordshire. People in this area are sick of the area's industries being destroyed piece by piece."

Almost 3,200 jobs have gone in North Staffordshire in the last year. Michelin announced in late October that it aimed to axe 950 jobs in 2001, on top of the 570 announced in January.

Last December, Corus steelworks — formerly Shelton Bar — closed, destroying 216 jobs and ending more than 150 years of steel production in the Potteries. In July, Staffordshire Police announced that 110 jobs were to go. During the year, electronics firms Sumitomo Electrical Wiring Systems and Leoni Wiring Systems announced 300 job losses. But now workers are uniting to oppose the continued destruction.

EDUCATION**Action in universities**

HIGHER EDUCATION union members have voted by an overwhelming 70-80% in favour of industrial action in protest at vice chancellors' and principals' refusal to negotiate on pay workloads or working conditions. Six trade unions are involved NATFHE, UNISON, MSF, EIS, TGWU and GMB.

The six unions' 100,000 members in universities will begin the action on 5 December with a day of demonstrations and rallies across the country, launching continuous disruption which will include withholding student marks, overtime bans, working to contract and work to rule. The action has the full backing of the National Union of Students — which is clear that deterioration in conditions for university staff also means deterioration in the quality of the students' experience.

The final straw for staff has been the vice chancellors' continued refusal to return to negotiations despite the announcement in the middle of November of an additional £1 billion government funding — a third of which was specifically earmarked by the government for pay.

AGRICULTURE**Look out for the pesticides**

THE GOVERNMENT'S Working Party on Pesticide Residues samples food annually. It is not acting on the results.

The most recent report of 2,500 home-grown and imported samples found that 43% of fruit and vegetables tested showed traces of residues. The overall figure for bread, milk and potatoes was lower at 27%. Even so, 1.6% of this category was above the government's Minimum Residue Level and therefore recognised as potentially dangerous.

In contrast only one organically grown item revealed any residue — an apple with traces of an organophosphate (azinphos-methyl), probably cross-contaminated from a neighbouring, non-organic holding.

The UK is refusing to ban the use of another organophosphate, chlorpyrifos, which regularly turned up in apples and other fruit tested. But the US Environment Protection Agency has imposed a partial ban on this pesticide, because it fears it to be dangerous to children.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****DECEMBER****TRADE UNIONS AND THE EURO**

A chance to hear the arguments from a trade union perspective. Speakers include John Edmonds (GMB), John Monks (TUC), Mick Rix (ASLEF), Doug Nichols (CYWU), Jean Geldart (Unison). Chaired by John Toomer (NUJ).

£5 waged, £2 unwaged.

Friday 7 December, 6.30 pm

NUT Headquarters, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1

JANUARY**SERTUC CONFERENCE, LONDON**

An Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy for London — developing a trade union response to the London Development Agency's consultation document.

Wednesday 31 January, 10.00 – 15.30.

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Teachers unite on pay

THE TEACHER UNIONS, the NUT, NASUWT and ATL, are in the process of discussing a proposal for a brand new salary structure for teachers which will put them back on the "high ground" of the struggle to rebuild our education service.

The Government's imposition of Performance Related Pay (PRP) has been roundly condemned by all and the NUT in particular. It is seen universally as divisive and damaging both to the collaborative and cooperative education process, and to the recruitment of new teachers, recently shown to be in crisis by research carried out for the NUT by Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson of Liverpool University (see www.teachers.org.uk).

The unions, led by the NUT, have for two years been engaged in a protracted campaign against PRP. Now they are moving onto the offensive with a proposal for a salary structure which would continue to recognise year on year experience and to reward the additional management responsibilities assumed by many teachers. A new element would recognise and remunerate properly accredited professional development and in-service training.

The unions insist that all teachers should have the right to continuing professional development throughout their careers, as well as the right to carry out research into new areas of teaching and teaching methods.

If successful, such a campaign would ensure more funding for professional development, more teachers in schools to allow the time for the training to be carried out, and enhanced skills and qualifications for teachers throughout England and Wales. A report looking at the proper remuneration of teachers in Scotland has already come up with similar proposals, and rejected "payment by results".

All teachers want to see year on year improvement in education standards, but reject the notion that this can be imposed without the training and resources to achieve it.

As they celebrate the passing of the stick-wielding Chris Woodhead of Ofsted, they can look forward to a genuine campaign for higher standards based on the provision of proper professional development — and its recognition in salary terms. Such a campaign will surely win the support of parents, School Governors and LEAs — all of whose organisations are hostile to the Government's PRP scheme.

The price of pills

MEDICINES AND FOOD supplements bought over the counter from high-street chemist shops have been exempt from the Resale Prices Act of 1974, which was designed to prevent manufacturers from keeping retail prices artificially high. The exemption mechanism is known to the public as Resale Price Maintenance (RPM), and it stops retailers in general from selling over-the-counter medicines at a price below that recommended by the manufacturer.

In allowing the exemption, the Restrictive Practices Court had decided that removal of Resale Price Maintenance, in this particular instance, would be detrimental to the public interest because the profitability (and therefore the viability) of many smaller high street chemist shops would be threatened.

What was at stake was something of public importance: that the elderly should have access to professional advice from a qualified pharmacist, free of charge, in an environment comprising the full range of medicines and pharmaceutical services, including the dispensing of NHS prescriptions. Four million such interactions a day take place with the old, infirm and mothers with young children being the main recipients. A plentiful and well-distributed supply of such shops was considered by the Court to be desirable.

Recent analyses have shown that 4% of the 23% gross pre-tax profit of small pharmacies derives from price-maintained goods. Loss of half these sales, to supermarkets, could result in the closure of half Britain's high street chemist shops, with annual turnover of £500,000 or less.

SUPERMARKET SWEEP

In 1996, Archie Norman, then Chief Executive of the Asda Group, initiated a campaign to end resale price maintenance on the grounds of a desire to provide his customers with good honest value. This was more important, he argued, than pharmaceutical advice. The public wanted low prices, and those exempt from prescription charges who were unable to afford chemists' prices simply exhorted their general practitioner to prescribe, causing unnecessary extra workload for the GP and cost to the NHS. The public, he claimed, was paying an additional £300 million a year in additional costs.

Opponents rightly pointed out that branded non-prescription medicines are 20–30% cheaper in Britain than in every other European country except Sweden. Competition amongst manufacturers, and through the availability of "own brand" generic medicines reduced cost further. And sound professional advice was available from high street chemists, easily accessed by those who find it most difficult to travel to out-of-town supermarkets.

The Restrictive Practices Court is currently hearing evidence from the Office of Fair Trading, who have made application to end Resale Price Maintenance on medicines. The Court sits behind closed doors, with a written judgement anticipated in writing sometime in January 2001, available to the public.

SAFETY AND THE FREE MARKET

Should the free market prevail or is there a real issue here of safety and quality? Patient Partnership in Medicine Taking (PPMT) is central to the Programme for Pharmacy within the NHS Plan, and the government has acknowledged, in principle, the vital role that the profession plays by publicly stating that there will be a five year moratorium for Resale Price Maintenance on over-the-counter medicines should the Court rule that the status quo is against the public interest.

The range and level of high quality services provided to the public from small pharmacies throughout the country should not be allowed to fall foul of the free market. The demise of town centre or local neighbourhood shopping in favour of one-stop out of town locations is in the interests of the supermarkets and their shareholders, not principally, the consumers. Grocers, butchers, dry cleaners, post offices have all fallen victim. Effective use of medicines ought not to be similarly jeopardised.

When the autumn drowns And despite the media

How society fo



Firefighters filling sandbags in readiness for flood

THE BRITISH, it is often said, like nothing better than talking about the weather. Well, recent events must have sent the talking into overdrive. But the good thing is that there has been a fair bit of thinking too. Floods of it, in fact.

There is no doubt that the flooding of the past few weeks was on a grand scale. Over a thousand flood warnings across the country, town centres under water, and vast tracts of countryside turned into lakes — probably the biggest event since the great floods of 1947.

The TV screens in November were full of dramatic scenes in places like York, Worcester, Bewdley, Lewes, and Shrewsbury to name but just a few.

When rain pours hit Britain, it was a battle between floods and society. In the headlines, society managed to win...

Fought the floods



© Shout (reportdigital.co.uk)

Flood water approaching houses

But one of the real stories has hardly been told. And that is of how society, in many ways, has triumphed. Of how, on the whole, public service worked. For when all the waters have subsided it will be seen that despite all the misery and disruption actually remarkably few have been deeply affected.

Planning

It is estimated that nearly 2 million properties lie within the flood plain. Despite the massive amounts of floodwater fewer than six thousand properties were actually flooded out. A tribute to years of investment in flood defence and other planning measures.

Around six million people live and work in these flood risk areas yet there has hardly been a single death directly attributed to the swollen rivers. This is a tribute to weather forecasters, flood warning officials, emergency planners, firefighters and many others who went into action.

This was no accident. It was planned for. And planning is the sign of a civilised advanced society. It stands out in an age of short termism and selfish profiteering.

But — and there are some big buts here — another sign of a mature society is how it reflects and responds to incidents like the floods of 2000. For it

was certainly not all plain sailing: far from it.

Perhaps the big issue on everyone's lips has been climate change. Was it or wasn't it down to global warming? The truth is we can't say on the basis of a single extreme event. The flooding was certainly not unique — at worst (in places), the worst for perhaps 400 years.

The River Ouse in York reached about the same height as notches in old buildings marking the level of a flood in 1625.

The very fact that it has happened before tells us not to be too quick to

Continued on page 8

assume too much. The great flood of 1606 is well documented, for example. Twenty miles of sea defences along the Severn Estuary gave way causing extensive deep floods from Gloucester to Bridgwater and covering 150 square miles.

The water spread so rapidly that “men seeing it coming flew back to their houses, yet before they could enter, death stood at the doors ready to receive them!”

That said, the mounting scientific evidence about climate change is compelling. Four of the five warmest years in three centuries have occurred in the past decade. Sea levels are rising at an increasing rate, with the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia predicting global sea level rises of between 12 and 67 centimetres by 2050.

Recent extreme weather events have certainly been consistent with models of global warming. The question therefore for us is should we at least apply the precautionary principle. A sane society would surely say yes.

Environment summit

But how sane was the debate in The Hague where an international summit of environment ministers failed to reach agreement on limiting carbon emissions? Certainly the USA has been doing everything it can to get out of commitments made at the previous Kyoto summit.

John Prescott has described the floods as a “wake up call”. And it is not just climate change that is telling us something about the way we are living. Another major issue to emerge is development in the flood plain.

Historically it made sense to build by rivers, the source of vital water supplies. Today it is a nonsense, idyllic though pastoral riverside locations may seem.

Yet developers still propose thousands of houses on the flood plain each year. Despite most of the planning applications being rejected still too many are allowed by local councils. The Environment Agency says about 20% of

‘...yet developers still propose thousands of houses on the flood plain each year’

the objections it makes to planning applications on the grounds of flood risk are ignored. And the sins of older planning decisions are obvious for all to see. Again it is short term versus long term — proper planning versus expediency — that is at issue.

Another important factor is the consequences of changes in land use, particularly in agricultural areas. It is now increasingly clear that postwar intensification and the move to large scale farming has had an impact on flooding.

A combination of things like extra drainage, removal of hedges and riverside buffer strips, deep ploughing and soil loss, and the eradication of water meadows have all served to send water off the land far quicker than in the past. Prince Charles’s remarks about arrogance and disregard for the “delicate balance of nature” need to be set in the context of capitalism where profit takes precedence.

Financial straitjacket

When all is said and done there is still the grubby question of money and how much has been invested in the flood defence infrastructure. Yes, what was in place did a great job in most instances. But years of financial straitjacketing (particularly the result of blinkered short term thinking in the drought years) has left lists of proposed schemes undone.

The Government announced a £51 million boost to flood defence spending. And that to be spread over four years. But this would hardly buy five major schemes. As Charles Secrett, Director of Friends of the Earth, said: “The sums Mr Prescott is talking about

are finger in the dyke stuff. We’ll never keep climate change at bay by spending a few million.”

And it is not just flood defences that need the money. The sewerage system which has to take rainfall in built up areas just cannot cope.

Brian Duckworth, managing director of Severn Trent Water, said, “We are seeing massive changes in weather events. We are relying on nineteenth century systems to deal with new millennium weather conditions. The pipelines are simply not big enough to deal with these amounts of water.”

Research at Portsmouth University shows that the water industry spent an average of just £169 million a year on maintaining the 301,400 kilometres of sewers in England and Wales from 1991 to 1999 — about an eighth of what is required.

Work is progressing at about 213 km a year — at which rate it will take 1,400 years to replace the network. If privatisation was the answer it must have been a funny question.

Another concern is the state of hundreds of earth dams when put under increasing pressure. Severe weather could lead to more instances of the dams being overtopped with floodwaters which erode the earth structures.

Professor David Crichton of Middlesex University, said: “Climate change will lead to an increased risk of dam failure. About half the 2500 large dams have earth embankments, most of them constructed before heavy soil compaction equipment was available.”

And we also have to consider other parts of life affected by flooding. Train lines have been damaged or endangered to add to that industry’s already long list of problems.

Like so many other parts of Britain our engineering infrastructure is creaking. The warning signs are there. As with climate change, development in the flood plain and land use changes we can either take note and act or look the other way.

How we respond will tell us how successful a society we really are.

Do passengers' interests come first? Not when there are shareholders around...

Crisis on the railways

BRITAIN'S RAILWAYS face their worst crisis since the war as the realities of a fragmented and privately owned industry are manifested with two more crashes and loss of life, and an inability to respond in a cohesive way to the recent serious flooding.

Railtrack Chief Executive Gerald Corbett has at last resigned but only after agreeing to increase the dividend payments to shareholders, underlining in whose interests the railways are really run.

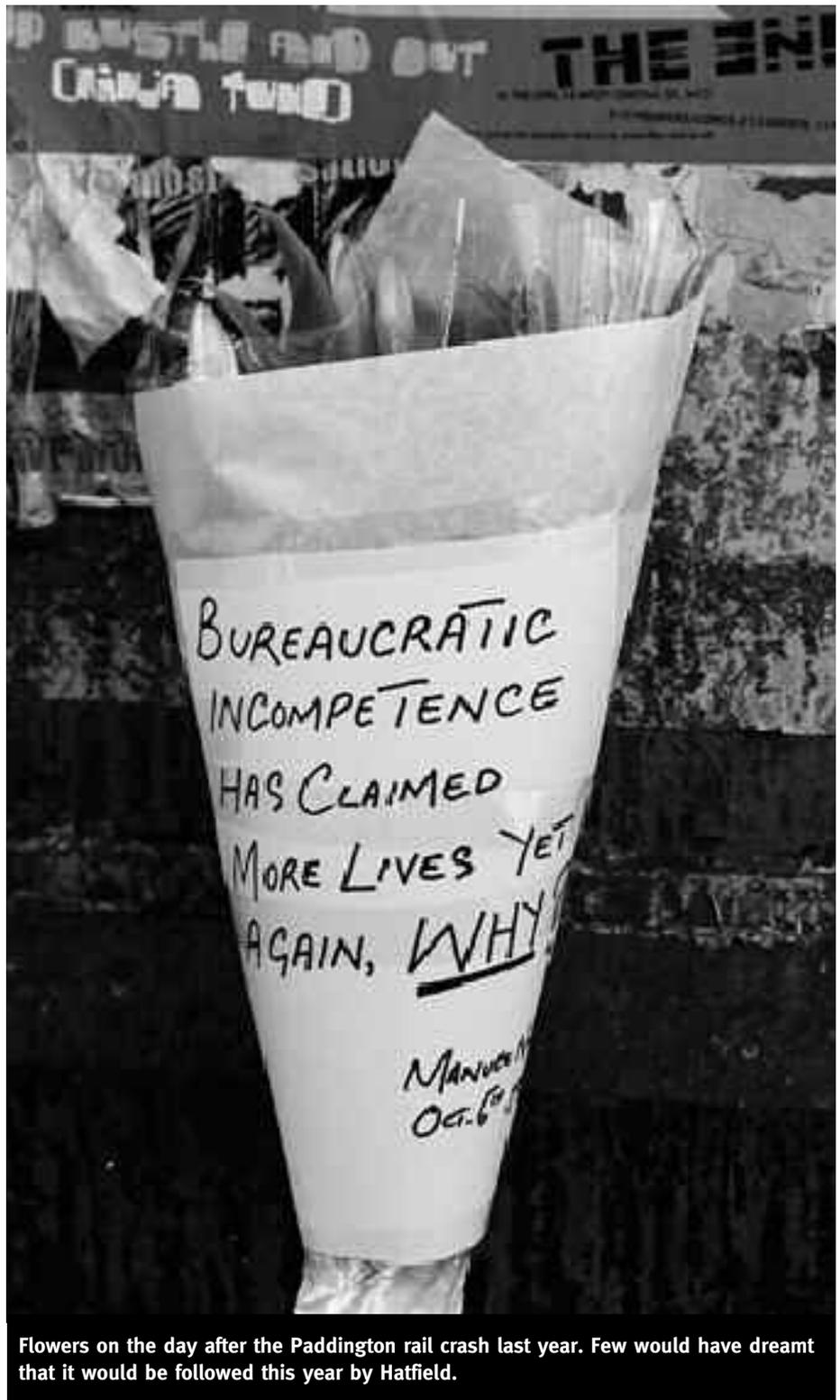
The interests of passengers clearly comes last. It has proved to be impossible to get accurate information on the temporary timetables hurriedly introduced after the Hatfield crash and the floods. Rail staff have had to cope with mounting anger from the public trying to find whether they could get to work, or could make a planned trip.

Panic

Panic set in at Railtrack as the true state of the railways became obvious. Lines were closed at a few hours notice, severing the vital sleeper links between London and Scotland. Trains have now been crawling the 99 miles from Leicester to London at 20mph.

Rail unions have been warning about the state of the track and other infrastructure for some time. TSSA last year commissioned a report from Sheffield University which highlighted how the track was literally wearing out. RMT have complained bitterly about the 'cowboy' sub-sub-sub...etc contractors such as Jarvis who employ staff who know nothing about railways, and who are not certificated in rail safety.

But this state of affairs is hardly surprising. Gwynneth Dunwoody, Chairman of the Transport Select Committee stated that she had concerns about the fact that the new Railtrack Chief executive and most of the rest of the Board of Directors knew nothing about railways.



Flowers on the day after the Paddington rail crash last year. Few would have dreamt that it would be followed this year by Hatfield.

Continued on page 10

'No wonder that Ken Livingstone and the rail unions are fighting to stop partial privatisation of the tube'

The rail infrastructure companies which have the contracts with Railtrack to maintain the nation's railways are all from the construction industry.

The construction union UCATT would verify that they do not have good records when it comes to safety on building sites, so why should they on the railway? The regular checks that used to be made under British Rail just don't get done anymore. Thousands of skilled staff have been made redundant by these companies, and now engineers are having to be brought in from abroad — Scottish company First Engineering are employing Romanians, Jarvis are employing Indians — presumably leaving these countries short of skilled railway engineers for their own systems.

The contractor responsible for the maintenance of the track at Hatfield was Balfour Beatty. They were recently slated by Railtrack engineers for the standard of work at Leeds Station, which is undergoing a huge rebuilding programme.

It would be wrong to single out one contractor. They all cut corners on safety — and Railtrack knows it. The name of the game is saving money, and maximising profits.

It is not just Railtrack and its contractors who do it. The train operators are just as quick to cut corners if it means saving a few bob. That's why Southall happened. It is likely to be found to be a contributory factor in the Ladbroke Grove crash.

The recent crash at Bristol involving a mail train whose brakes failed is another



The mangled wreckage of coach H, Ladbroke Grove, last year. They said it should never happen

case in point. EWS have imported a large number of US locos (most of our factories have been closed down). ASLEF drivers have made complaints about the braking systems on these machines, yet Railtrack approved their use.

No wonder that Ken Livingstone and the rail unions are fighting to stop partial privatisation of the tube!

All the rail unions are opposed to further privatisation, and have policies that call for the renationalisation of Britain's rail network. Those policies have been adopted by the TUC. Surely now the trade union movement must demand an end to the slaughter, and a return to public ownership. Most Labour Party members agree with the policy. It would command the support of most of the country. So where is the campaign?

Most analysts agree that the industry will now have to be restructured. The government accepts this, and is in the process of changing the franchises, which has cost one of the worst train companies, Connex, its London-Brighton route. The train operators umbrella body, ATOC, is calling for a national rail safety authority. But this is like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Fine words

The government has been full of fine words about improving public transport — lots of buzz words like integration. Yet where is the substance? The government seems paralysed, unable to sort out the mess bequeathed to them by the Tories.

Real integration will only be possible if there is real control. That means



Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

en again, and yet it has.

renationalisation, but NOT a return to British Rail, hardly a great success. What comes next must be better, more radical, and certainly more effective than the current private nightmare, and what went before. It must also be part of the wider public transport network which includes buses, ferries, taxis, and even planes.

Maybe it can't be done overnight. But how about getting Railtrack into public ownership, complete with an 'in-house' maintenance organisation over which effective control could then be exerted. That would re-establish the integrated safety culture which the private railway has had ripped from it.

Why not take franchises back into public ownership when private companies fail to run them adequately, like London Transport has done with

some of London's bus network?

The government could accomplish those two measures easily. It would be popular, and it would begin to address the very serious concerns that Britain's travelling public have about the safety of their rail network.

Failure to now make the necessary structural changes to the rail industry will condemn it to a steady decline, reversing recent upward trends. The Post Office is already reported to be looking seriously at alternatives to rail, despite an recent multi-million pound investment in new trains and purpose-built stations. Other freight users will follow suit.

Many former rail users have been forced to find alternative means to get around, and will not be easily tempted back to rail. If car use is to fall, and if

the government is serious about cutting the pollution which increasingly looks responsible for the weather which produced the floods, then a safe and reliable rail network will be essential to that strategy.

After Ladbroke Grove, it was said that things would never be the same again, and that change would HAVE to happen. It didn't.

The trade unions, the rail users and those who care about the environment need to mount an effective campaign which will ensure that this latest rail crisis doesn't merely lead to the next one. If fundamental change in the rail industry does not come about as a result of Hatfield, confidence will ebb away, and the future of the industry will look bleak.

The real problem with the public/private argument is that there — hospitals, social care, nursing homes...everything

And so to private beds...

THE GOVERNMENT announced on 31 October that it had reached an agreement — a “Concordat” — with the private health care sector. This means that all health authorities are now able to bring private providers into the planning of local healthcare “on a more systematic, proactive and long-term basis”. Much emphasis has been given to its desire to break down the old barriers — the so-called “third way”.

The Concordat covers the use of private operating theatres and facilities, the transfer of patients to or from the NHS and the private sector (when their condition is critical and it is clinically appropriate to make best use of facilities available). It also includes the use of facilities in private and voluntary organisations to provide rehabilitative care for the elderly.

New Labour has heralded this new “third way” as bringing benefits to all. But Old Labour looks on it as being yet another nail in the coffin of British socialist principles.

Dire necessity

The reality is much more prosaic and is driven by dire necessity. Doubts about the morality of private health care, or Party managers’ concerns that this approach would affect the traditional Labour vote, have been swept aside.

The far larger potential election problems are becoming a reality, with the Government’s failure to fulfill its election manifesto pledge to take a million patients off the waiting lists, and pictures of A&E departments across the land bursting at the seams with patients waiting to be admitted to beds.

The real problem is one of overall capacity in the health care system, and that includes the social care and nursing home system to which many patients transfer after their hospital treatment.

The NHS today cannot cope with the pressures being put on it, either from rising demand or from the imposition of the Government’s waiting list pledge. This Government in its early days set up a National Bed Enquiry, which surprise,

surprise, concluded that too many beds had been shut in the NHS. The dramatic developments in day surgery and shorter lengths of stay had not offset the implications of the drastically reduced total bed stock. This has had to cater for growing non-surgical acute medical admissions (primarily the elderly). But what has now become known as intermediate care (including such services as rehabilitation and convalescence) has not expanded to fill the vacuum fast enough.

The National Beds Enquiry found that

‘The Government has been forced to look to the private hospital sector...but spare private capacity is patchy around the country’

two-thirds of hospital beds were occupied by people aged 65 or over. It also found that there has been a long-term increase in acute and general admissions of around 3.5% a year. Staffed hospital beds (for acute, general and maternity care) peaked around 1960 at about 250,000 — by 1999 this had reduced to 147,000.

While the 1960 figure is not what is required today, as we do have improved care (we no longer have huge “bins” full of the elderly waiting to die, and surgical improvements have revolutionised care), the bed reductions have gone too far.

The ever-increasing pressure on staff in the acute hospitals trying to manage patients in wards and departments constantly running red hot has resulted in a further crisis of staff shortages, as staff vote with their feet. One busy A&E department recently had the resignation of 12 trained staff in one day who wanted to go to less pressurised jobs in

NHS Direct, the advice line service.

We now have a situation of too few beds and even fewer beds actually useable as there are not the staff available to run them. Hence the flying in of trained nurses from Spain, the Philippines and even China, to staff the wards during the winter “pressure crisis”. Except that the winter pressures are now all year round.

Staffing problems

Staffing problems in nursing and medicine take years to resolve. First you have to get people who want to train and then they have to be retained.

The overall capacity problem in the hospitals is compounded by the dilemma faced by social service departments across the country, which struggle to cope financially with the ever-increasing stream of patients flowing to them. Every time social services are financially unable to accept a care package in the community, it causes a ‘delayed discharge’ and a ‘blocked bed’ in a hospital.

Further, the whole system has relied on private sector nursing and residential homes to accept these patients, if they can be paid for. Currently there are some 600,000 residents in nursing and residential care homes.

But there has been a steady decline in the numbers of places available in these homes. Inadequate funding has stopped this part of the private sector having the licence to print money that it used to have. Particularly in the South East the owners have taken advantage of high property markets, closed their homes and realised their assets.

Now that the places are needed they are no longer there and even if they were, there is not the money to pay for them.

Looking for beds

So the Government has been forced by necessity to look to the private hospital sector, and any capacity it has, to help alleviate this dire problem. But this spare capacity is patchy around the country.

is just not enough capacity in the public healthcare system



Neonatal intensive care: the NHS needs more intensive care beds, but the private sector in general cannot provide them.

The private hospitals will not run with excess capacity for any length of time as that affects profits. Any additional capacity that it can switch on has to be staffed and where will the staff come from? From the over-stretched NHS, where else!

In the critical care services (intensive

care) which have in recent winters stretched beyond breaking point, there is not much spare capacity except in the big London private hospitals. Around the rest of the country the complex, risky critical care work is done in the National Health Service.

The private sector will not provide

salvation over this winter. Nor can the overall capacity problem of the NHS be papered over by any "Concordat". That can only be resolved by continuing additional investment in the NHS over a number of years. There is no instant fix: additional capacity in the NHS cannot be turned on overnight.

The astonishing intricacy of the human body has entranced artists and anatomists alike for hundreds of years, as a new exhibition shows

The body beautiful

THE HAYWARD GALLERY on London's South Bank is showing a fascinating exhibition: *SPECTACULAR BODIES: THE ART & SCIENCE OF THE HUMAN BODY FROM LEONARDO TO NOW*. The exhibition shows material from the 16th century to the present day, books, paintings, models, instruments and photographs, drawn from a variety of collections, chiefly British and including the medical Royal Colleges, the Science Museum and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.

Anatomists were in the forefront of the scientific revolution. In the teeth of the obscurantism of the Catholic Church, men like Vesalius used experiment and observation to find about the human body, rather than reciting the received truths of Galen (AD 130–200). Galen of Pergamum was a Greek physician whose work, outstanding as it was in his time, had become established as a rigid orthodoxy — it was as heretical to disagree with it as it was to challenge the Inquisition.

For the new anatomists dissection, which had been merely an instrument to illustrate the truths of Galen and Avicenna, the Persian commentator on Aristotle, became an instrument of discovery. Leonardo da Vinci, represented in this exhibition by a number of works, took a scientific approach and examples from the sketches he prepared for a never-published textbook of anatomy and physiology are a major part of this exhibition.

Vesalius, contemporary of Copernicus, revolutionised anatomy with his *DE HUMANI CORPUS FABRICA*, illustrations from which are here. Vesalius was also a

contemporary of Ambrose Paré, the founder of modern surgery whose work as an army surgeon, as so often in later



medical history, brought about advances in knowledge. Paré found that the traditional approach to battle wounds, of pouring boiling oil on them, was not both cruel and useless.

William Harvey, the British discoverer of the method of the circulation of the blood, had anatomical tables made which are on display from the Royal College of Physicians collection are also on display.

And as for artists, Michelangelo, Raphael and Dürer, and later Stubbs and

Fuseli, all studied anatomy the better to represent it artistically. Stubbs did not confine himself to human anatomy, producing a text on the anatomy of the horse which stands today. Until the demise of the life class in British art education, this approach was the basis of all artistic training and education.

These pioneers in anatomy come from those countries that pioneered a new mode of production, capitalism: Italy, Holland and Britain. Among the first exhibits the visitor meets are a series of paintings showing anatomical demonstrations from Holland, which display both the detail of dissection but also the anatomists themselves, the equivalent of the modern medical school group photograph.

On the way to the next gallery beautiful surgical instruments are shown, in preparation for astonishingly intricate exhibits — models that show the beauty of the human body's structures, both from the perspective of the artist and of the anatomist. Here are drawings, wax models and statuettes of flayed bodies: the so-called *écorchés*, and models of astonishing intricacy of bodies and heads. These figures were used in the education and training both of

surgeons and physicians but also of artists.

The exhibition is perhaps let down in the later galleries; the modern artists' installations, scattered throughout the exhibition, rarely achieve anything more than a playful response to the human body.

The galleries that show 19th century work concentrate on some of the less historically significant issues, the more bizarre preoccupations of certain

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

Victorians such as eugenics, phrenology and physiognomy. Had they cared to, the curators could here have shown some of the work of 19th century anatomists and physiologists which contributed directly to better care for patients and laid the foundations for many of this century's advances.

The visitor may very easily receive the impression that, like history in 1066 AND ALL THAT, anatomy has come to the end. Nothing could be further from the truth, and if the curators had wished to show something of modern approaches to anatomy, they could have done worse than to include the Visible Human Project, a fascinating project to put complete human male and female cadavers online in MRI, CT and anatomical modes (sample data and images can be seen at: http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_gallery.html)

Nevertheless, any WORKERS reader who can reach the South Bank is strongly urged to visit, to admire the extraordinary beauty and scientific interest of the exhibits.

The exhibition, at the Hayward Gallery, South Bank, London SE1, is open until 14 January 2001.

Opening Hours: Daily 10am – 6pm

Late nights Tuesday and Wednesday until 8pm

Closed 24–26 December 2000 and 1 January 2001

**Tickets £8
Concessions £5.50
16s and under Free
Up to three children of 12 or under free with each accompanying adult.**

If you want to be a player in the political game, not a spectator, the politics of cynicism is not enough. But thinking about the mountain of work and the changes in attitude that will be needed to transform Britain is overwhelming if you are on your own. That's why British workers need their own political party, this party, to generate the ideas and effort to bring the changes we need.

Who are we?

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist was founded in 1968 by Reg Birch and other leading engineers. They identified that there were only two classes in Britain and that only workers could make the change that was needed. Birch pulled together a diverse crew of workers and turned them into a party with a difference.

In 1971, the Party's second Congress produced a piece of completely new communist thinking for Britain called THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND ITS PARTY. We call this our Party programme and it remains as fresh and important for today as it was then. You can find it on our website, www.workers.org.uk.

Dozens of political parties formed in the 1960s and 70s have come and gone, while the CPBML is alive, well, and welcoming new recruits. One reason for its success has been that every CPBML member must be a thinker and a do-er. There are no paid officials.

The party is made up of working people like you, who are helped by their participation in it to develop as leaders and earn the respect of fellow workers. The party vows never to put itself above the class which created it, but to serve the interests of the class.

Those who join us know we are in for a long haul, and most of our members stay for good. We leave it to the political Moonies to grab anyone, exploit them and spit them out. We don't tolerate zealots on the one hand or armchair generals on the other. What about you? If you are interested, get in touch. In the long run, the only thing harder than being a communist is not being one.

How to get in touch

* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet WHERE'S THE PARTY. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

• Subscribe to WORKERS, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

• Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. You can ask to be put in touch via e-mail, or by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

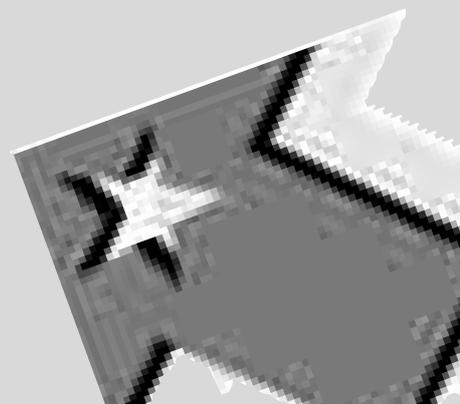
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Back to Front – An inspector falls

‘Why would anyone want to join a profession constantly harassed and bullied by this petty dictator?’

AT LAST! Chris Woodhead (“ol’ grey eyes”) is about to shuffle off down the road to that bastion of old grey thinking, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH. He may find it tricky to adjust to being a bit-part player at the paper, contributing the occasional article.

As Chief Inspector he saw himself as the leading man, centre-stage. Nevertheless, the £100,000 salary he will receive as a part-timer (only £15,000 short of his OFSTED salary), may go some way to massaging his huge ego.

Did he jump or was he pushed? He himself would probably say the question is academic. He has been in post for seven years — seven years too long. During his tenure the real inspectors, HMIs, were emasculated.

Teachers and schools throughout England and Wales suffered severely at the hands of this prima donna. His high-handedness and offensive behaviour towards parliamentary select committees, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Quality Assurance Agency were only part of the picture.

One of his many dubious achievements has been to destroy teachers’ confidence in the inspectorate and lower morale in the

profession to such a degree that by last September there was a recruitment shortfall of over four thousand on teacher training courses. Why would anyone want to join a profession constantly harassed and abused by this petty dictator?

Over the last few years Woodhead led a charmed existence, indulged by both Conservative and Labour governments and impervious to criticisms by educationalists and the public. Who can forget his breath-taking assertion that a paedophilic relationship between a teacher and a young student could be a valuable educative experience? And after his recent claim that A levels were “too easy” Woodhead admitted to MPs that evidence for this statement did not exist.

Schools have always been accountable to their community — Woodhead’s words and actions have never been. Teachers, through their unions and now their General Teaching Council, have called for radical changes to the school inspection system.

The government must listen and act accordingly. The General Teaching Council should be accountable to us — as Woodhead never was.

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