

# WORKERS

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## HANDING OVER BRITAIN



Back to industry, back to class

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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

# WORKERS

## “The meat market

AT THE TURN of the 20th century James Joyce described the “stately, plump Buck Mulligan” character as someone who “ate with relish the internal organs of beasts and fowl”. As the 21st century perversely turns, it is the stately and the plump humans who are having their internal organs eaten or sold.

Hideous cannibalistic networks have been revealed on the internet in a repulsive case in Germany in which willing victims have offered themselves up to join their murderers in eating their own bodies. It’s all videoed of course for the fetish market. The Nazi death camps sought to make profit from most parts of the human body, skin and all. There is nothing capitalism cannot find a market for and psychotic behaviour is licensed by the freedom of the market.

The Mafia’s opening of the market in former socialist countries has led to a multi billion dollar trade in living bodies, bits of bodies, children and babies. One click and there’s a baby in the shopping trolley just for you. Proceed to checkout. Every manner of depraved sexual practice can be purchased at a price and practically every internal part of the body can be bought. Gangs deal in literally both kinds of arms trade.

In feudal times it was salvation that could be bought and sold and the poets ranted for

generations against the corruption and hypocrisy of the Church in which celibate monks would preach abstinence to congregations of their own illegitimate offspring. Under a dying capitalism it is not the soul, but the body that is valuable on the market. Science advances and so do the despicable ends to which capitalists can take it.

We should be horrified that in Britain a father is sanctified by the press for trying to flog one of his kidneys on the internet in order to pay for conductive education treatment for his disabled daughter which had been refused by the local authority. Where is it going to end? Can’t afford student fees? Let us sell your kidney at discounted rates and give you a cut of the profit.

If the consumer market wasn’t so vile, you would have to laugh and hope that next time you ask the take away if they deliver, just hope they say No, they only do chicken or beef. Bodies and parts of them are not for sale. They are for donating to science or saving others’ lives when we die or under medical control as in marrow transplants when we are alive. We are not cannibals and cash cattle. The barbarism of our times is tolerated, both in the cruel and in the seemingly compassionate.



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## EU — lower and lower

ALL BRITISH GOVERNMENT departments will be ordered by the EU to consider using 'reverse auctions' on all projects worth more than £100,000. In these internet auctions tenderers are pitted against each other on the internet to encourage them to cut prices until all but one of them can go no lower. The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) believes up to 25% can be cut from current prices by this method.

The construction industry has argued that the provision of complex services is not suitable for e-auctions and the automatic acceptance of the lowest bid would lead to low quality and lack of safety. The Construction Industry Council (CIC) has produced much evidence to demonstrate that apparently 'cheap' contracts have turned out to be poor value. The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) has made specific recommendations against the use of e-auctions in its recently published 14th Report.

Until recently, government departments dealing with construction ran a campaign together with the construction industry to develop modern contracts, which emphasise good value, good design, sustainability and whole life costs. Then the EU Consolidated Public Procurement Directive arrived and the British government must make it law by 2005. Brussels is keen on e-auctions because internet auctions are apparently less open to corruption. So the UK must sacrifice quality and safety because the EU cannot deal with corruption.

- The European Court of Auditors has 'qualified' the accounts on all but 10% of the EU's 100 billion euro budget for the ninth year running. Auditors point to "significant errors in terms of legality and regularity" — in other words, fraud.

Head European Commissioner Romano Prodi has promised yet another action plan and a public prosecutor to fight fraud across the EU. All this follows the scandal at Eurostat, the EU's statistical bureau, where an auditors' report into secret slush funds kept by Eurostat directors reported that missing or destroyed records made it impossible to track what had happened to £3 million of taxpayers' money.

The Court of Auditors found that EU accounts are impossible to audit due to so many inconsistencies and omissions. Many accounts are retrospectively doctored and whistleblowers are harassed.

The worst malpractice is to be found in the infamous Common Agricultural Policy. Half the EU's budget, payments to farmers, are "materially affected by error", with farmers claiming for more land than is cultivated, overdeclaring livestock numbers and illegally reimporting produce after pocketing exporting subsidies. Last year the Commission cynically wrote off 1.1 billion euros as "irrecoverable debt" even though it had "no knowledge of the detail of the transactions in question".

**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](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)**

### GERMANY Who's the greatest?

A RECENT POLL in Germany for the greatest German has thrown up a top three of (1) Adenauer, Chancellor post-Second World War, architect of the European Union and all-round toady for the USA. Closely followed by (2) Luther, Protestant reformer. Thirdly, Karl Marx, Communist.

Marx's lead of the poll apparently galvanised the Christian Democrats (Adenauer's party – who have nothing to do with Christianity or democracy) into a frantic swamping of the polls. In what was the German Democratic Republic, Adenauer got zero votes. In West Germany Marx's vote was average. As 20% of the German population live in what was the GDR, for Marx to have secured third place indicates a massive turnout of the electorate. The organisers of the poll may not have intended the man who shattered Catholicism and the man who laid bare Capitalism to have come through as forcibly as they did.

### IRAQ Oil-rich, petrol-poor

DESPITE SITTING on the world's second largest oil reserves, occupied Iraq now finds itself having to impose petrol rationing. The move, ordered by the US-chosen Iraqi oil ministry, comes with penalties of up to 10 years to deter operators in the burgeoning black market.

In early December, according to the French news agency AFP, Iraq imported four million litres of fuel from neighbouring Turkey.

**WHAT'S ON****Coming soon****SPRING 2004**

Burning Issues — the Miners 1984 – 2004

Starting March 2004 the Birmingham-based Banner Theatre will be touring a new production, *BURNING ISSUES*, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Miners' Strike. The show will be based on in-depth interviews with former mineworkers, their families and friends and people living in former coalfield communities. Banner Theatre is actively seeking bookings, too. For further details please contact Banner Theatre on 0121 682 0730, via email at office-banner@blueyonder.co.uk, or visit the website at [www.bannertheatre.co.uk](http://www.bannertheatre.co.uk).

**STEEL****Grim future**

THE NATIONAL Trade Union Steel Coordinating Committee has presented Corus, the Anglo-Dutch inheritors of British Steel, with plans to save steel production on Teesside and Llanwern. In November, Corus announced £71 million in investment for its furnaces in Port Talbot, aimed at increasing production of steel slab.

Named 'Phoenix', the plan identifies key investment and enhanced production at some of the already established most efficient steel producing plants in the world. There are to be further discussions with Corus, led by the steel union ISTC.

**NHS****Losing blood**

STOCKS OF BLOOD held by the National Blood Transfusion NHS Trust are in decline and have been since early 2003. There are various factors causing this decline. The age profile of donors is increasing, while there seems to be a problem in recruiting young donors. Also the facilities used are often Dickensian.

One other fascinating factor in the decline is related to donor collections at large industrial and office complexes. As large concentrations of workers have been decimated during the last 20 years, the availability and volume from smaller sites cannot make up the shortfall.

Loss of industry is equating with loss of blood: life support systems in Britain are being closed down.

**IMPERIALISM****In search of new bases**

THE US PENTAGON has commenced a series of informal discussions in Japan, South Korea and Germany with a view to re-positioning US bases and military reserves away from those established after the Second World War. This is being defined as overhauling the US global 'footprint'.

The political implications of such changes — done with minimal consensus with countries effectively occupied by the US for decades — have yet to be gauged. Will South Korea survive without the US

hand inside the puppet glove?

The United States is being modest in only seeking for new bases in Africa, the Middle East, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and a number of undefined Asian countries. One of these 'undefined' countries would appear to be Nepal after the US declared the revolutionary war there was a "national security threat to the USA".

How land-locked Nepal threatens the US beggars the imagination. But if the global footprint is to leave no path untrudged, then a significant US presence after Afghanistan and Iraq may be of more concern to India and China and their future independence and sovereignty.

## New peace plan

ON 1 DECEMBER, Palestinian and Israeli representatives formally launched the Geneva Accord, a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East. It looks to the withdrawal of the Israeli army from most of the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and to the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian state.

Under the Accord, the Palestinians agree to give up the right of return for those Palestinians who were forced to flee their homes in 1948, although some would be allowed to return. Most Zionist settlements would be dismantled and evacuated.

The Palestinian state would gain sovereignty over most of the Old City of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem would become the capital of Palestine; West Jerusalem would remain the capital of Israel.

The Accord maps out the 1967 Green Line as the definitive border for the West Bank, though some adjacent settlement blocks would be annexed to Israel.

The Palestinians would recognise Israel's existence and right to live in peace, and Israel would similarly recognise Palestine's existence and right to live in peace. The Accord would be a final and permanent peace settlement.

What blocks this road forward to a settlement? The US state disapproves of the Accord because it wants to determine what happens in the Middle East. The members of the EU also want to meddle, if they can do so without annoying the US too much.

The peoples of Israel and Palestine have to work out how to achieve the necessary settlement, on their own, rebuffing the outside interference that has for so long held back their progress towards peace.

**MANUFACTURE****Record loss for Rover**

MG ROVER, owned by Phoenix Venture Holdings, recorded a £95 million loss in 2002. The T&GWU and Amicus trade unions are expressing further concerns over the financial stability of the group and the financial arrangements associated with its directors.

MG Rover was bought from BMW in 2000 for £10 by four venture capitalists, hence the Phoenix title. Though MG Rover has recorded losses, trade union analysis of the company books has raised significant worries about the future livelihoods of the 6,500 Rover workers. The company pension scheme has a £73 million deficit.

Yet through the complex, murky company infrastructure and lack of clarity as to who owns what, a £13 million trust fund for the directors and families has been established for future pensions. A £10 million interest-bearing loan for share purchase has been established with returns of £2.5 million due in 2005 to four directors. The directors earned in 2.5 years what a shop-floor worker earned after a year. The annual 'basic' director salary was £3 million (ignore other benefits) as opposed to the average shop-floor wage of £27,400. The directors received rises of 307% as opposed to 7% for those building the cars. The unravelling of the financial relationships has led to the unions appointing a specialist financial adviser to examine the company books.



## Coal under the cosh

THE EXPECTED £60 million subsidy for coal has been cut to £52 million by the government. There is a drip-feed of pennies to just keep coal on the life support machine. Again the funds are EU bribes, not to save the industry but supposedly for new developments. No strategic plan, no consolidating what already exists, just hand to mouth resuscitation.

Still, coal provides 30% of British electricity and the wind farms and small fry generators are not built or on stream yet. So 'King Coal' must be kept alive – for the moment. While the local authorities, the National Union of Miners, the Coal Communities Campaign and the coal owners all continue to try to save the industry, the government washes its hands — nothing to do with them, it says, blaming the EU.

Near Doncaster a truly monstrous new structure is being built on the grave of the old Manton pit. The skyline is being changed as one of the largest warehouses in Yorkshire is constructed for the new B&Q mega-mega superstore. B&Q are reputed to be investing over £65 million in one superstore and an industry dies all around it.

### UNITED STATES

#### Built on sand

ANALYSIS OF THE economic record of George Bush demonstrates how US power is built on sand. Government statistics show that an estimated 43 million people have no health care insurance. Nearly 35 million people — 1 in 8 of the population — are deemed to live below the poverty line. Over 13 million of these are children.

The US has the worst child poverty rate in the industrialised world. Over 31 million are deemed to be 'food insecure' — capitalist-speak for hungry or starving. Nine million are officially unemployed. Health care, education and pensions have collapsed. 54,000 children in Texas have been removed from school health insurance during the last 12 months due to budget cuts. Personal and business bankruptcy is running at unprecedented levels.

Tax cuts in the USA were supposed to generate 306,000 jobs a month. Actual figures indicate that only 125,000 jobs per month have been created. At election time the jobs deficit will be an estimated 6.9 million worse than Bush promised.

While the war of aggression against Iraq continues, Pentagon casualty figures which are an estimated 3 months in arrears, are showing that nearly 10,000

US personnel have been killed, wounded or been too ill to continue serving in Iraq.

This is the equivalent of one US division.

The mood in the USA cannot sustain such blood-letting abroad and internal collapse of jobs, health, education and pensions at home.

### SPYING ON WORKERS

#### Database of activists

A PRIVATE AGENCY, run by an Evelyn Le Chene, has inherited the mantle of the collapsed Economic League. The Economic League existed throughout most of the 20th century, funded by various employers' organisations to spy and blacklist trade unionists, Communists and others deemed to be the enemies of capitalism. The League collapsed in the 1980s amid financial irregularities and outcry over abuse of civil liberties.

The new agency claims a database of over 148,000 individuals — 'activists' covering a very wide political and economic spectrum — effectively anyone who is anti-capitalist. Various companies, such as Group 4 Security and manufacturer BAE Systems, have bought information on these 'activists'. BAE is said to be paying more than £120,000 a year for information.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Brown's statement

THE CHANCELLOR of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, announced his pre-budget report in the run up to Christmas. It looked very festive — all magic and sparkle. On closer inspection Labour's public finance plans are as bare as a Christmas tree without needles.

Brown painted a picture of economic stability, low inflation and low interest rates coupled with full employment. Yet many workers still worry about debt, job insecurity or long hours, decent housing and education for their children. So who's right?

Since 1997 the government has put money into education and health services, with many more people employed in those areas. Brown introduced the new deal programme for jobs, paid off debt early and changed public finances to allow long-term planning.

The loss of 700,000 manufacturing jobs and the new fad for exporting service jobs are obvious omissions. The government's plans rest on forecasts of economic growth. Yet Brown emphasises flexibility of labour and capital rather than encouraging employment in making and providing the country's needs. This will lead to an even greater loss of key jobs.

Brown touched on housing and pensions. We've heard about the pensions crisis; "fat-cat" pensions will be curbed, but nothing else. The housing market is "essential" to prosperity, but the answer to the spiralling cost of housing is to introduce more flexibility.

Government will be made more efficient and modernised. Many aspects of public service need reform. But workers know this is often a cover for expansion of PFI projects and increased private profiteering. We don't know yet how much of the extra cash for education and health has gone that way.

Then there is £6.3 billion spent on the war. Workers rightly point to the good use to which that could be put. But we cannot stand behind that terrible abuse; we should also take the responsibility to question the rest of Labour's spending plans.

**As workers we have to consider the reality of the political situation. Reality is probably the wrong word — perversity would be a better description....**

## **Back to industry, back to class**

SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR saw the publication of the CPBML's 13th Congress document — PEACE, JOBS & POWER — in WORKERS. Now, observers are also recognising the importance of the issues raised in the document, and furthermore the labour movement is beginning to address many of them.

Productivity and the creation of surplus value are running at unprecedented levels and yet in health, education, transport and housing we are represented as a third world nation.

We said that 'new' Labour would be remembered as being "Tough on industry, tough on the causes of industry" — now we are seeing record job loss in manufacture. Amicus General Secretary Derek Simpson's comments about an 'investment strike' are interesting.

There was always a social democratic fear, and hence arm twister for workers, that capital would have an investment strike, paralleled with what happened under Attlee, to bring down the Labour government. What we have now, however, is a Labour government linked to capital, intent on further fragmenting any resurgence of working class power. Same conspiracy — different line-up of players. There will come an end point: the death of industry as we understand it.

The ideas in 'Peace Jobs & Power' on science and class have almost been repeated verbatim in some of the recent debates at the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

### **Latter-day slave trade**

Our statements on migration as the latter-day slave trade are being clearly recognised, as teachers, nurses, skilled workers world-wide have been brought here as cheap labour — bleeding the world.

When it comes to young workers — even the TUC now recognises that a huge chasm has opened in age, thinking and generation terms between what was and what is in the workplace. This contradiction should be reflected on seriously, as it mirrors the same recruitment problems common to other

working class organisations.

On war and US aggression, Blair is besmirched in the Hutton enquiry. Meanwhile, the result of the euro referendum in Sweden challenges us to do likewise.

As workers in Britain we should consider the reality of the political situation. Reality is probably the wrong word — perversity would be a better description. The Labour government is despised by the working class. There is no parliamentary alternative — the Tories are even more despised. Lies are followed by counter-lies. And probably more than ever, the working class is looking in every direction other than where responsibility rests: within itself for allowing all this.

**'What we have now is a Labour government linked to capital, intent on further fragmenting any resurgence of working class power...'**

As class-conscious workers we can use PEACE, JOBS & POWER to tackle the ideological state of the class and confusing and negative propositions all round.

Certain perceptions — seemingly widely held — need to be considered, and dealt with:

- A majority of the population seem to want to leave the country. This seems especially prevalent a view in the South East of Britain.

- The country is seen as worn out and failed.

- Communism is seen as a failure, Communists as losers. Yet here in the birthplace of capital all the productive factors, barring ideological clarity, exist for the establishment of Communism.

Disintegration, fragmentation, individuality are accelerating, and undermining awareness of class.

Half the population have been identified as having met one or more indicators of poverty during the past ten years.

Meanwhile, there are more Special Branch officers operating in Britain than ever. At least one Chief Constable has warned of severe civil disturbance. Not from the war on terrorism, nor associated with asylum seekers, but in Devon and Cornwall as pensioners consider refusing payment of the council tax.

The Heckmondwikes of this world are the birthplace of the industrial revolution, the Luddites bestrode its streets but they are now ghost towns left behind by the destruction of Britain's staple industries. There is a time line of high on 100 years decay.

The attempted usurping of our Party's "Rebuild Britain" line by such scum as the BNP underlines the ideological miasma enveloping our proud working class.

All these perverse contradictions are set against the background of a government and capitalist class propaganda machine which has ensured an unprecedented, infinitely resourced, unceasing ideological assault on anything working class, anything Communist, anything progressive.

Confusion reigns. Black becomes white, white becomes black, mischief, disorientation. No one believes anything or anyone. No wonder there is such a conscious switch off from party politics.

Workers in every workplace must in a most honest manner re-examine our activities on what will generate growth of working class consciousness and recruitment to working class organisations. We must undoubtedly sharpen up our thinking and action.

Are we going to set the agenda in the struggle of ideas?

We have to deal with false ideas smuggled into or erroneously evolved within the working class — that trade unionism is primary and class consciousness secondary. This was never the case. It is perhaps the major contributing factor to the loss of clarity or confusion among a number of active

workers recently.

The siren call of Parliament has been smuggled into the trade unions. Our working class has achieved gain through control exercised in the workplace, not through support for a parliamentary party. We should be equally on guard against new versions of the same dream, to effect change through standing in parliamentary election.

'Reclaiming the Labour Party'? It is not our party — neither the old nor the modern variety of Labour Party. This is a further twist in the old revisionist shibboleth of a parliamentary road, of a CPGB of thinkers telling a Labour Party of workers what to do and say. This entire "left majority in Parliament, triumph through the backdoor, unity of the left," and so forth is dead politic which has blighted Britain since 1920.

Two strategies are at odds with one another: a parliamentary road versus an industrial strategy arriving ultimately at revolution. The latter is the way forward for our class and our Party's road. But the truth is that as a working class we have been hammered into the ground during the last 25 years. The destruction of industry and an industrial nation and our industrial class identity explains why so many workers have lost heart and direction. So what are we going to do to change matters?

The Party's line on many issues is unique. Does that perhaps frighten workers? What we are arriving at is what the class is saying. The class — not the left or the politicians.

We must think hard about single issue politics — the glamour of the moment — versus a long-term strategy of bringing about revolution. For everyone loves Cuba but few want to be British communists, to pursue the same politics of class power here.

Coming to terms with the new Britain is the job of all who aspire to understand — a Britain where manufacture may be all but dead or in mausoleums. Or is it? One where the only textile mills, docks and steel works will be converted into luxury flats. Do we have our roots in the past but also need to make a leap to the future?

Our analysis of Britain has to be consistently tested against practice. This Party is 35 years old and will continue our permanent dialogue with our class.

In this extremely frustrating and perverse period, very 'deja vu' — like living through the early days of Ramsey MacDonald, we must strive to ensure as workers in trade unions that our thinking and organisation is forward thinking and not living in the past.

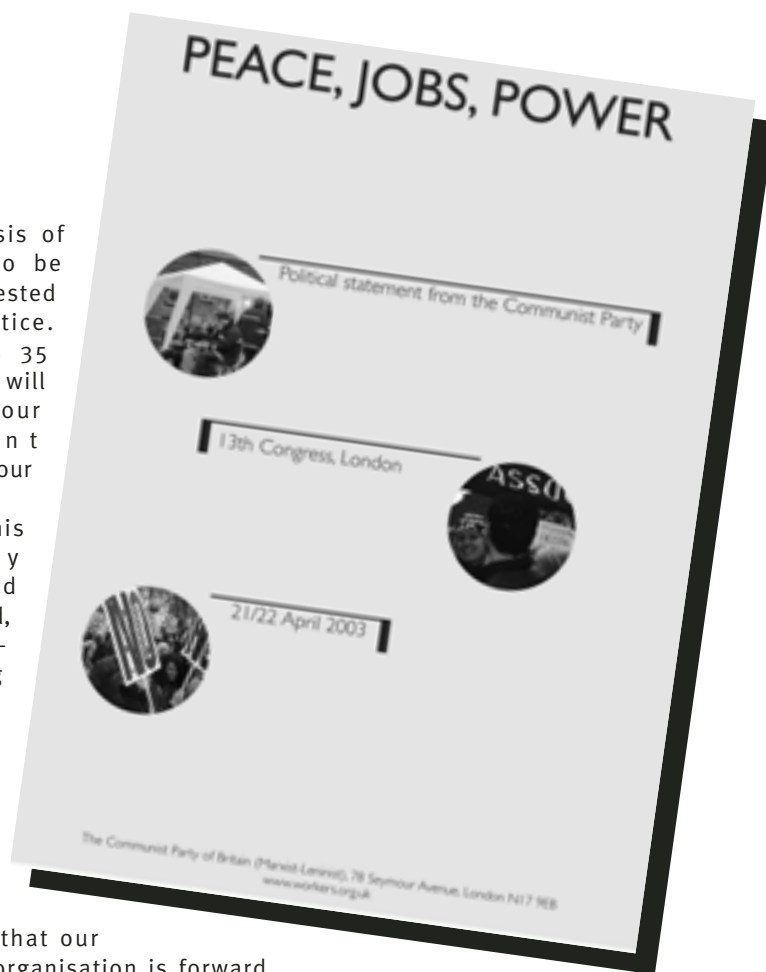
So what are we going to do?

## Industry

We should return to the question of industry. It remains key. Without the production of wealth through manufacturing industry there will be no Education, Education, Education (nor will there be any healthcare, healthcare, healthcare either). Perhaps we develop plans in our workplaces to catch the imagination of this dying breed of manufacturing worker. If Tony Woodley of the TGWU can advocate taxing imported goods of British companies who have gone to China and the Far East, surely we could be more radical?

If we are a nation of industry then trade unions should be a factory of ideas for the working class. The Congress document published in *WORKERS* seeks to contribute to that manufactory of ideas.

There is work to be done around the EU — the subject is not going away, and plans continue to remove from us the power to run our own land. How difficult would it then be to run our own workplace!



There is work to be done in support of Cuba and other nations. If Bush is re-elected they will invade Cuba. The purge early this year in Cuba should be properly understood by workers here.

Had it not happened Cuba would have been higher on Bush's invasion list than Syria now appears to be.

We live in dangerous times, but then we always have. There has been no war on British soil now for nearly 60 years, and yet we are tolerating all the features that lead to a war: kowtowing to an illegally elected foreign government; letting our national sovereignty be gently eroded while we look the other way; turning away from our unions, our only mass working class organisation.

These traits are leading to disaster, and they have been encountered before, in the 1930s. They are the conditions that prepare a country for the acceptance of war. That is how serious our predicament is.

If there is no short cut in a 'new' Britain, then let's get on with it and build revolutionary politics in new circumstances.

Even the former Labour minister charged with representing Brits have a say. But the government still refuses to agree...

## Still planning, still plotting: the European



Architects of the new European order? Left to right: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Chairman of the Convention, Giorgio Napolitano, Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, and Hans-Gert Poettering, Chairman of the Group of the European People's Party

IN SPITE OF the failure of December's Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to agree the proposed new European Union Constitution, we have not seen the last of it. It will be resurrected, and the implications for us in Britain are serious — unless we put a stop to it through a referendum.

In June 2003 *WORKERS* (issue entitled "Why we need a referendum") reported on the Convention on the Future of Europe and its offspring, the draft new European Constitution. *WORKERS* warned that, under the terms of the constitution, EU law would override nations' laws. A supranational state would supplant the powers of nation states to draw up economic and defence policy, asylum and immigration policy,

industrial and employment policy, transport, energy, and public health policy, and much more besides.

The draft constitution — ambiguously entitled "A Draft Treaty for Establishing a Constitution for Europe" — now contains further radical changes, added late in the proceedings of the convention. These include: a mutual defence guarantee to rival NATO; policy areas requiring the unanimous agreement of the member states to be transferred to QMV (qualified majority voting) without formal amendment of the constitution; an increase in QMV to over 40 new policy areas; loss of the national veto over EU expenditure and Britain's budget rebate; and the creation of a European Foreign

Ministry.

If it were ratified, the constitution would become part of British law. Any questions of legal interpretation will be adjudicated by the EU, not the relevant countries. In other words, it will become a constitution for the Britain — without having been drafted here, nor requested by Parliament or the people. It would be amendable only with the consent of foreign interests.

### Only Labour

Only the Labour government — with Lib Dem support — pretends it is anything other than a constitution. "The proposed changes, though important, do not involve any fundamental change in the



n in the planning of the constitution has said the people must

## Constitution and the handover of Britain

relationship between the European Union and member states,” said the government’s White Paper earlier this year.

But former Italian prime minister, Lamberto Dini, said, “Anyone in Britain who claims the constitution will not change things is trying to sweeten the pill for those who don’t want to see a bigger role in Europe.”

In fact, Labour’s “tidying up” is a profound change, involving the repeal of all existing treaties — the Treaty of Rome, the European Treaty, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice. More than comparable with the founding of the EEC in 1957, the European Constitution is as significant as the Acts of Settlement of 1689 and 1701. At stake is nothing less than the repeal by the back door of that uniquely British institution, the Constitutional Monarchy.

### End of Britain

It would spell the end of the supremacy of Parliament and the end of Britain as a self-governing entity. The pound sterling, if it survives, would dwindle to a mere symbolic currency. The Constitution would create an entirely different EU, separate and above the member states, with its own powers and a legal personality (Title I, Article 6). The European Court of Justice (ECJ) would become Europe’s Supreme Court.

There is a curious legal twist to all this. Under the British Constitution treaties do not have the force of law in our domestic courts. A ruling over the Maastricht Treaty in 1994 said the government could repudiate or fail to comply with obligations under the Foreign Affairs section (Title V) of the treaty.

It is not true to say we are governed by EU law already. There has to be a British Act of Parliament to instruct the courts to give legal effect to a treaty, as with the European Communities Act of 1972. So up until now, national law has prevailed. And Acts of Parliament can be repealed.

Non-compliance would be a serious matter. But it is not correct, as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw claims, that treaties have precedence over national law. Unless, of course, that treaty is repealed and replaced by a constitution, the ultimate

**‘Listening to Straw contradicting himself under questioning, anyone would think the government is simply in a muddle...’**

source of legal authority, conceptually different from a treaty. If the government handles this “treaty” in the usual way it will incorporate it into English law by amending the 1972 Act. By doing so, Parliament would have abolished its own supremacy. We must insist that it does not have the power to fetter its own sovereignty and deprive itself of the right to repeal legislation.

Listening to Straw contradicting himself under questioning, anyone would think the government is simply in a muddle. “Any international treaty takes precedence over national law,” he says, disingenuously. But in the White Paper, his government has written: “The ultimate guarantee of parliamentary sovereignty lies in the power of Parliament to repeal...the Acts which give effect to the EU treaties in this country.”

In truth, Labour will say whatever sounds best at the time.

The reality is that Blair has promised his friends in Europe that by excluding the voice of the British people, he will deliver a Yes to the constitution. It is only the British government that repeatedly mis-states the situation by downgrading it to a treaty. While many continental countries will have referendums on the constitution, Blair attempts to evade the issue, insisting that referendums on treaties “is not the British way”.

Addressing the Rally for a Referendum on November 7, Martin Howe QC delivered judgment on the Constitution, describing the “miasma of institutions in Brussels”,

where it was “impossible to see any clear line of democracy — whereby to throw the rascals out”. His publication, *A LEGAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAFT TREATY*, sets out to answer the key question of how ratification will affect “our right to govern ourselves in accordance with the wishes of the British people through our democratic institutions”. He confirmed everything previously stated on the subject in *WORKERS*, with the added insights of a legal mind.

Howe quotes John Locke: “The Legislative cannot transfer the power of making laws to any other hands. For it being but a delegated power from the People, they who have it cannot pass it to others.” Some of those who attended the rally pointed out that the logic of this is that such power cannot be transferred into foreign hands even in the unlikely event of the British people voting yes in a referendum.

At the heart of the matter is the concept of what constitutes a people — a demos, a nation. Europe has no such homogeneous demos. Representatives of different peoples come together in Europe by mutual arrangement, as at the Convention on the Future of Europe, but this does not guarantee a democratic outcome.

### Consensus?

The convention did not call for anything as grandiose as a constitution, but this is what it got because it was susceptible to being browbeaten by ideologues. Although the draft treaty was supposedly drawn up by consensus, alternative views, arguments and amendments were repeatedly disregarded.

This bodes ill for the poorer countries of eastern Europe. The real significance of enlargement, says Howe, is that these new candidates will be client states whose votes will be biddable in exchange for favours.

It had been argued that the Nice Treaty was necessary to enable enlargement to work. Now it is clear that Nice was to be

*Continued on page 10*



**Big room, even bigger ambitions: the European Convention at “work”**

*Continued from page 9*

swept away in any event — the Constitution was drafted by Giscard d'Estaing before Nice. Enlargement was merely the pretext to pursue an ideological agenda.

Blair and his chums want us to be grateful for the removal of the word “federal” from the “treaty”. It has been replaced by a clumsy phrase. Competences (powers) shall be exercised “in the community way”, which means...federally!

### **New legal order**

In fact the European Court of Justice has been advancing legal doctrine ever since 1963, when it declared the European Community to be “a new legal order” created by the Treaty of Rome.

By 1991 the court, advancing economic and monetary union, stated with irreproachable honesty, “The provisions of the Rome Treaty on free movement and competition, far from being an end in themselves, are only a means for obtaining those objectives.” “The Rome Treaty,” it went on, “constitutes the Constitutional Charter of a Community based on the rule of law”, and “States have limited their sovereign rights, in ever wider fields”.

The court developed the doctrine of the “occupied field”, whereby “the transfer by the States from their domestic legal system to the Community legal system...carries with it a permanent limitation of their sovereign rights”.

The reaction of national courts, however, has been to reject the supremacy of the European Court of Justice.

- In Italy in 1974 the court was declared to have “no power to violate the fundamental principles of constitutional order or the inalienable rights of man”.

- In France in 1993, it was found that Maastricht conflicted with the French Constitution Article 55, which had to be amended before ratification.

- There was a high-profile case in Germany in 1994 concerning the over-interpretation by the court of powers conferred by Maastricht.

- As late as 2000, Belgium retained the right to dis-apply Community law

- And in Britain in 2003 in the “Metric Martyrs” case of *Thoburn v. Sunderland City Council* Lord Justice Laws said: “The British Parliament...being sovereign, cannot abandon its sovereignty. Accordingly, there are no circumstances in which...the ECJ can elevate EC law to a status within...English domestic law to

which it could not aspire by any route of English law itself.”

While it may seem incredible that MPs should think they can obliterate a thousand years of history and struggle, “the doctrine of the supremacy of Parliament is not written in stone”, warns Martin Howe, “but rests on continued judicial acceptance of its validity”. That it is not secure, but can succumb to a drift of opinion over time is illustrated by the case of the “metric martyrs”, where leading counsel for a public authority was prepared to abandon English law.

### **Sovereign**

It is clear that we cannot trust the judges or the politicians to defend the structures of a sovereign state. We must do that ourselves, and in the process discover what to keep and what to throw away. The future — twenty years down the road, say — may not be clear, but what is certain is that British people must run their own country. No one can stand aside, least of all those who call themselves socialists.

Yet the government is not getting an easy ride. One of its own pro-EU MPs, Gisela Stuart, a member of the convention which drew up the constitution, has expressed alarm at the threat to British sovereignty contained in the proposal. In the week before the failed IGC, she warned: “The convention was riddled with imperfections and moulded by a largely unaccountable political elite set on a particular outcome from the very start...[and] many of whom see national parliaments as an obstacle.”

Stuart accused many MPs and MEPs on the convention of wanting to climb on the euro gravy train, and called for a referendum on the issue. Her views are secretly shared by many MPs in Blair’s party, most of whom so far lack Stuart’s courage.

**Want to know where your MP stands on this? Check out [www.vote-2004.org.uk](http://www.vote-2004.org.uk), a website calling for a referendum on the European constitution. It has a handy constituency checker, plus links to email your MP.**

Almost unnoticed, the government has been transforming early education and care, with more big changes to come...

## Childcare — quality or cynical ploy?



Photo: Workers

**Kiddy Care Nursery, part of a chain of nurseries in east London: the national childcare strategy has led to a boom in the private sector.**

THE EXISTENCE of a national childcare strategy might come as news to many hard-pressed workers desperate to find affordable, good quality care for their children while they go out to work — but it has been a major plank of government policy since 1997. The strategy has been transforming the scenery in the field of early years education and care, with big changes yet to come. Whether those changes take us forwards or backwards will be largely down to those of us who either use or work in the sector.

The history of day care for small children in Britain is a very mixed one. Except in wartime, and apart from using relatives or friends, working parents have mostly had to rely on paid childminders or private day nurseries. Social services day nurseries, which at one time provided free day care for some, have almost disappeared as budgets were swallowed up.

Local authority nursery schools and classes (staffed by teachers and trained nursery nurses) have seen themselves primarily as educational institutions, offering free half day or full time places, but only within normal school hours. Working parents have to pay a childminder to drop their child off and pick them up. As under-fives education is not statutory, many local authorities have provided no places at all, simply starting children in reception classes at statutory school age.

Add into this mix the playgroups or “pre-schools”, which offer short play sessions run by parent volunteers and a few poorly paid staff, often in areas where there is nothing else for parents and children, and the private schools which mostly charge a fortune to stuff little children into uncomfortable uniforms and make them sit down to do sums at three years old, and you have a nightmare for parents who have young children and need to work. The problems and costs are so high that many young women give up paid work altogether.

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## Poverty

Enter the Labour government, with a stated mission to reduce child poverty. The way to do this, they said, was to get mothers of young children back to work (presumably the fathers were either unemployed or not earning enough to keep their children out of poverty). In no time, in every local authority, new bodies called Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) were set up. These partnerships were given lots of targets to increase childcare places for young children, their own funding, and lots of grants to bid for.

They also became responsible for the new Nursery Education Grant, which, by 2004, will fund free part-time education places for all 3- and 4-year-olds (taking

this away from local education authorities). Any local authority, private, or voluntary nursery that provides foundation stage education — now part of the national curriculum — is eligible to provide these grant-funded places (including childminders).

To meet local targets, EYDCPs could bid for lottery funds (the New Opportunities Fund) to add on “wraparound” care in “areas of deprivation” — enabling children to attend from 7 am to 7 pm, and for providers to stay open throughout the year. The next big push is to increase group care places for under-3s.

The idea was to create relatively cheap childcare without increasing direct government spending, and providing a handy boost to the private sector into the bargain. An added bonus would be loosening the grip of the maintained

sector — the nursery schools and classes, with their trade unions and national pay and conditions. It hasn’t quite worked out like that.

## Problems

It is true that the national childcare strategy has led to a boom in the private sector, as millions of pounds in grants have poured in. The big private nursery chains like Asquith Court and Leapfrog now provide thousands of day care places for under-fives nationwide. The last two years have seen buyouts, takeovers and stock market flotation plans. For instance, Just Learning, owned by equity firm Alchemy, recently bought up Careshare, Scotland’s largest chain, for £17.25m, doubling its size.

But a major problem has been the woeful state of many private day nurseries. The better ones, which might employ a qualified teacher, tend to be very expensive. Of the cheaper ones, many have single owners who have bought up a big old house, or opened up in part of their own home, often totally unsuitable for babies and toddlers. Young, inexperienced, poorly qualified and low paid girls staff these nurseries. Staff turnover is high and quality of care is low. Trade unions hardly exist. Recently one of the biggest day nursery chains, Jigsaw, was fined £60,000 after pleading guilty to 11 separate failings in training and procedures under the Health and Safety at Work Act, which led to the death of a five-month-old baby.

## Non-existent

But in really poor areas — the ones government wants EYDCPs to target — day care often doesn’t exist at all. If parents can’t pay, no profits can be made. These areas are often where the local authority nursery schools are sited. They are free to parents of 3- and 4-year olds but very expensive to run for local authorities looking to save money from a non-statutory service. As a result, a number have closed over recent years.

One factor that the government probably had not bargained for is the

highly vocal and committed sector of state nurseries and early years academics, who have been unwilling to lose their grip over events. Pressed hard by professionals, and desperate to get them “on board” for its strategy, government was persuaded to pay for “qualified teacher involvement” for all private and voluntary nurseries, to raise quality. This does not mean the nurseries employing teachers themselves, but allowing in teams of local authority early years teachers. These advisory teachers, going for the first time into private day nurseries, have raised alarms at what they have found. Many of these teams are now drawing up their own quality guidelines, which private and voluntary nurseries have to work towards if they are to continue to receive the grant funding.

### Quality

Teacher concerns are proving difficult to ignore, especially when at the same time a prestigious government-funded research project (EPPE) into effective educational provision for young children reported conclusively that specialist teachers and good outdoor provision — both expensive to provide — are essential for children’s learning. The best provision is — you’ve guessed it — local authority nursery schools and early years centres.

One interesting outcome of EPPE is that local authorities wanting to save money by closing nursery schools now have to prove that there is equivalent or better alternative provision in the area — very unlikely. In November 2003, after a big local campaign, the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was refused permission from the national schools’ adjudicator to close two nursery schools, Maxilla and Ainsworth, because “financial considerations have to be weighed against the quality of alternative provision, and the desirability of further integrating pre-school education and childcare services”.

The fact is that government now desperately needs maintained schools to

## **‘The fact is that government now desperately needs maintained schools to rescue its stalling childcare strategy...’**

rescue its stalling childcare strategy. The latest part of the initiative is to create Children’s Centres in the poorest areas, at least one for every local authority. These will be modelled on pioneering centres like the Thomas Coram in London and Pen Green in Corby, which provide early education, morning to evening and holiday day care places, places for under-threes, and all sorts of additional services for families such as training and health advice. These centres have been shown to have significantly improved children’s lives and academic attainment, but are not cheap to run.

### Prohibitive

After another struggle with early years professionals, government has conceded that all new Children’s Centres must employ at least one qualified teacher, although without additional funding. This will make costs prohibitive for many private day nurseries hoping to go it alone as Children’s Centres. So although in theory any nursery provider can apply, in many local authorities the centres will have to be based in schools, giving highly qualified professionals — teachers — a central role. Nursery nurses, who are trained to be child development specialists and are in short supply, much prefer to work in the public sector where wages and conditions are at least regulated, and trade union membership is widespread. These Children’s Centres, based on nursery schools, will charge for under-3s and additional services, but can operate a sliding scale of charges

according to parental income. At least one pioneering Children’s Centre employs some teachers all year round to ensure no slipping in quality of provision.

Low pay is a big issue for childcare workers. Where there has been organisation and struggle, some gains have been made. For instance, nursery nurses in the London Borough of Lewisham won regradings and pay rises after going on strike. At present, 5000 nursery nurses in Scotland — where 10 years’ experience brings an annual salary of £13,500 — are involved in industrial action.

### Children’s Trusts

Now a further development, Children’s Trusts, will require local and health authorities to bring together services for young children and families. This is a result of the Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié, where the breakdown in communication and liaison between social services, health and the police allowed abusive adults to torture and kill a child. The Trusts will mean big changes for workers in these services, but Children’s Centres will have an important role to play. Those who work in these services will need to take charge of the process of change, and ensure it is carried out properly.

The government’s stated aim is to reduce the numbers of children living in poor households, by enabling mothers to go out to work. All parents certainly need good quality childcare. But in poor areas the only work available tends to be casual and low paid. In fact, new research has shown that using paid day care to go out to work has often meant a drop in income for low paid parents.

We need a government prepared to invest in British jobs — real, skilled jobs, with decent conditions and paying a living wage, and producing goods and services which people really need — and prepared also to prevent the large scale exporting of jobs abroad. Without this commitment, the government’s childcare strategy will look like a cynical ploy to reduce unemployment figures.

## Make a resolution this year to read one of the world's greatest Chilean communist poet...

# The voice of Latin America

YOUR USUAL RATION of English poetry can be more than a little self-obsessed. So take a break from it, and look at *CANTO GENERAL* — by the Chilean communist poet Pablo Neruda. It is a warm expansive poem about the whole continent of Latin America from pre history up until 1949.

Neruda was given permission by the Party to take time off and write part of this work, and he wrote other sections while on the run from the state, which had issued a warrant for his arrest after he made a particularly effective speech and article.

As Europe lay in ashes after WW2, Neruda wrote with a sense of urgency that his continent must not repeat the crimes of the old world. So he sings of the natural landscape and human history and the

aspiration of his people for socialism.

He recreates a sense of the world before man arrived when “in fertility time grew” and imagines himself “among Zapotec flowers and the light was soft like a deer and the shade was a green eyelid.” He celebrates the flora and fauna and loves the tiniest creatures.

He depicts the anonymous times of prehistory, with early man struggling with “the genital matrix of the earth”. He writes “Like corn, man was husked in the bottomless granary of forgotten deeds, the miserable course of events....and the ominous adversity of each day was like a black glass from which they drank trembling.”

He recounts the terrifying arrival of the

conquistadors and how they destroyed indigenous tribes: “The bishop raised his arm, he burned books in the plaza in the name of his little God, turning to smoke the old leaves worn by obscure time.” His “sweet ravaged kingdom” is mourned as it is subsumed by the sword and “crosses with spider legs”.

Then the liberators “rise up from the earth as leaves from the sap” and he celebrates generations of resistance and national liberation. As nations are liberated they create new class divisions, and Neruda both savages the new oligarchies and praises the bravery and endurance of workers and peasants. We feel tribal society become proletarian and see spirits raised by the early communist leaders who he celebrates.

### No ‘invented torments’

He condemns artists who “seek ancient Greek sorrows” and “invented torments” while missing “the oceans that pound the people’s dark breast” on their own “doorstep”. “I went straight to...thrust my hand amid the lice...among tatters, in the stench of scorching poverty.”

He shows how “Wall Street” invaded the continent with its “merchants and executioners” with “their obese emperors from New York” who “are suave, smiling assassins.” He shows how they rule: “A President assassinated for a drop of petroleum,” “Jehovah distributed the world to Coca Cola Inc.” Those who paid for crimes today sit in Parliament. He is vicious about the domestic fifth column which abets US power: “The tyrant in our black martyred geography always found a slimy clerk to spread the lie.”

Neruda burns with anger at every drop of blood shed by his countrymen and women, is inspired by the Soviets and longs for vengeance on class traitors and oppressors: “that’s what I wanted to tell you comrades, punishment is needed.”

By giving voice to the people, their creations, their struggles and the sights



Pablo Neruda with (left) murdered Chilean president Salvador Allende

ems, written by a

and sounds of his culture, Neruda reveals direction in history and progress and the values of collective struggle. Unpopular sentiments in these post modernist times, but more important than ever. He reveals the leadership of a communist party that is close to the people and in one of his most important poems "To My Party" creates a valediction that all communists should learn by heart.

*You have given me fraternity toward the unknown man.*

*You have joined the strength of all the living.*

*You have given me the country again as in a birth.*

*You have given me the freedom that the loner cannot have.*

*You taught me to kindle kindness, like fire.*

*You have given me the rectitude that the tree requires.*

*You taught me to see the unity and the difference among mankind.*

*You showed me how one being's pain has perished in the victory of all.*

*You taught me to sleep in beds hard as my brothers.*

*You made me build on reality as on a rock.*

*You made me adversary of the evildoer and wall of the frantic.*

*You have made me see the world's clarity and the possibility of happiness.*

*You have made me indestructible because with you I do not end in myself.*

Neruda's Canto General lives and breathes the life and soul of Latin America and its people and places. Its four hundred pages could take you months to read it is so resonant with associations: one minute with jungle birdsong the next with Inca lore, the next with the detail of a strike. It is one of the greatest patriotic poems ever written and one of the broadest and deepest in scope.

As such its liberating, humane power is of world significance and demands appreciation by a wide audience.

# WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

## How to get in touch

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- Subscribe to WORKERS, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 for a year's issues (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.

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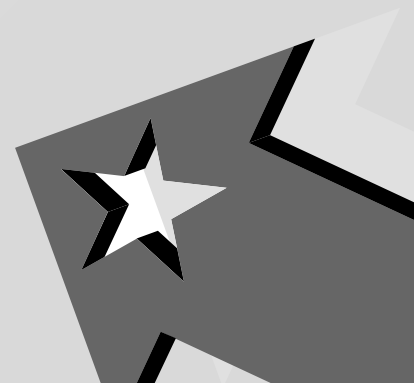
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# Back to Front – Time to be ungrateful

**‘In our unions, we should oppose the wasting of members’ money on any party’s election campaigns...’**

**THIS YEAR** will see a host of elections, local, regional, European Union. Is there any way that the working class could use them to advance our interests? Or is there a better way?

We are everlastingly told that we should vote just to show how grateful we are that we live in a parliamentary democracy. But how democratic is parliamentary democracy? Most of the British people oppose foundation hospitals, but Parliament votes for them anyway. Most of the British people opposed Blair’s attack on Iraq, but Parliament backed it anyway. Most of the British people want a referendum so that we can vote down the European Union’s new Constitution, but Parliament insists that it alone has the right to decide.

Successive national governments have stripped so much power away from local government that local elections are increasingly seen only as referenda on the national government.

The EU idea of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ drives the proposed regional elections, and the EU and its supporters will make desperate efforts to get us to vote, so that they can claim popular support for the EU.

Similarly, the EU and its supporters

will try to increase the turn-out in June 2004’s EU elections, so that it can claim popular support for the EU. The ‘left’, from the Socialist Alliance to the Scottish Socialist Party, falls neatly into the trap.

In all these elections, it is not a question of calling ‘Blair Out!’ Blair Out would still leave the ruling class in; it means, according to taste, Brown In, or Kennedy In, or Howard, or Tommy Sheridan, or George Galloway. But in truth, none of them are any use to us, in or out. We want the whole lot out!

In our unions, we should oppose the wasting of members’ money on any party’s election campaigns, and insist that we use this money to get what our members want.

The ruling class is quite happy to offer us more and more elections of less and less significance, while it takes the real decisions. But it has, so far, refused us a referendum on the euro or the EU Constitution, because a referendum gives us the power to decide our future.

The ruling class wants to end Britain as a sovereign independent nation, and it does not want the working class to make the right decisions for Britain. That is why we demand a referendum, and why we call for a resounding NO to the euro and the EU Constitution.

**FINANCIAL APPEAL:** June 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the death of Reg Birch, founding Chairman of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). In commemoration of Reg’s life, the first biography of this engineer and communist is to be published.

Drawing upon speeches, articles, previous unpublished photographs and family reminiscences this will be a major

contribution to the history of working class struggle during the 20th century.

**WORKERS** is inviting its readers to assist in this major publishing event by making a donation to the Reg Birch biography. Cheques/donations should be made payable to **WORKERS**, and sent to **WORKERS**, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. All donations are welcome.

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**WHERE’S THE PARTY?**

“If you have preconceived ideas of what a communist is, forget them and read this booklet. You may find yourself agreeing with our views.” Free of jargon and instructions on how to think, this entertaining and thought-provoking pamphlet is an ideal introduction to communist politics. (send an A5 sae)

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Refutes some of the main arguments in favour of Britain’s membership of the EU and proposes an independent future for our country. (50p plus an A5 sae)

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