

WORKERS

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JULY 2005 £1

29 May NON.
1 June NEE.
Why can't we
also say NO?



Coventry strike over pay cuts plan

06



Another Labour threat to the NHS

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Give us back our land

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WORKERS

“ EU Constitution: CPBM-L statement

AFTER THE MAGNIFICENT votes against the EU Constitution in France and Holland, those here who want to try to save the tatters of a Treaty are desperate to deny a similar vote to British workers. So Kinnock, on behalf of Brussels as ever, immediately declared the Constitution dead, seeing this as the best way to try to salvage it by bringing it in some other way. But the Treaty – signed by Blair – is still there. Straw followed Kinnock's lead, telling Parliament that the British referendum would be put on hold.

A British vote would kill it. Now we want our say. A year ago Blair smirked as he signed the Treaty establishing the Constitution – a constitution which would hand over British sovereignty to a European state to decide our affairs. He did this in our name, without asking us what we thought (because he knew). We should never have permitted it. That signature remains on the document, until we undo the treachery. We want our referendum. If they are set to deny us, then why not run one ourselves?

Where was the voice of the British unions after the French and Dutch votes? Are they ashamed of so many in the ranks who have willingly echoed Blair's betrayal – or just hiding from the sight of those jubilant crowds of workers, young and old, black and

white, town and country, celebrating the overwhelming No votes in their countries? We should demand of our organisations, the trade unions, that they organise for us to kill off this fascistic constitution.

The ruling class wants the Constitution badly – because it would lock us in to a system which would take apart the nations and working classes of Europe, turning us into itinerant, rootless wage slaves for easier exploitation by a declining and ever more vicious and warlike capitalism. For Constitution read profits, pure and simple. Capitalism unconstrained by nations. They are now desperate to find a way to keep the Treaty alive.

The utter disarray in their ranks following the votes should show us what power we have when we decide to assert ourselves. The French and Dutch voted no in their millions in spite of all the weapons of the state deployed to persuade them otherwise, including vast sums of euromoney. Now the euro's possible demise is openly discussed – remember how we were told this could never happen?

The people of Britain must demand their referendum. The Constitution is not so much dead as undead – we must put a stake through its heart and finish it off.



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Cover picture: Blair, with Straw sitting next to him, smirking as they put their signatures on the European Constitution in Rome in October last year.

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Get freight off the roads

THE RAIL UNION ASLEF is to lobby parliament on 13 July in its campaign to get the bulk of freight transferred from road to rail as part of an integrated transport system. This makes sense on environmental, safety and cost grounds and is supported by a huge majority of the public. The road industry is pushing for longer and heavier lorries of between 60 and 84 tonnes, which would be unsuitable for most British roads and cause huge wear and tear. Recent research also indicates that HGVs only pay for around 65% of the costs they impose on society. A 40-tonne, 5-axle lorry causes over 10,000 times as much damage to road surfaces as the average car.



Lorries also exacerbate congestion. Transferring goods onto the average freight train would remove 50 heavy goods vehicles from the roads, while some trains could remove the equivalent of 120. Road traffic grew by 1.7% in 2004, HGVs by 2.9% and the distance goods travel has increased by 24% in the past 10 years. At any one time 30% of HGVs are running empty.

Lorries are also responsible for pollution: emissions from road freight transport increased by 59% between 1990 and 2002 and constitute 8% of Britain's carbon emissions. Rail produces only a tenth of CO2 emissions per tonne carried.

Although lorries only account for 7% of road traffic, they are involved in 22% of fatal crashes. They do eight times as much damage as cars in terms of fatalities per miles travelled, with each death costing £1 million in overall costs to society.

ASLEF is hoping the government will listen, in view of its commitment to "lead internationally on climate change". But it will take more than a lobby to get this government to invest in anything in Britain – it is far too preoccupied "leading in Europe".

EURO

Bank governor speaks out

FOLLOWING ON from the rejection of the EU Constitution by Holland and France, the Czech Central Bank has now issued warnings against the single currency. The governor of the Czech Central Bank has described the euro as "a significant risk" to the Czech economy.

Though the Czech Republic will not join the single currency until 2010, the Bank's warnings are seen as the Czech Republic looking for a bail-out from the euro. The governor's comments echo the German economics minister, who has blamed EU monetarist policy for making Germany "the sacrificial lamb of stability" within the EU.

INVESTMENT

Buying bolt holes

THE RULING class is betraying Britain, abandoning Britain. It is investing abroad - which is actually just buying assets, or bolt holes, abroad. Some 60% of the members of the Engineering Employers' Federation say that they want to shift some or all of their production to China.

Overseas investment is not about developing resources, just exploiting them. The same is true of so-called inward investment. Malcolm Glazer's acquisition of Manchester United will doubtless be counted in Treasury statistics as £790 million worth of inward investment! (More than a third of the cost of Glazer's bid for the club is debt secured against United's assets, such as its Old Trafford stadium, while a further £275 million comes from loans from three US hedge funds.)

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

EUOTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Propping up the EU...

THE MOST recent figures available – for the years 1999-2003 – show that Britain's total gross contributions to the EU, at 2003 prices, were £37.8 billion. Receipts were £20 billion. So our average loss was £3.6 billion a year. Since joining the EEC, our net contribution totals more than £100 billion. Never mind a rebate – we want all our money back.

...and losing out at home

A REPORT from the Institute of Economic Affairs in June 2005 estimated that Britain loses £200 billion a year by being a member of the EU, including paying much higher costs for manufactured goods.

Health for sale

RECENT European Court of Justice rulings have dictated that health care is subject to the rules of the EU's internal market, and therefore to competition, regardless of national policy.

Another smear

FORMER Europe Minister Denis MacShane told listeners of the TODAY programme that a British newspaper had described Polish immigrants as a 'murderous horde'. When asked his source, he repeated the smear. An extensive search failed to find any such phrase: MacShane had just made up the quote.

The hand of Washington

THE US government backs the euro because it wants to cripple France, Germany and Italy, to cut down their industries and services and to hamstring their working classes. Blair wants to enlarge the EU to include the Eastern European countries and Turkey, in order to strengthen the market and the US's influence in the EU.

The bank that loses money

THE EUROPEAN Central Bank is making catastrophic losses. Last year it lost 1.64 billion euros as compared with a mere 0.48 billion the year before. Meanwhile, the eurozone growth rate is the lowest in the world and unemployment in the eurozone is growing. Youth unemployment is again rising, with 17.8% of young people under 25 in the eurozone out of work.

DISCRIMINATION

Trainee midwives win case

IN A LANDMARK case, an Employment Appeal Tribunal has found against the government on the grounds of sex discrimination against trainee midwives.

Trainee midwives who become pregnant have had their bursary award cut and are effectively forced out of midwifery training. The policy raises serious questions about government intentions at a time when Britain is suffering from an acute shortage of midwives.

The case, brought by UNISON as part of its Pay not Poverty campaign for student nurses and supported by the Royal College of Nurses, the Royal College of Midwives and the Equal Opportunity Commission, overturns government policy established in 1989. The decision gives

trainee midwives the same maternity rights as any other mother.

PFI

Search and rescue for sale

IN ANOTHER about-turn, the government is planning to privatise the Ministry of Defence's search and rescue activities. These embrace the RAF, Royal Navy and Coastguard helicopter rescue services at 12 bases across Britain – both helicopters and crew.

The Labour Party vigorously opposed the Tory attempt to privatise this service in the 1990s but has now grabbed the opportunity to place over £1 billion into the private sector by hiding the privatisation in another Private Finance Initiative scheme. An estimated £43 billion worth of PFI projects have been entered into by the government since 1997.

Trust remortgages its debt

OCTAGON, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) consortium which manages the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust, has "re-mortgaged" the PFI debt. This is a clever ploy being used by many PFI shareholders. When a company has been selected for a PFI project, it borrows money at a rate of interest determined by the risk factor involved. But after completion, the risk factor disappears. Also, as the government has guaranteed that profits come before everything, so the contractors must be paid before all else.

This means the company can now borrow against future earnings at a significantly lower rate than before and extend the pay-back period. So the next step is simple – borrow the same money more cheaply, pay off the bank and the difference is sheer profit!

Although the hospital will apparently get a million a year out of this, Octagon will get £70 million in total. The hospital is in fact completely strapped for cash. Last year it was found the building contractor failed to install the isolation units properly – the hospital rather than Octagon picked up the resulting £80,000 bill and the matter has been referred to the NHS Fraud unit.

Selling of PFI bonds, debts and consortia are now commonplace Stock Market business. Blair and Brown have handed over £43 billion of public money to privateers through PFI and related schemes. Whose brain-child is PFI? Why, the European Union – who else?

FREE MOVEMENT OF LABOUR

Stealing Africa's health workers

THE BRITISH Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing have confronted the G8 with a simple but profound demand. Never mind "pie-in-the-sky" debt cancellation – always supplanted by another "aid" package – nor fatuous claims to be making poverty history, the BMA and the RCN are calling for an end to the stealing the greatest wealth of any country or continent – its people.

The organisations have demanded an

end to the importation of qualified nurses and doctors from the poorest countries in the world into the wealthiest and for Britain, the USA and others to establish training programmes at home to meet the needs of their own populace.

In the next 5 years, the USA intends to increase its number of doctors by 200,000 and its nursing workforce by 800,000 – most of these bought in at reduced rates from countries where HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and endemic diseases are legion. Denuding African countries of their precious health workers is tantamount to sentencing millions to death.



Cleaners picketing on Tuesday 24 May in the Coventry single status fight

'Single status' strike

UNISON and T&G workers at Coventry Council held a successful three days of strike action at the end of May in opposition to their employer's decision to impose pay cuts from 1 June 2005 (see photo, above). Their strike has been followed by an indefinite work to rule, which has also been joined by GMB workers.

The pay cuts – for around half the workers in all grades, including the lowest paid – are the result of a "single status" regrading. As in many other councils the employers are cutting wages to enable them to pay those they know will win equal pay claims.

The results of the regrading exercise were rejected by huge majorities in all unions, and the strikes were well supported even by those who stood to gain from it. Even those whose pay went up lost out on back pay, as they received only one year's back pay when they were entitled to up to six years depending on their length of service.

Many of the losers are from occupations with many women workers, such as school secretaries, librarians, clerical workers and cleaners. Manual workers, including refuse collectors and ground workers, also lost out.

Across the West Midlands in Sandwell, members of the Sandwell General branch of UNISON are boycotting the job evaluation process after a successful industrial action ballot. This follows the employer going back on an agreement on pay protection and on the way in which the evaluation was to be carried out.

Throughout the West Midlands region UNISON branches are working together to ensure that members do not lose pay and that those entitled to more under "equal pay" legislation receive it. UNISON's conference on 23 July will provide an opportunity for all branches to share their experience and develop strategy and tactics.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Action brings concessions

DISCIPLINED and united action by non-teaching staff in Northern Ireland (reported in the last issue of *WORKERS*) has brought significant concessions from Angela Smith, the Education Minister.

Following more strike action, which closed all the special schools, and a call for further action on 17 June, the minister met with NIPSA (the Northern Ireland Public

Services Alliance) and has managed to come up with an extra £10 million for special education and the schools meals service. She has also promised to resolve the pay dispute by releasing money for pay upgrades from the Department of Education, where they have apparently been "sitting on it" for years.

The action deserves massive publicity through the union movement in Britain as an example of what can be done by determined and well organised action in defence of public services.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Friday 15 July – Sunday 17 July, Tolpuddle, Dorset

2005 Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival

The annual commemoration of the Dorset labourers transported to Australia 171 years ago for organising a union kicks off at 7pm on Friday 15 July with a party, leading into a weekend of concerts, cabaret and workshops – with the grand procession through the village on Sunday 17 July. For more information, especially on camping pitches, contact the South West TUC at southwest@tuc.org.uk, or see http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-9738-f0.cfm.

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 4 September, Burston, Norfolk
Burston Strike School Rally, 11am on.

Another commemoration demonstrating Britain's history of rural struggle. On 1 April 1914, 66 of the 72 pupils of Burston school walked out on strike in support of their two sacked teachers – both strongly associated with the Agricultural Workers' Union and hated by the local squirarchy and the Church (which ran the school). The strike lasted for 25 years, with local pupils being educated at the Strike School in Burston. Headline speaker this year is Tony Benn. For updated information on the programme ring Peter Medhurst, TGWU: 01603 618314.

SAFETY

University reduces security

WITHIN DAYS of two incidents where staff at the University of Greenwich were subjected to an intruder brandishing a knife, physical threats and property being stolen, the university has announced proposals to reduce the number of security staff.

In a supremely cynical and uncaring manner, the university is presenting staff and students with a consultative exercise on the replacement of people with CCTV cameras. The exercise is solely about cost cutting across the several campus locations which make up the University of Greenwich, and is being opposed in a co-ordinated campaign by all the unions on the campus.

What 'pension reform' really means

IN THE RECENT Queen's Speech are plans to screw even more money out of workers in the form of so-called pension reform. Previous issues of **WORKERS** have outlined the deliberate destruction of pension schemes, with employers taking 'pension holidays', boosting their profits by taking surpluses from our pension funds, and government raiding public sector pensions to keep costs within EU parameters.

Adair Turner, former CBI chief and government supremo, is carrying out a review of pensions. He says there is a "muddle" over pensions, when in fact government is clear about wanting to raise the retirement age and force workers into more private pension schemes; no, the muddle is in our minds as to what is rightfully ours and what to do about it.

EU control

Britain, unlike euro countries, has about £750 billion in occupational pension scheme assets – 75% of the EU's pension assets. These assets built up by past and present generations of workers have been put aside to pay present and future pensions – 81% of Britain's GDP. Pension provision in Germany is 16.3% of GDP, in France 6.6%, Italy 2.6% and Belgium 5.9%. At a time when our country desperately needs investment Britain's pension funds hold record levels of overseas stocks and shares – 28% of assets for average funds, up to 50% for others. The EU wants its hands on the rest by further liberalising national investment rules for pension funds and enabling multinationals to provide unified pension plans for their workers, reducing costs by millions each year.

Planning a crisis

The cost of occupational pensions has increased by some 40% over the past eight years. This is almost entirely due to the fall in interest rates that has taken place and has very little to do with workers living longer after retirement, as Adair Turner would have us believe. The reason falling interest rates have had such an impact is that with current returns the capital now required to provide each £1000 per annum of pension has increased from around £10,000 to around £18,000. Yet even the increased cost of occupational pensions could have been absorbed had it not been for the government and employers stealing from our funds through the introduction of pension fund investment taxes in 1997 and pension contribution holidays over the past 20 years.

Also, in 1995, as preparation for EU convergence and the Maastricht Treaty to prepare for the euro, the Treasury stopped the issue of Government Gilts through the UK financial gilt market. Government said it was reducing national debt – whereas in fact it could no longer finance its revenues through the issue of new gilts because it would contravene the EU laws on borrowing.

With the end of new gilts the financial demand for gilts increased, especially 15 and 20 year gilts which would underpin pensions paid to retiring workers expecting to live a further 15–20 years. Remaining gilts have rocketed in price, thus also contributing to the increasing cost of pension final salary guarantees. This is another high price to pay in the drive towards European integration.

All workers should stiffen the trade union campaign, ignore distractions about living longer and instead focus on the real culprits – the government and employers, both sponsored by the EU.

What is rightfully ours has been stolen from us. We must take it back and rebuild Britain.

The European Constitution is dead plotting how to bring it back to life

Why Britain must be

THE PLANS for creating a single EU state have met an immovable obstacle – the peoples of Europe's nations. The French working class decisively rejected the proposed Constitution by 55% to 45% on a 70% turnout. 80% of blue-collar workers and 60% of white-collar workers voted No. The Dutch voted against by 62% to 38% on a 63% turnout.

The results have thrown the euro-establishment into crisis, so much so that the European summit on 16 and 17 June broke up without agreement on what to do about either the Constitution or the budget. In Italy government ministers are talking about leaving the euro.

In France, some of the left campaigned on the slogan Europe Yes, Constitution No. But this is a muddle. The EU Constitution, with its 92 references to the market, puts into words the EU's capitalist reality, its overriding commitment to the free market, as spelt out in the Thatcher-inspired Maastricht Treaty. The Constitution makes the free movement of capital, goods, services and labour into a constitutional obligation (Articles 1-3 and 4, Articles III-130, 166 and 167). So, for example, any attempt to manage immigration so that Britain no longer robs Africa's countries of their scarce nurses and doctors could be judged illegal.

Article III-147 allows the EU to enforce liberalisation (that is, potential privatisation) of public services like health, education and social services. The European Central Bank has ordered reductions in public pensions, measures to raise the effective retirement age, greater private involvement in healthcare financing, extension of working hours, containment of labour costs and abolition of overly rigid labour market regulations. What is social about this market, this Europe?

After the votes, various EU oligarchs showed their contempt and loathing for democracy. Lord Kinnock described the Dutch people's vote as a triumph of ignorance. The European Green Party stated, "No in France and Holland does not mean no to the European Constitution." Liberal Democrat MEP Andrew Duff said that the No votes were not a brake on the European project, but were proof that we are not going sufficiently fast.

Vote again?

The EU wants to impose the Constitution anyway, overriding the opposition of the nations. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing said, "What we'll say at the end is that those who have not voted for the Constitution, we will ask them to revote." Peter Mandelson said, "No single member state has a veto over a constitutional treaty of this sort. France will have to consider its position: whether it is going to maintain a No or whether it is going to revisit the question and possibly come forward with a different view." MEP Elmar Brok said, "In the end there will be the Constitution because there is no alternative in Europe" – a familiar tune!

Lord Patten, an ex-Tory minister and ex-EU Commissioner, said that parts of the Constitution should be implemented under the existing treaties: the job for the UK in the presidency will be to pick out the bits of the Constitution which don't require treaty change. Baron Brittain, also an ex-Tory minister and ex-Commissioner, agreed, saying that the EU should now cherry

ad...or is it? Throughout Europe, the political 'elites' are busy
life – regardless of what the peoples of Europe want...

able to reject the EU Constitution



He signs, he smiles: watched by flunkeys, Blair put his signature on the Constitution at the signing ceremony in Rome on 29 October 2004.

**Blair signed the EU
Constitution in Rome.**

**He didn't ask us if we
wanted it.**

**He hopes to avoid
ever asking us what
we think.**

**That's why we need a
referendum here.**

pick parts of the Constitution and implement them.

John Monks, now Secretary General of the European Trade Union Congress, said, "The treaty is not dead. I think that by suspending the referendum, Blair acted with opportunism or with realism. He knows that, if there had been a referendum in Great Britain, he would have lost it...Keeping the referendum would have been suicidal...In six or twelve months the 25 could publish a political declaration and put it to ratification, with the Constitution eventually modified."

The EU never wanted to put its Constitution to referendums. As Dutch foreign minister Bernard Bot said, "We always said that this subject matter was far too complex to be made the subject of a referendum."

So why did they risk referendums? Because, in the 2005 election and after, Labour promised us a referendum on the Constitution, in order to stop its unpopular pro-Constitution policy being an issue in the election. On 13 May, Blair said, "Even if the French voted No, we would have a referendum. This is

a government promise."

Well, we all know what that's worth.

When the French voted, Blair declared immediately, through Stephen Byers and Kinnock, that the Treaty was dead and there would not be a referendum here. Given the EU's history of seeking second referendums in countries who defeat them, as previously in Ireland and Denmark, Jack Straw, once a fervent anti-Common Marketeer of course, kept the door open to

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a future referendum here, and to cherry picking from the defeated document. Opportunists never change. A referendum remains the best way of ending the uncertainty and war of attrition that the EU will now launch. (See CPBM-L statement, p2.)

But now Blair is terrified of a referendum and of debate, because the debates in France and Holland produced

the No victories. The Constitution says (in Article IV-443) that if, after two years from the Treaty being signed, twenty member states have ratified it and others have encountered difficulties, the matter will be referred to the European Council. Ten have so far ratified it; seven are due to have referendums. Blair is desperate to stop any other countries having referendums and failing to ratify the Constitution.

He promised us a referendum in order to get out of one fix, now he wants to

‘The treaty will not be dead until we make them withdraw it completely...’

break the promise in order to get out of another. He is trying to ditch the promised referendum, not the Constitution.

Blair signed us up to the Treaty Establishing the Constitution for Europe, without asking us, on 29 October 2004. We are stuck with it, until we say that we are not.

In the real world, every nation affected by a treaty has the right to veto it. Even the treaty's Article IV-447 says it cannot enter into force until all 25 EU members have deposited their instruments of ratification. The French and Dutch votes mean that the French and Dutch governments cannot, as things stand, ratify the treaty, so it cannot enter into force.

The French and Dutch peoples have wounded the Constitution, but it is not dead yet. Saying that it is already dead would mean sending us all back to sleep. The treaty will not be dead until we make them withdraw it completely.

The more countries that have referendums, the better: each one makes it harder for the EU to impose the Constitution, in whole or in part. A Mori poll held after the French and Dutch referendums found that 67% of us want a referendum on the Constitution.

Finish it off

We should not drop this referendum weapon that has so hurt the Constitution. We must demand the promised referendum so that we can finish it off. Blair admits that the referendum would benefit what he calls the europhobes, that is, most of the British people – an ICM poll shows that 64% would vote against the Constitution and just 20% for.

After rejecting the Constitution, we must go on to reject the EU's unwritten Constitution, its capitalist essence, by leaving the EU.

Trade unions and the constitution

THINK OF THE TIME, respect and debate trade union members dedicate to their own constitutions. We study carefully what governs us. A quick EU bounce to totalitarianism was therefore never for us. A quick rejection was not on the cards either, so the French and Dutch have now opened a deeper debate. We need to leave the EU altogether. The Constitution is the tip of the iceberg.

In Britain trade unionists came in painfully late, and without Trade Unionists Against the European Union Constitution (www.tuaeuc.org.uk), who knows what would have happened? Certainly there was a danger that, had the unions solidly supported the EU Constitution, Blair may have sold off our rebate and stormed ahead with a public campaign for a Yes vote. As it is, forces are now mustered for Britain to contemplate seriously leaving the EU and thereby fulfil our internationalist and socialist aspirations.

Governed by corpses

It was trade unionists, socialists and communists in France and the Netherlands who led the campaign for a no vote on the EU Constitution. It was the same in the nine countries, especially Germany, where referendums were denied but the people were opposed. Only workers in Spain, through their mass abstention in their referendum, lagged behind. The Constitution would not have stood the test of the people in any other country in Europe. You can't

resurrect a corpse, but we are governed by corpses in the shape of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties and a government with no interest in our own destiny as an independent nation. The current treaties are enough to create the imperialist momentum of the EU.

TUC an embarrassment

Strong opposition to the single currency has been consistently expressed at the TUC over the last few years and this was a major factor in preventing Britain joining that particular disaster – despite a TUC international department so consistently bad that the week after the French Non vote, it was again pumping out misleading information as if nothing had happened, extolling the virtues of the EU. Quite simply, Tony Blair and John Monks could not get their funders to back them on either the euro or the Constitution. They will now get nasty.

The call we successfully made for a referendum should any government be foolhardy enough to propose joining the euro was also important. It was members of TUAUEC who started to turn around the mindless acceptance of all things European Union in the trade unions this year who ensured that none of them, including the four largest, would support the Constitution in a British referendum.

There has been a real mood change as a result of holding honest debate in the official structures of the movement. Something the TUC General Council never did.

The rejection of the Constitution by France and the Dutch makes it even more urgent for us to get out of the EU...

And why Britain must leave

THERE IS NO such political entity as Europe and the sooner the right, left, ultra left and centre realise this the better. Workers have always known this which is why they liberated Europe from those seeking to impose their vision of it 60 years ago. Calls for a better Europe without the Constitution are chauvinist. There are only independent nations. The EU juggernaut has stalled, but not stopped; the enemy, in chaos, is regrouping. If sovereignty were truly respected, the process would have stopped by now. But the EU was established not to listen to the people but to dictate to them.

What is sovereignty? A country has sovereignty when the decisions that matter to the people of the nation are taken in the country not abroad. No foreign power holds sway. The people of the country have the right and the duty to determine what happens in Britain. We allow our rulers to govern Britain and we can withdraw that permission whenever we want. The sovereignty, the ultimate veto, rests with us. To sustain sovereignty a country needs economic independence. A country that does not control its economy is not free.

The European Constitution is designed to stop all EU member states from being independent sovereign nations running their own affairs. It would reduce each nation to a province of the new state.

A nation is a people living and working together in a historically constituted community which, in a particular geographical area over a considerable period of time, has developed as a single economic unit with its own arts, language, skills and culture for the enrichment of life. So Britain, France, Germany and Italy are nations, Europe isn't.

A dangerous momentum was started in Europe and consolidated in the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties, which in the absence of the Constitution remain in place. These enshrine Thatcherite economics, demand privatisation of services, destroy the capacity for the economic and agricultural independence of nations, remove power from nationally elected governments and create a drive to centralised foreign policy and military

'The EU and its supporters are in disarray. Now is the time to remove them from power for all they have done against our people...'

power in the EU to fight the resource wars of the 21st century. It's not just the Common Market concept that is dead, but the concept of a social Europe, though it was a convenient illusion for years.

The defeat of the Constitution leaves these lumbering giant dangers on the loose. No sooner were the referendum results in than the government declared its intention to progress with the Services Directive designed to deregulate and privatise public services throughout Europe, a directive hated even by the EU's fifth pillar, the European TUC.

Pensions attack

It wasn't the Constitution, but the EU Central Bank that ordered reductions in public pensions and measures to raise the effective retirement age, greater private involvement in healthcare financing, the extension of working hours, containment of labour costs and abolition of 'overly rigid' labour market regulations. It wasn't the Constitution but Maastricht's curbs on public spending that led to the withdrawal of long term government gilts which underpinned so many final salary pension schemes that were distinctive of the British industrial relations landscape.

In any event, key elements that appeared only in the Constitution are already being put into place. An office for a European President is already being set up. Member governments have already been told to prepare for a European diplomatic service. Heads of government have already agreed a special legal basis for the Constitution's proposed Defence and Armaments Agency. Battle groups for the European army are already being

assembled.

The fact the Constitution was ever in a position to be put as a serious option to the people of Europe was a sign of appalling weakness on our part and of course theirs. More worryingly it was indicative of the tyrannical and centralised power that now exists through the EU structures over the whole of the continent. Where is the European Parliament in all of this? Even if it were allowed more powers to move against the Commission, it would remain a parody of democracy – there is no such thing as a European people to elect it, so how can there be a European parliament? It is nowhere and never will be. Worse still, it is the Council of Ministers that we allow to determine the fate of the Constitution after the French and Dutch votes, thus further endorsing their unaccountable powers as tenuous as those that brought us the draft constitution in the first place. The Commissioners and ECB governors have no intention of standing aside in the face of market regulation.

The EU and its supporters are in disarray. Now is the time to remove them from power for all they have done against our people. It is time that all the countries of the EU left and formed new, peaceful and cooperative alliances. Even the state-funded Britain in Europe campaign is contemplating winding up. It never wound anyone up in the first place. Much like the institution it sought to promote.

We need a British model for Britain: independent trade unions, completely free, non-religious health and education services, habeas corpus, trial by jury, the industries and utilities in complete public ownership, no foreign ownership of our land, productive industries, agriculture and services, no free flight and import of capital and labour, but strict controls, everything in and out on our terms. A vibrant economy built on science and manufacturing investment, strict limits on land and capital ownership, cheap housing and an independent foreign policy.

In short we need the powers of self government, precisely the powers that membership of the EU and NATO and the special relationship with the United States deny.

Independent Treatment Centres are the latest in a line of destructive initiatives that Labour has foisted on the NHS...

You wouldn't have let Thatcher do this!

IF THATCHER were trying to do what Blair is doing to the NHS working people would be up in arms. It has been said before, but it bears saying again: the working class allows a Labour government to get away with actions that it would not tolerate from a Conservative administration.

So what is Labour doing to the NHS? Relentless privatisation is too benign a description. It is dismantling the infrastructure, in particular eroding the skills of the workforce and its ability to develop the skills of the next generation.

The first speech of the new health secretary, Patricia Hewitt, signalled clearly that this weakened Labour government will be ever more vicious in decline. She announced the government plans to increase to 15% the proportion of operations on NHS patients to be carried out in the private sector. This treatment is to be carried out in the Independent (read: private) Treatment Centres known as ITCs.

At a stroke this will double the public money spent on surgical treatment in the private sector. Bear in mind that large amounts of public funds are already being channelled to the private corporations via the Private Finance Initiative where private consortiums now own a significant proportion of NHS buildings and equipment. Increasingly, workers are rumbling the Private Finance Initiative and becoming clear that PFI should stand for Profiting from Illness. However, there is not yet clarity about the potentially destructive impact of the growing number of ITCs.

Why are ITCs destructive?

The hype around ITC is seductive. It is all about reducing waiting lists, claims the government. The private companies will receive NHS money for doing the simple uncomplicated operations and because they will not have to take the emergencies and complicated cases from Accident and Emergency Departments, they will be able to maintain throughput (read: maintain profit levels). Essentially the ITCs will cherry pick the easiest work and leave the NHS to carry out all the more expensive

and difficult cases. And of course deal with any errors that happen at the ITCs when a case goes wrong.

As reported in last month's WORKERS, UNISON, the Royal College of Surgeons and the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland have already spoken out against this trend. Inevitably the cherry picking process takes away what would normally be a reliable slice of income which would flow to the local hospitals and destabilises local finances. However, it is not just a financially destabilising process.

Impact on education

The type of operation which will move to the ITCs is the very type that junior doctors and other health workers carry out under supervision as their skills are developing. The Royal College of Surgeons has already highlighted the impact on the training of new surgeons.

Once the protest develops the government is bound to suggest that the patient comes first and the student must follow the patient. Such assertions ignore the fact that student learning always has some impact on throughput (read: profit) and the Independent Treatment Centres may well refuse to take students. They are, after all, independent and can do what they like. Even more alarming is the thought that some ITCs may welcome students, perceiving them as cheap labour.

ITCs would lack the infrastructure that currently surrounds student learning in the NHS. At present all teaching hospitals and teaching GP practices in the NHS are subject to annual educational audits

which ensure there are adequate supervisors, resources etc. for students. This process in turn puts significant demands on education staff who have to visit the units and monitor the quality of the environment both for the patient and the learner.

If the number of teaching areas were to multiply to include places such as ITCs, then already overstretched resources would be further extended and proper teaching circuits which allow students to progress under supervision from novice to competent would be disrupted and fragmented. So those who comfort themselves by saying, well only 15% of the work is going to the private sector, the rest stays in the NHS, do not appreciate the impact on the whole organism which is clinical learning in the NHS of moving the simplest (read: most profitable) work.

GP services

Diverting public money into the private sector is also occurring in general practice. It is already the case that less than 50% of the British public have access to an NHS dentist. In areas such as South Devon only one in 10 dentists offers NHS treatment. This is a privatisation by stealth, which now spans many years.

The assault on medical general practitioner services is more recent. It has intensified and speeded up since the election on 5 May. In primary care the jargon is to talk of alternative providers (read: private providers).

On 31 May, the TIMES revealed that there had been a secret Whitehall meeting where private companies have been assured of more than £1 billion of NHS money to take over the running of some GP services. At this closed meeting health officials outlined plans to ring-fence 10% of health trusts' primary care budgets for contracts with the private sector.

This move coincides with another policy development which will be formally announced later in the year. This will allow companies that invest in building local health centres to also provide health care for that community – a scheme very similar to US health care provision. The

'The working class allows a Labour government to get away with actions that it would not tolerate from a Conservative administration...'



Photo: © Shout/reportdigital.co.uk

NHS has appointed a commercial director, Ken Anderson, who has said the treatment centre model is very much the direction to travel. And who would 'we' be in this context exactly?

Although privatisation of Primary Care was never mentioned in any manifesto, Blair had already introduced the mechanism known as alternate provider medical services (APMS). APMS could also stand for "Another Preposterous Money-grabbing Scheme". APMS allowed NHS trusts to pay private companies for services such as maternity care or diabetes care or out of hours cover whenever there is a shortage of NHS care.

Before the election ministers were disappointed that very few private companies showed much interest in this, but now that 10% of NHS primary care funding will be channelled their way, what once looked a bit of a business risk now looks like a nice little earner. And where

will the APMS get their staff? Why from the NHS of course, without any of the cost of training them.

Alyson Pollock, Professor of Public Health at University College London, described the government's plans: "The strategy is to liquidate the old NHS and bring in the market, and it is being done quite covertly...they are redefining the NHS by stealth."

Fighting back

Opposition from doctors is growing. The British Medical Association's conference, which met at the end of May, added its voice of opposition to that of the surgeons. Their leader, Dr Hamish Meldrum, said that the government was infatuated with the private sector and questioned whether the private sector would improve efficiency and provide value for money, saying, "Where is the evidence? Even more particularly, where is

the evidence that it will improve rather than destabilise our present system of general practice? ... We have to ask, if the private sector is so wonderful, so efficient, why does it need to be given such a financial leg up?"

A particular objection of the GPs is that allowing private firms to run services leads to the perverse incentive to offer as much treatment as a patient desires - and get paid for it all.

Just as with the City Academies in education, presenting hard evidence to oppose grandiose government assertions is one means of attack.

The impact on medical education is also now being discussed in the trade union movement but there is pressing need for a wider understanding of this particular aspect of the attack. A motion opposing ITCs was carried unanimously at

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

last month's NATFHE conference following a debate that explored the educational impact. However this aspect has not received much coverage in the national or professional press.

Two key questions are being asked by health workers: Where is the evidence that the private sector does it better? Why don't you give the NHS the money and we will run these treatment centres as part of the NHS?

As ever there is an EU dimension to this Blairite attack. In this case it is the Services Directive which would allow any company registered anywhere within the EU area to set up a branch in any other EU

'As ever there is an EU dimension to this Blairite attack...'

country without regard to standards of the host country. Just think: if Blair succeeds in fragmenting our NHS into ITCs and APMS what is to stop a company from any part of the EU running your local health centre? The labour would move in freely while the standards could be allowed to

move down equally freely.

The headlong rush to City Academies in education has been checked, though not repulsed, by workers challenging every assertion made about them. The GP leaders described the health privatisation as another example of this headlong rush, but the questioning has begun and must continue.

For a start, let's learn a little more about these companies. Who are ChilversMcCrea healthcare, who run 13 surgeries in Essex, London and Sussex? And who are Intrahealth, who deliver primary care to 6,000 patients in the Prime Minister's own constituency in County Durham? Keep reading WORKERS for further updates.

'All you get are lies and more lies, spin and more spin...'

LIKE SO MUCH of the NHS in northern Ireland plastic surgery is in deep crisis. At the end of May there were over 8000 people waiting to see specialist consultants, a wait that was so long that GPs were advising patients anxious about potentially cancerous blemishes on their skin not to bother trying to get an appointment with the NHS but to go private instead.

In an attempt to rectify the situation hospital managers in northern Ireland approached a Manchester-based NHS waiting list consultant for help. The notes on the 8000 people were duly passed to this individual for review and a meeting arranged with northern Ireland's three plastic surgery consultants to discuss what might be done to improve matters. The meeting was arranged, the three very

busy consultants cancelled all their lists for that day and waited for the arrival of the oracle from England. And waited, and waited.

The consultant never arrived, for after all, a waiting list consultant must be very busy indeed. He also never arrived for the rescheduled meeting, when again all lists were cancelled and, to make matters worse, didn't manage to make a third meeting either. Three days when the plastics consultants could at least have done some practical work to reduce the list and ease the anxiety of the 8000 people on it.

What did arrive, however, shortly after the cancellation of the third meeting, was the returned notes of the 8000 people with more than 2000 names removed from the list. This was

supposedly done after "full consultation" with the three plastics consultants that he had never deigned to meet. How a waiting list consultant makes his money: he simply removes 2,000 names in order to promote the government's lie that the NHS is ever improving, and to ensure that the government's target for waiting lists was more than met for another year.

You begin to wonder whether this was an isolated case or one which is repeated endlessly throughout the NHS. As one of the consultants said, "I always thought that Margaret Thatcher was the worst enemy the NHS ever had. But at least you knew where you stood with her. Tony Blair is much worse, much worse. All you get are lies and more lies, spin and more spin. And that is much more difficult to fight against."

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Through the 18th century enclosures, the landowning class stole million acres from the people. They still hide their crimes and th

Give us back our land

WHO OWNS BRITAIN, by Kevin Cahill, paperback, 450 pages, ISBN 1-84195-310-5, Canongate, 2002, £16.99.

THIS IS A survey of landownership across Britain and Ireland, detailed county by county. Cahill shows how a tiny minority exploits British society. 160,000 families, 0.3% of the population, own two thirds of Britain, 37 million acres, 230 acres per family. Just 1,252 of them own 57% of Scotland. They pay no land tax. Instead the government gives them £2.3 billion a year and the EU gives them a further £2 billion. Each family gets £26,875.

By contrast, all workers pay a land tax: 57.5 million of us pay £10 billion a year in council tax, £550 per household. We live in 24 million homes crammed onto just four million acres. 65% of homes are privately owned, so 16 million of us own only 2.8 million acres, an average of 0.18 acres each.

Our towns and cities are ever more overcrowded, with smaller homes being built in higher densities. Local councils no longer have any say over land use. Playing fields for our young people are still being sold off, despite government promises. Swimming pools are closed or restricted to adult use. Where are our young people supposed to go when there are no leisure facilities for them? ASBOs and dispersal orders are just forms of house arrest. Capitalism robs young people of public places, and then imprisons them in private places.

Workers who live in the countryside are robbed of their jobs, their chances of buying their own homes, their bus services, their shops and Post Offices, their pubs and their village halls.

The top landowners are the Forestry Commission with 2.6 million acres. The Ministry of Defence has 750,000, the royal family 670,000 (including the Crown

Estate 400,000 and the Duchy of Cornwall 141,000), the National Trust (Britain's largest conservation charity) 550,000, insurance companies 500,000, the utility companies 500,000, the Duke of Buccleuch 270,700, the National Trust for Scotland 176,287, the Dukedom of Atholl 148,000, the Duke of Westminster 140,000 and the Church of England 135,000.

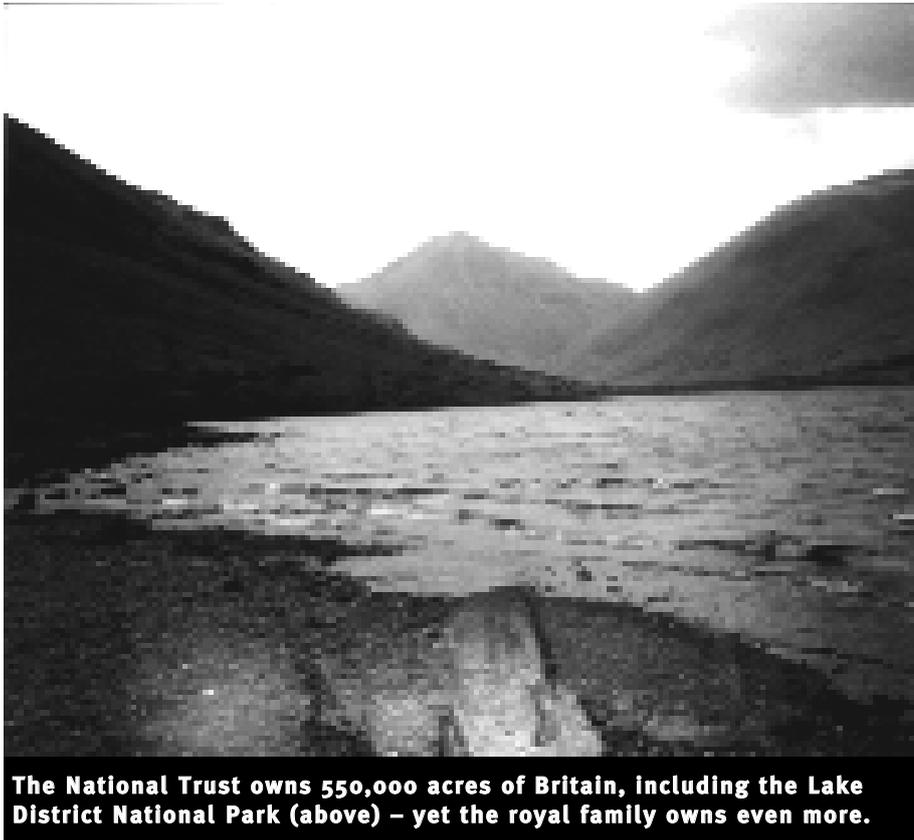
The Forestry Commission, a government department which is Britain's biggest single landowner, runs its holdings conservatively and secretly. We could expand the forest estate by a million acres a year, producing rural jobs, getting profits from the sale of wood and pulp (cutting our balance of payments deficit) and reducing the output of greenhouse gases. This would cost between £588 million and £750 million.

Enclosures

Through the 18th century enclosures, the landowning class stole an estimated eight million acres from the people. They still hide their crimes and their takings. The 1872 Return of Owners of Land was produced, but then hidden and never updated. Shares have to be registered; land doesn't. The Land Registry does not even know who owns between 30% and 50% of the land.

Cahill compares Britain with other countries where revolutions ended the feudal tenure of land. Denmark redistributed its land to the peasantry in 1800. In Ireland, in 1876, 616 landowners owned 80% of the country. By 1930, 13 million acres of Ireland's 20 million acres had been sold to owner-occupiers. Now, there are no landlords – home ownership is 82%, Ireland's 149,500 farms are 97% owner-occupied and owner-farmed, there is no poll tax, water is free and pensioners get free transport, TV and glasses.

Cahill claims that Blair's reform of the House of Lords "definitively cut the permanent link between power and the landowners." But just as in 1872, the state is defending landed capital by making it less visible. Class power does not depend



The National Trust owns 550,000 acres of Britain, including the Lake District National Park (above) – yet the royal family owns even more.

...e an estimated eight
...eir takings...

...on seats in the House of Lords, but on
...private ownership of the means of
...production, including land, protected and
...subsidised by a capitalist state.

The Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs says its mission is
to shift EU subsidies from food
production to land management, but the
EU already does this by paying £2 billion
a year to the landowners, much of it for
setting aside productive land. The EU
pays hardly anything to working farmers.
We need to produce our own food: food
production is a British national security
interest that must not be decided either
by the EU or by the market.

Parasites

Landowners' wealth is a parasite on
Britain. It is the least productive part of
the economy, with the most state
support. Their wealth comes not from
farming, nor even from renting, but from
trickling land onto the urban housing
market. They sell land to property
developers, at an average price per acre
of £404,000 in 1999. The clearing banks
and building societies strip our industries
of investment capital, and then support
their landowner clients by running the
rigged and overpriced land market.

Cahill proposes land reform and
taxation: "Windfall gains on development
land should be made subject to windfall
taxes." Taxing their land and stopping the
big landowners avoiding tax through
offshore trusts could raise £17 billion.
More land for housing would cut land
prices, free more to invest in good
quality, spacious homes and gardens, and
revive the building industry.

But Cahill opposes nationalising the
property of the big landowners. He points
out that the European Convention of
Human Rights says there should be no
confiscation without compensation. So
much the worse for the Convention, which
defends property rights at the expense of
people. Haven't landowners had enough
compensation already?

Workers should be demanding our
land back, so we can use it for the benefit
of our people.

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

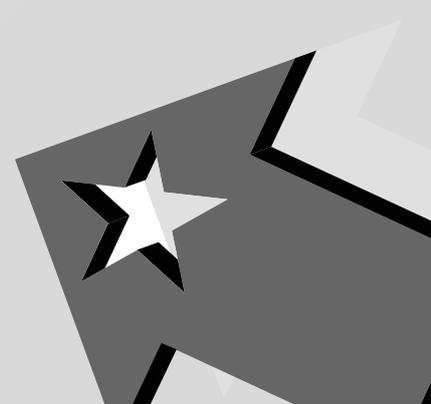
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Back to Front – Rewriting history

‘Bush’s decision to visit Latvia and Georgia either side of the celebrations in Moscow shows one man who is behind the rewriting.....’

WE LIVE at a time when we can actually see history being rewritten. The 60th anniversary of the defeat of fascism in 1945 is a case in point. Schools are already equating Stalin with Hitler. The history of China and Mao is now being reversed as if it were truth. Now the role of the USSR in World War II is being rewritten. Bush’s decision to visit Latvia and Georgia either side of the celebrations in Moscow shows one man who is behind the rewriting.

We are now being asked to believe that the war started when the USSR and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression pact in August 1939. According to this theory, the Baltic Republics suffered a Soviet occupation and the war only really finished with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those who advocate this would have to admit, therefore, that the rise of Nazi Germany and the coming war was for the purpose of destroying the USSR.

Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia never existed before the Russian revolution of 1917. They had been part of Russia, or at times part of Swedish, Danish or German territories. Their populations had actively taken part in the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions, with Bolsheviks in a majority in Latvia and Estonia.

By the end of World War I, the US, Britain and France wanted to isolate revolutionary Russia with a cordon of hostile states if their armies of intervention failed to destroy the revolution. They succeeded in creating these three states and encouraged Poland to take as much of western Russia as possible. They also tried unsuccessfully to detach oil rich Azerbaijan, Armenia and

Georgia, but failed because Attaturk’s new revolutionary Turkey had come to terms with Russia. Many Balts fled to Russia and many, notably Latvian Red Riflemen, went on to rise to the highest levels in the Red Army. Russia had lost much of Byelorussia and Ukraine to the invading Polish ultra nationalist army, which also took the Lithuanian city of Vilnius. Russia knew that the threat to its sovereignty and its revolution would come from the west.

Surrounded by hostile artificially created states, Russia viewed the rise of fascism in Germany with concern. It supported the Spanish Republican forces with arms while all other European countries either appeased fascism or adopted its methods. With much foresight, it forced Finland, formally part of Russia and now allied with Hitler, to cede territory to defend Leningrad. It signed a non aggression pact with Germany for the same reasons, to buy time, and defend its territory. Part of that pact restored the territory lost at the end World War I, mainly stolen by invading Poland and yielded under the Brest Litovsk Treaty. Russia then went about building its defences for what it knew was coming, the Nazi invasion.

Some 27 million Soviet citizens died to save the world from fascism. Many of the nationalists in the Baltic states collaborated and fought with the Nazis, while many more Balts fought and died fighting with the Red Army. These were the real heroes of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. No wonder Putin recreated, just for one day, the truth of the heroic Soviet past in the celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the defeat of fascism.

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