

WORKERS

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THE BATTLES FOR PAY



Irish employers back Lisbon treaty

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Karl Marx was right!

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A musical celebration of May Day

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WORKERS

“ Unnatural disasters

US PRESIDENT George Bush made the most outrageously hypocritical statement recently while being filmed at the White House. Having just come from the US Congress where Burmese/Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi had been awarded in absentia the Congressional Medal of Honour, in the footsteps of Tony Blair and the Dalai Lama, he sang her praises as “this brave woman”.

Bush then went on to scold the Burmese government and proceeded to insist that “Burma must accept US aid on US terms delivered by the US military” following the destruction of the Irrawaddy Delta by Cyclone Nargis. When Myanmar did not accept these conditions, it was subjected to a hysterical campaign of hostility, accusing it of not caring about its own people. The Myanmar government might well have been remembering previous US aid to countries that would not bend the knee to its power.

Particularly, Mozambique comes to mind. In 1983 after one million people had died at the hands of Rhodesian-backed RENAMO forces and the rest of the country faced starvation due to famine. The Mozambique government asked the United Nations for urgent food aid (the US being the largest provider of food aid in the United Nations), saying that if pledges were insufficient thousands would die. And 100,000 died.

And what did the US do? In what is probably the most blatant example of a powerful country using a disaster to expand its political power, remembered by many countries, the US refused to provide food aid until Mozambique showed some “distance” from the Soviet Union, stopped voting against them at the UN, took all reference to socialism out of its constitution, shared power with RENAMO, and started a process of privatisation. All aid was to be distributed by religious NGOs. Mozambique had no alternative but to accept.

But to put this case in contrast, we need to remember Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed New Orleans in 2006. How long was it before Bush actually got around to visiting the scene of the disaster? And how effective was the US government in providing relief to its own citizens? In contrast to the tardy and disorganised shambles that deepened the agony of New Orleans, neighbouring Cuba – the morning after the Hurricane hit – offered to send a brigade of 1,500 doctors and skilled disaster experts to the city to save lives. The US State Department refused the offer and the rest, as they say, is history.

Is it any wonder, then, that the Myanmar government accepted aid from its friends – mainly India, Thailand and China plus the UN, while only accepting US aid on its own conditions?

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Education pay fight continues

NUT MEMBERS walked out on 24 April in their first national strike for over 20 years, over pay. The union estimates that at least 90 per cent of members took part – most schools either closed or sent classes home. (Some were exempted for reasons such as needing to invigilate exams or because they are near retirement and would lose pension.) The police agreed with the union that around 10,000 marched in central London, and the mood was buoyant.

All over England there were successful local marches, rallies and publicity events held – a result of work put in in advance by the membership. Many noted the high participation of young teachers, many of whom had never taken action before. Teachers feel they have won the argument over "RPI versus CPI", with even schools minister Jim Knight forced to concede on the day that real inflation is higher than the 2.45 per cent the teachers have been offered. Now the debate is on about tactics for the fight to continue.

Although it was the teachers who grabbed the headlines on 24 April thousands of staff teaching in FE colleges also took action in support of their pay claim with over a thousand University and College Union members joining the teachers' march in London, where Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary, addressed the rally in Central Hall Westminster. In Leeds many FE colleges took action and staff attended a rally at the Victoria Gardens. Pickets were out in all corners: West Kent College down to Exeter (where the Students Union joined staff on the picket line) and Truro, from Coventry up to Sunderland, Bradford and Tyneside. Even Wormwood Scrubs prison had to close the education department as staff joined the action.

College lecturers teach over 3 million students in England but they earn on average 6 per cent less than school teachers doing equivalent work. Almost half – 47 per cent – of colleges have still not implemented a new national pay scale agreed more than three years ago.

On 1 May (a fitting date) the six further education unions representing 250,000 members rejected an offer from the employers' body the Association of Colleges for a rise of 2.5 per cent, so the fight continues. Joint trade union side secretary and Unison national officer, Chris Fabby, said: "We reject this offer outright. 2.5 per cent is just not enough. This year, our members have been struggling to cope with huge hikes in the cost of essentials like fuel, food and housing."

The six trade unions – ACM, ATL, GMB, UCU, Unison, Unite – have submitted a catch-up pay claim for 6 per cent or £1,500, whichever is the greater. This would establish a minimum wage of £7.38 an hour for workers in FE.

EURO Germans don't like it



IN A RECENT poll organised by the BdB German banking federation, more than half of those surveyed think that the euro is to blame for an increase in prices in recent years and about 34 per cent want to ditch the euro and bring back the Deutschmark. Indeed, in Germany the euro has the nickname "teuro" which is a play on words combining euro and "teuer", the German word for expensive.

It seems apparent that much of the EU is based on unpopular devices and institutions. Dissatisfaction and disapproval are growing.

Is it not time for the nations of Europe to sweep aside this capitalist experiment which only serves the interests of financiers and big business and consign it to oblivion?

ENVIRONMENT GREEN FASCISM?

AN INTERESTING posting (2 May 2008) from comments on Michael White's blog on the Guardian website told us, "the only hope that we – and the planet have – is some form of benevolent Green Fascism. People are never going to vote for reduced quality of life, but ultimately – in a post-carbon and therefore post-industrial, post-capitalist age – that's what it's going to take."

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

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

In the trough...

MEPs have been voting on financial matters. They voted to cover up a report showing widespread abuse of allowances. They rejected calls from the European Ombudsman and others, to publish the names of over 400 MEPs who are believed to illegally pay their pension contributions from office allowances.

Chris Davies, a Liberal Democrat MEP, attacked this attitude. He said, "Far from cleaning up their act, a majority of MEPs seem intent on allowing greed and self-interest to triumph over the proper financial management of public money."

MEPs also approved the EU's budget for 2009, including a pay increase for themselves – although the Court of Auditors failed to sign off the EU's accounts for the thirteenth year running.

Great expectations

THE EUROPEAN Union has plans for its own embassies, according to the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 May. This is the first indication that full EU embassies have been seriously considered. They would be controlled by the new EU diplomatic service established in the Lisbon Treaty.

The proposals are for over 100 EU offices around the world to become embassies and for EU ambassadors to be accountable to the European parliament.

Finnish Foreign Minister Alex Stubb said, "All over the world there will be EU embassies... if we play our cards right, we'll become one of the world's great actors. We are already a superpower in trade, a superpower in aid, but in foreign and security policy we haven't reached the level we should be at."

Food thoughts

EU AGRICULTURE Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel has her own views on the recent global surge in food prices and its causes. She said, "Isn't that great! Do you know what, prices have fallen for 20 years straight. In Denmark, the average family spends 10 per cent of their income on food – they spend more money on their kitchens. So yes, I'm really happy that prices are going up."

Commissioner Boel "completely discards" the idea that biofuels are behind the increase: "The most important factor is the climate", she said.



Teachers from schools and colleges pack Central Hall, Westminster, for a rally during the one day strikes by the NUT and UCU last month.

Photo: Workers

Irish employers back Treaty

WITH IRELAND in the grip of a lively referendum campaign on the Lisbon Treaty, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation is backing the EU constitution because, as it says, "The Lisbon Reform Treaty creates the legal basis for the liberalisation of services of general economic interest (Art. 106). A yes vote for the Lisbon Treaty creates the potential for increased opportunities for Irish business particularly in areas subject to increasing liberalisation such as Health, Education, Transport, Energy and the Environment."

But Ireland's Technical Engineering and Electrical Union has urged its 45,000 members to vote no in the 12 June referendum. TEEU general secretary Eamon Devoy said recent European Court of Justice judgments showed that the pendulum had swung against workers' rights and in favour of big business.

Despite previous warnings of a "disaster" if Ireland votes no, the Irish government has admitted to an Argentine newspaper that this was in fact untrue, and a no vote would make little difference. "There would be no dire consequence should the referendum go amiss," Irish Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern told the *Buenos Aires Herald*, "Life will go on as it did after the French and Dutch rejected the European constitutional treaty in 2005."

"A lot of people are just beginning to realise what they have signed up to," one of the negotiators working on the new EU constitutional settlement said. One EU official said the Lisbon Treaty was "more profound and far-reaching than anything else in the EU's 50 year history. It might not be quite Constitutional in the national sense but for us here it is the most important time in our lives," he said. "There has never been such a constellation of jobs and institutional changes aligned at the same moment. A lot of people are talking about a new epoch."

UNITED STATES

The poor die young

LIFE EXPECTANCY may have reached an all-time high for the USA, but it is declining in many of its poor counties, especially among women, a team from the Harvard School of Public Health has reported.

By the 1980s, death rates started to head back up in Appalachia, Mississippi River states and parts of Texas. "Female mortality increased in a large number of counties, primarily because of chronic diseases related to smoking, overweight and obesity, and high blood pressure."

"There has been increasing disparity in health in the US population for two decades," said Majid Ezzati of the school's

department of population and international health, who led the study. "The people who are worst off are either not getting better or are worse off" than they had been, Ezzati added.

While many of the worst-affected counties had a high black population, Ezzati found that white populations in poorer counties fared worse than whites elsewhere. "It exists above and beyond race," he said.

"One of the questions we are asking is whether our ranking in the world is getting increasingly worse because we are not doing a good job of taking care of the worst-off," Ezzati said. "To have 20 years of decline for about one out of five American women, it is something that is rather unprecedented," he added.

CONSTRUCTION

Grinding to a halt

ACTIVITY IN the UK's construction industry sank to its lowest level for nearly a decade in April, according to a report from the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply. The Institute's Construction Purchasing Managers Index, which measures overall industry performance, registered 46.1, the weakest reading since December 1998.

A figure of 50 and above represents growth. Poor economic conditions,



Photo: Workers

especially in the slowing housing market, and reduced tendering opportunities have been blamed for the drop. All three sectors of the industry – housing, commercial construction and civil engineering – reported falling activity.

Keele redundancies halted

KEELE UNIVERSITY Council has had to halt its redundancy proposals following massive protests from the University and College Union (UCU). The Visitor of the university, the Baroness Ashton, has asked the university council to take no further steps towards implementing its proposals pending her inquiry into a complaint that it bypassed university rules to get the job cuts agreed.

The council established an unprecedented "redundancy committee" on 6 December 2007, bypassing the normal consultation and decision-making processes at the university's senate or faculty meetings – without the approval of senate, as required by the university's charter and statutes.

That committee then agreed plans that have left more than half (38) of the 67 academic staff in Keele's world-renowned School of Economic and Management Studies (SEMS) facing compulsory redundancy if they did not agree to voluntary severance. This is not an acceptable procedure, and it is, as a matter of elementary logic and law, not voluntary severance. The SEMS staff are refusing to send in "personal information profiles" because these would facilitate selection for redundancy.

This is not the first time that Keele University has ignored standard practice to try and push through controversial plans. During the pay dispute of 2006, where lecturers were not marking coursework or setting exams, the university agreed to award degrees based on work already submitted, rather than wait for students' full marks. That policy prompted serious questions about the potential quality of degrees at Keele, with the Quality Assurance Agency refusing to back its plans. Fortunately the dispute was resolved before graduation day.

The chair of the SEMS action committee, Mike Ironside, said, "Keele UCU has repeatedly called on university management to follow normal procedures. We welcome the news that the Visitor will be fully investigating what has happened here, and we hope that management will now take more notice of our members' views."

UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said, "No institution should think it can ride roughshod over its own constitution. Trying to rush these job cuts through at a quiet time of the year and outside its own internal structures was cowardly and offensive. The University can rest assured that UCU will be fighting this decision all the way."

The redundancies plan has already caused enormous damage to Keele's reputation.

POSTAL PRIVATISATION

No benefits, says report

THE GOVERNMENT'S strategy of opening up the postal market to private sector competition has provided "no significant benefits" for households or for smaller businesses, while representing a "substantial threat" to the Royal Mail's future, says an independent report by

former media regulator Richard Hooper. Only large companies have benefited.

Mainstream coverage of the report failed to mention that the liberalisation was introduced by the EU Postal Services Directive. On 10 June 2002, the European Parliament and the Council formally adopted its Postal Directive 2002/39/E, which amended the initial Postal Directive (97/67/EC) by defining further steps in the process of market opening.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Tolpuddle, Friday 18 July to Sunday 20 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival 2008

Annual rally to commemorate the six farm labourers from the Dorset village sentenced to transportation in 1834 for daring to form a trade union.

The festival just gets bigger each year, with more music, stalls and events than ever. There's even a Tolpuddle group on Facebook. For details of the festival programme, including online purchase of camping tickets, see www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/regions_info_southwest.cfm.

AFRICA

EU pressure resisted

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS are concerned about the impact of the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements, controversial trade opening pacts being negotiated between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. In December 2007, 35 ACP countries, including 19 African countries, signed up to interim EPAs with the EU Commission as a prelude to signing full EPAs in 2008.

At a conference in Ghana on 23 April, Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry of South Africa, Mr. R. Davies, said EPAs would not deliver the benefits they claimed to offer ACP countries, adding, "The devil is in the details of the agreements." Davies argued that while EPAs contain provisions that require ACP countries to liberalise tariffs on 80 per cent of goods received from Europe, their exports to the European markets would still be subjected to tariffs.

Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika said at a press conference earlier in April that he would not allow Malawi to sign up to an EPA on current terms because it would not benefit Malawians. He was critical of the EU's strategy of using aid as a lever to cajole developing countries into signing EPAs.

He said, "This is imperialism by the EU which we must fight against because the EDF funding has nothing to do with EPA conditionalities. They are doing this in order to punish those that who are not signing their agreements." Mutharika asked, "If the agreement is so good, why do they have to force people to sign?"

Colombia: the weapons pour in



Bogota, Colombia

WHILE THE US and Britain direct hostility at Venezuela's progressive government, no attention is paid to the crimes committed by its enemy the Colombian state, whose armed forces are supplied and trained by US and British special forces.

Blair welcomed President Álvaro Uribe to Britain and described him as a democrat. Uribe is actually linked to Colombia's biggest drug barons and death squads: in 1991, the US Defence Intelligence Agency reported that he "worked for the Medellín Cartel" as a "close personal friend" of the cartel's chief, Pablo Escobar.

Under Plan Colombia, the US state has given Colombia more than \$6 billion worth of arms, planes, special forces, mercenaries and logistics.

In a study of 31,656 extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances between 1996 and 2006, the Colombian Commission of Jurists found that right-wing death squads had murdered 46 per cent of the victims and Farc (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas 14 per cent. The death squads were responsible for forcing most of the three million internal refugees from their homes. This misery is a product of Plan Colombia's pseudo "war on drugs", whose aims are to eliminate the Farc and to put pressure on new democracies, especially Venezuela.

The Labour government is now the second biggest donor of military aid to Colombia, but of course Whitehall refuses to disclose the extent of British involvement on the grounds of national security. "We provide some military aid but we don't talk about the details," a Foreign Office spokeswoman said.

Counter-insurgency assistance to the Colombian military and its death-squad allies includes training by the SAS of units such as the High Mountain Battalions, condemned repeatedly for atrocities. Other key areas include SAS training of the narcotics police, an increased supply of military hardware and intelligence equipment, and assistance in setting up an intelligence centre and a joint intelligence committee.

On 8 March, the Foreign Office invited Colombian officers to a counter-insurgency seminar at its conference centre, Wilton Park in West Sussex. One keynote speaker was Colombian Vice-Minister of Defence Juan Carlos Pinzon. Rarely does the Foreign Office so brazenly parade the killers it aids.

Capitalism isn't working, and workers must find their own solution – or go down with it.

Marx was right!

SO LONG as we were able to kid ourselves that capitalism was working, however cruelly, and would see us out, we could avoid the hard intellectual task of trying to understand how it all works. Now it clearly doesn't, so we have to try and do for our time what Marx did for his.

Marx's understanding of capitalism grew from his experience of living and working in Britain, the world's first industrial manufacturing and capitalist economy. Similarly, communists have to understand what is happening now and challenge all the received wisdom – judgement is by results not by proclaimed intentions.

Marx's basic principles still apply. The employer never lets up, even where workers choose to stop resisting. The employer always tries to get more for less – intensification of work – which used to be called "speed-up", and more household members have to work to survive. In the 1930s, there was often just one breadwinner. Now a household needs at least two workers to keep going, and increasingly the next generation lives at home, trying to find work or working for nothing or for a pittance. Household debts, just like local authority debts, company debts, government debts and trade deficits, keep growing.

Mass immigration means they have no need to reproduce labour power here – no need for a home-grown British working class. They'd let our class rot and import another one already educated and keen to work for less. The government maintains the EU's dogma of unrestrained immigration, whatever the consequences, whether we like it or not. The government talks of a future population of 70 million – is this what we want? And if immigration is not controlled, the number could be 80 million or 100 million. Is there really no sensible limit? And even this device for increasing profits has not prevented the crisis we see today.

Take responsibility

We must take responsibility for our land and for the size of our population. If we don't care for our land and our people, who will? The days of Empire, when we could migrate into other peoples' countries without their consent, are over.

Is manufacturing really the wealth-producing base, or can finance capital save us, as Thatcher, Blair, Livingstone and now Brown propose? Why has London become once more the financial capital of the world? Where does Canary Wharf come from? Are we already in a "post-industrial" world, as so many parrot? Surely, if there were no industry at all, we could not still be alive. If we were producing no goods, how could we continue to consume?

They tell us that property is the way to escape debt and dependency. But Inside Track, the biggest buy-to-let company, crashed in April. It spearheaded the buy-to-let scam, promising to show customers "how you could give up work and be a property millionaire instead". Now buy-to-let mortgages dry up as British new-build flats, Spanish apartments and Florida homes all lose value, Spanish apartments by 30 per cent. Housing starts in Britain fell by a quarter between January and March this year. As WORKERS has said, "Financial services – not so much an industry, more a short-cut to debt and dependency" The drive for profit by those parts of the capitalist class who own and control the finance companies is responsible for that debt and dependency, urged on by the successive governments who serve them.

We are told that there is a "credit crunch" because of the US



Photo: Workers

Unite pickets at Ineos in April: they showed that workers can win – and that capital never accumulates enough profit for the capitalists

housing sub-prime market collapse. WORKERS in September 2007 called capitalism itself “A sub-prime system”. Sub-prime means banks parcelling up bad debts with good. But this is nothing new. In the early 1990s, the IMF’s Brady Plan repackaged developing countries’ debts as collateralised tradeable bonds, privatising debt ownership, so venture (vulture, hedge fund) capitalists could buy debts and then sue for full, immediate repayment.

For example, in 1996 a company called Elliott Associates bought from the IMF \$20 million of Peru’s debt for \$11 million; it then sued Peru’s government and won \$58 million, a cool \$47 million profit. They have pulled the same trick in Panama, Poland, Turkmenistan, Ecuador, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Debt rescheduling means capital bondage. The peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America pay \$5 in debt repayment for every dollar of aid their governments receive. Under finance capital’s rule, one billion people only get a dollar a day, whereas every cow in the EU gets \$2 in subsidies. For every \$1 the US taxpayer gives to the international financial institutions, US companies get \$2 in bank-financed procurement contracts. For every \$1 going into developing countries (investment, aid, grants), \$2 come out to service debts. Since the mid-1960s, \$22 billion a year has gone from the developing countries to the capitalist classes in the USA and the EU.

The capitalist classes designed the World Bank and the IMF to benefit themselves and to harm the working class, to defeat economic rivals, like East Asia’s developing states, to try to destroy Russia and flatten Africa. Capitalism’s regional Free Trade Agreements, like the EU’s, threaten state sovereignty, workers’ rights, local cultures, and render meaningless all forms of democracy and representative government since decisions are actually being made elsewhere.

The government tells us three million British jobs depend on the EU, because they produce the goods we export to the EU. But there is another side to the story. Our imports from the EU are 21% more than our exports. (In 2007 our trade deficit with the EU was a record £40 billion.) So if the exports create three million jobs, then the imports must be destroying 3.6 million jobs. So we make a net loss from the EU of 600,000 British jobs.

EU rule

This EU rule is not legitimate. We have not consented to it, either by majority participation in EU elections, or by participating in drafting the EU Constitution, or by freely ratifying that Constitution. The Constitution has neither the explicit nor even the tacit consent of the majority of British citizens, so the government acted illegitimately when it ratified the Constitution.

The government’s arguments against

holding a referendum on the Constitution are arguments against democracy. To refuse a referendum on the issue of increasing EU integration, on which all the parliamentary parties promised a referendum, is to attack democracy. The government opposes a referendum because it fears and opposes the people. We are for real democracy not for parliamentary democracy, where, in theory, the people rule, but then the state overrules and does what the capitalist minority wants.

We said the bubble would burst, and now it has. And they mean for workers to pay. The government says the answer is to squeeze public sector pay, 2.5 per cent rises for the next five years, when inflation, even on official figures, is 4 per cent and rising. People are voting against increasing exploitation, lower wages, rising living costs, Post Office closures, and the attack on pensions, against government arrogance, dishonesty, corruption, spin and denial of reality. People vote against one lot of rascals or the other, usually to get shot of the rascals in office when their corruption becomes intolerable. But it is not enough just to kick the rascals out every five, ten or fifteen years.

We workers have to find a way ourselves to run and rebuild Britain or else capitalism will pull us down with itself, starve us out and hope to find someone else to exploit. We have to find a way, and it starts with class thinking and struggle.

Despite the highly successful national strike by teachers and the push back by fragmentation, privatisation, legal hurdles – and above all, the fragmented nature of the organisations...

The battles over pay: still too many generations



Photo: Workers

London, 24 April: NUT members and supporters on strike and marching for pay.

THE MANOEUVRES around the pay offers, potential pay disputes and who is really saying what their members mean in the trade unions – or even if the members have spoken at all – are what are shaping

the choreography around pay in local government.

The indices which determine inflation are rising but all the forecasters predict a drop later in the year, so no one can

believe the torrent of pro or anti statistics which workers are bombarded with over whether a pay offer is a good deal or poor. The GMB have indicated that if the statistics stood still for a moment then to make an inflation-equivalent pay offer and settle this potential dispute would cost the government something like £2.1 billion on top of the local government pay offer of 2.45 per cent. Sounds a lot but it is actually small beer compared with the £50 billion to bail out Northern Rock or the £11 billion paid out in City bonuses.

Unite, GMB and Unison are going in three different directions over local government pay. Different in supposed consultation, different in the messages of what they are going to do about it, but perhaps not very different in the absence of the members from the process?

The sabres rattle

Unison, the largest local government union, is vociferous in its head office generated noise and sabre rattling. Yet the recently concluded consultative exercise resulted in a 15 per cent average national return, with a questionable 54 per cent rejecting the offer. In some regions as low as 5 per cent, in London, despite more sabre rattling and banging of drums a mere 11 per cent of the membership bothered to respond to ballots and branch meetings.

Nevertheless the national committee – dominated by the ultra left – is to press ahead with a ballot for industrial action. The ballot will be low, probably lost and will further damage the integrity of the union in the eyes of the members, the employers and government. The last two will be suffering from hysterical laughter as yet again Unison's pay strategy hits the buffers.

The question has to be posed what is democracy and democratic in this artificial situation of having a distinct minority responding – 15 per cent of the membership – but then dressing that up as a majority decision to go for strike action? 85 per cent of the membership have abdicated and walked away from the process. In these circumstances, those who argue that a majority even of one

their colleagues in the colleges, the fight for pay is still held
 all, the lack of involvement of most union members in their own

als, not enough in the front lines

justifies a strike call are living in cloud cuckoo land and are placing the union at risk in perilous times. The fetish with this so-called democracy is at best a parody of historic class decision-making and unity, at worse evidence that the lunatics have taken over the asylum.

If the decision-making process is dangerously flawed then so are the tactics of actually trying to arrive at dates for industrial action. Originally Unison planned to deliver a ballot and a decision to coincide with its annual delegate conference. The hysteria and hothouse environment of a national conference would have resulted in a vote for industrial action irrespective of how pathetic the turnout or ballot result.

Unfortunately, or some may say luckily, due to the nigh on impossible restrictions, hoops and obstacles placed in the way of trade unions trying to hold a legal ballot, the deadlines have slipped. What was envisaged as industrial action in early July (8-9) now looks like the week beginning 23 July.

Fragmented

It is a glaring example as to how weak the trade unions are in local government and how the workforce has been fragmented, sold-off, outsourced that the really painful pressure points in local government – housing, finance, refuse etc – no longer figure in the tactical arsenal. The only tactic left is to hit the schools, hence the desperation to get a least one day's stoppage in before the school summer holidays.

Will all this happen? In the Unison head office bunker some believe it will or perhaps the body swerve will occur. The Grand Old Duke of York with his men half way up the hill, neither up or down, will wave his fist at Gordon Brown and say, "You wait till next year!" And next year will be the run into the general election and nothing will happen but everyone will feel good after the displacement activity and diversions of 2008.

Health

Over a million health workers are looking at a three-year pay offer worth 8.1 per

“Unite, GMB and Unison are going in three different directions over local government pay...”

cent. More for the low paid, with an estimated 60 per cent of employees benefiting. Once more statistics, damned statistics and lies.

The RCN, with 400,000 members, is recommending the offer to its members. Unison is balloting its 470,000 members without recommendation. But all the indicators coming back from branches are that the deal will be accepted.

Despite all the huffing and puffing of the other health trade unions and professional bodies by sitting on their hands and being ever so pure, what they are really saying is, "We don't like it but we will accept it." Between Unison and the RCN, representing 80 per cent of union members in the NHS, the exercise is rather academic.

But a dangerous mind-set is developing with health workers. All the trade unions signed up to the Pay Review Body strategy in 2007. This institutionalises the concept that you do not bargain, you do not struggle, you do not bother, you hand responsibility for pay away to a do-gooder "independent" body, and your union becomes incorporated into the state.

One reason to explain this is that health workers have faced and accepted three three-year pay deals in a row since 1997.

This conditioning only to be engaged from afar and over several years with the most fundamental reason for a union to exist – improving wages and conditions – results in the same mind rot generated by general elections. If you only have to place a cross every three, five or seven years then why get excited, interested or care about who rules?

Further education

Negotiations in FE are ongoing with an offer of 2.5 per cent tabled, and rejected by all unions involved – Unison, UCU, GMB, Unite and ATL. Preparations for industrial action ballots are under way – UCU to strike on 9 June, Unison possibly in July, to coincide with the local government strategy. The UCU's chosen date is to coincide with the TUC "Speak up for Public Services" lobby of Parliament on 9 June – a rally that promises speeches from at least 26 trade union general secretaries (oh joy!).

Education

The National Union of Teachers held a very successful strike on 24 April, the first national stoppage in 21 years. The NUT is the only schools teaching union not to accept the three year pay deal on offer. But the question now is what next?

The NUT is being manoeuvred into a corner, very like the Fire Brigades Union during 2002/2003. The result for the FBU was that they lost control of the fire service – overtime and hours worked, staffing levels, control of the brigades – along with influence and a mature and authoritative position very similar to that held by the NUT in teaching.

Trade union density in teaching is high though fragmented across too many teaching unions. The NUT must not become a further example of fragmentation and marginalisation by fighting on the government's predetermined terrain.

Ofsted

Inspectors held a one-day stoppage on 16 May to be followed by working to rule and contracted hours from 19 to 30 May. The strike halted inspections to schools and nurseries. Some teachers and parents may wish they were on strike forever.

The Ofsted inspectors have seen their pay offer actually reduced, agreements from previous years reneged upon, their structures cut and as they are home-based, their terms and conditions undermined. If there was ever a hint that a career was terminal then Ofsted inspectors must be in the vanguard.

The agenda shared by the US and the European Union is clear: **sovereignty. But as Serbia, Lebanon and Venezuela show, they are**

Imperial ambitions: US and EU rebuffed as

THE UNITED STATES and the European Union are hell bent on interfering in the internal affairs of other countries in order to secure puppet governments that will do their bidding and open up to their capitalists. There are currently three obvious cases that illustrate this.

First there is Serbia. Not satisfied with effectively annexing the Serbian province of Kosovo, now under NATO/EU occupation and with the euro as its currency, the EU supported by the US wants to gobble up Serbia. Prime Minister Kostunica pulled his party out of the Serbian government because of President Tadic's grovelling to Brussels over the issue of Kosovo and potential EU membership.

This led to a general election that the EU hoped would result in their man Tadic winning and bringing Serbia minus Kosovo into the EU. Brussels openly interfered in the election, just as it did in the Ukrainian election during the so called Orange Revolution, funding NGOs to support the EU line and, this time, signing a pre-membership pact with Tadic. In addition, it promised all the goodies that would flow from fast tracked EU membership if only the Serbian workers would vote their sovereignty away.

National sovereignty vs the EU

When Tadic's party won the higher percentage of the vote, but not enough to form a government, the EU applauded, declaring that Serbia would shortly be in the EU. What they didn't bank on was the possibility that all the opposition parties, who were committed to defending national sovereignty and viewed Kosovo as rightly Serbian, would unite and form a majority. This they have done, and have pitted national sovereignty against the imperialism of the EU and US.

Second there is Lebanon. The US has history in Lebanon and has always been defeated in its attempts to control that nation. It is having another go now.

Lebanon has a constitution reflecting the various religious groupings – and that accordingly has always kept the nation divided. Since the civil war and the Israeli

occupation, most of the religious groups and political parties are armed.

Bush's man, Prime Minister Siniora, showed his US credentials as he stood by and watched as the US backed Israel in attacking Lebanon in 2006. Then under the pretext of fighting an Islamic Palestinian group in a refugee camp in Lebanon, Bush channelled \$400 million worth of arms to the Lebanese army. The real reason for the military aid was to enable the Lebanese army to destroy the armed opposition of Hizbollah, Amal and the Lebanese Communist Party in the country.

Meanwhile, the position of President remains vacant. Under the constitution this post must be filled by a Maronite Christian by consensus. But because Bush has told Siniora not to agree to anyone who is not pro US or who has the slightest sympathy with neighbouring Syria, the post remains vacant and the opposition has withdrawn from the cabinet creating a

Picture unavailable for copyright reasons

“So this is the New World Order, bequeathed to us by Tony Blair and his doctrine of interventionism...”

power vacuum.

Siniora was instructed to take on Hizbollah with the promise of more US military support and direct US intervention from its fleet in the Mediterranean. When Siniora started this confrontation, he was met with all the armed opposition groups taking over key areas of the main cities whilst the US sent its warships to the Lebanese coast.

Meanwhile US Presidential candidate McCain called for the bombing of Syria while Bush promised to rush military

nough – destroy any government that stands up for national
are not having it all their own way...

they seek to control around the globe

Hugo Chavez supporters celebrate in the streets surrounding Miraflores Palace as news of the sweeping election victory comes through in December 2006. In revenge, the US is now trying to get Venezuela named as a sponsor of terrorism.

support to Siniora cheered on by the EU.

Fortunately, the Arab League intervened and called all Lebanese parties to mediation in Qatar. Siniora backed off and the US attempt to take over Lebanon was thwarted for now.

Eyeing Venezuelan oil

Third there is Venezuela. Not content with initiating a coup against democratically elected President Hugo Chavez, the US tried to wrest control of the oil rich state of Zulia by financing opposition groups seeking secession from Venezuela.

But the US is now attempting to put Venezuela on its list of countries “sponsoring terrorism”. The US and its proxy in Venezuela’s neighbour Colombia, are claiming that laptops and hard drives “captured” when Colombian troops

entered Ecuador to kill senior Farc Commanders, prove that Venezuela was planning to provide missiles to Farc in Colombia. They claim that Interpol have supported their claim.

In fact, Interpol was asked to examine the laptops and verify if they had been tampered with after being captured by the Colombians. This it verified but no more. Press releases from Colombia and the US ignore this and proclaim Venezuela’s guilt. The EU will surely follow.

The US is also planning to build a huge military base in Colombia close to its border with Venezuela. Fortunately, Venezuela is one of the main suppliers of oil to the US and so is in a strong position to counter this interference.

So this is the New World Order, bequeathed to us by Tony Blair and his doctrine of interventionism, now taken up by Brown who drooled over his host in the White House during his recent visit. Those who thought there may be some change under Brown can now see that there is no difference. Those who thought that the EU was a counterbalance to the US have also been proved wrong. They are two sides of the same coin.

Exposed: the Pentagon’s lie machine

IN 2002 the US government made more than 75 retired military officers the main focus of their public relations push to construct a case for war against Iraq.

The officers appeared on television and radio news shows as military analysts, and penned newspaper op/ed columns. The Pentagon held weekly meetings with them until this April, when David Barstow exposed the programme in the *New York Times*.

The programme was, unsurprisingly, illegal under US law. The White House’s Office of Legal Council determined in 1988 that a statutory prohibition on using appropriated funds for “publicity or propaganda” precluded undisclosed agency funding of advocacy by third-party groups. “Covert attempts to mold

opinion through the undisclosed use of third parties” would break rules against using appropriated funds for “propaganda”.

The Pentagon’s military analyst programme did exactly that.

Recruited by Rumsfeld

It was covert. The 75 officers, who were recruited by Donald Rumsfeld and given talking points to deliver on Fox, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS and MSNBC, were given extraordinary access to White House and Pentagon officials. However, “The access came with a condition. Participants were instructed not to quote their briefers directly or otherwise describe their contacts with the Pentagon.”

It was an attempt to mould American

public opinion. According to the Pentagon’s own internal documents, the military men were considered “message force multipliers” or “surrogates” who would deliver administration “themes and messages” to millions of Americans “in the form of their own opinions”.

It was done ‘through the undisclosed use of third parties.’ In their television appearances, the military analysts did not disclose their ties to the White House, let alone that they were its surrogates. They were used as puppets for the Pentagon. In the words of Robert Bevelacqua, a retired Green Beret and Fox News military analyst, “It was them saying, ‘We need to stick our hands up your back and move your mouth for you.’”

On 1 May, the CPBM-L held its traditional May Day rally and celebration. A speech at the event illustrates the spirit of the evening...and of the future.

Forty years on: a May Day celebration of the CPBM-L



IN CELEBRATING the bold move to found a new party of our working class 40 years ago, we're not having a reminiscence session or wallowing in nostalgia. A vital stream has flowed, influencing our class ever since, breaking away from moribund, social democratic thinking.

There's a rich pre-history, too: born out of previous decades of struggles of ideas that include the dark days of the Second World War where the bright light of class resistance was kept burning and (as I have heard from our veterans) soldiers and airmen vibrantly discussed possibilities of creating a new world, a new Britain. Our biography of our founding chairman, Reg Birch, eloquently



Scottish band Slip the Lead provided music and singing for the May Day celebration. British work songs were supplemented by songs from a visiting Chinese musician.

sums up those decades.

No benefit or achievement for the people of Britain has been won without hard, long demands and struggle. Capitalism has never been benevolent. The anniversary we celebrate today has resonances in such struggles – such as the six decades since our National Health

Service was achieved (I remember it well – I was born in 1948!).

I would not be here today but for those who, over centuries, fought for that, and free education for all, too. Which brings us right up to date, with teachers still vigorously defending their dignity and standards. I would not be presenting you

BADGE OFFER – Referendum now. No to the EU superstate!

DESPITE ALL THE promises, Labour is trying to take us into a European superstate without giving the people of Britain a chance to say what they think.

The so-called Constitutional Treaty is just the despised Constitution in another form, as even Giscard d'Estaing, author of the first attempt, has admitted. In backtracking on the referendum promise Gordon Brown is trying to wipe out a thousand years of independence and sovereignty using his tame party in Parliament.

The will of the British people has been clearly expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll. Now it is time for a poll of a different kind, a referendum. The TUC is already trying to renege on its September vote for a referendum. Don't let power slide over to Brussels.

FIGHT BACK with a Referendum Now badge (actual size, 25mm), available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to "WORKERS".



celebration at Conway Hall, London. This edited extract from a book covers the preceding four decades.

The founding of the Party – with music

with music tonight [see photo, left] had it not been for the winning of free instrumental teaching and the foundation of nationwide funding for arts and music, freeing culture (somewhat) from the direct patronage of capitalism and its rich, controlling benefactors.

Perhaps my own route to joining this Party has parallels with our class and its journey – needing to “get organised”? 1968 was one of those years when disparate militants and aimless activists were shouting loudest. But there were also strong inspirations to resist and to change the world.

The Vietnamese people – led by communists – were pushing back US invasion under relentless bombardment. “Che” Guevara’s murder by US agents had aroused support for socialist Cuba (I composed a musical epitaph which was performed by five students on this very stage in October 1968!).

Martin Luther King’s murder that year showed the anger that could erupt on the streets of such a capitalist power. He had

started to condemn the Vietnam War and had given a memorial oration in praise of W. E. du Bois, a prominent communist.

Later this evening we’ll perform *The Ballad of Joe Hill*, made famous by Paul Robeson back then, which links to the struggle of our own working class. Robeson brought the struggle of his own people and its lessons close to our hearts, especially when he sang such songs with the Welsh male voice choirs (mainly drawn from the ranks of coal miners), performing from London to Clydebank.

Inspiration is not enough

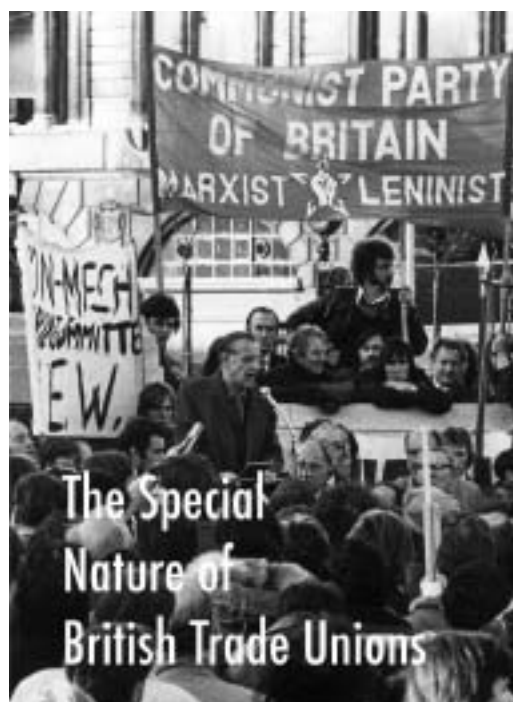
However, such disparate activities and diverse inspirations are not enough in themselves – and when I heard of the formation of a party by industrial workers which would unite all sectors of the working class including students, I knew it was the best course to follow. My early memories of a strong-willed, creative industrial class had started with listening to my grandfather, an engineering

patternmaker (I had a tramdriving uncle, a train driving cousin, and my father was a clerk).

I found that spirit in the party and – just last week – on visiting the picket line at Grangemouth oil refinery, where workers were out in strength, optimistic and taking action for their future and on behalf of the future wellbeing of the whole class.

With that spirit we have survived the collapse of several socialist nations, and a warmongering Labour. I heard a union leader at April’s Scottish TUC Congress in Inverness calling on the movement to “fight for the little people”. That is not how to characterise the working class. On the contrary, it is skilled and strong.

Our responsibility is to harness that strength and now, too, build a resistance to the growing imposition of the European Union and the consequential disintegration of our class and country. Keep up that struggle and we’ll be here to celebrate again in 10 years – a 50th anniversary and beyond.



New pamphlet: The Special Nature of British Trade Unions

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

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

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

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

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

Our fifth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by looking back over four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessor, THE WORKER. This month: the Vietnamese people's fight for national liberation...

1972: the US lashes out in Vietnam – and f



In the 1970s, both Labour and Conservative governments continued to support the US government's wars of aggression against Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. This complicity was one of the most shameful acts in British history.

The Labour government led by Harold Wilson backed the US April 1970 invasion of Cambodia. In December 1970, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath said that bombing North Vietnam would be 'justifiable'; on 13 June 1972 he praised President Nixon's 'unparalleled restraint'; and in December 1972 he backed the US bombing of Hanoi.

But however much the US government escalated the war, however much they spent (an estimated \$500 billion), they could not win. The US Air Force dropped more bombs on Vietnam than on all targets in all history. US forces killed possibly three million Vietnamese. Yet the heroic Vietnamese people decisively defeated the self-styled most powerful state in the world.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the CPBML we reprint below the lead article from *The Worker* of 1 June, 1972.

One War: One Strategy

Protracted War Victorious in Vietnam

“The United States, like a wounded beast, lashes out wildly. The bombing of Hanoi, the mining of Haiphong harbour,

the new attempts to turn Vietnam into a raging inferno are last desperate lunges of a defeated Titan. Capitalism is a dying force. On its deathbed, with the hopelessness of the damned, it determines to take with it to Hell as many human souls as it can garner. Hence the viciousness of the vanquished.

Vietnam has lost some of its sons and daughters in this war. It goes without saying that without readiness for sacrifice the war could not have been fought. Workers, fighters may die but a working class, a people cannot die. Every last barbarity perpetrated by U.S. imperialism has been recorded and will not go unavenged. Blood debts are being repaid in blood; in April alone the Vietnamese people's forces took a toll from their enemy of 90,000 killed, wounded or captured.

For us it is time to take stock of this world-historic achievement of the Vietnamese. Vietnam is the international touchstone of our age – the contemporary classic of confrontation between exploiter and exploited, as instructive for us as the Paris Commune of a century ago. It has been in essence a third world war – a war in which no-one in the world could remain uninvolved and unmoved. And in this war, how have we the British people performed?

Governments, Labour identical with Tory, have tailed obediently three steps behind their Washington masters, excusing and explaining each new enormity.

The working class, with a few honourable exceptions, have tried to look the other way.

The various 'Left' factions in the social democratic circus have acted entirely true to form. The 'Left wing' of the Labour Party and the King Street revisionists, never daring to support the Vietnamese, made little deprecating noises about the bombing of north Vietnam. (The burning alive and bloody murder of people throughout the country was all right – just stop bombing the north). The Trotskyists were happy to support the Vietnamese as long as they were convinced the



Three years later: victory as the South Vietnam Libe

Americans would win – at which point they could condemn the 'treachery' of the Stalinists (i.e. Ho Chi Minh). When it became clear even to them that the Vietnamese were not going to lose they made themselves scarce, found other carrion to crow over.

A whole generation of youth in Britain received their political baptism of fire from the guns of the Mekong Delta. For them Vietnam has been an almost sacred cause, a rock of faith in a shifting, doubtful world. Yet they did not translate their faith into deeds. They did not build for victorious Vietnam a movement to compare with that built by their parents for defeated Spain.

Why? Why have we, the working class of Britain, failed in our internationalist

Looking at the past
THE WORKER. This

ails



Operation Army enters Da Nang City on 29 March 1975

duty? Why have we left it to the Vietnamese people, in the way an earlier generation left it to the Soviet working class, to carry the burden of revolutionary war without our taking the action here that would have complemented their struggle? Can we shake off this social democratic sleeping sickness before it numbs us entirely?

Ho Chi Minh said the only true internationalism is to make revolution in your own country. We rejoice with the Vietnamese people in their victories. We grieve with them in the destruction wrought upon their land. Let us now vow that we the workers of Britain will match their intellect, their heroism and their achievement in the very heartland of the imperialist beast.”

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

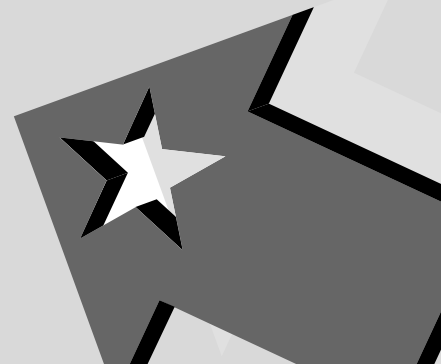
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Back to Front – Who asked us?

‘This “democracy” allows capitalism to flourish while denying workers any say in their future. That’s why they want to spread it across the world...’

WE ARE TOLD our system of government – “democracy” – is so good we must spread it across the world, by force of arms if necessary. Even the International Trade Union Confederation, to which our union movement is affiliated, declares that its mission is to spread democracy across the world. So what’s so good about it that two-thirds of British workers chose not to participate in the recent council elections?

From the Greek, democracy means people, (demos), rule or strength, (kratis), or popular government. Not the sort of label you’d put on Brown’s government that secured 24 per cent of the latest poll – 8.4 per cent of all those entitled to vote in those elections – with even some in Labour predicting support could slump as low as 17 per cent.

In Britain, workers get to vote in a general election once every five years and in council elections every three or so years. EU immigrants can vote while passing through. And that’s it! Not only is there no possibility to get involved in debating and determining policies on important issues, there is no difference between those main parties.

Labour accuses the Tories of having no policies, and the Tories aren’t announce policies because they are immediately stolen by Labour. Our unions dare not oppose a Labour government because they falsely believe they can influence its policies. This is not pluralism, it’s a one-party state.

Very few key policies are determined now by our “elected” government because they are determined by the EU. Yet no amount of tinkering with proportional representation will change anything.

Take the new proposals for care of the elderly, an issue that will ultimately affect every worker. We have been used to the state providing at least a level of basic care to the frail elderly, but because of NHS reforms which

have led to elderly patients discharged without local authority places or funding for them, this is coming to an end with the ultimate privatisation: frail elderly people will be given a lump of cash and abandoned to buy their own care. Never mind the lack of criminal record checks or the bureaucracy of employing someone. When were we ever asked about this? How did “Popular Government” consult the people affected?

And that’s the same for everything. Labour promised not to introduce top-up fees for students, then introduced them. They promised a referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty and then refused one. There is simply no mechanism under this system for working people to influence or control anything.

But this democracy does allow BP and Shell to make £7.5 billion profit in the first three months of 2008 while the rest of us pay £1.20 a litre of petrol, and more. It allows massive bonuses for bankers who gamble with their customers’ money. It allows our industries to be moved overseas or simply closed. It allows private equity investors and “non doms” to pay less tax than their cleaners. It spends £100 million to bail out failing banks. It allows capitalism to flourish while denying workers any say in their future. That’s why they want to spread it across the world.

Imagine as a worker, you genuinely decided who should run your industry, who should stand as a candidate for local councils or government, how the economy should be developed in the interest of the people, how the young, sick and old should be cared for. Imagine this process put workers in control of the direction of the nation and created a real democracy where the people truly exercised rule through strength, the true meaning of democracy. This would be the rule of the workers, or, as Karl Marx described it, the “dictatorship of the proletariat”.

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