

WORKERS

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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ No to AV

A REFERENDUM on changes to how we elect MPs will go ahead on 5 May, after opposition in the Lords collapsed. A Yes vote would replace the First Past the Post (FPTP) system with the Alternative Vote (AV).

Under AV, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If the favourite candidate fails to secure half the vote, the 2nd choices of voters who voted for the least favoured candidate are redistributed – a process which continues until a candidate wins 50 per cent or more.

AV is a pathetic attempt to give a democratic gloss to parliamentary elections in Britain, while the real issue is that in the past three general elections in a row the two main

parties between them persuaded less than half of the electorate to support the two together. The party that “won” got fewer people to vote for it than did not vote at all.

AV is far less democratic than FPTP, which at least follows the principle of one person one vote and has the merit of clarity. Under AV some will effectively have more than one vote as their second etc preferences count.

The mass abstention of the British people in general elections (over a third in 2010) is an embarrassment to reviled politicians who wish to rule “in our name”. Winners under AV will claim over 50 per cent of the vote, even if they get fewer first choices than another candidate.

Hands off!

IMPERIALISM IS trying to seize its chance to redefine nation states in the Middle East. The club of military intervention seems to have been set aside – for now – in favour of economic intervention on an unprecedented scale.

The USA admits it has been assisting “pro-democracy” organisations in some Middle East countries for several years, based on similar activities that it promoted in Eastern Europe and the former Socialist countries. The

Egyptian Army High Command is directly advised (and funded) by the Pentagon.

The US, egged on by Britain, would like to see feudalism replaced with regimes dedicated to free markets. The economic restructuring sought by the USA would be as traumatic as the military intervention in Iraq. The peoples of North Africa and the Middle East must be allowed to decide what they want to happen in their own countries.



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The shrinking economy

THE LATEST figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that the British economy shrank by 0.5 per cent in the last quarter. GDP was 4.4 per cent below the first quarter of 2008; it was the same as in the first quarter of 2006; and it was 8 per cent below the trend line for the last two decades.

Chancellor George Osborne put the fall chiefly down to the snow. However, the ONS said that GDP growth would likely have been flat even without the bad weather. This fall occurred not just before fiscal tightening had seriously begun but when both short-term and long-term interest rates were already extremely low.

Inflation is rising because of the rising prices of imports (as a result of the depreciation of sterling in 2007 and 2008), the soaring prices of energy, and the rise in VAT. As the Governor of the Bank of England stated, "the three factors described – higher import and energy prices and taxes – have squeezed real take-home pay by around 12 per cent. Average real take-home pay normally rises as productivity increases – money wages normally rise faster than prices. But the opposite was true last year, so real wages fell sharply. And given the rise in VAT and other price rises this year, real wages are likely to fall again. As a result, in 2011 real wages are likely to be no higher than they were in 2005."

The government claims that higher net exports and corporate investment will offset the contracting impact of its public spending cuts, falling real household disposable incomes, the highly likely further falls in house prices, and massive household indebtedness.

Meanwhile, December's trade gap in goods was yet another new record – £9.2 billion, up from November's £8.5 billion. These are the kinds of figures we used to see for a whole year, and a bad year at that. The overall deficit in goods and services was £4.8 billion, up from November's £3.9 billion. Some City analysts blamed December's snow, which somehow cut our exports while mysteriously assisting imports.

Public spending should be directed towards investing in British industry, especially in high-growth sectors like nuclear energy, electric cars and high-speed rail, and in R&D, science and technology.

We shouldn't keep bailing out the predatory banks, which take our money and pay it to themselves in ever-huger bonuses and salaries. Labour sold the pass by not requiring the banks to guarantee that they would lend and that they would not pay absurd bonuses. The Labour government, with its PFIs, academy schools, tuition fees, marketising of the NHS, etc, paved the way for this savage ConDem government.

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

CITY

The bonuses are back

LAST YEAR, Goldman Sachs' profits fell by 38 per cent. Yet its head of UK and Europe, Michael Sherwood, is getting a 60 per cent rise on his 2009 bonus, up to £9 million. Its CEO, Lloyd Blankfein, is getting a 380 per cent pay increase, up to \$2 million, plus \$12.6 million of stock. The shares amount to a 42 per cent rise from the \$8.9 million all-stock bonus he got in 2009. In the world of finance capital, nothing succeeds like failure.

RETAIL

The high streets are emptying

THE PROPORTION of empty shops on Britain's high streets has risen to 14.5 per cent, compared with 12 per cent at the end of 2009, according to research from the Local Data Company. The highest vacancy rate in Britain is Margate with 37.4 per cent. The worst large and medium towns respectively were Rotherham at 28.2 per cent and Morecambe at 30 per cent.

SOVIET UNION

Celebrating treachery

BORED ON 30 March 2011? You could have attended the gala performance for Mikhail Gorbachev's 80th birthday. Billed as "The man who changed the world", he was inspired by Thatcher when Soviet Ambassador to Britain to become the architect responsible for undermining the Soviet Union. It was in London: a traitor to his country, class and party, he did not dare put such a show on in Russia.

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Powers to Brussels

THE COALITION government has opted in to 8 of the EU's 13 new laws on crime, justice and immigration proposed or adopted since the general election. All of these shift power to Brussels, including the controversial European Investigation Order and a new IT Agency to oversee the EU's vast crime and immigration databases.

Out now

THE DAILY EXPRESS has delivered to Downing Street a petition with 373,000 signatories calling for us to get out of the EU. The government has ended all pretence that it wants to take back powers from Brussels.

Freeloaders United

EU FOREIGN Minister Baroness Catherine Ashton pays the lower EU tax rate on her earnings. While the lower rates are automatic, EU officials can choose to pay the difference between that and national tax rates, giving the balance to the exchequer in their home country, but most, including Ashton, do not.

About a sixth of MEPs check in for work early on Friday mornings, in order to get the £258 daily allowance, before leaving for long weekends. Conservative MEP Robert Sturdy and Labour MEP Peter Skinner were both filmed signing in to work on 11 February and then arriving at the Eurostar, in a chauffeur-driven car, to catch the 8:29 a.m. train to London.

Stop the funding

COUNCILLORS ON Medway Council in Kent unanimously backed a motion urging their local MPs to vote against any increase in funding for Brussels while local authorities had their budgets cut.

Costly and useless

THE EU'S police training mission in Afghanistan has achieved very little in the past four years. About 70 per cent of Afghan police still cannot read or write so they cannot process basic paperwork. The mission will cost 54.6 million euros for the year 2010-11.

The no work zone

YOUTH unemployment in the eurozone is now 20.4 per cent, up from 14.6 per cent in February 2008, before the start of the economic crisis.



After the recently departed Chief Executive called for staff to give up a day's leave so they could fund the proposed new St Helier Hospital in Surrey, Unison staff and children demonstrate to ensure that the new hospital is not only adequately funded but remains within the NHS.

Cuts deluge London NHS

FEBRUARY SAW 2,200 redundancies in London's Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authority – and then saw announcements of 1,500 jobs losses in three key acute hospital trusts – Barts and The London, Kingston, and St Georges. Job losses will include doctors, nurses and consultants. The Chief Executive of St Georges is quite clear: the Trust has to manage on a 25 per cent reduction in income. So much for Cameron's ring-fencing of NHS funding.

Before the election, Cameron, Clegg and Kingston LibDem MP Edward Davey all campaigned to stop cuts at Kingston. Davey set up a "Save the Kingston" campaign which was exposed by THE DAILY MIRROR as fake: Kingston was never under threat from the Strategic Health Authority or previous Labour cuts. The local LibDem Borough Council Scrutiny Committee unanimously voted against cuts in 2010.

Now Davey vehemently promotes the cuts. When Cameron visited Kingston in 2010 he said he supported "this hospital and the excellent maternity unit". The draft plans include cutting 22 consultants, 214 nurses, midwives and health visitors.

UNIVERSITIES

Glasgow campaign

SINCE THEIR day of action in December, students and staff at one of Scotland's biggest universities have been building a strong campaign of action against the University of Glasgow's plans to cut £20 million to cope with their funding reduction.

The latest protest saw over 2,000 staff and students marching on 16 February and the occupation of the popular Research Club, which is being closed down. The actions have spread to several other institutions such as the formation of an anti-cuts action network at the music college (the RSAMD).

The university's cuts would mean axing several departments and abandoning the

university's Department of Adult and Continuing Education. This vital link between the local community and higher education attracts over 5,000 adult learners every year.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Funding Council has ordered a 10 per cent reduction in college budgets this year alone. Speaking for those who work in the sector, Unison's City of Glasgow branch officer said: "Cutting funding for higher and further education will not help rebuild the economy. These cuts will not only affect staff and students – they will affect employers, families and entire communities. We want to work with colleges to protect ourselves and ensure there is no need for forced job cuts; however, if compulsory redundancies are imposed we will not rule out industrial action."

Out of office, into clover

LABOUR'S LOVE affair with the City is sealed with big money. Ex-City minister Lord Myners has accepted a City post, as chairman of Autonomous Research, a stock analysis business. He is also tipped to chair Justice, the ironically named cash shell that hopes to shake up Britain's financial services with a £1 billion to £5 billion takeover.

Lord Mandelson has an advisory role at Lazard, at £200,000 a year for two days a month. Former Brown aide Baroness Shriti Vadera has non-executive roles at BHP Billiton and AstraZeneca.

Former health secretary Patricia Hewitt has advisory roles at Alliance Boots and BUPA. She will also become the "special adviser" to Cinven, one of the world's biggest private equity companies, which last year paid £1.4 billion for BUPA's 25 private hospitals. While Health Secretary, she championed the NHS's use of private facilities to treat patients, carry out operations and reduce waiting lists. She is expected to get more than £100,000 for the posts. In 2009, she got £159,575 on top of her MP's pay in the previous 12 months. She was paid up to £12,500 a month as a senior independent director for BT, and an undisclosed amount from city bankers Barclays Capital.

Former Defence Minister Adam Ingram got £159,800 last year from a chairmanship, a director's job and other paying consultancies.

Former education secretary Ruth Kelly, who also played a key role in implementing Brown's useless financial regulatory system, now leads HSBC's strategy unit – a £200,000-a-year job in the City – less than two years after she quit the Cabinet to "spend more time with her family".

EDUCATION

Conflict of interest row

OFSTED'S INCOMING chair has become embroiled in a conflict of interest row after it emerged that she will continue to advise an academies chain despite her new role. Sally Morgan, a former aide to Tony Blair, joins the board of the schools watchdog next month. Morgan is to continue in her

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Attack on council press

THE GOVERNMENT intends to ignore both local councils and the House of Commons Select Committee on Communities and Local Government over local democratic engagement. Both have reacted in dismay to the government's decision to limit direct communication by local authorities with their local citizens via free newspapers to only four times a year.

When journalists meet in Southport at the beginning of April for the NUJ Delegate Meeting, they will have before them a motion calling for the defence of council newspapers. The union's Public Relations and Information Industrial Council rejects the argument that council publications are damaging the local "freebie" type newspaper. In fact, the claim that advertising revenue has been hit is refuted by those newspapers themselves.

When Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, compares local council newspapers to

role as adviser to Ark, a charity set up by millionaire hedge fund capitalists, which runs a chain of eight academies and aims to expand to twelve.

She has advised Ark's global board since she left Downing Street in 2005. She is also governor and chair of the curriculum committee at the Globe Academy in Brixton, London – one of the schools it runs.

"PRAVDA and Soviet style" propaganda, it reveals his real thinking. The Select Committee responded by viewing the new centralising code as having negative implications for local democracy.

"We fear the impact of his onslaught will lead to important information about the impact of government cuts being concealed and curtail open debate," says a motion for the NUJ meeting.

CHILDCARE

Cost rockets

THE COST of childcare increased by twice as much as the average pay rise last year, according to research from the Daycare Trust.

An average nursery place costs £5,028 a year for a child under two in England, a 4.8 per cent increase during 2010, more than twice the 2.1 per cent rate of wage growth.

Apparently, parents in Britain spend an average of one third of their net income on child care, more than in any other industrialised country.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MARCH

Thursday 3 March

"Health – A front line in the fight for Britain"

7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Are we going to allow MPs to vote through the legislation which formally consents to the destruction of the NHS? Public meeting organised by the CPBML. All welcome.

Saturday 26 March

"March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice"

Assemble Victoria Embankment, 11am to march to a rally in Hyde Park

For more information, look for updates on www.tuc.org.uk/events. Details of travel from Scotland down to this national demonstration can be seen on the Scottish Trades Union Congress site: www.thereisabetterway.org

PENSIONS

Indexation scam

PUBLIC SECTOR pension indexation will change from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) on 1 April 2011. This means a direct 15 per cent reduction in purchasing power for pensioners over the following 10 years. The pay freeze for these workers will permanently depress the value still further.

The change is a direct result of the Hutton Report into public sector pensions, commissioned by the Coalition government last year. The headlines were about false claims that these were "gold-plated" and impoverished other workers. But pensions for all workers are under threat too.

The aspirations and interests of 14 million British workers and their families will be subordinated to those of the class responsible for near collapse of the banking system so that it can be re-capitalised at our expense. More "big con" than "big society".

Outside the public sector the Department for Work and Pensions has published an impact assessment of the cost implications for up-rating all benefits, including pensions, in line with the lower CPI as opposed to RPI. It shows that the value of these benefits would fall by £83.6 billion over the next 15 years. That's 8.4 per cent more than the December 2010 estimate of £76.66 billion.

Benjamin Franklin is often quoted on tax: “In this world nothing certain, except death and taxes.” That isn’t true for the capitalists

Tax doesn't have to be taxing – if you are t

CHANCELLOR OF the Exchequer George Osborne will deliver his Budget on Wednesday 23 March amid the concern of most British people about what the future holds. Higher taxes, less job security, reduced welfare benefits, rising prices and fewer public services are widely expected.

The ruling class however has a different outlook. It sees that this government, like the last one, is willing to meet its demands. It expects a cap on wages even with rising inflation, restrictions on trade unions and above all to be itself insulated from the effects of the economic crisis.

Changes in taxation provide evidence that the coalition government has only the interest of capitalism as its guide. All else is lies and deceit.

Cameron, Clegg and the rest brandish slogans like clubs. They think workers are too stupid to see what is going on or too timid to do anything about it. Neither is true, though many would be surprised at the extent of the shift in the tax burden from businesses and the wealthy to workers and their families.

VAT went up in January, national insurance will go up in April – for workers these are unavoidable. Taxes on companies and wealthy individuals are another matter. Corporation tax is due to fall by 4 to 24 per cent. More importantly much of it can be avoided quite legally, and often is. Some of this is open and well known – such as reducing VAT and betting tax by the use of havens like Jersey or Gibraltar. An argument runs that this is good for us: it is “efficient” and keeps costs down – possibly true, but only for the companies and not their consumers.

In February Barclays Bank announced worldwide profits for 2009 of £11.6 billion on which it paid about £1.3 billion tax. But the proportion of tax in Britain was around 10 per cent – £113 million, which is completely out of line with its level of activity here. Barclays also sold its money manager offshoot, Barclays Global Investors, for over £10 billion, with a net profit on the sale of nearly £6 billion. Thanks to generous rules introduced by Gordon Brown, the tax on that was £200

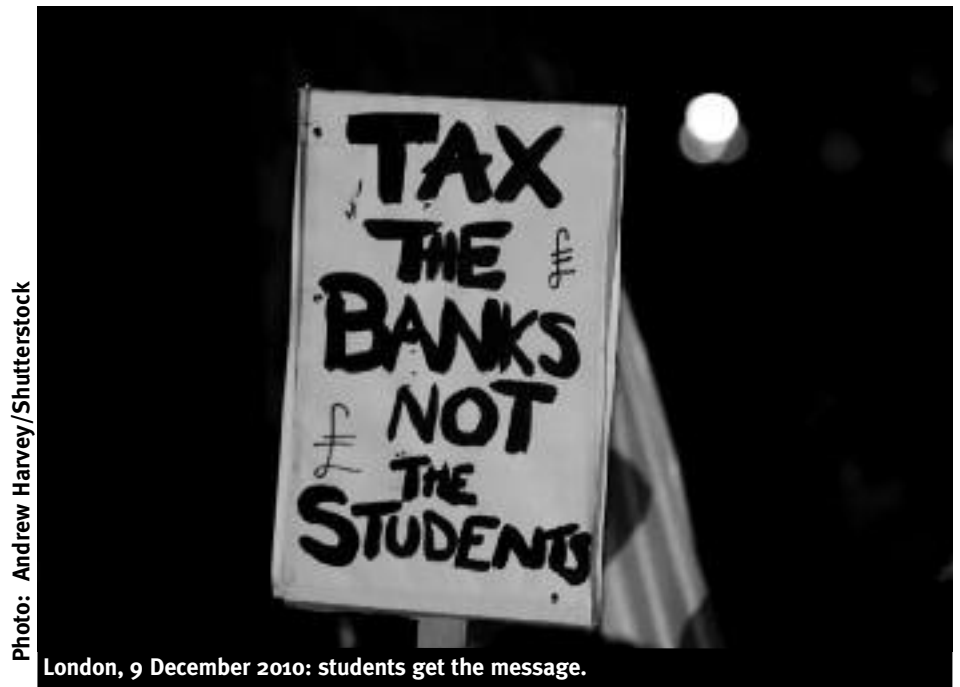


Photo: Andrew Harvey/Shutterstock

London, 9 December 2010: students get the message.

million, just 3 per cent of the profit.

Late last year it emerged that a dispute between Her Majesty’s Revenue & Customs and Vodafone had been settled for £1.2 billion, far less than many professional observers thought likely. The tax bill is thought to have been sliced by passing transactions through a Luxembourg subsidiary. Allegations were made about a too-soft approach by the Revenue and that the outcome was influenced by the position of the Vodafone finance director as one of George Osborne’s corporate tax advisors. But why they were using such offshore arrangements at all?

These two companies are not unusual – it’s just they have come to light. What we can see shows how multinationals can move their affairs around to minimise the tax they pay. And even that is not enough.

Britain: tax haven for the rich

Nearly all developed countries have tax rules that attempt to prevent or minimise the loss of tax in this way. At the moment Britain has such rules, but the government plans to let large business have an exemption so no tax is paid on earnings

from foreign branches. They will still be able to claim overseas expenses of course – and the financial sector will be the most able to take advantage of the change.

There will be knock-on effects if the plan goes ahead. Banks and insurance companies will have a large financial incentive to move head offices out of Britain and route profits through tax havens. Any that do not follow suit will be at a significant commercial disadvantage. Other countries and sectors will then want to join in. The result will be many fewer jobs in Britain and less tax for public spending too.

Barclays chief executive Bob Diamond appeared at the parliamentary Treasury Select Committee the week before its low tax bill became public. He said that it was time to stop bashing bankers, as if somehow unfair criticism was hurting them.

When the tax figure became public his company claimed that they contribute £2 billion in tax, but did not point out that most of that was in payroll taxes, in other words deductions from their workers’ salaries. Nor did it admit that the most highly paid individuals have ways of

can be said to be
t class.

The ruling class

avoiding tax through complex legal schemes that mirror those used by companies.

Some of this has been exposed and there are suspicions about other ways companies avoid paying tax. But it is hard to find out more about what is happening, because companies are allowed to hide information about where they pay tax.

You can find out the pay of senior civil servants or hospital administrators, but you cannot find out even basic information about the tax contribution of most well known companies operating in Britain. We are deluged by superficial “transparency” initiatives about crime figures or school performance, but banks and others are not compelled to report country-by-country on where they make their money and where they pay tax.

Propping up profits

The public purse is used to prop up capitalist profits, but never the other way round. The classic defence is that companies must act in the interests of their shareholders and so must indulge do everything legal to minimise their tax bill. That argument is kept quiet when taxes on workers are raised to pay off the public money used to bail out banks and deal with the outcome of the financial crisis.

Even Barclays (which did not take a government bailout) gained from support for the banking system in 2008.

Alternatively companies argue that what is good for them is good for the country; even if it seems “unfair” they don’t pay much tax. That is untrue in many ways – it ignores the international way that capitalism uses tax advantages. Ireland and other European countries have tried low tax regimes to attract investment, and they are abused and abandoned whenever it suits the “investors”.

Meanwhile, the people living in tax havens like Cayman or the British Virgin Islands see very little of the vast wealth that flows through their offshore financial regimes. At worst it encourages corruption and criminality to protect that status. And it distorts the economy of countries where profits are generated. ■

MAY DAY MEETINGS



Sunday 1 May, 2 pm

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

Sunday 1 May, 7.30 pm

**Speakers, music and
discussion
Word-Power Books,
43 West Nicolson St
Edinburgh EH8 9DB**

PLAN FOR BRITAIN: MAKE IT AND GROW IT HERE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another ballot shows overwhelming support from cabin crew at BA for a strike. A member tells WORKERS why...

The facts behind the BA dispute

ON 9 FEBRUARY the union Unite announced that for a second time in this long running dispute a fresh strike ballot of British Airways cabin crew would have to take place. The reason, it said, was a legal blitz by the company, which was deliberately upping the ante by once again seeking an injunction rather than engaging in genuine negotiation.

In January, for a second time, members of the British Airlines Stewards and Stewardesses Association (BASSA, part of Unite) voted decisively: nearly 80 per cent in favour of industrial action. BA clearly failed to understand the power of union members at the workplace, irrespective of divisions at the top and a low turnout in leadership elections. But, as the new general secretary Len McCluskey pointed out, there is usually a high turnout on workplace issues such as shop steward elections and voting on pay rises and industrial action.

By prolonging this dispute, BA has already lost £150 million (Unite has spent a great deal, too – maybe as much as £10 million). The company now intends to use the 1992 Trade Union Act to declare action based on the previous ballot unlawful. Under the Act, staff can be dismissed if they walk out for the same reason more than three months after they first went on strike. Staffing cuts were one of the reasons for action in 2010, and when Unite happened to mention this on their website, BA saw its opportunity and pounced.

Ingenuity

But in this cat-and-mouse game, management has failed to take into account the ingenuity of the workforce, who recognise that in a protracted struggle such as this, tactics need to change. They are now openly discussing a more guerrilla type of action, such as working to rule, instead of the long walkouts of 2010. Meanwhile, they have agreed to mediation at ACAS.

A significant background factor is the BA merger with Iberia, finalised in January. As part of the International Airlines Group, the new company seeks to

Pic: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com



BASSA strikers picket in March 2010.

compete with low-cost carriers, and there is a question mark over pensions as well as current pay and standards of service.

A member of cabin crew, who cannot be named for fear of victimisation, writes tellingly from the heart of the matter, and with an understanding of how the economic situation is being exploited to drive down wages and conditions:

“Here are the basic facts. BA had a long-standing agreement with unions re cabin crew numbers being 5 or 4 on short haul and wanted to reduce these numbers (and similarly with long haul flights). Not being able to reach an agreement with Unite, BA went ahead and reduced the numbers regardless.

“They also planned the introduction of a new ‘fleet’ serving both long and short haul flights. The new fleet crew members would be on a contract giving a salary of approximately one half of current staff flying the same routes and they would have fewer rest hours and days off.

“In my contract there is a ‘redeployment’ clause, which states that if BA finds that [an employee’s] job for whatever reason no longer exists, they must find [the employee] a similar job within the company with similar pay. BA wants to replace this with a clause stating that the employee has 52 weeks within which to find him/herself a new job in the company beyond which time he is on his own.

“These were the reasons for the strike. The crew numbers were reduced, the strikers had their staff travel privileges removed. Staff travel privilege is where a member of staff (plus a limited number of family members) can fly at 10 per cent of the full tariff plus tax. This means typically a £80 return flight to Venice [standby]. After 10 years service, the cabin-crew member has 1 free flight (+ taxes) a year. Availability for seats goes by seniority, position in the company and years of service. Employees of BA who went on strike have now had their privileges reinstated but with the seniority as of July 2010, as if they had started work on that date.

Sacked

“During the strike period several BA strikers were suspended and then sacked [for taking time with union duties]... About 18 people moreover were suspended for comments made on Facebook, which were pro strike or Union. The new fleet has been up and running since November 2010. Given that BA has shown no compunction in breaking past agreements, the fear amongst crew is that their intention is to force ‘old contract’ crew to accept the new contract.

“... [In the past] there was a strong feeling of pride in working for a company that offered a good service. The divisions in the company started back around 12 years ago with a strike for the same reasons: working conditions were worsened and a new contract was introduced with lower pay and different conditions. [...] The services BA offer are now of an inferior quality compared with the past, for example, no food on flights under 2 hours and fewer crew and the atmosphere amongst crew and between crew and management is one of fear and suspicion.

“BA has used bullying tactics, supported by governments and even the legal system ... I refer to the judge who ruled the first attempted strike illegal because of the current economic situation. Since when did legality depend on the economic crisis?” ■

Last month the largest pharmaceutical company in the world decided its profits needed a boost – by closing one of Britain’s premier research institutes...

Blow to Britain as Pfizer closes Kent labs

NOTHING MAKES finance capitalists happier than a good spot of destruction. On 1 February, shares in Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical company, soared by 5.5 per cent. The reason: its announcement that it is to close its giant research and development site in Sandwich, Kent, as part of a reduction in spending to offset expected reductions in revenue. The decision “should be met with a sigh of relief”, said an analyst for Credit Suisse.

What if a company took the opposite point of view? Two days after Pfizer made its announcement, rival drug company Merck announced a different strategy, one of investing in research. “I am not blind to what investors want us to do. They want us to invest in prudent ways, in ways that actually drive return on investment and productivity,” said its CEO. “But as a company we believe that the only sustainable strategy in the health-care environment that we’re in is real innovation that makes a difference to patients and payers.” Its shares promptly fell by 2.2 per cent.

Pfizer used to be an innovative pharmaceutical company. But with new products thin on the ground and patent protection running out on profitable drugs like Lipitor, which combats cholesterol (sales £427 million in Britain in 2007), it seems to have decided around a decade ago to buy innovative companies rather than come up with ideas itself. It started buying, and buying big – using borrowed money.

Last October it bought King Pharmaceuticals for \$3.6 billion – but that was a small purchase in comparison with what went before. In 2000 it bought Warner-Lambert for \$115 billion, following that up three years later with the acquisition of Pharmacia for \$60 billion, and along the way turning itself into Britain’s largest pharmaceutical company and the largest supplier of drugs to the NHS.

In 2009 came another huge purchase, Wyeth, for \$68 billion, but to complete it Pfizer drained its own cash reserves by \$22.5 billion and took on bank loans of a



Pfizer’s new plant in Belgium. In November 2010 it announced it was moving its veterinary research from Sandwich, Kent, to Belgium.

further \$22.5 billion, saddling itself with debt (the remaining \$23 billion was financed with a share issue). At the time, one of the prices to be paid was the loss of 20,000 jobs around the world. Now – surprise, surprise – it needs to save even more money, and is cutting deep into R&D across the globe.

Between them, Wyeth and Pfizer spent \$11 billion on global R&D in 2008. In 2012, that figure will be cut by almost 30 per cent, down to \$8 billion. Apart from Sandwich, around 1,000 jobs are to go in Connecticut as well – though more money is going to Pfizer’s China Research and Development Center in Shanghai. (China is a hot destination for pharmaceutical giants. In 2009 Novartis announced \$1 billion investment in a biomedical research centre in Shanghai, to be the company’s third largest R&D institute in the world.)

Devastation

Unite, the union, issued a statement from national officer Linda McCulloch saying, “This is absolutely devastating news for the local economy.” She also pointed out that Pfizer is the biggest employer in the area. “The staff at this site are at the

cutting edge of developing life-saving drugs. These are exactly the sort of jobs we need to keep in this country. Unite will be doing everything possible to save these jobs and seek alternatives to closure.”

For Sandwich, the closure will be a body blow, with the loss of 2,400 highly skilled jobs directly and another 2,400 indirectly, in contractors. The historic town has a population of only 6,800, though of course many Pfizer staff live outside it. But it is also a body blow for Britain: the Sandwich laboratories house the greatest concentration of pharmaceutical researchers in the country.

The pharmaceutical industry is essential to the future of Britain. It employed around 72,000 people in 2009, of whom 27,000 worked in R&D (though that figure was 5,000 down on the tally in 2007). But its importance far exceeds the number of the workforce. It accounts for £14.5 billion in exports, and made up the bulk of a trade surplus in medicinal products of £9 billion in 2009 – greater

Continued on page 10

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than any other industrial sector. Last year, for example, it accounted for 24.9 per cent of all British exports to the US, according to the US Census Bureau.

In 2007 pharmaceutical companies spent £4.5 billion on R&D in Britain. To put that into context, that was 28 per cent of all British industry investment in R&D.

But that figure must surely be set to fall: AstraZeneca announced on 1 March 2010 that it will close its Charnwood research centre near Loughborough – after the university the second-largest employer in the area – with the loss of 1,200 jobs, as well as a smaller facility in Cambridge. In February last year, GlaxoSmithKline announced major job losses in Britain as part of a global reduction of 4,000 staff, with hundreds of jobs to go in its plant in Harlow.

The giant companies are pinning their hopes on a new paradigm in drug development, known as “open innovation”. Instead of developing new ideas in-house, they think they can source innovative new medicines from small biotechnology companies. They don’t actually know if that strategy will work, but they do know that any saving on their own R&D costs translates directly into more money – short term – for shareholders. And the short term is where Pfizer is looking.

Pfizer calls its strategy “Invest to Win”, allegedly focusing on six disease areas, but increasingly it is looking as though winning profits is all it is concerned about. It has still to live down its admission in 2009 that it had illegally promoted drugs for uses that were not approved by the regulatory authorities. That resulted in a \$2.3 billion fine in the US, described by BBC Online as “the largest healthcare fraud settlement in the history of the Department of Justice”.

Protection

Pfizer’s presence in Britain began in 1952 with the opening of a factory in Folkestone, as a direct result of what is now sneeringly termed “protectionism”. It had several antibiotics it wanted to sell to



Pharmaceutical research is a central part of a modern industrial economy.

the NHS, but government regulations limited the bulk importation of medical materials and restricted the sale of medicines not made in Britain. So Pfizer had to set up a plant here.

Two years later, Pfizer needed to expand the factory, and found its present site in Sandwich. The Folkestone site was consolidated into Sandwich in 1960, by which time it employed more than 2,000 workers in Kent. By the end of 1970s, according to Pfizer's own information, the Sandwich laboratory was the largest research facility owned by an American company operating outside the US.

Success

A string of research successes followed, including: Mansil (for malaria), Feldene (for rheumatism); the antifungal Diflucan; Cadusa (for hypertension); and most famously Viagra. These drugs not only improved health but also boosted British industry and employment. Being developed here, they were also more likely to come onto the market quicker, benefiting British patients more quickly. Istin, for example, offering relief from angina and hypertension with a single daily dose, went on sale in Britain first.

Naturally, the Sandwich staff affected were the last to know. Among those who

received early warning was the European Commission in Brussels. Pfizer has huge markets in the European Union, and likes to keep good relations with it. The reaction was typically vague and useless. Research Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn said it was a "wake-up call" for policymakers, adding, "I'm sure I'll be given lots of ideas about things to do." One of her favourite policymakers is actually based in the Sandwich laboratories. Gill Samuels, Pfizer's head of science policy and scientific affairs, sits on the European Research Area Board, set up by the Commissioner to advise on research policy.

Business minister Vince Cable was also vague. He called the decision "extremely disappointing", and said he would be having meetings with Pfizer ("as a matter of urgency", naturally) to discuss alternative uses for the Sandwich site. So much for defending British interests! The government has set up a "task force" to look at possible alternatives. It is set to report early in March. There is talk that the University of Kent might open a Technology Innovation Centre there, but in terms of impact that would be a far cry from Pfizer's immensely influential laboratories.

Geoghegan-Quinn used the

announcement to call for increased government investment in R&D. Nowhere does she mention policy action to force companies to invest – after all, that would interfere with commercial freedom and the single market. And yet were it not for postwar policies designed to protect and foster the pharmaceutical industry, Pfizer wouldn't be in Sandwich at all.

Make it here

If our basic industries are to survive, we need long-term policies to protect them. How about saying that companies can't sell in bulk to the NHS unless they research and manufacture in Britain? It would break EU law. It would go against everything governments, Labour and Conservative, have been doing for decades. It would take us back to ... well, to 1952, and a Conservative government. But wiser this time – it would be a start in reversing the industrial abandonment of Britain.

A week after Pfizer's announcement, the Saga Group said it was planning to take on up to 1,000 workers for its "healthcare business", based in East Kent. Goodbye industry, hello service sector. That's the trend in Britain today, but if allowed to continue it is a trend that will wreck the country. ■



CPBML/Workers Public Meeting, London

Thursday 3 March, 7.30 pm

Health – A front line in the fight for Britain

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion
Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

Are we going to allow MPs to vote through the legislation which formally consents to the destruction of the NHS? Only people who are willingly blocking their ears can fail to understand the fundamental nature of this attack on the health service. Everybody welcome.

Secrecy and spin are the means for pushing forward a trade policy. That's no surprise, given that the policy involves undermining workers. No wonder it's being done in secret. No wonder information is being

Mode 4: How to bring skilled workers into

IT HASN'T BEEN big news in Britain – it's been bigger news in India – but the European Union is currently negotiating a Free Trade Agreement. Not just being negotiated: it's being "fast-tracked", in the jargon of the European Commission, which means that there is less time for scrutiny.

Free Trade Agreements are good for globalised companies, allowing them to break down tariff barriers. So what does India want from the European Union? Its sole demand – one that globalised companies are only too happy to agree to – is for something called "Mode 4 access" to EU countries.

Four modes of destruction

Cross-border trade in services has been divided into four "modes" in the international trade agenda. Mode 1 is services bought from abroad, for instance via the Internet. It is Mode 2 when buyers move across borders, for instance students going overseas to buy study programmes. When corporations set up in another country, this is Mode 3.

Mode 4 is the temporary movement of skilled service workers to another country.

It allows workers to be physically moved across borders on the pay and conditions they get in their home country, in this case India. Its inclusion in the international trade agenda allows transnational corporations to profit from cross-border wage differentials, national insurance exemptions, tax juggling and other benefits of "flexible labour". It is clearly of huge commercial importance – but at whose cost?

Calls in Britain and in the European Parliament for information receive spun responses that Mode 4 "intra-corporate transferees" are temporary and thus "not migration"; and that "service suppliers" are not supplying "labour" or "workers". But Mode 4 access will displace workers and devastate working conditions here as managers take up cheap migrant labour in "onshore outsourcing", for which Mode 4 is a perfect fit.

Leaked documents from another EU member state government show that other countries have consulted with organised labour and have opted for very strict limits on their Mode 4 commitments for this trade deal. But not Britain. This

government, like the previous one, is willing to take the lion's share of the resulting labour influx into the European Union: 40 per cent of the total.

There have been no open consultations in Britain on the government's Mode 4 commitment, only secrecy. Instead, the government's recent exemption of intracorporate transferees from any supposed immigration "cap" serves to pave the way for an unlimited Mode 4 offer from Britain. So the commitment to 40 per cent is not a limit. It's actually "40 per cent or more".

This means that Mode 4 commitments will impact disproportionately on British workers while allowing other, more wary, member states to vote for the Treaty. The European Commission admits that this notionally EU agreement is actually 85 per cent a British deal, but its existence has been kept off the screen here and the Mode 4 aspect is deliberately very secret indeed.

One example: last July's huge government "trade" visit to India, fronted by David Cameron and Vince Cable, failed to mention this deal to the British media posse.

A good time for bad news

In February, while media attention was distracted by Project Merlin and bankers' bonuses, the government presented a Trade White Paper. Mentioned in only one paragraph of the Paper, Mode 4 is couched in the language of "brightest and best", and "competitiveness". But even now, under national labour migration provision, some of those "brightest and best" intra-corporate transferees are paid below the minimum wage, with "expenses" added to bump them up on paper.

Only the White Paper's supposed support for small and medium-sized enterprises – actually very weak – was selected for press attention. In fact the trade agenda gives a privileged status to transnational corporations to the detriment of national firms and small companies, particularly with Mode 4. World Trade Organisation literature emphasises that

Meet the Party

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

M The next meeting dates will be: Thursday 3 March 2011 (on the NHS), 7.30pm; and Thursday 23 June 2011 (theme to be announced nearer the date), 7.30pm. Interspersed with these public meetings, the Party runs regular political study and discussion groups for interested workers.

M The Party's annual London May Day meeting will be held on Sunday 1 May 2011, in the Main Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, 2.00pm start with speakers, food, bar and interesting political discussion.

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



Policy that is formulated to benefit City of London financiers. Workers with cheap graduate labour from outside the EU. No log withheld. No wonder the lie machine is on full throttle.

Britain despite an immigration 'cap'

only transnational corporations can use the cheap labour mechanism of Mode 4.

The progress of trade deals through the EU mechanism is secretly manipulated at every point. Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) officials, who go fortnightly for trade policy meetings in Brussels, are instructed by City of London financial services firms and banks in London meetings. Despite the enormous bearing these meetings have on the British economy – on trade policy and on the lives of British people – no records of these meetings, “private” in every sense, are available. Similarly no minutes are available for the Commission’s Brussels trade policy meetings, so we can only find out our government’s input to EU policy anecdotally via other member states.

It’s different for transnational financial corporations. They have privileged access to information enabling them to influence trade policy.

In the middle of February the non-governmental organisation Corporate Europe Observatory launched legal action against the European Commission for giving privileged access to its policy-making process to industry lobby groups in relation to the EU/India Free Trade Agreement. The Observatory is demanding transparency. A letter written by then-EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson in 2008 is a key part of their evidence.

Negotiations for bilateral trade deals such as the EU/India Free Trade Agreement are secret until effectively finalised, or “frozen”. They are formally finalised when the European Parliament gives final formal assent. But a pattern of provisionally implementing trade agreements before this stage shows how even that slim semblance of scrutiny is being bypassed.

Because of the European Parliament’s huge agenda, the committee stage, in this case the International Trade Committee (INTA), is vital, and consequently a key site for secrecy and trickery. A confidant of financial services interests in London is in a key position on this Committee, and “academic” support from the think-tank ECIPE helps agreements to slip through.



Mandelson addresses EU-India trade talks in Finland, 2008.

Photo: Confederation of Finnish Industries EK

This academic advice, which denies the effects on workers inside the European Union, comes from the London School of Economics staff who run ECIPE.

When Conservative MEP Sajjad Karim presented to the INTA the EU/India trade document that would subsequently go to the European Parliament for approval, he omitted to mention Mode 4 or the fact that India would not sign up without it. But Mode 4 had been the first and main item in that committee session and was included, albeit briefly, in the written document.

Downplaying services

The common misapprehension that trade is mainly agriculture and manufactured goods is encouraged. The services part of the trade agenda, despite its importance to economies, its inclusion of banking and financial services, and its underpinning of all other trade, is deliberately downplayed.

At the last high-profile meeting of trade ministers (the “Doha” round) in Geneva in July 2008, the report of the meeting on services was issued only after the world’s media had left Geneva. And when the next Doha meeting was proposed, World Trade Organisation head Pascal Lamy specifically advised states to avoid a media circus and any mention of

services.

The trade agenda is not reported in Britain by the BBC, even from its Brussels office, despite its underlying importance to domestic policy-making – journalists seem to find trade too “technical”, which effectively deters media interest. Member state parliaments lost veto rights on trade agreements in the Lisbon Treaty – which further decreases the chance of trade agreement reporting in Britain.

Mode 4 is inevitably described as “sensitive” in the trade context. This is a code signal that as public knowledge could change the dynamics, public mention is to be avoided. Spin language of “competitiveness” reinforces the overriding importance of individual company efficiency, logically and legitimately advanced through using the cheapest labour from wherever. Labour is the main input cost in services.

Information is an urgent priority. British trade unions can and should counter the secrecy of the unreported trade agenda and how it will affect British workers. The wariness of those who – wrongly – consider it a “Left” agenda not to discuss migrant labour has supported this secrecy, allowing legal commitments that will undermine workers’ rights, including for future generations. ■

The first jolt to the ruling classes' arrogant belief that only they came in 1871 with the uprising of the Paris Commune...

1871: The 72 days of the Paris Commune

IT GREW out of a war and a siege. In the summer of 1870, Emperor Napoleon III of France waged an unnecessary war with Prussia. The Prussians soon proved to be a superior military force and invaded France. By September 1870, the French troops had surrendered and the Emperor, taken prisoner, abdicated.

The Parisian crowds – in disgust – proclaimed a republic. Civilians were called up to serve in the National Guard, a part-time citizens' militia set up in the great revolution of 1789. By October 1870 Prussian armies encircled Paris, then a city of over a million and a half people.

Fortified walls and a chain of forts were strengthened. Together with the remnants of the regular army, the National Guard comprised 350,000 men and women, grouped in neighbourhood battalions with a great mistrust of the military authorities. Guard units elected their own officers and formed a central committee.

The Prussians laid siege. By December food and fuel were running out. Then came the onset of one of the coldest winters within living memory. People began to die from hunger and cold. In the middle of January 1871, ration cards were issued for the daily bread allowance.

On top of the recently widened gap between rich and poor in the capital, the food shortages, military failures, and, finally, a Prussian bombardment of the city contributed to widespread discontent. Also, the temporary government began secret negotiations and agreed an armistice with the Germans, allowing them into Paris for two days to celebrate their victory. Paris felt betrayed and outraged.

The Commune

In the early hours of 18 March, government soldiers moved quietly to take over the 250 cannon held by the National Guard in the hilly areas of Montmartre, overlooking the city. Quickly, Parisians emerged from their homes to surround them. The

government soldiers following Head of State Adolphe Thiers were ordered to fire on the citizens of Paris. They refused to obey the order, and joined the crowd.

Crowds and barricades emerged all over the city. Regular soldiers retired to their barracks and the government withdrew to Versailles in disorder. A red flag flew from the Hotel de Ville (City Hall). The Central Committee of the National Guard was now the only effective government in Paris: it arranged elections for a Commune, to be held on 26 March.

Elected

On 28 March the Commune was proclaimed. 92 members of the "Communal Council" were elected including a high proportion of skilled workers and several professionals (such as doctors and journalists). Nearly a third of Commune members were working class. It was the first time workers had been elected freely to make policies instead of enduring them. A member of the Commune wrote, "After the poetry of triumph, the prose of work."

Other cities in France also set up Communes: Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Narbonne, St Etienne, Le Creusot and Limoges. However, all of these were crushed quickly by the Versailles government.

The Commune was a new kind of government. There were no organised political parties. The work of the Commune was done by committees, which elected delegates as leaders of government departments. By the middle of May, 90 trades unions were openly flourishing. Some 43 workers' cooperatives sprang up, and the Commune attempted to provide money to invest.

Women, who then had few rights, threw themselves into the commune, working alongside men on public committees, an innovation. Day nurseries were set up and an industrial training centre for girls planned.

Everyone in public service had to be



1871: Cannon and rifles outside the City Hall in Paris

elected by popular vote. The Commune only had time to issue and implement a few decrees – including the separation of church and state; the remission of rents owed for the period of the siege; the abolition of night work in the hundreds of Paris bakeries; the granting of pensions to the unmarried companions and children of National Guards killed on active service; and the right of employees to take over and run an enterprise if it were deserted by its owner.

On 21 May, the Versailles troops were allowed through the German lines, to enter the city of Paris. The toughest resistance came in the more working-class eastern districts, where fighting was vicious. 20,000 Parisians were killed in one week.

Ruling class brutality

The ruling class brutality was severe and draconian. The German army, partly surrounding Paris, colluded with the French army to destroy the Commune. People fought tenaciously in their local communities until the 28 May. After the slaughter, Thiers said, "The ground is strewn with their corpses. May this

are fit to govern



terrible sight serve as a lesson.”

Obviously, the Commune made mistakes. Probably the people of Paris were so caught up in planning social reforms that they did not get to grips with the threat of the Thiers government. And if the Commune had taken control of the Bank of France in Paris (which held the country's gold reserves), then it would have had something powerful to counter with. The Commune was never fully prepared for civil war – it did not train the National Guard nor prepare the defences of Paris very efficiently. People were left locally to fight behind barricades that the enemy outflanked.

But the events in the French capital city ushered in the prospect of a new type of society. To ruling classes everywhere, it was a fleeting alarm, as the Paris Commune was the first brief glimpse of the bounty of revolutionary power, and of what it might bring to the people. Marx championed the Commune writing of “these Parisians storming heaven.” It was short-lived, lasting only 72 days in only one city, but it happened and its example can never be erased from history. It is still an inspiration. ■

More from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

THE FORCE FOR REVOLUTION

How do we counter capitalism's relentless and absolute decline? How do we gather together our power (recently often left dormant) and commence our absolute rise?

Though our class has considerably less material strength than it used to have, we should not doubt its role or underestimate its potential. The only force capable of challenging and removing capitalism is the working class. The fact that so far it has chosen not to go down that revolutionary route does not negate the stark truth: whilst capitalism cannot do without workers, a working class can live without capitalists.

Experience over centuries has proved that there will be no salvation for workers by pledging allegiance to bourgeois parties or placing faith in bourgeois institutions, both of which are utterly wedded to the ways of capitalism.

Only by re-building our class strength, by regenerating our networks of class power, can we challenge capitalist decline and fashion our own agenda. Our starting point must always be – how do we create a collective response to the issues and problems facing us? How do we unite the many against the few? How do we assert and press our needs? Gradually, in this way, we can change the balance of forces between the exploiting and exploited classes in our favour and transform Britain into a nation fit for workers.

Yet inside too many of our trade union structures there prevail many trendy, harmful notions that are completely at odds with this necessary approach.

The most pernicious is the assertion that activists are essential to conduct and mobilise “campaigns”. This arrogant “elite” impedes natural class organisation. All that is needed is the mass involvement of members in their unions pursuing their class interests and out of struggle will be thrown up their leaders as well as appropriate forms of organisation.

Another debilitating obsession is the pathetic squabble over the “left” dominating the “right” (and vice versa) instead of a desire to unite the class wherever it may be. Everyone knows that the “left” can't agree on who is its “best representative” and spends most of its time in unproductive bickering while Rome burns.

It needs the whole range of the working class, not an introspective sect, to develop correct thinking, distilled and refined in action and through dialogue. Once a particular section of the class truly gets involved in their trade union, then these diversions of left and right reliably disappear, replaced by a true preoccupation on the things that actually matter. There is a working class discipline.

We are of and for the supremacy of the working class.

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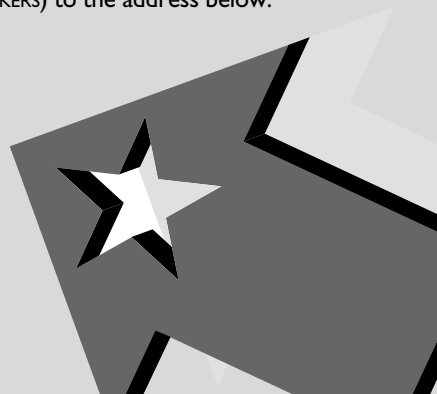
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Back to Front – Unity is strength

‘By now it should be blindingly obvious to all but the most blinkered that the politics that got us into this dreadful position will not get us out of it.’

WE FACE destruction, not cuts. Even the very metaphor is misleading. If we get a cut on our hand, it soon heals. But what the government is doing won't heal.

A 70 per cent cut in local government funding is not a cut or an amputation; nor is the attack on the NHS. The ConDem government aims to destroy, not reform. The proposed sell-off of our forests, hastily abandoned after a wave of outrage, wouldn't even have saved money.

The attack on the NHS will not benefit or empower doctors; any doctors who fool themselves that this is the case will soon see that they are merely the front men, the fall-guys for the vile “health” corporations poised to seize the NHS's assets.

We are fighting for the right to live as a working class. So we cannot just be against things. We must be for them as well. Positive thinking. For pay, for jobs, for dignity, for Britain, for a future. It is – sometimes literally – a life-and-death struggle.

By now it should be blindingly obvious to all but the most blinkered (and sadly there are plenty of those about) that the politics that got us into this dreadful position will not get us out of it.

Our response must be swift, all-encompassing and clear, and it must come through our trade unions, the only organisations that can unite us all. We must not let ourselves be divided into “left” and “right”, “militants” and “moderates”. We must not mentally, or organisationally, separate our members into self-appointed “activists” and others.

It sounds simple, but there are powerful voices within our own movement for whom true trade union democracy is anathema. Rather than have the tedious business of representative meetings, or electing delegates with a duty to report on

what they do, they form their own unelected organisations, with smart-sounding titles like “Anti Cuts Union”.

Well, we have anti-cuts unions. They are called trade unions. They are the only ones that can fight cuts rather than stage phoney demonstrations with thousands of surplus pre-printed placards. And they won't split because one faction decides it doesn't like another faction.

There is an intense anger welling up across the country. Unfortunately, opportunist organisations (guaranteed these days to have an Egyptian speaker in tow) are trying to seize control of this opposition and resistance. A hundred-and-one self-proclaimed anti-cuts organisations are trying to piggyback on this wave of anger.

In London last month, Barts and The London Hospitals witnessed a “spontaneous” demonstration outside its main entrance in Whitechapel with a clamour to “storm the hospital”, and when that failed there was a sad attempt to block the main road.

Barts Trade Union Staff Side ignored this infantile behaviour. The reps are looking to build a tidal wave of resistance from porter to Chief Executive, from junior doctor to senior consultant, every worker in the Trust, every patient, every GP, every local resident – not some false campaign outside, but real unity and cohesion based on those inside.

We must not create parallel, substitute organisations, of self-selected, non-elected, “activists”, outside the union structure. We must resist and defeat all such attempts to divide and destroy our unions. We must not interfere in the internal affairs of other unions, nor must we ever insult the elected representatives of other unions.

Unity is strength.

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