

# WORKERS

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## BEYOND FOOT AND MOUTH

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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# WORKERS

## “ First thoughts

THERE'S AN OLD idea that a general election is about who runs the country for the next four or five years. The irony about the coming election (postponed, so they say) is that neither of the two main contenders seem actually to want to do it.

Labour is content to leave all the main issues of the day to the European Union: industrial policy, agricultural policy, and anything else that Brussels may decide upon. If it had its way, it would leave the question of currency and finance up to the EU, as well. The Conservatives likewise would leave everything to the tender cares of market forces.

The very concept of government has become debased, until now the only active steps that are taken are either vindictive (let's have another go at teachers) or seek to kickstart the market (let's be first to privatise air traffic control). Heaven forbid that a government should seek to govern.

What use is a government if it cannot retain a steel industry in Britain? Yet constrained by EU "competition" law and by its own unwillingness to act, that is exactly the kind of useless government we have. British workers rejected this kind of Thatcherism at the polls in 1997, only to find the same attack on industry and public service being driven, uncontested,

by the EU's monetarist agenda.

In fact, things are worse. The rate of industrial decline is faster even than during Thatcher's blitzkrieg, and the privatisation of public services is reaching into areas unthinkable under Conservative rule.

Worst of all are creeping ideas of defeatism, or fatalism, or both — the notion that we are so weak and powerless that our ambitions, for ourselves as a class and for our nation, are now so pathetically limited that we will simply try to make do and mend within the confines of the European Union. Here is the true "little England" philosophy, that says Britain is so small that independent thought, or action, or existence, cannot be contemplated.

And yet if the past four years have shown anything, it is that the potential of the working class to dominate the political agenda is as strong as ever — even if the will can sometimes be lacking. The clearest demonstration of this is the fact that this all-powerful government has been unable to push through its dearest project, to destroy the pound and join the euro.

If we want our country to be run at all, we are going to have to run it ourselves. It's a simple idea, and simply achieved: all it requires is that we take responsibility, that we organise now in order to have a future.



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**EDUCATION****EU****TUBE****AIR TRAFFIC****ISRAEL****STEEL****TRAINING****SPY PLANE****COMING SOON****NEWS ANALYSIS**

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## Teachers in united stand

FOR THE THREE principal teacher unions (NUT, NAS/UWT, ATL) to take a united stand on the question of unacceptable workload, as they have done this Easter, must give the Government pause for thought.

Traditionally, over this relatively news-quiet period, the media could rely on the respective union conferences to snipe at one another, and the NUT in particular to indulge in stage-managed internal dissent, furnishing compelling evidence of teacher disunity. Ministers would breathe a sigh of relief.

But for once, the issue is more prominent than the protagonists. The entire profession, from the highest paid head to the newest recruit, is saying to David Blunkett, "Let us get on with doing the job we were trained to do."

Teachers' exasperation at the myriad bureaucratic burdens which grow exponentially with each new 'initiative' has been reaching boiling point for some time now. What has tipped it over the edge has been the chronic shortage of teachers to fill vacancies throughout the country (see p 4). This has led to, among other things, a dramatic increase in classes being split in the event of teacher absence; differing age groups being combined in single primary classes; non-teaching staff being called on to cover or assist in covering classes; and teachers stepping in to cover subjects for which they have neither training nor experience.

This is a catastrophic state of affairs, but the Government can take steps to resolve the situation, as it has done recently in Scotland. There, the McCrone inquiry has produced an agreement which gives substantial pay rises over the next three years, a contractual working week of 35 hours including guaranteed non-contact time, and 4,000 more teachers by 2006.

The education system in Scotland differs in many respects from that in England and Wales, and consequently the McCrone deal cannot be transplanted, but an independent inquiry into teachers' workload would be a necessary first step. The NUT and NAS/UWT have suspended further industrial action while they satisfy themselves as to the scale and scope of the Government's review. They are pledged, together with the third main union, the ATL, to undertake industrial action if the review is not forthcoming. This action will consist of imposing a limit of 35 hours on the teachers' working week. At present, research has shown teachers working between 55 and 65 hours a week in order to 'paper over the cracks' caused by the nationwide inadequate recruitment and retention of teachers.

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

**EUROPEAN UNION****Swiss 'No' to joining**

SWITZERLAND'S Green Party, among others, collected 100,000 signatures to force a referendum on whether to back a 'Yes to Europe' initiative calling for immediate negotiations on Switzerland's joining the EU. Those campaigning against joining argued that membership would mean higher taxes and interest rates, heavy financial contributions and a loss of sovereignty.

In the March referendum 77% voted against. All 26 cantons voted against. The turnout was 55%.

A spokesman for the European Commission commented, "The Swiss did not say 'no' to Europe." And the Swiss Government announced a week later that it still intended to seek EU membership!

**EURO-ARMY****NATO? What NATO?**

THE FINNISH GENERAL at the head of the European Rapid Reaction Force has repeated that the RRF should not be fully integrated with NATO, contrary to statements by the British Government.

General Gustav Hagglund described the Force as a "a question of identity in the same way as the flag and the euro". He said: "We are not talking about a subsidiary of NATO. This is an independent body. We are talking about co-operation with NATO." (DAILY TELEGRAPH, 2 April 2001).

General Hagglund's appointment caused controversy because Finland is not a member of NATO.

## AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

### Worst outcome avoided

UNIONS representing air traffic controllers and aircrew fought a high-profile battle against privatisation of National Air Traffic Services (NATS). They gave a cautious welcome to the decision made recently.

After a two-year campaign by the unions, and confrontation in Parliament over the Transport Bill last autumn, the Government backed away from its worst proposals. Instead it decided to award the contract to The Airline Group, a not-for-profit consortium including major airlines.

This option received the backing of unions in preference to the other bidder, a facilities management company that did not have their confidence in respect of safety.

Paul Noon, General Secretary of the union IPMS, said, "The Government has chosen a 'not-for-commercial return' bid and we welcome that. But we do not welcome the Public-Private Partnership. It is a major distraction at a time of momentous change for air traffic control. We shall now work with the airlines to build on the not-for-profit formula."

But the union is still cautious. Noon went on to say, "If at any stage the airlines put profit before safety we shall not hesitate to raise the alarm."

## ISRAEL

### Reckless in Gaza

THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT is intensifying its attacks on its neighbours, threatening to unleash yet another war in the Middle East. Israeli forces bombed Syrian targets on Mount Lebanon on 15 April. Its forces also occupied Palestinian territory on 16 April, invading the Gaza Strip. After a few words from the US Government, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the troops to be pulled back; the next day, he sent them back in again.

All 15 member governments of the European Union agreed that the Israeli attacks were "excessive and disproportionate", and that the Gaza attack "must not be repeated". So, presumably, moderate and proportionate attacks are all right; and after the Israelis repeated the Gaza attack, surely more than just words must follow? But no, the European Union member governments rejected sanctions. They are still determined to keep the EU's association agreement with Israel, a unique arrangement which allows Israel open trade access to the entire EU market.

# Tube safety fight spreads



**Unsafe: RMT demonstration in London last year outside Railtrack's London HQ against privatisation of the tube and of rail services.**

Photo Andrew Wiaard/www.reportphotos.com

LONDON UNDERGROUND workers will once again be in the forefront of the fight to improve safety when they take industrial action on 2 May. The union involved, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), has said that the action — the third episode since early February — could last for up to 36 hours and has warned the employers that further strikes are possible.

The dispute centres around the Government's controversial plans to run the tube through a public-private partnership plan (PPP). Mayor Ken Livingstone, who has been granted a judicial review of the Government's plan to break up the London Underground, said that the government's decision to announce the private consortia before the review starts on 12 June showed "contempt for the overwhelming view of Londoners".

From the union's point of view, this amounts to no attempt having been made to resolve the dispute since the last strike.

The Corporation of London, worried about employers' lost profits in the City, has missed the point again. A spokesman said "The RMT's plans for yet another strike are really quite intolerable... The union must not carry on with this irresponsible and reckless behaviour with no regard for the people of London and the future prosperity of the capital".

In fact, the opposite is the case and it is time employers in London paid attention to the appalling physical and mental stress that hundreds of thousands of workers experience every day in London just to get to work. The way they can do this is to support the only ones showing true regard for London's prosperity — the London Underground workers.

## ENGINEERING

### Giant cuts back

A LEAKED MEMO from the head office in Ohio has revealed that the engineering giant Timken is to cut 1500 jobs worldwide. There will be a major shake up involving the loss of two plants and the sell off of a third.

Last year the company announced it was cutting the workforce of the only UK plant, at Duston, Northampton from 1100

to 800 over two years, but told the staff that their jobs were safe. It is unclear whether Northampton will be hit in this latest round of redundancies, as details were still to be announced.

The company blamed a fall in profits and claimed that the 'restructuring' will improve profitability and growth. This won't be much consolation to the local community, as Timken is a significant employer and generates additional jobs in the area. It is also the company's European research centre.

**TEACHER TRAINING****Applications fall**

UNDERGRADUATE APPLICATIONS for teacher training courses this September have fallen by 14% from 60,000 to 51,600. Each student normally applies for up to 6 institutions, so this means that the number of applicants may be as low as 8,600 in total for 7,800 places. There are worries that this may force institutions to take on poorer quality candidates. Institutions are increasingly concerned that there may be no future for undergraduate courses.

One key problem is that the Government has only provided incentives such as training salaries to postgraduates. Not only that but since 1998 undergraduates have had to pay four years of

tuition fees. This particularly affects mature women students with families, who often show great perseverance, but who already have stretched finances.

Many teacher trainers feel that the three- or four-year course results ultimately in better teachers, who have studied the theory and practice in far more detail and are better equipped to deal with the demands of the National Curriculum.

Given that since 1993 the number of teachers leaving the profession has risen year on year, with a rise of 8.3% in 1999, the government needs to rethink both its recruitment and retention policies with some urgency. Statistics released by the Department for Education show that since the 1997 election primary school vacancies have risen from 1,450 to 2,100 and those in secondary schools from 1,290 to 2,580 — a jump of 75%.

# Ballot over steel axe

THE IRON AND STEEL Trades Confederation is to ballot its members on industrial action following the rejection by Dutch-owned Corus (formerly British Steel) of attempts to save 1,300 jobs at the Llanwern plant in South Wales.

"Regretfully we must conclude that Corus never had any intention of working with us to save plants and jobs," said ISTC general secretary Michael Leahy.

Llanwern and other plants affected by closure or redundancy proposals — including Ebbw Vale in South Wales and Shotton on Teesside — are believed to be profitable, but Corus wants to close production here to concentrate on its plants in the Netherlands.

"I will be working in Brussels with the European Commission to ensure that the maximum funding is made available to address the needs of all of those affected by closures," said MEP Glenys Kinnock, completely ignoring any possibility of intervening to keep the plants open.

At Llanwern Corus intends to end crude steel production. It wants to shut the Ebbw Vale plant completely. Also scheduled for closure is the Brngwyn works near Swansea.

**NURSING****Stealing from abroad**

EVIDENCE OF HOW thousands of nurses from developing countries are being brought to Britain in contravention of official guidelines was recently put to parliament. Ministers are ignoring agencies flouting the ban on recruiting from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and those in the West Indies. These countries and others have pleaded for their nursing staff not to be targeted for overseas work.

In 1999 Health Secretary Alan Milburn issued guidelines to NHS Trusts specifically forbidding recruitment from the three areas. But the Liberal Democrat Health Spokesperson gave parliament figures which show that recruitment from

South Africa has since risen by 243% and from the West Indies by 93%.

South Africa and Zimbabwe, with their huge incidence of HIV and AIDS have an enormous demand for nursing staff and immense pressures on the population of working age. Britain is supposedly offering overseas aid to African countries affected by the epidemic (not to mention all those pounds donated to Children in Need).

The ignored 1999 guidelines were help up as an example of the government's ethical foreign policy. The Liberal Democrats are asking for a "kitemark" system for agencies that stick to the policy.

At least they are prepared to call the situation "a scandal". The Royal College of Nursing is refusing to condemn the situation. Ignoring the dire effect on health in the nurses' home countries, the union has warned against policies that infringe nurses' "freedom to work where they like".

**WHAT'S ON****Coming soon****MAY**

Traditional London May Day march, organised by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils. Bring your banners, friends and families.

**Tuesday 1 May, 12.00.**

Assemble at Highbury Fields, march to Clerkenwell Green.

Come and join the CPBML in an evening of May Day celebration. There will be opportunity to hear some challenging May Day speeches, and also plenty of time to relax and talk with friends old and new. Food, drink, bookstall and even a political quiz will also be available! All welcome.

**Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm.**

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube, Holborn.

**SPY PLANE****Saying sorry**

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT and people have stood up to the US Government over the EP-3 spy plane incident, successfully extracting an apology for the US plane's activities. The US Government told the Chinese Government that it was "very sorry" for the incident, which apology was accepted. Unfortunately, Bush told Colin Powell to tell the world that this did not amount to an apology, to Powell's obvious acute embarrassment.

US spy planes regularly intrude into China's airspace, as part of the US Government's continual surveillance of China's armed forces and communications. Certain circles in the US Government see China as the USA's most likely significant enemy. Pentagon assertions that "rogue states" like North Korea threaten world peace are clearly absurd: we should note that North Korea in this context is US Government code for China, and that the US Government means that China is an obstacle to its outdated dreams of world dominance.

The British Government as usual sided with the US Government, complaining that the Chinese attitude was arrogant. Presumably Cook was criticising the Chinese for not being servile like him.

The Chinese Government has rightly demanded an end to all the US spying flights.

## What's going on with Hackney?

THE CRISIS afflicting the London Borough of Hackney is nearing its end. By May, a budget will have been set with the loss of a significant number of jobs, enforced changes to terms and conditions and damaged service provision. Hackney will retain its ridiculous victim mentality of being the 'poorest borough in Britain'. The central government funding cuts run into multi-million pounds and the thousands of job losses have become a meaningless swirl. Much tub-thumping has gone on as some of the most crass ultra-left politics, especially within the Hackney UNISON branch, have been allowed to run riot. Who needs the employers to destroy services when the trade unions have imploded into a disgraceful morass of faction fighting, political intrigue and division?

UNISON, established in 1993, began with a Hackney membership of 8,000 which is now down to 2,000. This is explained only in part by the externalisation of services with the transfer of some jobs. The branch has been wracked by infighting — white collar versus blue collar, black versus white, staff versus managers and so on. Allegations abound of assault, corruption, bullying, racism, harassment, political cleansing. A total disunity: everyone at everyone else's throat.

The Council has seen a disintegrating Labour Party. Councillors swapping from party to party has replaced any semblance of manifesto or principle with a Labour-Tory coalition being the ruling group for today. Scandals associated with race allegations and paedophilia, coupled with deteriorating services, have brought the borough into disrepute with many of the electorate. The result is, has been and fearfully for the future presents, a malaise of anti-working class destructive politically correct nonsense.

The UNISON branch, described in its own words as practising 'gesture politics', refuses to negotiate with the employers. The branch leadership would dearly have loved a solution of an indefinite all-out strike. They had to settle for a series of escalating 1-, 2- and 3-day stoppages, which collapsed in the face of a hardening employer. Now the branch 'leadership' is thrashing about desperate to offload the blame onto someone else. Nor can UNISON at a regional or national level ignore their responsibilities. All levels — lay or full-time — should seize this opportunity to change the direction Hackney is going in. The choices are simple: either a continuing spiral of decline and closure or a re-equipped workforce determined to take Hackney in a direction that would engender widespread public support.

'Gesture' politics of the ultra-left have resulted in the wrong fight at the wrong time in the wrong place by a leadership bent on self-destruction under a hail of revolutionary rhetoric. Destruction is definitely what they are going to get.

The attempt by the ultra-left UNISON branch leadership to politically cleanse not only their own ranks of dissent but also the GMB and TGWU, has seen both those unions break ranks with UNISON and seek a settlement. A breaking of ranks and arriving at a negotiated settlement will be followed by hundreds of workers swapping from one union to another.

## The survival of a unified London determined trade union struggle

## Keeping the service

OVER THE PAST few years, particularly since the return of the Labour Government in 1997, partnership as a term suddenly came back into fashion, after being sneered at by Thatcher and her acolytes for the previous 15 years. Partnerships sprang up everywhere inside the Health Service and elsewhere.

Many of them even came from Europe and were called "social partnerships". As part of European labour relations, "social partners" meet each other at European level in different industries and services to negotiate matters of joint concern. Many people in the British Labour Movement welcomed these developments in Europe, because many had lost confidence in their ability to achieve progress in Britain.

The substantial progress that has been made in the London Ambulance Service, however, cannot be put down to partnership, and even the concept is questionable. When the employer has the upper hand in a workplace then the last thing they want is a partnership. Perhaps we as working people are inherently more polite. Whenever we get close to having the upper hand in the workplace the word partnership appears! In crude terms, when Thatcher, representing employers, held sway, the thought of having a partnership with those communities and industries she was grinding into the dust would never have crossed her mind. Yet when a Labour Government is elected to represent the interests of the workers partnership with employers is almost first on its list of priorities.

Some careful distinctions need to be made. Working in the ambulance service is not the same as working for Ford Motor Company. Ford workers produce profit for an employer. Indeed figures show that each Ford worker in this country contributes more than £20,000 in profit to Ford. So unless a partnership with Ford UK, or Ford Europe, is going to get some or all of that £20,000 back for those workers, what would be the point? And if they were able to get that money back, would the employers offer such a partnership? History shows that in most private companies, trade unions have had to fight hard for recognition and for members and have never been helped along by a willing partner in their employer.

### Class interests

In the public services — and the ambulance service is no exception — things are somewhat different. When ambulance workers go to work they do not contribute a profit directly to the employer. Their interests are slightly different from their brothers and sisters in the private sector, but still their interests are not the same as their employers. Where they are strong, civilisation exists in the workplace. Where they are weak, barbarism reigns. Anyone with experience of anti-union ambulance trusts will know what this means.

But sometimes, on some issues, the interests of workers and their trade unions on the one hand, and employers in the public services on the other, come together.

# n Ambulance Service was due not to chance or luck, but to

## going

Ten years ago in the aftermath of the ambulance workers' struggle for better pay and conditions, the London Ambulance Service was in a mess. It had appointed a thoroughgoing anti-union Chief Executive who attempted to remove the need for most ambulance workers by introducing technology everywhere. This led to the ill-fated and much warned-of computer crash in October, which caused the loss of many lives. The Chief Executive was sacked and response times soared.

While the service was in disarray, so was ambulance service trade unionism. Anti-union station officers and duty managers roamed around London, and ambulance workers were divided and directionless. Before the establishment of UNISON there were 11 separate branches in a single ambulance service, which was itself fragmented, and which a hostile Thatcherite government wanted to dismember altogether. What was to be done?

First of all ambulance workers had to put their own house in order. The formation of UNISON gave the opportunity to do this, and although it took many years to bring about, 11 separate branches were consolidated into what is reckoned to be the largest ambulance service trade union branch in the world. This gave the organised workforce the authority to speak with a clear voice, and to organise industrial relations according to their agenda.

Then they needed to clear out a chaotic system with the employers whereby one union could represent the members of another and where unions with handfuls of members had more seats on negotiating committees than unions ten times as big.

This system, which had led to the creation of swollen egos and expense claims, was tackled by the establishment of a single UNISON branch. The union demanded a single-table bargaining structure on which UNISON's pre-



Ambulance workers in action during last year's Paddington train disaster.

Photo London Ambulance Service

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## **‘After a bitter and hard 10-year struggle London’s ambulance workers are much stronger now than they were’**

dominance of membership was reflected in the overwhelming majority of seats. This enabled them to articulate members’ views direct to the senior management of the service.

While all this was going on huge credit has to be given to the scores of shop stewards and local representatives who maintained a high level of recruitment of ambulance workers in London. Ambulance service trade unionism in London never dropped below 70%, and is now in excess of 90%. UNISON currently has in the region of 2,500 members in a Service of some 3,500. The objective is 100% membership.

From this position of relative strength ambulance workers were able to draw up their own agenda. First of all the ambulance service had to be kept together. It was the clear intention of the Tories to break it up, to give the North Eastern part to Essex, the North Western part to Bucks and Beds, the South West to Surrey and the South East to Kent. All means of parliamentary lobbying were used as well as behind the scenes briefings and arguments. Evidence was given to the House of Commons Select Committee which in the end went its own way, concluding in the union’s favour that London as a city should retain its ambulance service.

The second step was to redress the huge cuts which had been made under the Tories in staffing and vehicle resources in the London Ambulance Service. In the mid-90s there were fewer

frontline ambulance crews and fewer vehicles on the roads of London than there had been 10 years before. During that period over 70 Accident and Emergency Units were closed while congestion worsened to the point where blue light vehicles could only go at walking pace.

Following the tragic death of Nazeema Bagum in 1994, an extensive enquiry, the third in as many years, was undertaken in the London Ambulance Service. It accepted union evidence that the only way out of the mess was to recruit more ambulance personnel, and to purchase more vehicles. As a result of this report in 1995, an extra 240 staff were recruited. This was on top of the 300 who had flowed from the report into the computer collapse some two years earlier, again at UNISON’s instigation. With these measures, response times started gradually to improve, and the confidence of Londoners in their service began to return.

### **World class**

Next, but certainly not least, was the long-term objective. In order to provide what the current Chief Executive describes as a world class ambulance service for a world class city, UNISON wants world class wages for world class ambulance workers.

Perhaps the single biggest breakthrough has been in convincing the existing leadership of the London Ambulance Service at trust board and chief executive level that the only way to

recruit and retain the staff required to provide the service that Londoners need, is by improving pay and conditions of ambulance workers. In spite of the service recruiting, at union insistence, throughout the last 12 months, 37 fewer frontline staff were on the road than this time last year. This is because of the difficulties of recruiting and retaining skilled ambulance workers when comparable jobs — what are comparable jobs? — pay so much more.

There is also growing evidence that many ambulance services around London are deliberately paying “golden hellos” of some £4,000 to £4,500 per year to attract ambulance workers from London.

### **Bargaining**

Having safeguarded their terms and conditions — by holding on to Whitley contracts and never accepting trust contracts or local pay bargaining beyond the one year in which it was imposed on everybody — they now are engaged in our biggest battle of all. That is to find a way to increase pay and conditions for ambulance workers without undermining Whitley, but by negotiating local increases which members richly deserve and anyway necessary to retain them and protect the service.

Negotiations are at a sensitive stage, but there is a genuine partnership in one crucial area. The chair of the trust, the chief executive (who has now thankfully restyled himself Chief Ambulance Officer) and senior managers in the service are now of the same mind as the workers over pay. Now is the time for change and now is the time for improvement. Working in partnership is essential to extract the money necessary from Health Service Commissioners and ultimately the Government.

After a bitter and hard 10-year struggle London’s ambulance workers are much stronger now than they were. Credit goes to many hundreds of active members of UNISON over that period who have worked unceasingly to bring about this steady development in trade unionism.



It's as though there were a direct link between exchange rate and media profile...the lower the euro falls, the less anyone wants to talk about it

## The mystery of the disappearing euro



All together at Nice: now everything seems to have gone rather quiet.

AT ONE TIME, the euro was always in the news. Columnists debated whether it would end sovereignty; economists argued about whether it would work. Now that it has been introduced, it seems to have vanished; even its continuing fall is not newsworthy.

Only the Conservative Party talks about it, which is, as far as activists in our class are concerned, the kiss of death. The euro's supporters say, if Hague and dinosaurs like Thatcher are against the euro, then it must be OK: case proven. As opinion pollster Bob Worcester cynically put it, we'll tell the punters that 'the men with staring eyes' are for the pound, and that sober sensible citizens like Gordon Brown are for the euro. The pretence is that only Tories and the far right oppose the euro.

Euro supporters never debate against UNISON and the other trade unions that oppose the euro. The media never mention the Labour Euro-Safeguards Campaign.

But what is happening to the euro? And what is happening to our currency? Most important, why is our manufacturing industry under the hammer?

### Interest rates

The European Central Bank takes its important decisions well away from public view. It has held interest rates at the punishingly high level of 4.75% ever since last October, despite industry's calls for a cut. Every other major central bank has cut interest rates this year. But 'dim Wim' Duisenberg, the hard line monetarist who heads the Bank,

accurately said, "You might say, I hear but I don't listen." When critics accused him of a 'wait and see' policy, he replied, "We keep on waiting and we keep on seeing."

The high euro has an effect on the semi-detached pound, helping to keep it too high. The Bank of England, under Brown's tacit orders, is shadowing the euro, just as Lawson shadowed the Deutschmark. That is one reason why industry is suffering so badly.

In the first three years after Blair's election, 180,000 manufacturing jobs went, a rate of 5000 a month, the same monthly rate as under Thatcher. From May to December 2000, 155,000

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manufacturing jobs went, a rate of 25,800 a month. From December 2000 to February this year, 105,000 manufacturing jobs were destroyed, a rate of 35,000 a month. Under Blair, no fewer than 440,000 manufacturing jobs have been destroyed. Being outside the euro does not spare us from capitalism's destructiveness. Being inside would only intensify the slaughter.

Elsewhere, some people are being allowed a say in how they are governed - and no, we don't mean that they too are going to have a general election. In Ireland, the Government has been forced into calling a referendum on whether to ratify the Nice Treaty. But the British people are not being asked. The Blair Government's approach since the Nice meeting has been to say as little as possible, as if Neville Chamberlain had returned from Munich in 1938 and said nothing, not even 'peace in our time'. Again, only the Conservative Party mentions this significant Treaty.

## Integration

What does the Treaty say? The German and Italian Governments said, "the goal is not so much enhanced cooperation but 'enhanced integration'. The use of enhanced cooperation must serve the common good of more rapid and increased integration." Integration means a single state, the end of the present national sovereignties.

If the Treaty were ratified, no member government would be able to use its national veto to prevent further integration by a self-selected group of member states. This group could present the other members with continual faits accomplis, without having to win the agreement of all. Nor could a member government bargain a partial lessening of EU powers against their further integration. A member state would no longer be able to retrieve any powers from the EU, short of withdrawing from the EU altogether.

The Nice Treaty's Article 137, on Social Provisions, permits Qualified Majority Voting on matters relating to the

## 'Being outside the euro does not spare us from capitalism's destructiveness. Being inside would only intensify the slaughter'

representation and collective defence of workers' interests. The European Council of Ministers could decide how workers were to be represented, and no government could veto whatever proposals are made.

This interference in workers' organisations would be especially dangerous, because the member governments, the European Central Bank and the financial markets, all want structural reforms of the labour market, 'reforms' to cut wages and conditions, to make it easier for the employer to sack workers, and to reduce workers' control of their workplaces.

Article 157, on industry, says, "The Community and the Member States shall ensure that the conditions necessary for the competitiveness of the Community's industry exist. For that purpose, in accordance with a system of open and competitive markets, their action shall be aimed at: speeding up the adjustment of industry to structural changes..." So any member government now or future would be able to resist calls to protect industry by claiming that its hands are tied.

European Commission President Romano Prodi wants to abolish every national veto over taxation, social security, social and cohesion policy, external trade, justice and home affairs, budgetary, fiscal, economic and monetary policy, agriculture and fisheries policy, defence and security, immigration, decisions over the EU budget and treaty changes. As he said, "After 2006 no more decisions can be taken by unanimity."

A leading pro-EU academic, Ali El-Agraa, foresees a two-tier EU "with the majority constituting one tier and Denmark and the UK as the other. Again, this could happen for only a short time because sooner or later, the Danes and the British would have no alternative but to return to the fold."

He continues, "that might not be such a bad thing because the British would then have to consider their position seriously, and such a reconsideration would inevitably result in the UK applying to rejoin the EC, but then fully committed to a one-nation EC." El-Agraa writes that even if Britain were 'sacked' from the EC, "the door must be left open for them since they will have no alternative but to return, and then fully committed." So the democratic wills of the British and Danish peoples will be an irrelevance.

## Superpower

Blair described the EU as developing into a 'superpower not superstate'. 'Superpowers' (pretentious word!) exercise their power from the single source of their nation state. The EU could exercise such unified power only after its members merged into a United States of Europe, with a directly elected President answerable to a European Parliament, a European Central Bank, a European Finance Minister, a European Foreign Minister, a European Army with a European Defence Minister and the nuclear forces of France and Britain under the command of the European President.

But Britain is continually holding up the enemy's schemes by staying so resolutely hostile to the euro. That is why we are under such a ferocious attack, why the enemy is trying to destroy our industrial heart.

How can we save our industry? How can we save our country's independence? These are the questions we must answer in practice — as a first step, by understanding and addressing the effects of EU membership on our workplaces, and ensuring that our unions do the same.

Take an industry, drive it almost to ruin with EU policies, then add an epidemic — the results are all over the countryside

## Beyond foot and mouth

FARMING IS A BASIC INDUSTRY for any country, whether it produces for itself, or trades with others. Even today, with a worldwide market in food, governments cannot brush aside problems and let the industry close. The lack of direction displayed by Blair and his ministers is born of a need to work in the best interests of the profits of agribusiness and its dependence on, and support for, the EU. None of this is in the interests of the home production of good quality, disease-free, cheap food.

When the foot and mouth (FMD) epidemic dies down, the country will have to decide what it wants from its countryside and agriculture. Even before FMD, there were many problems.

Farm prices have declined. In 1998 farmers protested about this and blockaded ports. Little happened as a result, for while the Countryside Alliance opposes the reliance on the Common Agricultural Policy, the role of the EU in British farming has not been challenged.

Capitalists who run the huge agribusinesses care only about profits, not what is produced in relation to other industries. The possibility of a milk shortage this summer is not related to FMD, but to the EU pricing policies and the large numbers of dairy farmers who have gone out of production. The arable sector has its own problems of over- and under-production, none of which has been solved by set-aside or other recent changes to the Common Agricultural Policy. Efforts to control the disease with vaccination are also dependent on agribusinesses and the EU.

### EU rules

Because of the possibility of importing infected animals (FMD is highly infectious), most countries impose strict rules restricting export from infected areas. And since European rules treat the whole EU as one country, mass vaccination in Britain would destroy the disease-free status of all countries in the EU.

Routine vaccination is prohibited by Directive 85/511/EEC (as amended by Directive 90/423/EEC), and even emergency vaccination requires permission from the Commission (which the Government finally applied for in Cumbria and Devon).

### Strings attached

EU permission comes with restrictions on the movement of livestock and the marketing and treatment of meat and milk. These have given rise to fears that products and livestock within the affected areas will be regarded as second class.

As one Cumbrian farmer put it, "If we vaccinate, and [Cumbria] becomes a vaccinated zone, then when you compare how other countries run their vaccinated zones, all milk would have to be processed in Cumbria, all livestock slaughtered in Cumbria and either eaten or processed here. This means that we would be faced with taking whatever the buyer offered — permanent fire sale prices. So the options presented to farmers are effectively get slaughtered out now, take the money and get out of the

*Continued on p12*



## It shouldn't happen to a vet...

THE GOVERNMENT HAS STRUGGLED to cope with scale of the foot and mouth crisis. In several areas it is facing the consequence of underinvestment and closure. Cutting scientific support to agriculture is a false economy, a lesson that should have been learned with BSE.

For example the State Veterinary Service (SVS) is one of the public bodies that has played a key role on dealing with the outbreak. Its job is to diagnose and trace the course of FMD. It is also responsible for supervision of slaughter and disposal of culled animals. Its pay bill is less than £15 million a year, compared to the hundreds of millions that dealing with FMD will cost.

In 1967 there were over 400 people in SVS to fight FMD. Now there are 273. The number of regional centres has been cut from 24 to 13. Continual cutbacks (the result of deliberate policy) and pressures make it hard for an organisation to respond effectively to a crisis.

### Stressful

SVS vets are working up to 60 hours a week in dangerous and stressful conditions — affecting the quality of their essential work. That is why vets have been brought in from Europe, Australia and USA to support SVS. Retired and private sector vets are now also working for MAFF.

“Our members welcome outside support — they know they need it,” said Geraldine O’Connell, negotiator for the government vets union IPMS. “But it is galling to read stories in the press about a lack of veterinary officers available to visit farms from some of the very newspapers who used to bray so loudly for cuts in the number of public servants.”

industry, or spend the next two years going slowly and painfully bust.” Unsurprisingly, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has asked the Government to underwrite any losses arising from the implementation of a vaccination programme. Equally unsurprisingly, the Government has refused.

“Given that there is no trust or reliance in the government acting for farmers’ benefit,” writes the Cumbria farmer, “the general feeling is that all that will happen with vaccination is that the Government will vaccinate, regard the problem as solved and abandon farming in Cumbria, leaving it to rot.”

### Resistant

The farming industry has not reacted in a unified way to the epidemic, particularly in respect of vaccinations. The NFU speaks mainly for large-scale farmers. They are resistant to the idea of vaccination, because it would stop animal exports for a number of years.

Smaller farmers and organic producers are more in favour of vaccination than the NFU. Even though under threat, they see themselves going out of business, and do not want their industry wrecked just so that the big producers can continue profitable exports.

This live export trade has grown enormously, and is said to be sustaining large numbers of farmers at a time when their income is otherwise declining. At the same time we are seeing an increase in imports of inferior products, mainly from outside the EU. Much has been made of the possibility of illegal imports of infected meat. Yet few people have asked why it is that legal imports are permitted, when UK produce is exported or priced beyond the reach of average families.

There are several reasons why the numbers of animals transported is now greater than before. Firstly the scale of production in this country has increased. Producers operate larger enterprises. Secondly, many local markets and abattoirs have closed because of the expense of conforming to EU policy. Thirdly, live exports have increased. And

**‘The general feeling is...that the government will vaccinate, regard the problem as solved and abandon farming in Cumbria, leaving it to rot’**

farmers now see their animals as a commodity, trucking them from place to place in the hope of a better price rather than relying on local markets as in years gone by.

Meanwhile, reactions to the outbreak of FMD have varied from disbelief to conspiracy theories. Most people are in little doubt that it is a serious event, and has an impact beyond the farming industry. Beyond that, there is confusion about the way the disease is being tackled and concern for the future of affected industries.

### The economic element

Disasters, whether historical like the Irish Famine of the 19th century, or more recent ones like BSE, rarely have simple causes. But there is often an economic element involved.

The present epidemic was confirmed on 20 February at Heddon-on-the-Wall in Northumberland. Animals were probably infected for weeks beforehand. Sheep from that area went to a local market at Hexham the previous week and infected others sent to Longtown in Cumbria. From there animals were dispersed around the country by the time the disease was identified. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has now identified the main movements to Devon, Dumfries and the Welsh Borders. These are the areas worst affected.

FMD has been mainly absent from Britain since the last severe outbreak in 1967. There are key differences between that epidemic and the present one. In

1967 the disease principally affected cattle and pigs. This year sheep are far more frequently affected. The strain of virus responsible does not show up easily in sheep. This makes it hard to spot, and increases the number of infected carriers.

The most significant difference between the two outbreaks is the greater geographical spread of the infection this time, and the speed with which it took hold. This is in part due to dispersal from Longtown Market, but is mainly a result of the large number of live animals now transported around the country. In addition, unrecorded sheep sales took place around the markets, making it impossible to trace contacts

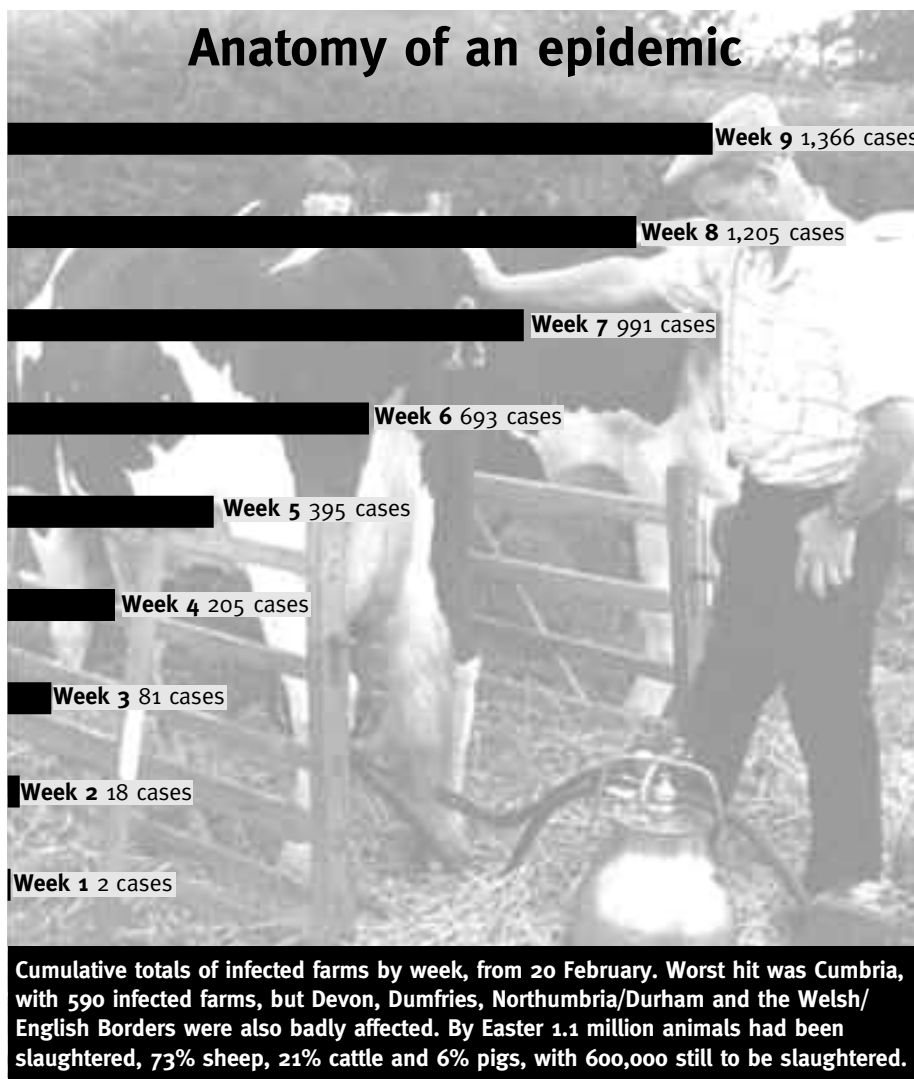
### Banned

The day after foot and mouth disease was confirmed, animal movements across Britain were banned, as was export of meat or live animals. Restrictions on access to all farmland, and closure of rural footpaths followed within days.

FMD is highly infectious. It is easily spread by people in contact with animals, and by air from animal to animal. Once animal movements have ceased, the main way to stop the spread of the disease is to cull all livestock within a few miles of an infection. Vaccination is possible, but controversial.

The difficulty with vaccination is that it is not entirely effective. Animals remain infectious or carriers after vaccination. The disease is not easily controlled in that way, and can persist following mass vaccination. This must be repeated to be effective, which is expensive. A few countries, such as China, have a policy of mass vaccination because they do not depend on an export trade.

The limited vaccination suggested by the Government is another matter. This is permitted to stop the spread of disease, and does not lead to such a long ban on exports. This is not done on animal welfare grounds, because the animals are destined for slaughter anyway. Ring-fence vaccination is just another way of trying to contain an outbreak, and not a long-term solution.



The outbreak of FMD has affected not only farming. A wide network of businesses, such as transport and agricultural machinery, servicing that industry has seen activity down. Indirectly, tourism in rural areas has dropped off sharply.

No one knows how the outbreak began, but it seems likely that there was one source. The virus is endemic in other countries, and so must have been introduced legally or illegally into the UK. The degree of risk is nowhere near that presented by BSE. FMD is not harmful to humans, and in most cases not fatal to livestock either. But affected herds may

not be as productive or profitable as those that are disease free.

Just how damaging FMD is to animal production is not easy to establish, nor is the extent to which it has been used to place further external control on small farmers in the interests of agribusiness.

The same problem still remains, and no government under capitalism will solve it for us: how can we take and retain control of our own food production? The first important step has to be to remove ourselves from the straitjacket of the European Union. This is an easy thing to do — just say Yes to independence.

# The recognition of British Sign Language as a priority has inspired campaigning for civil rights instead of pleading for more benefits

## Signing for progress

THE CAMPAIGN for the recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) led by the Federation of Deaf People (FDP) is having an impact and is mobilising deaf people into active citizenship. At the latest rally, in Wolverhampton on April 7th, local MP Ken Purchase, a councillor and a representative of Lichfield Diocese all pledged support for the campaign.

The MP, who had little previous experience of BSL, was moved by the sight of hundreds of his constituents signing slogans in unison, enjoying signed songs and poetry and debating the issue in silence but with visible enthusiasm and interest.

Later in the afternoon a sit-down protest halted the traffic for a time and resulted in publicity but also the arrest of six protesters. The court appearances of three women and three men afterwards kept the issue in the local news as the magistrates court failed to provide interpreters for the first two hearings.

### Membership

Although only three years old, the FDP already has a membership of 9000 and with branches all around the country has managed to organise the most active among the deaf with a campaigning style which marks it out from the other organisations serving deaf people.

Other organisations such as the British Deaf Association, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the National Deaf Children's Society are charities that do useful work but are reluctant to campaign actively, fearing loss of funding. The FDP is funded by membership subscription and donations. It has a constitution that ensures that deaf BSL users hold the leadership, although membership is open to all.

By making the recognition of BSL its priority the FDP has inspired the deaf into campaigning for civil rights instead of pleading for more benefits. This policy

was adopted at its founding conference in Blackburn, where BSL recognition was identified as the key to improving deaf people's lives, since it affects employment, access to public services, justice and most importantly education.

Around 70,000 deaf people have BSL as their first language but like all other

Only one in ten deaf people acquire good spoken and written English as a result of the exclusively 'oralist' education which relies on lip-reading, voice coaching and use of hearing aids and written language to educate. Those who do acquire reading skills manage to make progress, but most do not.

How did this sorry state come about? After a lot of progress in the 19th century a great debate on the way forward for deaf education culminated in the decision in 1890 in Milan by a conference of educators of the deaf to adopt 'oralism' as the way forward. Led by Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, who had a deaf wife, the conference rejected sign language. The conference went with the view that with sufficient effort the deaf could be taught to speak oral languages.

For most of the 20th century 'oralism' prevailed causing the disappearance of deaf teachers and sign language as part of education. Yet BSL, like sign languages in other countries, survived in the deaf communities. In some countries, such as the USA where there is even a University of the Deaf, it thrives.

The failure of oralism has not daunted its proponents, who are hearing people. Increasingly they pin their hopes on technology, the most recent being cochlear implants which are rejected by the deaf community.

Technological advances like subtitles, e-mail, text phone messages are only useful to the deaf with good English. What would be of real use would be signed interpretations for all TV programs in an on-screen box, which is only switched on by those who need it, and videophones for BSL conversations.

In recent years a few schools for the deaf have adopted a bi-lingual policy, using BSL to teach subjects but also teaching the English terms. This has proved very successful. To become a



deaf people they received their education in partial English. Partial, because, for the majority of them, it was mostly inaccessible. As a result the average reading age of deaf adults leaving the education system is seven years with many completely illiterate. As BSL is not taught in schools and in many it is actually forbidden, those who do not come from deaf families only learn it as teenagers after leaving school.

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teacher of the deaf a person must have taught hearing children for at least two years. Despite this barrier a few have qualified and have been particularly successful because of their ability to convey ideas in visual concepts. Hearing people from deaf families have made excellent interpreters, teachers and lecturers because of their knowledge of deaf culture and great visual awareness.

Trade union conference delegates familiar with BSL interpreters fully appreciate the sophistication and richness of sign language.

### Resurgence

It is difficult to be certain why exactly there has been a resurgence in BSL in Britain in the last few years, but there undoubtedly has been one. A quarter of a million hearing people have passed BSL Stage 1 with many going on to Stage 2, Stage 3 and degree level.

The universities of Wolverhampton, Bristol and Preston offer degrees in BSL interpreting and Deaf Studies and their graduates are making a difference as interpreters, TV presenters and educators. A few local authorities have allowed BSL to enter education for the deaf. Most importantly the deaf community has rescued the language and begun the process of nurturing and developing it.

By the creation of sign language the deaf community overcame the disability of not being able to hear. They see themselves as a minority language group, most of whom are unable to use their country's majority language and so should by right have access to all services in their own language.

Recognition of BSL by the government will enable the deaf to take their part as citizens and make education of deaf children a practical possibility. Who knows what other benefits this human achievement will bring, but we will all be the richer.

# WHERE'S THE PARTY?

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

### Who are we?

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

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

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

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

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

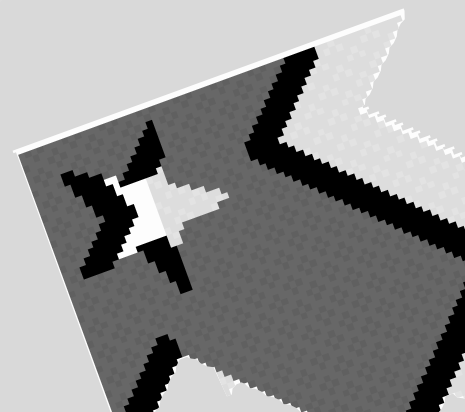
### How to get in touch

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

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

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

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# Back to Front – This land is our land

## ‘Most of the scars disfiguring Britain have a slimy trail leading back to Brussels’

WHAT IS the European Union for? Yes, everyone knows that it creates mountains and subsidies, bureaucrats and regulations, but what is it for? What, in the language of half of Brussels, is its *raison d'être*?

It's the kind of question that should loom large as a general election approaches, but it's a topic that the Labour Government seems anxious to avoid.

We say it has only one purpose, to prevent the working class from seizing power. And to achieve its aim, it is waging a concerted attack on the nation states that make it up.

In Britain, that attack appears first and foremost as an attack on manufacturing and on our ability to ensure a future as an industrial country. Along with that, we have the attack on agriculture and fishing. That makes the EU the greatest current threat to the British working class.

Yet despite its deep unpopularity, the European Union is not seen as central to the problems that we face as a class. Part of the reason for this is the traditional reluctance of the trade unions to criticise the Labour Government. And there is also the enthusiasm with which some trade union leaderships have embraced the EU with the handouts and sinecures it offers.

Yet most of the scars disfiguring Britain have a slimy trail leading back to Brussels. Who says we cannot support industry? Who says our public services must be privatised so that they can become profit centres? Who dictates

what farmers may grow?

Despite this — or maybe because of it — all the parliamentary parties are locked into the EU. The Liberal Democrats are unashamedly locked in. The Labour and Conservative parties are both divided, but neither will contemplate a future independent of the EU.

Of course, the existence of the European Union can come in handy for a party devoid of a strategy for industry or public services. If, like the Labour and Conservative parties, you have no strategy for these two lynchpins of a civilised society, you can find legitimacy in a political organisation like the EU. Since Maastricht (Thatcher's most destructive legacy), the EU has written into its own law the idea that the creation and maintenance of the free market is the supreme principle. So who needs a strategy when the market will determine it?

Meanwhile the EU is creating its own police and army, the better to enforce its rule. It may be only a question of time before the European Union intervenes militarily in the affairs of a member state with its Rapid Reaction Force — it has already interfered in the Balkans and under its Swedish presidency has ambitions to interfere in Africa.

We say that Britain's sovereignty and independence are not negotiable. We want no euro. We want out of the EU. For an independent working class in an independent Britain.

Is that too much to ask for?

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