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A PLAN FOR TEXTILES



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE WORKING CLASS created something which calls itself the Labour Movement. After the Second World War it started moving forwards. It created such a tidal wave rooted in workplace organisation that if it elected a duffer to government it had enough momentum to quickly repair the damage and elect another.

In the 1980s it stopped moving forward and went into retreat faced with the clarity of the print unions and mine workers.

As it retreated it was shackled by anti trade union laws which at heart made solidarity action illegal. The movement broke up like mercury into a thousand individual droplets with unions competing against unions for the few remaining union members. Twenty million workers got by without being part of their unions.

Gimmicks were tried while the movement was in neutral, but they failed. Growth in membership was only recorded where unions fought and campaigned to improve terms and conditions and where they created democratic

structures capable of responding to a wider variety of members' needs.

The idea of winning the organised workplace and organising instead of just servicing became fashionable again in isolated pockets and new shoots of trade unionism began to develop. These have not yet taken root and replenished the dead wood that leads the trade unions at the moment.

The movement has stopped because it is refusing to accept that it has to take the responsibility for Britain. Instead, it takes refuge in idle dreams of Europe, not so much the true believer as the cynic asking, "What's the alternative?" The alternative is to take charge.

To get the movement moving, the task is to reclaim politics and democracy, a simple sense that because we workers produce everything, we should control everything.

If this simple idea, so difficult to achieve, took root in Britain, the world would start moving again.

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Strikes in public services

SEPTEMBER 20 saw a second one-day strike by 70,000 Scottish local authority workers. Public services all across the country were affected including schools, libraries and council offices.

Workers have rejected a basic pay increase of 2.5% offered by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla). More action is planned on October 11 in support of a 5% claim. The employers say that the Scottish Executive has not funded pay increases. Members of UNISON in Scotland have become fed up with seven years of underfunding from central government. Councils have cut back on services, yet still their staff have not kept up with pay in other regions.

A week before the strike, the Scottish Finance Minister Jack McConnell announced extra funds for local authorities. Cosla said that would not help in paying more in the current year, but hoped the union would see it as helpful for the future.

Joe Depaula from Unison said his members were angry. They wanted to see money on the table rather than nods and winks. If talks with the employer do not achieve definite results, the action will continue.

- Social services staff at Plymouth City Council are holding a series of strikes and other actions in response to major cuts. Some 270 UNISON members have now carried out a one and a two-day strike — and more will take place if talks do not produce process.

The City Council has agreed a £933,000 cuts package including the closure of the Parkview Family Centre in Peverell, the loss of 150 jobs, and cutting funding to the Youth Offending Team.

During the latest strike staff collected over a thousand signatures on a petition in under an hour. Encouraged by this they held an impromptu march through the city centre and a symbolic 10-minute sit-down bringing traffic in Royal Parade to a halt.

UNISON says that children's services in Plymouth are close to crisis point. A spokesman told the local evening newspaper, where the action was front-page news: "We have no option but to strike. We have had an excellent response. It is something that has a lot of public support."

EURO Rock bottom, and below

AS SPOKESMEN for the International Monetary Fund called on the G7 group of industrial countries to discuss ways to intervene to prevent the total collapse of the euro, intervention by the European Central Bank, estimated at around \$6 billion to \$7 billion, has had no effect. The Bank of England helped out by spending tens of millions of dollars on euros, even though Britain is not part of the euro zone.

In addition to the economic pressures on the euro as the interest rate proves unsuitable to the diverse needs of the economies in the euro zone, the political effect of its growing unpopularity has added to the downward pressure .

Polls in Germany and, most importantly, the increasingly likely NO vote in Denmark's referendum spell trouble for the euro. As WORKERS goes to press, the Danes are preparing to vote in a hard-fought contest that is being closely watched around the world.

INDUSTRY Goodyear tries it on

GOODYEAR, the largest manufacturing employer in Wolverhampton, has put proposals to the unions which could result in pay cuts of up to 20% for some workers with the proviso that rejection could mean the loss of up to 600 jobs.

The Wolverhampton factory has higher costs than some of the other Goodyear plants because of the lack of investment in recent years. The trade unions are in talks to resolve the problems facing their members.

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@hotmail.com

TUC 2000: how about some debate?

If the TUC is the Parliament of workers and parliament means talking place, then the annual TUC Congress is a real talk shop. The talk represents the very best and very worst of the British working class — and WORKERS was there to read between the lines of motions and talk to people outside the Congress sessions to get a true idea of what is going on in active minds.

THE OBSESSION with suppressing differences of opinion in the televised debates will be the death of Congress as a genuine engine of working class thought and action. Workers will not be attracted to an apparently bland, mindless muddle. The TUC would be immeasurably strengthened if it actively encouraged the expression of different views on the big issues of the day.

The best contributions to Congress continue to come from small specialist trade unions which present ideas and plans of action that are clearly the product of mature thought in their own constituencies. These delegates often have a broader remit than just industrial relations or posturing in the face of New Labour. The first motion for years on the need to have a national strategy for food production came from the British Dietetic Association (showing why the persistent snobbery in the movement that public service unions are somehow worse than manual industrial unions is daft). Healthier diet, more production, more schools, more manufacturing.

Health on the agenda

Motions seeking to improve all elements of the health service were moved by a steady stream of highly specialised unions, while questions of control of the airways and shipping similarly came from those small groups who know these areas best. The main motions on pensions, union legislation and on the TUC's own democracy and structures came from small unions with big and important things to say. Many of the larger unions with their Labour Party affiliations speak more with messages to ministers in mind.

Because the talk of the TUC reflects the clarity and confusion among workers, the lack of joined-up thinking is one of the most marked features. John Monks, first to tell us that socialism is dead and that Britain's national sovereignty is a thing of the past, this year publicly embraced Cuban trade unionists and condemned the blockade, so ending years of coolness towards Cuba by the General Council. But

the biggest contradiction of Congress related to attitudes towards the British nation. A long line of speakers rose in the European Union debate to bellow about how the single currency would save us all from ourselves and how Britain's future lay only by giving up sovereignty to the EU. Then, not a few hours later, the same speakers rose to condemn the lack of British Government action on British

reflects the increasing departure of the movement from a range of democratic interests. While Congress resoundingly opposed the Private Finance Initiative and under the direction of the First Division Association again condemned the continual drift to running the country through unelected, unaccountable quangos and supported UNISON's loud call to value public services, by and large delegates have



Still too willing to take a back seat: delegates in Glasgow

Photo Andrew Ward/www.reportphotos.com

manufacturing and urged us to make it in Britain, have a national British industrial strategy, buy it in Britain, lower the price of sterling and support the British Chancellor in creating full employment for the people in Britain.

The nature of the debate on both matters showed the movement at its worst, putting talk and relationship with the Labour Party before thought and action. No pro-euro speaker seems able to answer the question how will we rebuild manufacturing and create full employment if we lose control of interest rates, exchange rates, oil and gold reserves, taxation, the legal system and Parliament?

The restructuring of Britain

The lack of real intellectual connection between the trade unions and the struggle for the independence of Britain in turn

unwittingly accepted the restructuring of Britain's state in preparation for the Europe of the regions. Regional government is being praised more than local government at Congress and, fresh no doubt from soirées in Brussels, many trade union leaders are preparing for European-wide collective bargaining while supporting an emergency motion from UNISON condemning the lower pay offer in Scotland than settled in the rest of the country as a result of devolution so praised by UNISON. National collective bargaining has been at the heart of the democracy and solidarity of the British trade union movement and the devolutionary tendencies required by the European Union are breaking this up.

There was no attempt by Congress to protect Britain. Unlike our Cuban brothers and sisters who have created simple laws to take complete control of the import and export of capital and the terms of its

employment of local labour, British trade unions (while some have a partial plan for industry) have mostly swallowed the concept of free movement of capital and labour demanded by globalisation and the European Union. While poverty rises in Britain any asylum seeker will be made more welcome than our own two million children growing up in abject poverty. While clothing and textile industries are literally rubbed each week here, the clothing and textile trade unionists will be the first to sign up to the EU project that is in fact causing the closures. While steel industries throughout Europe continue to suffer, particularly in Britain, the steel union proves helpless in the face of the continued decline and decides to diversify its membership base to become a general union, merging with clothing and textile workers and others in declining industries. Unions like this are relying on financial investments of past generations rather than new subscriptions and campaigning to survive.

Low aspirations

In looking around the world we see trade union movements at the heart of struggles for national democratic freedoms and liberation and building up impoverished nations, and trade unionists risking life and limb to establish democracy and basic human rights.

The TUC itself is the first to recognise that trade union growth and courage has been an engine of real change on many continents. Trade unionism lies at the heart of national democracy. Regrettably the lowered aspirations and subservient nature of the British trade unions at the moment means that we are in danger of surrendering the key national and democratic presence.

It was perhaps inevitable that the Congress would end with a revealing debate about the condition of democracy within the TUC itself. The NUJ argued forcefully for a recognition that the health of democratic structures throughout the movement is the key to membership renewal and that the bizarre executive-led structure of the TUC does not encourage this.

But they went down, as they had done earlier on an important motion simply calling for the trade union movement to be unshackled from the most oppressive anti-trade union legislation in the industrialised world. In short, worrying indications this year that the carthorse is content to be tethered in an obscure dark corner of the stable.

SECRECY

No relief

JOHN PRESCOTT, the deputy prime minister, has barred Mike O'Brien, minister in charge of freedom of information, from access to the financial details of the £750 million Birmingham North Relief Road. This project aims to provide an alternative to the heavily used M6 motorway.

The toll road, which is to be built under the Private Finance Initiative, will run through O'Brien's constituency. Protestors backed by O'Brien won a court ruling giving Prescott discretion to release the information but he refused, citing commercial confidentiality.

A commitment to freedom of information was part of the Labour Party's election manifesto.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

OCTOBER

Saturday 7 October

"Have the Danes saved our bacon"

Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq (near Holborn Tube), London.

Sponsored by Trades Unions Against the Single Currency, co-hosted by Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and Green Party.

Speakers include: Doug Nichols (Gen Sec. Of Community and Youth Workers Union), Ole Krarup MEP (Peoples Movement, Denmark), John Cryer MP (Socialist Campaign Group), Caroline Lucas MEP (Green Party), Geoff Martin (London Convenor UNISON), Tony Benn MP, Larry Elliott (Economics Editor Guardian). Contact Mark Hill: 0795-717635.

Engineering firms merge

With the recent concentration of investment in so called 'dot com' companies, stable and established engineering companies are reeling from a lack of investment by shareholders. As the share price plummets, the threat of takeover or merger looms.

In mid-September the boards of TI Group and Smiths Industries agreed terms for a merger stating that "there has been a sector shift away from UK engineers, which has caused a significant mismatch between the strong operating performance of the business and the stock market value".

Their profit levels are good and their real prospects in their respective markets are excellent. But the casino world distorts reality and has forced the companies to consider drastic strategies in order to survive. Both companies have moved in and out of the Footsie 100 but now have relatively low share prices.

The move will create a company with a turnover of £4.5 billion. Fortunately the two companies do not compete for orders and in fact complement each other, which should mean that few redundancies should occur in direct manufacturing jobs. The two companies each have a UK staff of 7,000.

There is a concentration of workers of both companies in Gloucestershire, where the merger is being viewed as a good deal for workers in the local press. But the pressures on engineering and manufacturing in Britain remain.

TRANSPORT

Fighting for the rate

DRIVERS employed by the First Bradford bus company are staging a series of one-day strikes after talks between the company and their union, the TGWU, appeared to be at an impasse.

The dispute hinges on the post-privatisation development of a two-tier wages and conditions structure within the workforce. Under the new ownership, more recently recruited drivers are earning up to £2 less per hour than colleagues doing exactly the same job.

The union says that First Bradford will

be prepared to unify the rates but only at the lower level, and the drivers, both new and experienced, are determined not to let this happen.

A strike on Friday September 15 was solid, though its effect was masked somewhat by the general traffic chaos at that time. Undaunted, the drivers voted by 329 votes to 45 to reject a marginally 'tweaked' management offer and in favour of taking further strike action, starting Monday September 25.

The union's regional official, Ronnie Morrison, described the feeling among drivers as overwhelming. Further action looks inevitable unless the company resumes meaningful negotiations.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Running on empty

The EU policy of imposing extra taxes on fuels, ostensibly for environmental reasons, harms the transport industry and all those who depend on it for goods, as well as all those who use any form of transport, whether petrol for cars and taxis, or diesel for tractors, farm equipment, lorries, trains and ships, or aviation fuel for aeroplanes. The EU's finance ministers decreed on 8 September 2000 that there must be "no change in policy on oil taxation".

But their pretended concern for the environment is yet another EU fraud. In 1989, the EU undertook to be using no more energy in 2010 than in 1988: by 2000, energy use had already risen by 11%. The Council of Ministers has consistently opposed setting up fiscal incentives for companies to save energy and reduce pollution. The INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY revealed last month that the European Commission wants to end the EU's only programme of energy conservation (Save,) and dump the only EU programme designed to find renewable sources of fuel (Altener).

In Britain, over 70% of the price of petrol is due to taxation. The Government's increase in excise duty and VAT on oil amounted to an extra 34p per gallon of petrol between March 1999 and September 2000. (Remember, VAT is the EU tax.) This was on top of the oil companies' price hike from \$23 a barrel of oil in November to \$30 a barrel in March. Our fuel prices have soared by 46% since August 1999. In Spain, petrol is 50p a litre, in Belgium 70p, in Britain 80p.

Last month saw a massive popular protest against these punitive taxes and against corporate profit seeking. Working farmers and working drivers, whose livelihoods depend on having reasonably priced fuel, organised blockades and demonstrations to force the government to cut fuel taxes. The country came to a halt: the action showed the working class's grip on the levers of power, and also showed how everything depends on the working class.

Under the cosh

Ordinary working farmers are under the cosh at the moment. Their incomes have declined every year since 1994. They depend on fuel to run all their farm machinery. The ordinary farmer does not benefit from the EU: 80% of the EU's subsidies go to the richest 20% of farms, largely the giant capitalist enterprises of East Anglia.

Those who use road vehicles do so very largely because they have to, to get to work, to get the children to school or to transport goods. The fuel taxes and price rises are universally unpopular because they force all transport users to pay more. They are a flat rate, regressive tax.

Higher energy taxes and higher fuel prices raise the costs of transporting both goods and people, by road, sea and rail; they only induce more fuel-efficient engines indirectly, if at all. Higher fuel taxes and prices are not 'green'; they do not 'force people off the roads', easing congestion. So in reality high fuel taxes and prices do not benefit the environment. Nor do they benefit the economy, because by increasing transport costs, they impose higher prices for all goods.

To improve the environment by reducing fuel emissions, governments must directly regulate the motor vehicle industry to produce cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles. In the USA, direct regulation of pollution, safety and fuel efficiency produced cleaner, safer and more efficient cars. But more than this, public and rail freight transport needs to be well run and affordable.

Self-regulation in the medical government legislation, how s**Health professions a**

A SERIES of high-profile cases of professional malpractice has put regulation of the health professions at the top of their agendas. As government has begun to intervene through the introduction of legislation, the professions cannot duck the issue, but must find effective ways to use the new legislation to improve the quality of self-regulation.

The government's power to change the law by 'Order', that is, not requiring parliamentary time for primary legislation, was of concern to all health professions during 1998-99 in the run up to the adoption of the Health Act. Its provisions to give the government such powers might mean that the professions' right to regulate their members was lost.

Regulation is essentially the function of registering workers as having accredited qualifications to perform the described job, and removing them from such registration if their competence is proven to be at fault. Many workers in the NHS are regulated and it is a key aspect of assuring patient safety that the schemes run well.

In the event the scope of the Order making power provided in Section 60 of the Health Act was very wide (see Box, page 8). Certain changes to the way the professions operate to govern themselves will still require an Act of Parliament. The Health Act includes certain safeguards; An Order cannot abolish a professional body such as the General Medical Council (for doctors). Neither can the Order require that a majority of members of professional bodies are lay persons.

Modernisation Plan

The government announced in its recent modernisation strategy for the NHS (NHS National Plan) that it will indeed reform the regulatory framework in the UK (by such an 'Order'). It is stated that modernising professional self-regulation should be seen as a component part of the wider strategy to modernise the NHS to help deliver better health and faster, fairer care.

A consultation paper (51 pages) has been issued inviting comment on a proposal to review the Professions Supplementary to Medicines Act 1960 and set up legislation to support the creation of a new Health Professions Council (HPC). The PSM Council and its 12 boards collectively regulate 120,000 health professionals. The HPC would also have the scope to regulate professions which are not presently regulated, such as paramedics who work on ambulances.

It is proposed that the new council will also include representation from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, the successor body to the UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and its four national boards); the General Medical Council; the General Dental Council; the Royal Pharmaceutical Society; the

professions is not always serving the public well. In the face of
 should the professionals respond?

and the 1999 Health Act

General Optical Council. The General Osteopaths Council and the General Chiropractic Council.

What is the politics of all this? The national press has made much capital out of the poor performance of the General Medical Council, the doctors' regulatory body. The Kings Fund has held a debate to consider whether 'self-regulation' is a fit model today to

safeguard patients. Should the regulation of health professions move entirely into a lay controlled environment with specialist advice received as requested by such a body?

It is evident that the public interest is currently poorly served by the GMC's way of working. Doctors under investigation are allowed to continue practising. Investigations take years to complete

and there is a significant backlog. Smaller professions may not have the same difficulties but must re-examine the robustness of their approaches. Many health professionals are not formally registered or regulated. Paramedics are a key group for instance; certain technical staff, such as in pharmacy are another. It

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Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Regulation in the health professions: which direction should it move in?

Inside the Act

When the Order laying out the Health Act 1999 was laid out this summer, it became clear just how wide its scope was. It permitted the repeal of many pieces of previous legislation and enabled the government to provide for the following:

- Establishment and continuance of a regulatory body
- Keeping a register of members admitted to practice allowing for the development of specialist registers
- Education and training before and after admission to practise, including continual assessment
- Standards of conduct and performance
- All aspects of discipline and fitness to practice including health related matters
- Investigation and enforcement by or on behalf of the regulatory body
- Making provision for the charging of fees
- Regulation of people providing support services to members of the profession

is essential that the public have the model which protects them the best.

There has been concern about the government taking to itself powers which permit it to change legislation that has served the public for decades. Where a profession fails, who can presume that the government would get it right?

The Health Act itself seems to have reached a sensible middle ground, which allows the professions to retain their important role without the need for government to replicate this centrally.

Adverse publicity

The practicalities of securing an efficient, effective replacement system should not be underestimated. There is also the question of the adverse publicity and criticism currently levied at the GMC. The government is not keen to become the pillory instead.

Self-regulation models are however suspected by the public. One set of professionals judge the performance of their peers. The risk is that justice is not done and professional protectionism generates conservative outcomes.

The recent case of the Wakefield surgeon, who has been disciplined by his employing authority, notwithstanding the views of his professional body, is a case

‘There has been concern about the government... Where a profession fails, who can presume that the government would get it right?’

in point. If confidence is affected then employers will begin to make their own decisions. This of course leaves the way clear for another employer to retain the services of a poor or unsafe practitioner since their professional registration is unaffected.

Anomalous practices

Another example of existing anomalous practices derives from the case of the gynaecologist who was also qualified as a pharmacist. He was debarred from medical practice and resumed practice as a pharmacist having not worked as one for a large number of years. The question of his fitness to practise in another profession had also to be separately investigated.

There is much to be put in order in the professional self-regulation arrangements currently operating in this country. In principle this is where the effort should be placed. The new Health Professions Council is to act as a forum in which common approaches to regulation across the professions could be developed for dealing with issues such as complaints against practitioners. External audit and scrutiny of the existing Council is also necessary.

Responsibilities

Performance by professional bodies should be examined. Where poor practice is evident it should be a requirement that the profession resolves this or lose the role of regulator. The government's responsibility is to ensure clinical governance is in place, that is proper management of safe, competent care of patients in all the healthcare professions. It should not seek divestment of this role from the professionals to itself.

To do so would be to undermine the solid core of expertise available, which is already being applied to the task. Patients may lose out in the reorganisation. The situation is in dire need of central control and management, not central operation.

This summer the textile unions and employers came together to plan a future for their beleaguered industry. The results are already being seen...

British textiles plan a future

BRADFORD is noted for its textiles. So it was fitting that back in the winter of 1998 it hosted a summit meeting of all sections of the British textile and clothing industry to set out a strategy for the beleaguered sector.

The meeting came about after years of effort, particularly on the part of the TGWU. And out of it has come a national strategy. The Textile and Clothing Strategy Group (TCSG) took up the declarations of the Bradford forum.

This summer it published A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE UK TEXTILE & CLOTHING INDUSTRY, a distillation of the problems and potential of textiles in Britain. Beyond that, the document has a signal importance because it exemplifies the significance of industry to the nation.

The strategic plan recognises that much may have to change if the textile and clothing industry is to survive in this country and regenerate itself. Changes will be needed both within the industry, and in its relationship to home markets. But the report also recognises how important such a major industry is in terms of jobs and wealth creation. That cannot be squandered on the altar of globalisation, or any other current fad.

As it is put in the plan, "...textile and clothing manufacturing has survived as a very significant industry in this country. However, the industry is approaching a watershed, and there is a danger that further contraction will lead to a loss of critical mass."

Proposals

What, then, are the authors' key proposals for survival?

The TCSG recognises as immediate and real the difficulties for exporters presented by the continuing weaknesses of the euro and some Asian currencies. But it rightly concentrates on the structural problems besetting the industry and remedies for those problems in the strategic sense. In doing so it seeks to play down quick-fix palliatives.

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The industry has a turnover of £17.7 billion and exports £5.1 billion of products each year. Yet it is threatened by low-cost imports from abroad. These have been accelerated by two factors. The rapid phasing out of the provisions of the international Multi-Fibre Agreement increased penetration of direct imports from low-cost countries. This was associated with a policy that major British retailers adopted to out-source to cheap-labour countries. These retailers, such as Marks & Spencer and British Home Stores, dominate the home market in a way unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

With a breadth of vision, the plan proposes closer ties between retailers and manufacturers. This would enable advantages for both sides based on an ability to react to "...short lead times, short runs, quick response and flexible manufacturing", all already features of the best production in this country.

The report declares that it is time for more British manufacturers to wake up to the potential provided by their high-skill, high-value products. They must employ clear branding and marketing strategies,

which they seldom do at present. After all, if a third of all production in terms of value is exported, it must have an appeal to the rest of the world.

Such a shift in approach would have a knock-on effect for training in design and fashion. It has long been a truism that the best designers come from Britain but leave to find work elsewhere. They go in particular to the relatively successful Italian industry, which has bucked the European trend of decline and retrenchment. The report suggests that much more could and should be done to nurture and retain talent. For a start, closer links are needed between the industry and the 12 main training institutions.

The proposed restructuring cannot take place in a vacuum. Import penetration continues apace in all sectors of the industry, particularly in high-volume, low-value clothing, and this trend is unlikely to abate by itself. As a consequence, the TCSG neatly calls on the Government to examine what is meant by an "ethical" foreign policy. Much of what is brought into this country is imported from low-wage countries

where working conditions are extremely poor. The report also acknowledges the role of our own sweatshops in undermining a modern industry.

An ethical trading policy would place restrictions on the importation of goods produced by sweated labour. This would give some relief here to the continuing downturn in jobs and create better conditions abroad. A 'Clean Clothes' label, or similar, could well have an impact in the same way as 'fair trade' logos attached to coffee and other products have had.

As well as clothing, the strategy suggests taking advantage of high investment levels in fabrics and in technical textiles — those made mainly for industrial purposes. In these areas Britain is still at the forefront of expertise and so they are prime candidates for expansion.

Investment

Investment and its effect on productivity are major features of the plan. It explains that the future is bleak without core investment from within the industry. More far-sighted and committed companies have recognised this and acted accordingly.

On the other hand, whole swathes of the industry have tried to rely on paying British workers less than other developed countries. These sections have lost out as even cheaper sources of labour have been tapped. Naturally, it has been mainly workers who have suffered from such short-sightedness. The solution from employers to being undercut has then been to rush capital abroad.

British companies have shown they can be more than just survivors where investment has given them a technical edge. In these cases skills have been retained and enhanced. The plan calls for these successes to help build a better image for textiles and clothing. It is not the sunset industry portrayed by all but the trade press. An improved image based on the substance of progress made by the best in the industry will in turn attract the best recruits.

Scotland under pressure

The strategy group's 12-point plan will also apply to Scotland, and a Scottish Textiles Forum has been set up. An early development is the establishment of a Centre of Manufacturing Excellence in Galashiels by Heriot-Watt University. Action is sorely needed, with a worrying list of recent job losses:

March 1999	Coats Viyella 200
September 1999	Levi 660 - overseas competition
October 1999	Russell Europe 300 - overseas competition
February 2000	Pringle 140, Baird Clothing 1,000 - M&S contract lost
March 2000	Daks Simpson 600 - M&S contract lost
May 2000	Laidlaw and Fairgrieve - Dawson International restructuring

Borders Council convenor Drew Tully said in response to the aid package: "It's not a great deal in UK terms but it is at least a recognition of a textiles industry that needs help. We still see a viable industry in textiles, despite all the troubles we've seen in recent years. We still have 4,000 people employed in textiles in the Borders and any help to those people is more than welcome."

The plan also calls for supportive government investment, particularly in research and development – neglected at present. And in fact the Government was impressed enough by the strategy group's arguments to announce a £15 million grant to the industry on the day the report was published. This is a drop in the ocean, but also a significant break with the practices of the past two decades. In that time the only grants have been to find alternatives to the industry, in other words for closure.

Paul Gates, General Secretary of KFAT, the knitwear and footwear union, said of the aid package: "We now need to build on this initiative; and we look forward to further measures being introduced in the near future. But manufacturers in the industry must seize this opportunity. They must improve their skills in areas such as design, marketing, and e-commerce; and they need to look at developing niche products and value added goods. I accept it is a major challenge, but we must all work together in partnership if we are going to secure a future for our industry."

This plan represents an extensive strategic step forward in industrial thought. It could become a model not only for textiles but also for the regeneration of manufacturing in Britain.

Web links

www.kfat.org.uk - Knitting Footwear & Textile Workers Trade Union. Award-winning site. Includes news on developments in the industry. Also good links to other unions and campaigns.

www.tgwu.org.uk - Transport & General Workers Union. As well as press releases on textiles, covers all manufacturing sectors.

www.dti.gov.uk - Department of Trade & Industry. You could search hard to find much about manufacturing, but a good source of official documents - including the full report at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/support/textile.htm>.

www.cleanclothes.org - The Clean Clothes Campaign, trade unionists and others aiming to improve conditions for garment workers worldwide.

Anatomy of an industry

The industry is concentrated in East Midlands, Yorkshire, the Scottish Borders and Northern Ireland, as well as being important in parts of London, the West Midlands and the North West. Marks and Spencer has 16% of the retail market. Overseas sourcing there has risen from 50% recently to 70%, the industry norm.

UK Textiles and Clothing Industry

Rank as UK manufacturing centre	9th
Gross added value	£7 billion
Turnover	£17.7 billion
Exports (1999)	£3.5 billion
Number of workers (January 2000)	277,000
Firms with no formal training plan	50%
Firms with no specific training budget	70%
Imported goods as a proportion of total sold	70%

Clothing and Knitwear

Sales (1998)	£8.1 billion
Exports (1999)	£2.6 billion
Imports (1999)	£7.4 billion
Gross Added Value (1998)	£3.5 billion
Number of firms (1999)	7,370
Number of workers (1999)	177,000

Textile manufacture

Sales (1998)	£8.57 billion
Exports (1999)	£3.8 billion
Imports (1999)	£5.6 billion
Gross Added Value (1998)	£3.4 billion
Number of firms (1999)	4,880
Number of workers (1999 est)	130,000

A good pension is part of the fight for better pay. But employer greed, made worse by EU budgets, is putting pensions under th

Pensions: hope you fight before you get ol

DURING THE 1997 election Labour and Conservative leaderships were vying over who had the best plans for attacking the country's pension arrangements. Labour won with their Stakeholder Plan and on the 1st October this year Stakeholder Pensions will begin to be registered.

A great deal of froth is spoken on pensions. But trade unions have always been clear that a pension, state or private, is part of deferred pay, and therefore part of the collective bargaining process.

Malthusian views are now being resurrected by apologists for the Government. They say there are too many people or that the population is getting too old. These ideas simply confuse and serve to weaken the collective approach. They also provide ammunition for the Government to reduce its social budget in line with Maastricht requirements.

It was the "too many people" prejudice that supported the means-tested system of Poor Laws and workhouses that Charles Dickens wrote about in the 19th century. Poverty forced more and more elderly people into workhouses until around 1907, when a system of universal pensions started to be developed. This change was entirely due to trade unions using collective bargaining to force the employers' and Parliament's hand.

The pensions split

In Britain today, pensions are split between state and private. The state pension is in two parts. First there is the basic state pension known as the Old Age Pension. On top is the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) that was introduced in 1978. At present the combined maximum from the old age pension and SERPS is £130 per week. The average is more near £80 per week — hardly a king's ransom.

In fact even with SERPS the state pension is near the bottom of the European state pensions league. When SERPS first started in 1978 there were a number of opt outs. But it was a

workable pensions plan that could have been further developed. Now, using Stakeholder, SERPS (which still covers approximately 4 million workers) is to be scrapped. In its place comes the State Second Pension. This will be means tested and only cover people earning less than £9,000 a year.

The Government's justification for downgrading state pension benefits centres on the fact that the proportion of elderly people within the population is

'A pension, state or private, is part of deferred pay, and part of the collective bargaining process'

growing, along with a rise in the ratio of pensioners to active workers. This proportion of young and old is known as the 'dependency ratio' and the view is that as more and more workers retire and live long lives, fewer and fewer active workers are left to support them. As a result the burden on the active workers and on the economy is getting too great. The only solution, supposedly, is to cut pensions.

And yet the fact is that in any population, the mix of ages constantly changes as economies change and urbanise. The apocalyptic visions of the pension wreckers ignore this. Most important of all, they ignore the vast numbers of people who for various reasons are either denied work, restricted to working part-time, or have had to take enforced early retirement through redundancy.

So on the one hand the Government and its apologists deny millions of people jobs on the grounds that the market does not need them, and then they deny them the most basic pension because the 'dependency ratio' is too high. The truth is that the mathematical

certainty surrounding the 'dependency ratio' is little more than a cruel ideological trick which is the result of mass unemployment and structural adjustment, not uncontrollable population shifts.

The call to scrap SERPS was first raised by Thatcher when SERPS still covered 8 million workers. The attack started in 1982 and culminated in 1987 with the introduction of personal pensions to opt out of SERPS. Personal pensions were then further mis-sold and used to get workers to opt out of occupational pension schemes. It was this 1980s opt-out drive that started the pensions mis-selling problems, where even now people are still seeking millions in compensation.

Following Pinochet

Personal pensions were first used to attack the state pension in Chile in 1981 by Thatcher's old mate General Pinochet. They have since become part of a strategy to attack, discredit and abolish public pension programmes around the world. Apart from the divisiveness of personal pensions — as against the collectively negotiated pension — up to 45% of the value of personal pension accounts are lost in charges and commissions, and so they are very profitable for insurance companies. For this reason, and to satisfy Maastricht, most of the remaining 4 million workers in SERPS will be shoehorned into various Stakeholder private pensions.

Stakeholder pensions will also have a potentially destructive impact on quality occupational pension schemes, in particular final salary pension plans. Like the attack on SERPS, the attack on final salary pensions was first led by Thatcher who considered them to be crypto-socialist in the way they guaranteed a pension at retirement.

We currently have £600 billion of pension assets held in final salary occupational pension schemes throughout the country. Typically under a final salary pension the employer will make annual contributions of between

and government reat

d

10% to 20% of total payroll. Compare this to Stakeholder, where the employer does not have to contribute. Thus, through Stakeholder 'compulsion', the Government is really giving a signal to employers as to how they can downgrade final salary pensions, using Stakeholder legislation as a lever.

Final salary pension costs to the employer have risen dramatically over the past 4 years. This is due to long term interest rates being trimmed in line with European countries linked to the euro. In fact the Treasury has been manipulating rates downwards by ceasing to supply 15-year and 20-year gilt-edged securities. (Gilts are simply one way the Government can obtain loans from capital markets without having to raise taxes). But any government using gilts to finance borrowing contravenes the Maastricht criteria, so new issues have dried up.

As a result the market price of gilts has rocketed. Gilts are particularly useful to cover final salary pension guarantees and have always been bought by pension funds for the sole purpose of covering their pension liabilities with secure gilt assets. So the fall in the issue of gilts to satisfy Maastricht has caused the cost of pension guarantees under final salary schemes to rise to record highs.

To twist the knife further, the previous Tory Government introduced a minimum funding requirement for final salary pension schemes. This test produces a skewed financial picture in terms of the cost of providing pension guarantees. Of course, under a final salary pension the employer not the worker carries the investment risk of pension funding — and the fall in long term interest rates has resulted in companies struggling to meet their pension promise.

The EMU squeeze

The effect on pensions of preparing for monetary union is twofold. First, the state pension has to be largely removed so that the Government can reduce its social budget. Secondly, the cost of pension guarantees backed by the gilt market has risen to record levels due to the unpreparedness of the Government to exceed Maastricht borrowing criteria.

Small wonder that the Government now has to dive in with Stakeholder pensions so that employers can use them as a vehicle to dissolve their final salary commitment, while the Government itself can dump state provision. Clearly, it is a game of 'pass the parcel', with workers themselves being the parcel. To conceal this, the wreckers are saying that the current pensions structure is inequitable, that it does not take care of the most socially vulnerable and that benefits should be more focused. In reality they want individualism, no sharing of pensions risk and no social solidarity across the generations.

The background of pensions at first glance appears technical. But pensions come down to collective bargaining. A good pension is a basic part of the fight for better pay. It is this mechanism that once more has to be used while at the same time understanding that the EU, far from securing social budgets, seeks to destroy existing social provision.



No one can afford to leave action about pensions to when they retire: the strength of collective bargaining is what has to be used to ensure that deferred wages are properly paid.

The climbing tradition is thoroughly working class and egalitarian with the desire and time to get to the hills...

The struggle for the high ground

THE FIRST RECORDED rock-climb was by the poet Coleridge, up Scafell in the Lake District in 1802, but rock-climbing really took off as a sport at the end of the 19th century. The nature of our hills determined the two strands of fell-walking and rock-climbing, with ice-climbing a late addition. British mountains are much older and smaller than the French Alps, making them more rounded, with easy access to almost all summits.

The climbing tradition is thoroughly working class and egalitarian, open from the start to anyone who had the means and time to go into the hills. In the 1920s and 1930s organisations such as the Youth Hostels and Scouts provided access to climbers from the smoky cities. Then in the 1950s the famous partnership of Joe Brown and Don Whillans, Manchester apprentices who owned a motorbike and had Saturdays off, showed that a new breed of dedicated hard climbers had arrived. Self-reliance is a key theme, attracting and breeding an anarchistic dislike of organisation, although a high degree of organisation is now needed to safeguard this tradition. Anyone can climb most mountains and cliffs when and how they please.

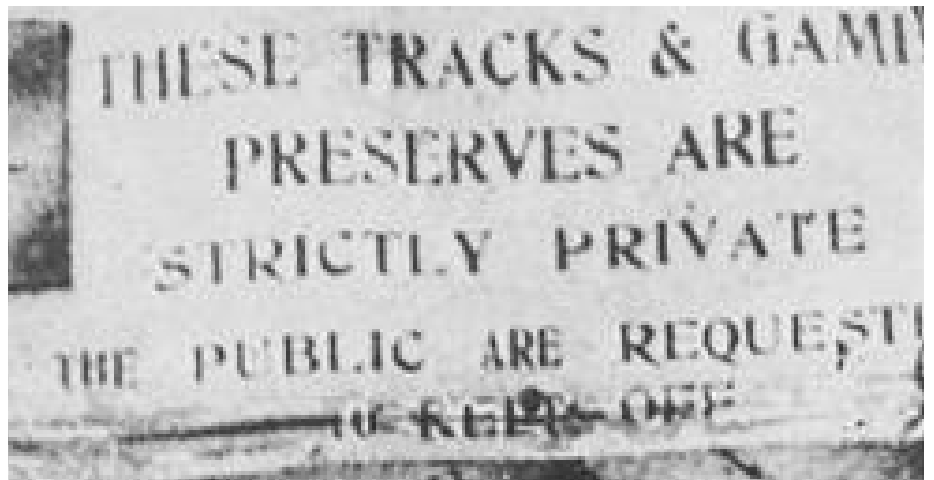
Access

Climbing clubs give access to other climbers, advice, transport and club 'huts', typically at £10-£20 per year. There are now 500 clubs affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council (BMC), whose elected officers are all active climbers. The anaerobic nature of movement on rock allows high levels of skill to be maintained by many in their 60s, although regular practice is needed to maintain both movement and mental familiarity with the process.

Before 1970 novices were simply taught that 'the leader does not fall'. Since then, a revolution has occurred in

the development of technical equipment. Today, falling from an overhanging rock is positively comfortable (assuming that your equipment is correctly placed!), and much safer than tumbling down the 600

feet slope of easy climbs. Indoor climbing walls provide the carefree thrill of defying gravity after a minimal period of training. On roadside crags you can see new climbers confident on harder rock than experienced climbers would dream of 40 years ago. The downside is that you could spend £1000 equipping yourself for an alpine trip.



The fierce fight for access to high and lonely places during the 20s and 30s led to huge rallies, like those in the Winnats Pass and Cave Dale, near Castleton in the Peak District, attended by around 10,000 ramblers. On 24th April 1932, 400 ramblers took part in the "mass trespass" on the forbidden moorland of Kinder Scout. Groups of keepers tried to prevent them, and scuffles broke out. Six were arrested and charged with riotous assembly and assault at Derby Assizes, and five went to prison for up to six months. Their struggle led to the creation of National Parks with free public access after World War 2.

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Handling risk

Unlike other sports, the freedom to risk your life is often regarded as giving climbing an added romanticism: 'it is better to live one day as a tiger...etc'. What is the attraction of testing the boundaries of acceptable risk? Whether

to ensure that climbers are aware of risks. The BMC technical committee examines accidents from equipment, and understanding is developed and passed on through rigorous courses for instructors and mountain leaders, with standards laid down by the BMC. The fun of climbing comes from the joy of movement and use of balance. But it also requires a fierce concentration and balanced application of skill and commitment as soon as you move away from straightforward roadside crags. Britain is rare in that there is no charge for rescue. Here, mountain rescue services are made up of local volunteers and paid for by public donations, though

an, open to anyone

the helicopter services of the coastguard and armed services help out.

Large numbers using popular mountain ranges could threaten this tradition, as well as conservation and access. Constant use can polish holds and destroy a climbing route, it can also turn a natural path up a hill into an ugly scar. In the national parks active management of footpaths shows how farmers and ramblers can co-exist. Battles over access to wild mountain and moorland during the 20s and 30s (see caption), which led to the creation of national parks, are still being fought, though estate owners have generally had to concede access.

Charging

Popularity raises the possibility of access charging, now creeping in through parking charges. Still, a limited effort can quickly take you away from the crowds. This summer, climbing the northern cliffs of Ben Nevis, the greatest cliffs in Britain, the writer's party appeared to be alone on the mountain, until the summit and the 'tourist' route was reached.

At one time access to the countryside and an introduction to outdoor pursuits were things that every Local Education Authority strove to put in place. During the 1970s it was seen as an entitlement. Thatcherism destroyed this, either with the closure of LEA centres or making them charge. Although the Scouts maintain their work, growth has come through private agencies, such as the PGL adventure holidays.

Mountains and moorlands form a fragile environment that could be easily destroyed. It has been protected only by political participation, by the Ramblers Association, by county councillors and MPs who love the mountains. Long may they continue.

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 there is a party. Only a party, and a special one at that, could bring together the people, ideas and effort needed to start the task of rebuilding Britain.

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, all sorts of workers, and over some 20 years, turned them into a party with a difference.

The dozens of political parties formed in the 1960s and 70s have come and gone, while the CPBML has grown up, is alive, well, and welcoming new recruits. One reason for its success has been that there is no division between lofty thinkers and humble foot-soldiers. Every CPBML member must be a thinker and a do-er. There are no paid officials.

The party is made up of ordinary working people 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

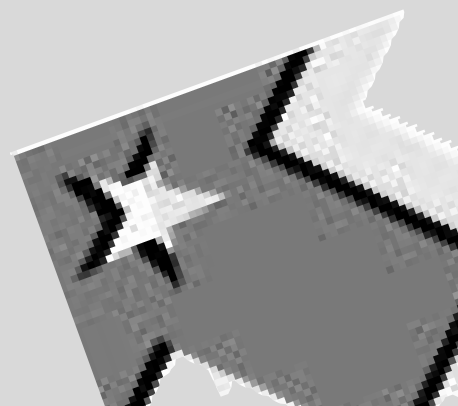
* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet WHERE'S THE PARTY. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

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Back to Front – The vanishing assembly

‘Londoners now have a remote authority, an impotent assembly, and a mayor who would sell them to the EU’

WHAT IS Greater London Assembly doing? Or for that matter the Greater London Authority? As summer melts mostly in autumn, the chances are growing that the riddle of the GLAs will not be solved this year.

Ken Livingstone and the assorted members of the authority were elected what seems like a millennium ago. Remember Dobbo? Since then, we have had almost complete silence. And worse than that, Londoners seem to have accepted it, and gone about their normal business.

Or tried to. One of the many ironies about the fuel blockade at the start of September was that it achieved at one stroke what Livingstone and his advisers had been promising: an easing of traffic.

Travelling into the centre of London by bus became a practical possibility for many thousands. Journeys that would have been unthinkable were accomplished in less time than it takes to say “toll roads”. And all without the intervention of a single politician.

The difference, of course, is that those driving cars during the blockade were just lucky enough to get petrol. If tolls were introduced, those driving around would be selected on the basis of income: if you can afford the tolls, then carry on polluting!

One thing the GLA is doing is forcing every manager at London Transport to apply for their own job. Whether that piece of Thatcherism

does anything to get services going remains to be seen. Even the best managers can’t spend all their time physically holding loose rails together, or cranking up broken-down escalators, or hand-wiring knackered signalling equipment. That normally requires a bit of investment.

Livingstone, meanwhile, is spending a fair bit of time, bizarrely, expounding the virtues of the euro. He is happy to tell audiences of businessmen and others that London will disappear unless Britain joins the euro. A cheery smile, a little quip. As if handing over the role of the Bank of England to a European Central Bank will enhance the role of the City! Look at the Stock Exchange: looking for a buyer, hiving off technology stocks (the ones with a future) to the Frankfurt exchange.

Londoners should be thinking things over. They voted for Livingstone for a number of reasons, mostly not including policy. They now have a remote authority, an impotent assembly, and a mayor who would sell them to the EU — not much to shout about, five months after an election.

The question before Londoners, and before the London labour movement especially, is whether to decide their own agenda and force it into this empty political arena. Anything less would be a betrayal of their responsibility as guardians of Britain’s capital city. And a betrayal, too, of their history of struggle.

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