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HISTORIC NOTES



1941: THE BATTLE FOR MOSCOW

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SAFETY UNDER ATTACK

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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WORKERS

“The twilight zone

RACKED BY debt and riven by internal differences, the European “project” is sinking fast. Even as they fail to agree on how to bail out Greece, the countries of the eurozone (17 members of the EU) cannot even provide the most basic need of work to their own people.

Unemployment in the eurozone stood at 10 per cent of the workforce in July/August, according to official figures. This means that 15.757 million people are out of work in these countries. A further 5 million-plus people are unemployed in the other 10 EU states.

In France, 2.15 million or 9.7 per cent of workers are unemployed, with 4 million on short-time working. Over 8 million people in France (out of a population of 62 million) are now officially living below the poverty line. One of the French government’s responses has been to increase the tax on medicines this month.

For capitalism unemployment is good news, however much governments may wring their hands. They love the downward pressure on wages. Indeed, as unemployment rises, so do bonuses for directors.

But the failings of the eurozone don’t stop there. Eurozone countries have given up their monetary sovereignty by adopting the euro. By divorcing fiscal and monetary authorities, they have ceded their capacity to provide high levels of jobs and services through the public sector.

Greece is being ordered to cut its budget deficit in a slump by cutting public sector wages, pensions and jobs, which will only worsen its situation, and the eurozone’s. This will not reduce the deficit, since slower growth will reduce tax revenue.

Greece would be better off leaving the union, regaining monetary sovereignty. Then it could default on the euro-denominated debt, and run budget deficits that are large enough to achieve full employment. This would relieve the newly sovereign government from being at the mercy of markets, rating agencies and other countries.

Here in Britain, 20 per cent of young workers are unemployed and overall official unemployment has now gone past 2.5 million. Capitalism is creating a lost generation – and, even worse, we are permitting it. Thank goodness the obstinacy and resilience of British workers prevented past governments from taking us into the eurozone – just imagine how bad things would be if that had happened.

Britain needs to invest in growth and invest in industry, for example by taking the railways contract away from Siemens and giving the work to Derby’s Bombardier workers. We could begin by stopping the loans to Ireland and Irish banks, and by pulling out of IMF “support” for Greece. That should free up a few billion! ■

Cover photo by Andrew Wiard/www.wiard.co.uk



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Pensions: the challenge

ANNOUNCED ON the final day of this year's TUC by Unison, the long-awaited call for industrial action to resist the attack on public sector pension schemes has been warmly welcomed. Eight months of phoney negotiations with ministers and civil servants who played dumb and deaf throughout are over.

The proposed strike on 30 November will embrace all TUC-affiliated public sector trade unions. Non-TUC trade unions – including the doctors' union the BMA, the Royal College of Nursing and others – are in discussions with the TUC about what they might do. Unison alone will be issuing over 9,000 notices of intent to take industrial action to employers. Tens of thousands of other employers will receive notification from Unite, GMB, PCS, civil service unions, teaching unions and health unions.

All trade unions involved in the decision have to mobilise the Yes vote in ballots which will be running in October and early November. Leadership forums of trade unions will be deciding the tactics and action on the day in the weeks leading up to the strike.

Of special concern is how the strike will affect the NHS and patient care. It is over 30 years since the last national industrial action in the NHS and many of the services and staff who spearheaded that action have been privatised, outsourced and may no longer be members of or covered by the NHS Pension Scheme. Many NHS workers will never have been involved in a collective dispute before, so this will be a challenge to organisation, leadership and determination.

The ballots are fraught with complexity as anti-trade union legislation gives the opportunity to the employers, prompted by the government, to lodge legal challenges blocking the industrial action. The unions have been going through frantic work in recent weeks and months to get membership records fit for a legal ballot. Sections of members not in the relevant pension schemes or in clusters of poor density have been put to one side, but the potential number of those to strike will be several million strong and will be the largest joint trade union action since the General Strike of 1926.

Luckily, despite the moronic mantra from some for the TUC to call a general strike, this isn't. This is the opening shot of a protracted war which will see guerrilla tactics deployed, selective action, "smart" tactics, further strikes targeting employers, regions as well as joint national strikes. To maximise the ballot return is the order of the day, to maximise joint trade union effort in the all public sector workplaces to deliver the most effective action on the day is the challenge. ■

LIBYA

Queuing up for deals

ALL THE states that took part in NATO's attack on Libya are now shoving towards the front of the queue for profitable energy deals with the National Transitional Council (NTC). France is the early front runner. The NTC sent a letter to the cabinet of the Emir of Qatar in April, saying that it had committed to granting France priority access to 35 per cent of Libya's crude oil in return for France's "full and permanent support". ■

IMMIGRATION

Still rising

NET IMMIGRATION rose 21 per cent last year, with 239,000 more people arriving here than leaving, according to the Office for National Statistics. In 2009, the total was 198,000. The government's cap on migration to Britain from outside Europe is being more than offset by a renewed rise in migration from Poland and other EU countries. Immigration from within the EU, which is not subject to the coalition's immigration cap, rose to 39,000 in 2010, up from 5,000 in 2009. ■

AFGHANISTAN

Obama tops Bush

DURING GEORGE W. Bush's presidency, 575 US troops were killed in Afghanistan. Since President Obama took office on 20 January 2009, 1,113 US troops have died there (as of 19 September). So in just 20 months, the Afghan war under Obama has claimed almost twice as many US lives than Bush's entire 88-month presidency. That number does not include suicides. ■

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

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Rome gets its orders...

THE EUROPEAN Central Bank bought Italian and Spanish government bonds after interest rates demanded by "investors" hit record levels. The ECB's price was austerity, telling the Italian government exactly what to do and when and how to do it. The unelected and unaccountable ECB is running Italian fiscal and labour policy; this only became public when the letter was leaked to the Italian press.

The ECB also ordered Berlusconi to enact these measures by emergency decree. The package of 45.5 billion euros in spending cuts over the next two years included privatisations, tax hikes and labour market deregulation; the second round of cuts in as many months. The Italian opposition cooperated by voting through the government's fast-tracked bill "out of a sense of responsibility".

...as Spain bows the neck

SPANISH PRIME Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and leader of the opposition Mariano Rajoy have agreed to insert a limit on the level of public debt and deficit into the Spanish constitution. This paves the way for the ECB to buy government bonds, and for the new austerity budget, cutting another 20 billion euros.

Ways of making you stable

GERMANY'S ECONOMY minister, Philipp Roesler, has proposed a new unelected "stability council" to impose sanctions on EU countries that do not adopt rigid budget discipline and pro-business labour policies. Meanwhile, the EU and IMF have forced Ireland to set up a Fiscal Advisory Council composed of outside fiscal referees, with significant overseas representation. The European Commission has ordered a number of member states to create their own fiscal councils. Britain already has the self-imposed Office for Budget Responsibility, with similar aims.

Closing ranks

FORMER GERMAN Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has called for closer EU integration in response to eurozone instability. He said. "The Commission will have to be turned into a government that is controlled...by the European Parliament. That translates into a United States of Europe." ■



TUC London 2011: not just debating pensions.

Photo: Workers

Motions throw down gauntlet

THOUGH THE TUC has been reduced in the number of delegates attending, reduced in the number of days' duration, with the lowest affiliation since the 1940s, and almost total unanimity over motions debated, at least several motions threw down the gauntlet. Despite Miliband lecturing the TUC on why there should be ever greater distance between the trade unions and the Labour Party (good!) and why striking to defend pensions is bad, the TUC passed the motion on Trade Union Freedom.

"Congress believes that workers' individual rights are best protected by a strong and free trade union movement....Congress reaffirms its commitment to the removal of anti-trade union laws." The campaign to re-establish, enhance and grow workplace organisation is the challenge for all unions and workers. Workplace organisation is the key to solidarity and collective consciousness. Workplace organisation is the basis for collective bargaining on wages, skills, pensions, health and safety, equality, dignity. Workplace organisation delivers real justice. Scrapping the most draconian anti-worker legislation in Europe is the challenge nearly 200 years since the first Combination (anti-trade union) laws were enacted in Britain.

An emergency motion on Bombardier, bypassed by the government for the contract to make new Thameslink carriages, firmly declared "the principle of supporting British manufacturing and protection of jobs is the overriding issue". And Congress unanimously passed a strong motion on the crucial but largely unreported "Mode 4" negotiations that the European Union is conducting with India, which will allow transnational companies to bring their own workforce temporarily into the EU, including Britain. Now the task is to translate those motions into action – starting with publicising them.

And the Professional Footballers' Association struck a blow for the unity of Britain with its successful motion calling on the General Council to support the idea of a united GB team at the London Olympics. "In these days of political separation and movement towards the break up of the United Kingdom, football and the Olympics allow the people of Britain to focus on what unites us and serves as a reminder of the great achievements that have come about when we have pulled together in the national interest," it said. ■

TAX

'Fairness' misses the point

CHANCELLOR GEORGE Osborne is considering dropping the 50 per cent top tax rate for those declaring income of over £150,000. The TUC, amongst others, thinks it would be unfair to do so – pointing to wealthy people in the USA and Europe who say that high earners should pay high taxes.

Osborne claims that the 50p rate collects little tax and is a disincentive. The TUC suspects that the evidence for Osborne's assertions is likely to be thin or lacking entirely. It fears a decision will be made before statistics on the amount collected are published in spring 2012.

The TUC response misses the mark. It's not just about "fairness", or making high earners contribute more. Workers do not need to be told that "we're all in this together" is empty, or that the coalition government is increasing taxes on workers at the same time as cutting child benefit, tax credits and so on. Nor do many fail to grasp that the failure of the 50 per cent rate to bring in much tax is due either to massive avoidance or emigration by those who have no allegiance to Britain.

The TUC would do better to emphasise the real unfairness: that the product of our labour is shared with those who do not contribute. So-called wealth creators who might be frightened away by 50 per cent tax are in fact the opposite – parasites on the value created by workers. ■

HEALTH**US care workers strike**

SOME 23,000 Kaiser Permanente health care workers struck in mid-September in California in a state-wide protest against the multi-national private healthcare company. 2,000 engineers of the International Union of Operating Engineers and Stationary Engineers joined 17,000 registered nurses of the California Nurses Association in sympathy strike action with 4,000 National Union of

Healthcare Workers members.

NUHW members are fighting Kaiser Permanente's refusal to address short staffing and patient care issues. At the same time the company is attempting to eliminate workers' defined benefit pension schemes and health benefits.

Kaiser Permanente has made over \$5.7 billion in profits during the past 30 months and yet still penalises and exploits some of its lowest-paid workers providing health care. The company is currently in talks with the Department of Health about expansion into Britain. ■

Free hand for developers?

RADICAL CHANGES to planning laws proposed by the government are a charter for developers. A "presumption in favour of sustainable development" will replace the strict limits on building in rural areas and the green belt that have been in place since the 1940s. This will make it easier for developers to build.

The framework will degrade the protection currently afforded to listed buildings, historic sites, national monuments and gardens. Councils would be required to publish details of land available for development. Consultations on the draft national planning framework are due to end on 17 October and a government decision is expected at the end of the year. If these plans go ahead it is expected that there will be more applications for planning permission and that the approval rate will increase.

At the same time, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH has revealed close links between the Conservative Party and developers: namely, that the Conservative Party has accepted millions of pounds in donations from property developers in recent years; that representatives of the housebuilding industry helped draft the wording of the government's consultation document; and that a special club has been set up to allow developers to buy time to meet with ministers and senior Tories.

Many influential organisations fear it will lead to unrestrained building in the countryside, particularly in protected areas. The framework will reduce thousands of pages of planning rules to fewer than 60 and more power over planning applications will be given to local bodies with more economically-led planning prescriptions.

Ministers argue that more housing is necessary to prevent growing homelessness and overcrowding, while ignoring the cause and succumbing to pressure from house-building firms, which want access to the far more lucrative rural areas. Less profitable "brownfield" sites are not being considered as a possible strategic direction even though many sites are still available for housing.

Organisations such as the National Trust, English Heritage and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England have voiced their fears, calling for a delay and a longer period of proper consultation to ensure there is protection for the green belt. ■

POLICING**EU database takeover**

WITH ALMOST no publicity the European Union has introduced the "principle of availability" – a typically vague term which effectively places police powers in the hands of unelected EU bureaucrats by linking three major police databases.

The European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) links with the European Police Records Index System (EPRIS) and the Information Exchange Platform for Law Enforcement Authorities (IXP). ECRIS was supposedly developed for transfer of criminal data between EU

states, but has been extended to transfer all non-criminal court rulings as well.

EPRIS, grown from Europol as opposed to Interpol, allows all EU police organisations access to each other's databases and the opportunity to search on any EU citizen. IXP is the centralising of all EU law enforcement information exchange instruments under the control of the Council of Ministers.

The linked systems will allow any law enforcement agency access to roam across what the EU defines as its borderless "Area of Freedom, Security and Justice". In practice, the beginnings of a European-wide police state, without doubt linked to NATO and US intelligence. ■

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****September**

Thursday 29 September, 7.30pm.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

"Britain: What Next for Workers?"

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. Rocked by financial crises they can neither understand nor control, with unwinnable wars abroad and rising discontent at home, the ruling class has become the clueless class. But what about us? Will we go down with sinking capitalism, or strike out for ourselves? Come and discuss how the working class can rebuild industry and Britain. Everybody welcome.

October

Sunday 2 October, 12pm

Manchester for the Alternative: assemble at noon at Liverpool Road, off Deansgate.

TUC-organised demonstration to coincide with the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester. Details at www.tuc.org.uk/ altogether.

Sunday 2 October, Various times

Wilton's Music Hall, 1 Graces Alley, London E1 8JB. Nearest stations Aldgate and Aldgate East, and Shadwell.

The Battle of Cable Street, 75th Anniversary.

A programme of events and exhibitions to celebrate and commemorate the Battle of Cable Street. Stalls, exhibition, music, books, discussion, song and dance. See battleofcablestreet.org.uk for this and more events around the anniversary.

November

Thursday 10 November, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

"Energy – Britain in Crisis"

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. This country was built on power: first steam, then electricity. Now they've closed the pits, North Sea oil is running out and power stations are being shut faster than new ones are being planned. Can renewables really plug the gap – or will the lights start going out? Come and discuss. All welcome.

As NATO makes a grab for Libya's oil and reconstruction contracts, it is looking at where it has come from to be what it is today...

NATO – the hidden history of capitalism's r



Photo: Workers

Protestors gather in Glasgow city centre on 8 September for their weekly 5pm Thursday rush hour vigil to condemn the ongoing intervention in Libya and the attack on its sovereignty. Model resolutions are being drawn up to put to trade unions that have not considered the issue yet.

IT'S BEEN involved in the bombing of Libya, in North Africa. In the war in Afghanistan, in Asia. In the break-up of Yugoslavia, in Southern Europe. You wouldn't think, then, that its initials stand for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. So where did it come from, and why?

NATO originated with the Washington Treaty of 4 April 1949, but the ideas that gave rise to NATO go back to the latter months of World War II when the Red Army was demolishing the Nazi war machine. Through Swedish channels, Himmler and Goering sued for peace urging Britain and the US to unite with Germany to fight the 'real' enemy, the USSR. Churchill was also concerned at the pace of the Red Army's advance, and instructed his military

planners to come up with a plan to attack the Red Army on July 1 1945. The plan, named "Operation Unthinkable" and dated 22 May 1945, proposed to retake eastern Germany and Poland through a two-pronged attack on Stettin and Poznan with 47 divisions including 14 tank divisions.

Meanwhile, Field Marshall Montgomery was told to stockpile all captured German weapons. The plan's primary goal was "to impose upon Russia the will of the United States and the British Empire". It envisaged using 100,000 German Wehrmacht prisoners of war and concluded "If we are to embark on war with Russia, we must be prepared to be committed to a total war, which would be both long and costly". Churchill was aware

that the US had atomic bombs and told the Chief of the Army, General Sir Alan Brooke, that "if Stalin failed to listen to the West's wishes, the US could target Moscow, Stalingrad and then Kiev" (with atomic bombs). Brooke was appalled and privately described the Prime Minister as a warmonger.

However, at the war's end, bankrupt Britain was in no position to call the tune in terms of the new economic, political and military realities. The USA emerged as the new world power with a mighty navy and surging economy due to the war. The US had seized most of the Japanese empire and controlled the Pacific with its Navy and bases.

The formation of NATO in 1949 was an

ts in an unholy alliance with Islamists and spies, it's worth

military wing

extension of the Truman doctrine, which sought to create military alliances, controlled by the US and intended to "contain" the Soviet Union, and it put what remained of Europe's military assets firmly under US control. With Britain, Iceland, Norway, and Italy among NATO's members providing the US with bases, the US dominated the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The admission of Greece and Turkey to NATO allowed the US to start its encirclement of the Soviet Union.

NATO's first act was the creation of West Germany from the NATO-occupied zones of old Nazi Germany which claimed to be "the democratic reorganised continuation of the German Reich" laying claim to the Soviet occupied zone and parts of the Soviet Union as well as Poland and Czechoslovakia. The German Democratic Republic was set up in the Soviet-occupied zone months later as a response although the Soviet Union called for a united, neutral disarmed democratic Germany.

In 1955 West Germany joined NATO, vowing to reclaim "lost territories". Responding to this threat, the GDR and Poland initiated the Warsaw Pact, which was established as the military alliance of Comecon – the socialist economic community – on 1 May 1955. NATO was now the armed wing of capitalism set against the socialist Soviet Union and its allies.

The US and NATO escalated military spending and embargoed the sale of a range of technical products to the Soviet Union, forcing them to waste huge resources on developing high tech weaponry. The US introduced nuclear missiles, targeting the Soviet Union, in bases from South Korea through Canada and the US to NATO European countries.

Similar military alliances to NATO were created to complete the encirclement of the Soviet Union and also China. The Baghdad Pact enjoined the US, Britain, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan but was dealt a severe blow when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in 1958 and then a death blow when the Iranian Shah was overthrown. SEATO enjoined US allies

in South East Asia, but internal bickering and the Vietnam War ended that.

By the 1960s, the US was mired in its wars in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The European NATO countries were losing their empires to liberation struggles one by one. But the US thought that it was militarily strong enough to take over France's former Indochinese colonies. It was to be proved wrong. The US tried to bring NATO into this war but failed, turning instead to its SEATO allies in Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. It still failed and suffered a humiliating defeat to popular guerrilla forces.

In the 1980s, US President Ronald Reagan escalated military spending dramatically culminating in the so-called "Star Wars" anti-missile system. He also invaded Grenada, a British Commonwealth country with the British Queen as Head of State, without consulting Thatcher, just to remind NATO allies, including Thatcher, who was in charge

Expansion

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and most of the eastern bloc, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. It may have been assumed that NATO would act similarly. But this was an opportunity to expand NATO and the EU in a manner similar to 18th- and 19th-century empires. Most of Eastern Europe was gobbled up by NATO and then required to join the EU on its terms, their industries privatised and taken over by EU and US companies.

Some stood up to this, particularly Belarus and Yugoslavia, the latter paying a heavy price, being bombed by NATO and seeing Warsaw Pact military hardware channelled to Croatia to hasten the break-up of the country. The Serbian Province of Kosovo was occupied by NATO and remains a NATO/EU colony hosting the biggest US base, Camp Bondsteel, in the Balkans, the others being in Bosnia, Romania and Bulgaria. The base houses a detention centre described by the Human Rights envoy of the Council of Europe as "a smaller version of Guantanamo Bay".

Ten years ago, in 2001, NATO attacked Afghanistan, marking the start of a war

without end, and in 2003 some NATO forces, though not under NATO control, invaded Iraq. France had vigorously opposed attacking Iraq and this marked the beginning of a number of splits in NATO. One by one NATO members Poland, Italy, Spain and eventually Britain, began to withdraw their troops from Iraq. But NATO did take on the role of "training" the Iraqi army.

Meanwhile the US-led alliance was busy engineering the "Orange" revolution in Ukraine, the "Rose" revolution in Georgia and the "Tulip" revolution in Kyrgyzstan with the intention of incorporating them into NATO and establishing military bases there. To a degree, they succeeded in Georgia and to a lesser degree in Kyrgyzstan but Ukraine fought back. And, of course, today NATO is bombing Libya.

So what is NATO today? It remains the armed wing of US/EU capitalism, or in fact finance capitalism, under US control. Once the only capitalist game in town, today it has global interests and it would take something big and intercontinental, like Russian and Chinese capitalism, to challenge its hegemony. The US is now reinforcing its military presence in the Pacific to contain China. NATO protects access to oil and other resources by control of central Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea, the Persian Gulf and shipping lanes from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

But the US economy and political system are failing, the Eurozone is in turmoil, Britain is bankrupt and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are seemingly unwinnable. There's a NATO east-west split about the attack on Libya: dissatisfied Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava and Budapest have created the Visegrad Group as a Polish-led military alliance within a military alliance, and are seeking to recruit some Balkan states, while Germany flirts with Russia.

NATO is not in good shape but when a beast is wounded or cornered it lashes out. NATO's appetite for blood will not be satiated by Libya. We can expect more wars around the corner. ■

Blown-up stories of “health and safety gone mad” are providing of progress. Nothing, certainly not workers’ lives, can be allowed

Health and safety: put on your hard hat – a



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.wiard.co.uk

The Paddington train crash, October 1999: work and travelling to work are the most dangerous environments.

THE GOVERNMENT’S recently published review of Health and Safety, the catchily titled “Common Sense Common Safety”, is, paradoxically, a very dangerous document. It presents itself as a necessary antidote to “insane bureaucracy” and a challenge to “the compensation culture”, but reading between the lines, the intent is blindingly obvious. They mean to reverse the gains made by workers in securing regulation and safety in their places of work.

The report uses a familiar blend of popular misconceptions, erroneous conclusions and outright lies to give a veneer of acceptability to its thesis that health and safety mania is strangling British business and stifling

entrepreneurship and growth. So it is not banks refusing investment capital, or the government giving preferred bidder status to foreign firms, or employers taking their work abroad then. It’s all the fault of the Health and Safety zealots. Good to get that one out of the way.

Of course stories abound. Many is the collective taproom chuckle at the tale of the egg and spoon race cancellation, or the school forcing children to wear goggles when playing conkers. The point is most such occurrences are blown up out of proportion or fictitious.

During this year’s tennis championships, the Wimbledon club closed “Murray mound” on a rainy day, citing health and safety concerns that

people might slip and hurt themselves. This prompted the chair of the Health and Safety Executive to write a stinging open letter condemning the decision, and the ban was promptly rescinded.

Speaking for the government earlier this year, the Work and Pensions minister Chris Grayling fulminated against schools making teachers do a 100-plus-page risk assessment before they could walk children to the local park. All righteous indignation, but it simply isn’t true.

Work, the biggest risk

To focus on trivialities, and the eccentric interpretations of some individuals is to miss the point. It’s not in the school playground where people are at greatest

...a useful cover to a government intent on rolling back decades
...to get in the way of a good profit...

...and get ready for harder times

risk, but at work. And the sphere of work is just where the review poses the greatest danger. Buried within the report are proposals for a dramatic reduction in proactive regulation – down by a third, a reduction of 11,000 inspections a year – and the introduction of more fees for employers when HSE inspectors find fault.

Unions are understandably alarmed by these developments. Prospect negotiator Mike Macdonald said “...the new strategy shows that health and safety regulation in Britain is now driven by the government’s wish to cut spending rather than by a professional assessment of what action saves lives and avoids accidents. The key question should be what type of regulation best suits British business and its workforce, not a simplistic dogma that all regulation is bad.”

With fewer workplace inspections, the requirement for employers to take the wellbeing of workers seriously is fatally compromised. Less risk of inspection equals less attention to safety. RMT general secretary Bob Crow hit the nail on the head: “...When ConDem ministers talk about easing regulation what they mean is removing it, and when it comes to health and safety that is a charter for death and injury. There are already far too few workplace inspections and it is already next to impossible to get bosses whose negligence causes injury, death or disease at work to face legal consequences.”

The report recommends that inspections for “low risk” places of employment, shops, offices and schools should be replaced by simple online risk assessments. The harrowing story of Gurmail Singh, 63, who was beaten to death in a Huddersfield convenience shop in February 2010 when he confronted shoplifters, gives the lie to the notion of low risk. Every town in the country will have its own Gurmail Singh.

In construction, there is growing evidence that employers are flouting existing law with impunity, knowing as they do the road the government is travelling down. Construction union

UCATT is calling for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to take action. UCATT says its officials have become increasingly alarmed that many employment agencies require construction workers to supply their own personal protective equipment (PPE) or alternatively charge the worker if they supply it. This is against safety regulations, and given growing concerns about fake and counterfeit PPE being available in the construction industry, it places already vulnerable workers at greater risk of injury.

Compromised workplace safety puts the lives of others at risk also. An official investigation found crumbling infrastructure and staffing cuts led to a potentially lethal tube derailment last year. The incident happened between Earl’s Court and Gloucester Road on the Piccadilly line at 5.30am on 12 May 2010.

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) report concluded an engineers’ train was derailed because the Tube track was in such poor condition it shifted and collapsed under the weight. Investigators found five steel brackets holding the track were not secured to the sleepers underneath because the screws had broken. The investigation found several sleepers were in poor condition, track faults were not identified and workers had insufficient time to do the repairs.

Potters Bar

A portent of the way employers can evade their responsibilities was announced with the decision to drop a health and safety charge against the rail maintenance company Jarvis over the 2002 Potters Bar train crash. Seven people were killed and 76 injured in the Hertfordshire crash when a northbound train derailed at high speed. The rail maintenance section of Jarvis is now in administration, which led the Office of Rail Regulation to conclude that continuing the prosecution would not be in the public interest. The regulator said any trial would be lengthy and costly, and any conviction would lead to only a small financial penalty.

At its heart, this report is part of the

attempt to unravel the advances made by workers since they first organised for their own defence. Britain has an envied safety at work record because British workers have demanded it. Since the industrial revolution, when mechanisation transformed production but at the cost of workers’ lives, there has been a constant struggle between employers and their workforce over conditions on the job.

Reforms have been won, but the history of factory and related legislation throughout the 19th century and beyond is the history of employers evading their responsibilities. For every concession won there was a price paid in the blood and shattered limbs of men, women and children working in the mills, mines and factories.

The growing strength of the labour movement ensured that certain unsafe practices were outlawed and safety standards put in place. But workers always had to be vigilant. And to this day, lives are lost at workplaces up and down the country.

Of their very nature, certain types of work are hazardous, as the tragic mine deaths in Swansea valley remind us. But risks can be managed. The nationalisation of the mines brought about a huge reduction in the rate of casualties for pit workers. Now nationalisation and the safety standards that went with it seem a distant memory.

But knowledge lives on. We do not have to relearn the risks associated with gas and electricity, with machinery and explosives. It is well documented. We do, however, have a responsibility to challenge a government that is effectively saying to employers, do away with this safety nonsense.

Oh, and by the way, if British workers won’t work in unsafe conditions, we can guarantee a supply from abroad who may not speak English don’t have the British attitude to safety. The insistence on minimum safety standards and independent inspection is one of the ways in which we still exercise some control over our working day. We can ill afford to see it diluted. ■

The world is becoming increasingly dangerous, with our rulers r fighting dictators, but all they are interested in is propping up th

Capitalism: killing us all with its greed and



THERE'S A need to look around and see what is going on in the world and try to make sense of it. Not a Cook's tour, but what is changing and developing just now. Not least because we are embroiled in an undeclared, illegal war again – beginning with Africa and the Middle East, with what looks like a domino effect.

Tunisia, a series of demonstrations, a popular uprising focused on unemployment, food prices, government corruption etc. President Ben Ali and family hot-footed it to Saudi Arabia, taking as much

This article is an updated and edited version of a speech given at the CPBML's May Day rally in London this year.

loot as they could get their hands on.

Neighbouring Egypt similarly rocked and Mubarak was gone. And so it was presented to us like some political chicken pox, a contagious thing. Libya caught it, Algeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and others. But in all the sound and fury, what is really going on?

It feels like looking at events through frosted glass – through a veil. We are aware of movement, of noise. But who is moving, who is shouting? Jack Straw drew some flak earlier in the year when he described a veil as an obstacle to direct communication. He might recant soon, like Galileo, or maybe some latter day Torquemada will get him. But he was

right. We know events are unfolding, but we can't discern.

Blair used lies to obscure what was going on in Iraq: weapons of mass destruction, 45 minute warning, links to Al-Qaeda. We saw through that. Now we have YouTube footage, shaky mobile phone pictures, the sound of artillery somewhere off camera, reports originating in some other town or even country. Hard evidence is thin on the ground. Yes, this building has been shot at, but who is shooting? Yes, this is a cluster bomb, but who fired it? And more importantly, who bought it and who sold it?

Especially so in Libya, which became the permanent focus of the movers and

resorting to wars to protect themselves. They say they are the dictatorship of capital...

and stupidity

shakers of “Western Democracy”, Britain, France and the USA. Why these countries at this time, and why the fixation with Libya?

Cameron says it was about democracy, and Sarkozy says we won't have dictators. And Obama says it is unacceptable when your own citizens are killed. (They execute more of their own citizens than the rest of the world put together. Who says Americans don't do irony?)

Actually, it was about the decay and demise of capital. We have said that the nation state is the best shell for workers under capitalism. Best of all, a stable nation state. As capitalism collapses and implodes, it is to be expected that artificially created states will be least able to withstand the tremors.

So look at a map of Africa and the Middle East, where straight-line borders drawn with rulers, often British or French rulers, bisect centuries-old tribal and ethnic differences. An artificial hegemony imposed with colonial force and maintained with post-colonial authority and power.

Think of the puppet regimes, the special forces trained by the SAS, the officer graduates of Sandhurst, the supply of planes, tanks, bombs. It's still good old imperialism, dressed differently, with “special advisers”, “special relationships” and all the rest.

Dictators

All those dictators there with our blessing, to serve the interests of western capital. Whatever the need, be it oil, military bases, extraction or passage of raw materials, or just to keep the neighbours in check, those guys are there with our leave. They think they are invincible, they think nothing will change. But people change.

Modern communication tools make the world a small place, people cannot be kept in the dark. Modern education engenders aspiration. Young people all over the world want to be part of the future, not stuck in the past.

So there may well be an element of popular discontent in much of this.

People, especially young people, are looking at their emperors and seeing the new clothes for what they are. Shelley and his poem Ozymandias comes to mind.

But we come back to this point. Why are we there? What's it got to do with us? If Tunisians want to improve their country, fine, but they'll have to do it there. They can't do it from here. It's all well and good to taunt your leader, but if you then have to beg NATO for help you're not such a force are you? They should study history more carefully and learn from Hannibal. He was from that neck of the woods.

And why this frenzy to invade Libya, which is what NATO has in effect been doing. Because of all the tin pot dictators in the region, Gaddafi is one who ruled his own country, and he wouldn't have NATO telling him what to do.

Now, whether his rule of Libya was good for Libyans was a matter for debate, but it's only Libyans who should debate it. Cameron and Sarkozy and the rest want to impose something on Libya. They call it democracy but it's actually submission. They bombed Gaddafi and his people to

surrender. It wasn't a no-fly zone, it was a blitz.

Cameron and Sarkozy (and Miliband as well) are presiding over the attempt to destroy our NHS, and they wave the bombers over to Libya, which had the best health service in Africa. And it has to be said, the rest of us stood by, observing.

This theatre of war has become a show. Why no roar of disapproval? A million marched against Blair's Iraq adventure. That should have been multiplied over Libya. Every plane and ship that went there is a hospital ward closed or a needed school not built. We might wish to be detached but we are up to our necks in it. We can be for a war against Libya or we can be against it, but we can't be neutral, not when it's in our name.

And it reeked of desperation. Sarkozy's popularity at home is at an all time low, so he led the charge. When the Libyan provisional government was in exile nobody knew who they were – they

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Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings began on 29 September, with further meetings on 10 November and 15 February; except on May Day, all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings are advertised in What's On, see page 5.

M The theme of the next meeting, on Thursday 10 November, will be “Energy – Britain in Crisis”. Details of further meetings will be announced in WORKERS and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2012, Tuesday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings elsewhere in the country.

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



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didn't even recognise each other. But Sarkozy gave them recognition. Just as Germany did to Croatia in the Balkans conflict. Look what that led to.

It's not new. Unpopular leaders interfering in someone else's business to draw attention away from the fact that they cannot give people what they want and need at home. Foreign Secretary William Hague said it was about regime change, a clear violation of the UN resolution. Chancellor George Osborne compared himself to Churchill. They are all has-beens pretending to be somebody. Actually they're not has-beens, they're never-wases.

Of course Greece, Ireland and Portugal aren't keen on any of this. They are but the first casualties of the euro experiment, now unravelling. It is to the credit of the intransigence of British workers that we never got entangled in that mess.

And now the EU stamps its foot and says it is imposing sanctions on Syrian oil and gas. Actually there is something sinister afoot here, because we have deployment of a European defence force

by any other name. When the EU declares war, it does so in the name of member countries who do not agree. It plays its last card as an instrument of war. No wonder it dropped the word 'Economic' from its title. Its economic facade has failed so is dropped. It is revealed as the thing it was set up to be, another stick to beat workers with at home and abroad.

Escape?

We have the spectacle of thousands of North African "patriots" wanting to escape the heat in their own back yard. And Italy says come through here to France because you speak French. And France says we've got just the place for you, next to Calais. Should we be concerned? Yes, because we've got our hands full at the moment. If North Africans, (or anybody else for that matter) want work and the benefit of a modern economy, they'll have to build it there. What Africa needs is not a super highway to Europe – it needs industry.

Before all this kicked off we were fascinated by what was going on in Japan. Seismic events require a seismic response. The courage and selflessness of those power station workers was earth-

shattering. Now comes a renewed call to turn away from nuclear power, which is allegedly not safe. Well, a car is not safe if you don't regulate driving and manage the road system properly. So the company running the power station didn't bother with routine maintenance and checks. That would eat into profits. And when it all goes pear-shaped, it's the workers who will sort it out. And they'll probably pay with their lives.

Capitalism is killing us all with its greed and stupidity, and it insults us with its abuse of literacy. The noted Middle East journalist Robert Fisk cites an entry in the diary of Victor Klemperer, the outspoken opponent of Nazism and Zionism who survived the Holocaust. Even as he and his wife were waiting for a knock on the door from the Gestapo, he was able to write, "There is no remedy against the truth of language."

So respect workers internationally who do what they have to do to make their part of the world a better place. But no to this crazy attempt to relive history. Leave Libya to the Libyans, countries to their own peoples. We've got our own battles to fight. ■



CPBML/Workers Public Meeting, London Thursday 10 November, 7.30 pm "Energy – Britain in Crisis"

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

This country was built on power: first steam, then electricity. Now they've closed the pits, North Sea oil is running out and power stations are being shut faster than new ones are being planned. Can renewables really plug the gap – or will the lights start going out? Come and discuss how the working class can rebuild industry and Britain. Everybody welcome.

Seventy years ago the world held its breath as Nazi troops came up to the gates of the Soviet Union's capital city...

1941: The battle for Moscow



Scanning the skies above Moscow for German aircraft.

STRUGGLE AND sacrifice on behalf of workers everywhere should never be neglected. This is particularly true of the battle for Moscow, the Soviet capital, in 1941, which receives slight attention compared to those for Stalingrad, Kursk or Berlin. The battle was immense, shifting over a territory the size of France.

It was not only the greatest battle in the Second World War but also the largest battle ever fought between two armies, involving more than seven million soldiers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and lasting for 6 months from September 1941 to April 1942. The Battle of Moscow was decisive in the reversal of fortunes for Nazi Germany, benefiting workers around the world.

The Soviet Union paid a dreadful price - the loss of 926,000 soldiers killed - for inflicting on Hitler's armies the first real defeat they had ever suffered. Previously the German armies had easily crushed Poland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and France, and had an invincible aura. Hitler's goal was for another swift victory in the east so that he could then return to the war against Britain, but fascist Germany's blitzkrieg tactics, previously an unstoppable whirlwind, failed to triumph. After the Battle of Moscow, the myth of the invincibility of German soldiers perished, although three more years of bitter military conflict lay ahead.

In 1941, Germany had the best equipped army in the world and Hitler

envisaged another rapid campaign - to wipe out the Soviet Union, take control of the resources of Russia and the Ukraine and ensure Germany could never be starved and blockaded of materials as in World War One. Hitler considered Russia as Germany's 'lebensraum' (living space). Initially, when they invaded on 22 June 1941, the Germans did catch the Soviets off guard. In the early weeks and months there was disarray and confusion. However, even in these first few days and weeks, there was solid evidence that some of the Soviet forces were capable of inflicting setbacks on the Wehrmacht (German army), even in circumstances of

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retreat. And on the second day of the war, the Soviet Union created the Council of Evacuation that would eventually lead to the dismantling and transporting of thousands of factories to the safety of the eastern regions of the country, out of the control of the Nazis.

German forces unleashed 3,550 tanks and 2,770 aircraft, backed up by another half million troops from Finland and Romania, and pushed deeper into the Russian heartlands, advancing 450 miles in the first month. Germany's Army Group Centre was obviously heading for Moscow because of the city's immense importance to socialism.

Before the coming of winter, German military operations aimed to capture Moscow, depriving the Soviet Union of its strategic and political centre, which housed the Soviet government, contained a massive industrial and armaments centre and was the country's key transportation hub. Its seizure would have been a devastating blow. Nazi goals were to level Moscow to the ground and make it uninhabitable.

Despite large initial advances, the Wehrmacht was slowed by Soviet resistance, in particular during the Battle of Smolensk, which delayed the German advance until mid-September, disrupting the blitzkrieg.

At this stage, Moscow was vulnerable, but Hitler ordered the attack to turn south and eliminate Russian forces at Kiev – which resulted in a huge triumph for the Germans. Their advance on Moscow was resumed on 2 October 1941. Autumn 1941 was the lowest point reached throughout the war. But since 22 June, the Luftwaffe had lost 1,603 aircraft with a further 1,028 damaged planes. As a result, the balance of power in the air was shifting.

The initial advance resulted in two huge encirclements around the towns of Vyzama and Briansk which pocketed 660,000 Russian troops. But by mid-October, the Russian rainy period commenced, turning the roads and countryside into muddy quagmires. The



Armed with heavy shovels, Moscow women and elderly men build a tank trap to halt German Panzers advancing on the Russian capital. More than 100,000 citizens worked from mid-October until late November digging ditches and building other obstructions.

German tank forces were reduced to a crawl, often unable to move. Through the great forests which lie in front of Moscow, only narrow trails were negotiable and it required only small Russian forces to block these. Their cavalry became very active during this period, frequently moving through the woods and getting behind German lines where they laid mines and ambushed supply columns.

Stretched supply lines

By late October the German forces were worn out, with only a third of their motor vehicles still functioning, infantry divisions at a third or half strength, and serious logistics issues preventing the delivery of warm clothing and other winter equipment to the front. German supply lines were being stretched beyond their effective limit and the colossal loss of material on the eastern front – without having won a decisive victory – was bleeding the German economy.

On 13 October, Stalin's decision to stay in Moscow even though some parts of

government such as the General Staff and various civil government offices were evacuated to Kuibyshev proved a key turning point, though there was a temporary panic among Muscovites. The Soviets created a reserve of army units around Moscow. Moscow was placed under martial law. The civilian population were mobilised in the war effort..

Moscow itself was transformed into a fortress. 250,000 women and teenagers worked, building trenches and anti-tank moats around Moscow, moving almost three million cubic meters of earth with no mechanical help. Moscow's factories were hastily transformed into military complexes: the automobile factory was turned into a submachine gun armory, a clock factory was manufacturing mine detonators, the chocolate factory was producing food for the front, and automobile repair stations were repairing damaged tanks and vehicles.

Additionally, Moscow was now a target of massive air raids, although these caused only limited damage because of extensive

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of Marxist thinking

COLLECTIVE ORGANISATION

anti-aircraft defences and effective civilian fire brigades.

Russian winters are as cold as the summers are hot. Snow starts in October or November and continues until April or May. Most of the German troops lacked winter clothing, resulting in over 100,000 cases of frostbite. Many Axis vehicles could not withstand the cool temperatures, resulting in cracked engine blocks. Their air force was grounded much of the time.

To stiffen the resolve of the Red Army and boost the civilian morale, Stalin ordered the traditional military parade celebrating the 1917 Revolution to be staged in Red Square on 7 November. Soviet troops paraded past the Kremlin and then marched directly to the front. The parade had a great symbolic significance in demonstrating Soviet resolve.

Of the two German armoured prongs, the 2nd Panzer Army operating to the south of Moscow got as far as the city of Tula where it finally ground to a halt. In the north, the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies pushed across the frozen Moscow-Volga canal, but no further. By early December, some leading German units were able to see some of Moscow's buildings with binoculars.

Fresh troops

On 5 December 1941, fresh Soviet Siberian troops – comprising 18 divisions and prepared for winter warfare – attacked along with new and reconstituted units of the Red Army. By January 1942, they had driven the Wehrmacht back between 62 and 160 miles, ending the immediate threat to Moscow.

It was the closest that Axis forces ever got to capturing the Soviet capital. Though the Wehrmacht had been forced to retreat before, during the Yelnya Offensive (September 1941) and at the Battle of Rostov, Moscow marked a turning point: it was the first time since the Wehrmacht began its conquests in 1939 that it had been forced into a retreat from which it did not recover the initiative.

Seventy years may have passed but we still remember the first great Soviet victory, the first great loss for Nazi Germany. ■

Existence under early industrial capitalism was harsh and brutal for our fledgling working class. Unwilling to accept their lot, workers sought improvements to their working conditions and gradually their quality of life was raised. Following World War Two, gains endured but illusions grew, as improvements were taken for permanent fixtures. There was a dwindling acknowledgement of why the improvements were there. Many forgot how they had actually been won, assuming the gains and reforms had capitalism's blessing. We lulled ourselves into thinking that these gains were secure "rights", incapable of suffering erosion or being overthrown. As capitalism's absolute decline proceeds, we now know that reversal and setback are possible as the system attempts to diminish the power of our class.

So how did previous working class gains materialise? Improvements and reforms came out of past struggle and campaigns by organised workers. Enhanced working conditions such as increased rates of pay, better holiday entitlement, implementation of pension schemes, reduced working hours, etc. were extracted and won in the face of opposition from employers and government. Equally, reforms such as free national health provision and free state education were struggled for over many generations, not arising from government benevolence. Collective need actively challenged private profit.

Recent decades have seen too many in the class freewheeling, exploiting an impetus set going long before, enjoying advances that had really been earned with difficulty by preceding generations of workers, who had fought hard to establish them. Because these gains were not protected by our organised vigilance, because our defences – mainly our organisation in trade unions – had become neglected, weak, and used for other purposes, everything we should have held dear was more vulnerable to capitalism's eventual assault.

If destruction and retreat are to be halted, if the prospect of progress is to rise again, then we must put right the central weakness, the lessening organisation and collective instinct of our class. We must painstakingly put our class together again. We must stop depending on others, banishing reliance on false politicians or scheming activists. When there is a self-reliant mass of workers spiritedly wanting reconstruction in Britain, then progress will return. To that end, workplaces are key. We must rebuild collective union strength in workplaces and, as soon as it is feasible, link them up as networks of power. Our class will have to shape the trade unions in the best fit and form to do its bidding. If well-planned action is conducted in tactically sound ways, then confidence will reappear.

But initially our steps may have to be small. Sometimes the greatest step is to speak out: from good ideas, other things will flow.

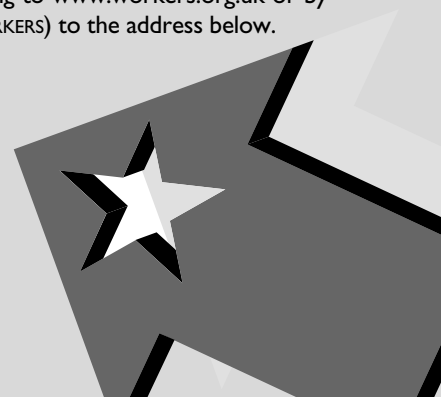
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Back to Front – Anyone for a future?

‘Our trade unions were born as defensive organisations. They may attack as a tactic but, strategically, they cannot do the job that is now needed...’

HAS THE working class a future? If we do nothing we do not have one. We have a choice: decline as an unproductive island off the coast of Europe, with a bit of tourism and a pool of cannon fodder for European military adventures, or re-build a productive Britain. In other words, we either die as a national working class or live as a working class nation. Life or death.

Nation and class are now synonymous as the ruling class abandons Britain. But they have not left it to us – parts of our sovereignty have already been ceded to the European Union.

So how do we establish this nation with a real economy based on industry and agriculture? We need to liberate our nation from the grip of finance capital. We need to go on the offensive. Our trade unions were born as defensive organisations. They may attack as a tactic but, strategically, they cannot do the job that is now needed.

Think back to when workers as a class have challenged the ruling class, when we refused to allow their government to govern. We did defeat the Social Contract and the Industrial Relations Acts in the 1970s. But we were not in a position to terminate their rule, we lacked a developed enough class organisation that we could deploy offensively; and the class was not convinced that we could successfully carry the fight.

Our retreat led to the Thatcher counter revolution. When you start a fight, finish it or get your head kicked in. So we ended up with the systematic destruction of our manufacturing capacity, our means to produce wealth.

Of course, conviction and organisation are related. They grow together as and when the practice enables that – i.e when there is forward movement within a

winning strategy.

In Britain there are two classes only and working class progress depends entirely on their desire so to do – and workers developed a strategy of living with capitalism (forget that it no longer wants to live with us). But others of our class internationally were, within their nation states, showing how a ruling class could be toppled in favour of a working class. Literally all political life since 1917 has pivoted on the need for capital to destroy that advance. And just as we have gone backwards in Britain, so we have internationally.

To advance, the working class needs its Communist Party – something it has resisted up to now. As a party we in the CPBML do not offer to do anything for anyone. We are only part of the process of the class taking power for itself. As the conviction of the need for revolutionary change develops, so do we as a party. As the party develops, so does the class conviction of both need and ability.

We seek to take all our class experience and use it to develop our ideas. These ideas are then tested in class struggle. It is a continuous process. Each member of the working class in struggle brings more experience from themselves and their fellow workers.

How else can we make progress? If we are honest, we know there is no saviour of any sort that we can turn to. We have to do this ourselves for ourselves.

So, if we wish to continue as a British working class, take back what resources are left and re-build a productive economy, then we have to be prepared to help build the Party. Feed in your class experiences to us. Read WORKERS. Come to meetings for an exchange of mind. Do the same with your fellow workers.

Best of all, join. ■

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