

WORKERS

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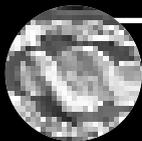


HOSPITAL STRIKES SET TO CONTINUE



What next for trade unions?

06



Political Statement: The future is ours

09



Lawyers and the subversion of unions

13

WORKERS

“Don't underestimate Cuba

THE BUSH administration set aside around \$80 million for the “Transition to a Free Cuba”. A plan was drawn up to establish capitalism in Cuba in the event of Fidel Castro's death. A secret annex to the plan outlined invasion plans. Activists in mass organisations were to be rounded up and imprisoned – trade unionists, women, young people, and communists.

Unlimited money was to be given to any dissidents or anti-Castro organisations set up on the island. Even the US Interest Section in Havana (US embassy) that distributes this largesse, is displaying huge neon signs attacking Cuba and its leadership calling for a counter-revolution. Some in Miami could not wait to get their hands on “confiscated property” – plantations, houses and other property. But they were to be disappointed. “We have achieved a smooth succession,” commented a member of Cuba's ruling National Assembly. “We cannot accept this,” cried Bush. “We cannot have one dictator replaced by another!”

What he failed to take account of was that Cuba did indeed have a “dictatorship” – a dictatorship of the working class – the highest form of democracy. A collective leadership has taken over the functions of President Castro following his complex surgery for intestinal problems days before his 80th birthday. They

will either return his duties in the event of his recovery, or if not, there will be elections according to the constitution to elect a new President. Nor did Bush count on the prayers offered for Fidel's recovery by the Cuban Catholic Church or the expressions of solidarity and good wishes from national leaders around the world.

Bush underestimated the respect that both Cuba and Fidel are held in around the world. Like in more than 60 countries where Cuban doctors provide free health care to the people or where Cuban teachers are eradicating illiteracy and improving education standards. Or the 135 countries that voted Cuba onto the new United Nations Human Rights Committee recently. Or the 180 countries that voted against the US blockade of Cuba at the UN in 2005. Or the fact that Cuba is to host the World Conference of Non Aligned Nations in Havana in September.

Comrades in Cuba have advised WORKERS that Fidel's condition is “delicate”. We wish him a speedy recovery and recognise the achievements of his leadership, not least in steering Cuba out of the “special period” in recent months and years. We stand with the Cuban working class in defending their revolution from subversion and attack, and recognise that their struggle is ours, against capitalism and for a better world.



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Contents – September 2006

News

Bush, Blair and Israel, p3; Hospital strikes continue, p4; US firms stream into Serbia, p5; News Analysis: the ruin of Eastern Europe, p6.

03

Features

What next for trade unions?, p6; The future is ours: Political Statement from the Communist Party, p9; Equal value spells an end to collectivism, p13.

06

Book Review

The crisis of communism, p14.

14



MIDDLE EAST	Bush and Blair fuel war
EXTRADITION	The NatWest Three
HEALTH	Hospital strikes continue
EU	Thames safety in balance
UNIVERSITIES	Middlesex seeks get-out
SERBIA	US firms stream in
MIGRATION	Poles call for return
EUROTRASH	The latest from Brussels
WHAT'S ON	Coming soon
NEWS ANALYSIS	The ruin of Eastern Europe

Bush, Blair and Israel

SINCE 27 JUNE, when the Israeli government started its brutal attack on Gaza, its forces have killed more than 140 innocent civilians (as *WORKERS* went to press). They have destroyed bridges, water and fuel pipes and the territory's only power station, cutting off water, fuel and electricity to the 1.4 million residents. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared, "I want nobody to sleep at night in Gaza." They have arrested a third of the government and 36 members of the Palestinian parliament and forced the rest of the government into hiding. They bombed the Palestinian Foreign Ministry for proposing negotiations.

The US government vetoed a Security Council Resolution demanding that Israel halt its attack on Gaza and end its "disproportionate use of force" and calling for the immediate release of the captured soldier. The Labour government's representative cravenly abstained. Blair rejects universal demands that he call for a ceasefire. Last year, Britain doubled its arms sales to Israel; the US rushes two-ton "bunker-buster" bombs for Israel to use.

So, encouraged by the US and British governments, the Israeli state launched a second war, its savage attack on Lebanon. Israeli Brigadier General Amir Eshel warned, "nothing is safe" in Lebanon and threatened to "turn back the clock in Lebanon by 20 years". As of 16 August, 1,076 Lebanese civilians (a third of them children) and 29 Lebanese soldiers had been killed, more than 3,293 wounded and a million driven from their homes. Israel has lost at least 144 killed, 104 soldiers and 40 civilians, and 1,867 wounded.

The Israeli Justice Minister said that all those people still in southern Lebanon must be considered "terrorists" and called for the Israeli air force to flatten all the villages there. He also accurately described the Rome Conference's US- and British-inspired decision not to call for a ceasefire as "permission...to continue the operation".

Bush and his PR man Blair assert Israel's "right to defend itself". How can targeting civilians, ambulances and bridges in another country be acts of self-defence? These are war crimes. Doesn't Lebanon have the right to defend itself against Israel?

A US spokesman said, "We hold Syria and Iran – which directly support Hizbollah – responsible for this attack and for the ensuing violence." This whitewashed Israel of all blame for its two illegal assaults. It encourages the Israeli state to start more wars and opens the way for more US aggressions in the Middle East.

Far from bringing peace and democracy to the region, the US state is starting wars and provoking terrorism. And in all this US-inspired carnage, Blair is disgracefully complicit.

EXTRADITION

The NatWest Three

THE EXTRADITION of the three bankers – The NatWest Three – to the United States under the 2003 fast track Extradition Act, legislation not ratified by the US and where the US does not even have to present a prima facie case in a UK court, has raised major questions about civil liberties in Britain.

None of the individuals was facing or was going to face criminal charges in any British court, but the government grovelling to the Bush administration allowed the US government to swoop and arrest anyone they deemed a target.

While this flawed legislation was rushed through supposedly to aid the "war on terrorism", it dovetails with other EU legislation likewise undermining UK civil liberties. The European Arrest Warrant allows any EU state to arrest any British citizen, extradite them to face charges abroad, charges which may not exist in British law, again without presenting a prima facie case in a British court.

The draft EU Constitution made it a criminal offence to oppose the European Union. How long before such warrants are served on the writers and readers of *WORKERS*?

PAY

Snouts in the trough

DIRECTORS' PAY has risen by 20 per cent a year, unrelated to company performance. Meanwhile, City bonuses this year are topping £19 billion. No wonder Britain has 280,000 accountants, more than the rest of Europe put together.

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

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Justice veto at stake

THE EUROPEAN Commission has announced plans to abolish the national veto over criminal justice and policing. In response, the Blair government has not uttered a word against the proposals.

Franco Frattini, the European Union's justice commissioner, said, "The idea is to explore the best areas where it is possible to shift from unanimity to qualified majority vote and to co-decision with the European parliament... This is not a matter of changing the present treaty, it is not a matter of anticipating the constitution. It is just an opportunity to overcome stalemate in very sensitive areas."

The proposals would give the Commission more powers over criminal law than it would have had under the EU Constitution. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) would also benefit from the proposals, gaining jurisdiction in this area for the first time, and there are plans to speed up referrals to the ECJ by bypassing national courts.

Warning: cherry pickers at work

COMMISSION PRESIDENT Jose Manuel Barroso is arguing that EU leaders should accept the proposals as they had already agreed to the European Constitution. He said, "We are just proposing to implement ... what was already politically accepted by all leaders of Europe when we discussed the future Constitutional treaty."

The European Commission has previously denied claims that it is "cherry-picking" parts of the rejected EU Constitution.

The corpse lives

GERMAN EUROPE minister, Günter Gloser, said on 27 June that the EU Constitution was "alive".

Gloser insisted that the No votes in France and the Netherlands were "accidental", arguing, "It was not the treaty which was rejected by a large proportion of those in France and the Netherlands who voted Non or Nee... More positive economic circumstances and with better information about the treaty in both countries, the referenda would probably have resulted with Oui and Ja."

So No means Yes!



Whipps Cross workers at a lunchtime picket and rally, 21 July.

Hospital strikes continue

SOME 270 Initial Hospital Services staff employed at Whipps Cross NHS Trust, North East London, all Unison members, were set to take a further three days strike action during the August Bank Holiday week as WORKERS went to press. These will follow on from the five strike days already taken since 21 July.

The dispute is over the failure of the private contractors and the trust to implement the 2003 agreement guaranteeing the introduction of Agenda for Change NHS pay and terms of conditions by April 2006. The introduction of this agreement would be a major step in unravelling the two-tier workforce operating in the NHS and eradicate poverty wages being paid by Initial. Solidarity by the strikers has seen nearly 225 strikers out of the balloted 240 attending picket lines in a disciplined fashion during strike days.

Recruitment continues among the Initial employees despite a regime of redundancies, cuts in hours and a draconian disciplinary code. Support and solidarity from Unison members employed by the trust has been significant and support from the general public and local community excellent. An 'Open Letter' published by Unison highlights the numerous pledges by senior Trust managers to abide by the 2003 Agreement – now ignored or denied by the Trust.

- In an attempt to raise revenue hospitals in Leeds have doubled car parking charges to £12 a day. Charges for staff are set to rise from £7.50p a month to £21.00p. The increase for patients is effectively a tax on the ill. The increase for staff is a clawing back of wages. The Leeds hospitals claim they subsidise car parking for staff and patients to the tune of £1,000,000, though most hospitals see car parking revenue as a gold mine. The directors of the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust are on £150,000 per annum. A culling of a dozen directors would go a long way to solving this pernicious tax.

EUROPEAN UNION

Thames safety in balance

ANOTHER EU Directive, scheduled to be introduced in January 2007, will halve the qualifications, qualifying period, training required and training available to qualify for a Masters licence to captain craft on the River Thames.

The EU is introducing a one-size-fits-all directive for all river traffic and river working across the EU. Captain's qualifications were strengthened after the 1989 Marchioness disaster when 51 people

were drowned on the Thames.

The proposed legislation deskills the safety standards built up over decades. No other European river has the tidal complexities that the Thames has, but the directive ignores this and the five million people who use the Thames each year.

The legislation provides for exemptions. Both the Rhine and the Danube have been exempted after a request from the German government. Has this government made a sound? No. Did it draft the legislation? Probably. Watermen, crews, river users continue their campaign to oppose this nonsensical legislation.

UNIVERSITIES

Middlesex invokes 'get out'

ALTHOUGH THE lecturers union UCU has agreed a settlement in its national dispute over pay, at least one employer, Middlesex University, has announced its intention to use the employers' "get out" clause.

This clause in the final agreement allowed institutions to delay payment if they could not afford it. In addition Middlesex has signalled that, having agreed some slippage on the

implementation date of the national framework (an agreement which pre-dated the pay dispute) with both Unison and UCU, it will not backdate the agreement to the first of August 2006.

Both unions are aware that the university has already received money from the Higher Education funding council to pay for this from 1 August, so no possibility of invoking a "get out" clause there!

UCU has already invoked the collective disputes procedure, and the university response will have to be declared by 25 August.

US firms stream into Serbia

JUST IN CASE you were in any doubt why back in 1999 a US-led NATO force bombed Yugoslavia (by then only Serbia and Montenegro) into submission, consider that by 2003, the US had become the top investor in Serbia.

In August 2003, Phillip Morris Corporation bought the NIS Tobacco Company through privatisation, investing \$650 million, while US Steel acquired Serbia's steel producer SARTID through a similar process for over \$250 million. Galaxy Tyres of the US bought Ruma Guma, a specialist tyre company, through privatisation and the Colorado based Ball Corporation made the largest greenfield investment of \$75 million constructing a factory to manufacture metal cans.

Meanwhile, Coca Cola has bought the bottled water producer Vladinska and Dyncorp International has won a tender to build a \$60 million cargo terminal and set up a joint venture with Belgrade Airport following a US Transportation Administration feasibility study. Van Drunen Foods of Illinois is snapping up all the agricultural assets it can for export.

Presumably this is softening Serbia up for NATO membership and EU membership as these are the usual conditions to join. Meanwhile, Kosovo Province of Serbia remains under EU/NATO occupation.

MIGRATION

Poles call for return

IN 2001, 50,000 British citizens emigrated. Last year the figure was 120,000. Also last year, 340,000 people moved into the country.

In the past two years, there have been 500,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, mainly Poland, the largest wave of immigration Britain has ever experienced, which, as employers crow, keeps wages down.

But the Polish city of Wroclaw is to launch a campaign in London to try to persuade Polish migrants to return. Pawel Romaszkan, the head of the Wroclaw's promotion office said, "We want to tell them that in Wroclaw they have a future in Poland, and a career that is far better than working in a bar." If the campaign is successful it will be extended to the rest of Britain.

Meanwhile, the Royal Economic Society has called for the importing of 10 million migrants over the next 20 years to

resolve Britain's supposed pensions crisis.

The overall number of people in work in the UK is 29 million, its highest level ever, with an estimated 8 million 'economical inactive' – unemployed, with disability, carers, unemployable etc. It is estimated that of the 1.7 million jobs which have expanded the total workforce in the UK during the last 10 years, 1.3 million are migrant workers.

The RES argument that Britain needs 10 million more workers beggars the last 10 years' growth and changes in UK work. The RES also wants the retirement age to be raised to 70 years immediately.

The basis for these arguments is the claim that Britain has an ageing population whose pensions cannot be sustained unless we work longer.

Twenty years ago the argument was that a declining birth-rate would create a demographic time bomb. Due to a future shortage of workers, they would have to work longer. The integrity of these arguments has as much validity as holding your finger up to see which way the wind blows.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 3 September, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk, 11am to 4pm

Burston Strike School Rally 2006

Organised by the TGWU and supported by SERTUC, the GMB and Amicus.

Speakers, food and beer tent, and march.

For more info, email TGWU regional secretary Ivan Crane, icrane@tgwu.org.uk

NOVEMBER

Thursday 9 November, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Who Owns Water – Us or Them?

Drought orders all around, but floods of profits. A public meeting organised by WORKERS and the CPBML. All welcome.

NATIONAL BARGAINING

Threat to agreement

GORDON BROWN'S speech at the Mansion House in July called for an end to national bargaining. Now Ineos, Britain's largest privately owned company and the third largest chemical company in the world, has given notice that either the National Agreement for the Engineering and Construction Industries (NAECI) changes or they withdraw. The threat is naked: if it remains Ineos will not invest in UK projects, or if it has to then it will "employ workers from other countries". It will ship cheap labour to the UK to undermine established wage rates, skills, terms and conditions, and so on.

The NAECI covers 52,000 workers and was drawn up in 1981. It and the Joint Industry Board for the electrical contracting industry remain the last two key national agreements in manufacturing and construction.

COUNTRYSIDE

Attack on Yorkshire Dales

A BILL slowly edging its way through Parliament is an EU inspired piece of legislation which will change the face of the Yorkshire Dales forever. The Commons Bill aims to change the use of common grazing land and replace farming with conservation stewardship. Hill farmers will become park keepers and sheep grazing will disappear after a legacy of 1,000 years.

The Federation of Yorkshire Commoners and Moorland Graziers, combining with Commoners' associations across Britain, is resisting this attempt to close down farming.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The ruin of Eastern Europe

WHY ARE workers from Eastern Europe choosing to leave home and travel to Britain to find work, where they know little of the language? A recent World Bank report, "Enhancing Job Opportunities in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union", shows that unemployment there is high and rising. It was 9.4% in 1995, 9.4% in 2004 and 9.7% in 2005 – leading to a huge exodus of their young people.

After the counter-revolutions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, it was claimed that the resulting high unemployment would be temporary and would decline once the new private sector created jobs. But reliance on 'neo-liberal' strategies based on privatisation gave extra leverage to the corrupt and criminal groups who had got rich by looting the economies' public assets. These "newly independent" countries are simply protectorates, recolonised by the EU and the USA.

Kosovo

Since mid-1999 and the end of NATO's attack on Yugoslavia, Kosovo has been under UN administrative rule. The report says, "progress has been made in implementing liberal market policies. Kosovo is one of the most liberal trading regimes in the world with no or low tariff rate and no quantitative barriers. Use of foreign exchange has been legalised for all domestic transactions, establishing the euro as the de facto local currency."

And the results of this beneficent regime? 37% of the population live in poverty (below \$1.75 per adult equivalent per day) and 15% live in extreme poverty (\$1.14 per day). The industrial sector remains weak and power supply is unreliable. Unemployment is estimated at 40%, particularly affecting young people.

Half the adult population has completed only primary education; 6% are illiterate. With insufficient space and classrooms, children do not have a full day's education; schools operate on 3-4 shifts per day. Infant mortality rates are the highest in the region. TB, disabilities and mental health are major problems. Crime is rampant: as the Greek president, Karolos Papoulias, pointed out, "Organised crime and the black economy were the real winners of the war."

Bosnia

Aid has been abused by 12 privatisation agencies, leading to ethnically exclusive privatisations. Asset-stripping deindustrialised and destroyed the socially owned economy. An American police officer working in the International Police Task Force described the corruption among his fellow American police: "They're making \$85,000 in a place where everyone else is making \$5,000 and they're chasing whores."

By mid-2002, industrial output was just a third of its pre-war level and unemployment was 40%. A UN official admitted, "Bosnia has taught much to all of us about how not to implement a peace agreement."

As a class and as a people we rely on being organised in trade unions. We ignore our peril...

What next for trade unions

AS WORKERS we mostly act as if we are nothing to do with trade unions, which as everyone knows are declining in numbers and influence. But they shape what we are – as a class and as a people we rely on large numbers of us being organised. We ignore their decline at our peril. We need to look at how our organisations are distinctive, what's gone wrong with them and what it is about them we cannot afford to be without.

The 2005 trade union membership figures published by the Department of Trade and Industry in May indicate that trade union membership in Britain was 6.5 million workers. Four out of five workers in the private sector are non-unionised. Three out of five public sector workers are unionised. One out of five workers is an agency, temporary worker. Decline in union membership has gone from just over 50 per cent in 1979 to 29.3 per cent in 2003, 26 per cent in 2004 and 24 per cent in 2005.

Workers need to give serious consideration to the health of the only organisations which represent their interests in the workplace as well as trying to disentangle the myriad contradictory and confusing pressures placed upon us. The why or why not join a union or remain in a unionised workplace has to be answered. Though union membership is slowly declining, statistically the unionised workplace averages hourly wages 17.6 per cent higher than non-unionised workplaces – presumably an attraction but seemingly not one strong enough to turn around decline. Despite nearly 900,000 "new" jobs created in the public sector since 1997, there have not been 900,000 new union recruits.

If Britain's organised trade union movement represents 24 per cent of the labour force in government statistics, that ignores a further 6 million-plus workers in non-TUC affiliated trade unions like the Royal College of Nursing, staff associations, employers' company unions, all of which shows that socialised workplace organisation in Britain differs from anywhere else in the world. And it involves nearly double the official numbers.

The uniqueness of Britain

Statistics of trade union density across the world raise many questions. There are 164 million trade unionists world-wide. One in 20 of the 3 billion workers in the world are trade unionists. This reinforces the uniqueness of Britain and the trade union density achieved up to 1980. It is useful to compare it with the situation in the USA and across Europe.

In the USA in 2004 trade union density was 12.5 per cent, reaching 36.4 per cent in the public sector. The US trade union equivalent of the TUC – the AFL/CIO – split in July 2005, causing the worst division for nearly 70 years. The Change to Win Coalition led a significant minority out of the AFL-CIO, 5.5 million trade unionists versus 8 million trade unionists into competing camps, which must have Bush and the employers in hysterics. The division, supposedly over whether you organise top down or bottom up, has handed disintegration on a plate to the employers. Trade union density of 12.5 per cent is not going to make the bastions of capitalism shudder.

The Service Employees Industrial Union, the prime mover behind the US split, wrapping itself in leftist phraseology, is now funding industrial organisers for the TGWU in Britain as well as parallel organisations such as the "Workers Organisation" part of the London Citizens Organisation, a direct and deliberate attempt to undermine existing British trade unions.

FBI, CIA and Mafia infiltration, manipulation and control of the US trade unions has nothing to offer British workers. They have no organic root or purpose. The seemingly bottomless pit of money to fund this imported new organising culture in Britain, where after all trade unionism was invented, must make us smell a rat. The entryism and splinterism within the US trade

Large numbers of us ignore their decline at

is?

unions, with all the hallmarks of Trotskyist politics from the 1930s, has ensured that any possible organised labour opposition to Bush's economic policies at home and warmongering abroad is fragmented.

In France less than 10 per cent of the workforce are actually union members. However, 90 per cent of French workers are covered by trade union agreements. Trade union density in Poland stood at 80 per cent in 1980, which reflected the historic developments in the socialist countries to tie trade unionism and state power together. But the figure had dropped to less than 14 per cent in 2002 and probably has plummeted further as Poland exports its people as cheap labour to Britain and Western Europe.

Trade unionism in Germany post reunification is on a par with British trade union levels. But German trade unions post 1945, though overseen by the British TUC, were embroiled in the state and many British workers would struggle to understand their role and purpose. Though significant set-piece struggles occasionally engulf German industry, for example IG Metall, the manufacturing union, or Ver.di, the public service union, these organisations have very little in common with British trade unions other than numbers and single union organisation across single industries or services. Denmark, Norway and Sweden have trade union density at between 70 and 90 per cent, but this level of density reflects differing social structures not just industrial organisation.

Mergers

In 1950 the UK boasted 700 trade unions. In 2005 this had dropped to 67 with further mergers being proposed. Is merger a sign of strength?

Like company takeovers and mergers or the merging of the failed capitalist economies of Europe into the European Union, the answer is no. No merged trade union to date has grown beyond its starting numbers.

Historically ASTMS, MSF, Amicus, the ETU, EETPU, AEEU and all the myriad sectional groupings which have been devoured in the process – the going for

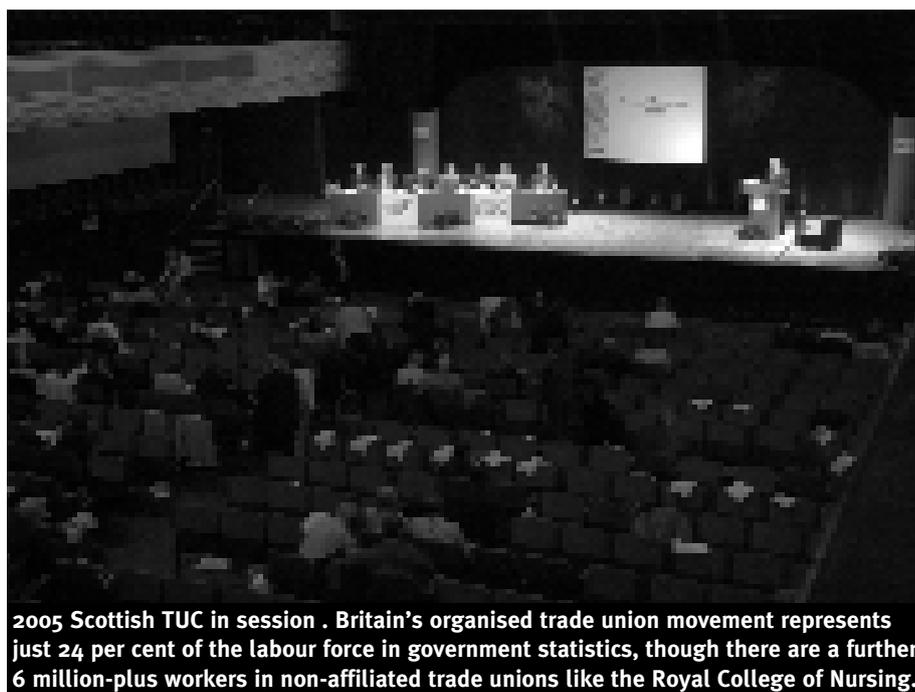


Photo: Workers

2005 Scottish TUC in session . Britain's organised trade union movement represents just 24 per cent of the labour force in government statistics, though there are a further 6 million-plus workers in non-affiliated trade unions like the Royal College of Nursing.

700 to 67 – is about huddling together through weakness. Certain union mergers have had an industrial logic or organic root to them – Unison, Natfhe/AUT, PCS. But 'Unity 2000' – the proposed merger of school teaching unions – has clearly failed, and we are more than halfway through 2006. None of even the successful mergers has grown beyond the limitations of the organic root and none has cracked the issue of how to recruit.

However, both Unison and the University & Colleges Union will see growth in 2006 due to significant industrial disputes; Unison recruited in March 2006 more members in one month than throughout its 12 year history. Something which speaks volumes as to why workers join a union.

The proposed merger between Amicus, TGWU and several tiny other unions – Community and Youth Workers Union, National Union of Lock and Metal Workers and so forth – is proffered as the solution to declining trade unionism. The GMB has withdrawn from the merger negotiations.

The argument runs on several levels: big is beautiful; capitalism is global therefore you need one global union to counter it; only a large lobbying union can represent the many diverse strands of labour in Britain at the court of the European Union in Brussels.

All strands of the argument are deeply flawed. Mergers between unions, like the very founding of trade unions, have always been about the organic defensive needs of workers in particular industries, workplaces, regions and so on at any one time against capital. They have not been

about grandiose structures and theories but of the needs of workers as they currently are. Nothing in the proposed "super-union" is organic, very little fits in common across the pitch.

Ego and reality

Being the biggest trade union in Europe if not the world speaks more of ego and divorce from ordinary workers than reality. We had Robert Owen in 1834 and the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union – it collapsed. Then there was the artificial 'Red' Trade Unionism of the 1920s and 1930s, the Trotskyist answer to global capitalism – which similarly collapsed.

The arguments about dealing with capitalism not globalism were clearly outlined in THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO. Ironically, what Marx and Engels described as the worldwide spread of capital, this latter-day globalism, was concurrent with the rise of the industrial working class. The growth of union organisation today in South America, the Far East, India and so on parallels the decline of union organisation in Britain and other European countries.

Do we need a super-union to be the super-lobbyist in European Union circles? Doesn't such a proposal equate to the absolute abdication from defending industry and manufacturing in Britain, and its replacement by simple grovelling to the bankers and bureaucrats of the EU?

The proposed super-union fits closely with Blair's vision of modern trade

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

unionism as lobbyists, providers of legal advice, self-help societies, community pressure groups, do-gooders, equalities campaigners, charities and so forth. Anything will do but tackling the critical issue of being organised as a workplace, as an industry, as a service, as a working class with its own interests.

Such a vision fits neatly with those who have adopted a legalistic resolution to all the ills of society as opposed to a collective class solution. The difficulty with this is that legal challenges to the unions – the GMB have to pay £1 million in compensation to members in Middlesbrough over alleged negligent advice (being appealed against) – will bankrupt the trade unions (see page 13). The GMB and Unison are facing dozens of similar cases pending, which arise from those who have advocated EU equalities legislation.

Compensation claims

Meanwhile, the TGWU faces compensation claims from British Airways over the Gate Gourmet dispute estimated at £60 to £70 million. The GMB has an estimated £100 million deficit in its pension fund, also subject to litigation.

Bankruptcy and the smothering of collective bargaining and collectivity are as dangerous to British trade unionism as death squads in Central America or Iraq

“To reverse this situation we have to get organised. Getting organised means doing it for ourselves...”

are to trade unionists there.

The past 25 years in Britain have seen the deliberate destruction of Britain’s manufacturing base, the export of industry, the shift of balance from blue collar to white collar working class. Two million manual skilled manufacturing full-time equivalent jobs have been removed from the economy. These have been replaced by casual, part time, unskilled jobs.

From 1979 to 1997 Britain stood still on the job creation front. Jobs that were created never surpassed the numbers destroyed. So the difficulty of a working class that isn’t working or is disorganised, demoralised and losing the commonality of industry has posed the greatest challenge to passing the baton of struggle from one generation to another.

The anti-union legislation, continually reinterpreted in legal advice to the unions, has made it virtually impossible to have a legal strike. Though the strike figures for 2006 will have a huge blip due to the numerous pensions disputes, overall the number of disputes and days

lost through industrial action has been declining. The figures are now on a par with the first statistics kept in the 1890s. From this comes the perceived inability to successfully resist offensives from capital that has further undermined confidence and sense of purpose.

To reverse this situation we have to get organised. Getting organised means doing it for ourselves: every worker in work, every worker in their trade union, every workplace unionised. The trade unionism of waiting for knights on white chargers to do it for us, leaving issues to the do-gooder, the individual human rights expert, the equalities missionary and the charitable would-be saints leading the largest union in the world are over.

In fact it never started or ever had any basis in the British labour movement. We do not divide on gender, race, colour, age, religion or community, immigrant or indigenous. We have to bridge the generational divide which has occurred in workers’ consciousness – the real though temporary victory of Thatcher and her grandchild Blair – and reassert unity, class and being an organised worker.

Suggested further reading:

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, Marx & Engels

“The Special Nature of British Trade Unions”, Reg Birch, appendix to REG BIRCH: ENGINEER, TRADE UNIONIST, COMMUNIST, £10 p&p from WORKERS.

BADGE OFFER – Nationalise water. Reclaim our most vital resource!

BRITISH WATER supplies are in the hands of foreign owned monopoly companies who are enjoying a cash bonanza while our infrastructure crumbles. If the ridiculously high profits made by these companies in the last few years had been channelled into developing a national water grid and other infrastructure projects we would no longer be facing a water shortage.

As it stands, if the winter of 06/07 has the same low rainfall in the South East as it did last year, then by next summer much of SE England will be

using standpipes.

Severn Water, for example, has seen a 18% rise in profits as complaints against the company rose by 55% and it was investigated for providing false data to OFWAT. And since it acquired Thames Water in 2000, RWE (its German parent company) has extracted around £1 billion pounds in dividends to shareholders!

FIGHT BACK with a Nationalise Water! badge, available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 8EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.



The future is ours



Political statement from the Communist Party

14th Congress, London



At the previous congress the Party laid out an analysis of the state of Britain and the class which has been utterly borne out by events. The questions for us to consider now are: Where do we go from here? What has changed? How do we strike out for a future?

Read on...



Britain

In Britain the sheer speed of decay is breathtaking. The ruling class has a horrifying future in mind for us: abandonment of Britain as a nation which means abandonment of this working class. Not just jobs but the class itself is to be outsourced.

Don't like this working class (too literate, too skilled, too expensive, too awkward)? Then import another one, from anywhere in the world where people who are so desperate and can afford it are prepared to abandon the aspiration for improvement in their own country, in the hope of something, anything, somewhere else. They'll come and work longer hours for much less money, without expecting pensions. And they don't share our history of organisation.

Blair presides over a court where he assumes absolute powers because he can no longer govern in any other way. Parliamentary government is in collapse, with ensuing chaos to come. The charade of Parliamentary democracy, with its political parties, its cabinet system, its select committees, has become irrelevant to the ruling class. Blair and his executive simply force policies through.

The Labour Party no longer cares about its members. Support from capitalist companies is all that matters. And because we won't vote for them they plan to force us. The deliberate sucking in of our Trade Unions into the state machine and its work – their incorporation – is gathering pace.

EU directives are slavishly followed. In fact traitors Blair and Brown use the EU as the motor to weaken our sovereignty, drive down wages, close down production, sell off our assets to private companies, open our borders to all-comers. The EU is a handy smokescreen – "We have to do it because we signed the treaty" – a useful lie but still a lie. The EU is a flag of convenience to drive the changes required by decaying capitalism – of all EU member states felt most sharply here. Now British workers through taxation must pay for a new underground system in Warsaw, while paying ever higher fares to travel to work packed shoulder to shoulder on their own collapsing transport system.

Wilson and Callaghan paved the way for Thatcher. Blair and Brown have destroyed more manufacturing jobs and production than her. What are they paving the way to? Something worse than Thatcher if we allow them to?

Capitalism and war

Capitalism is a spent force, not dead but weak, with nothing to offer British workers but abandonment of our nation, terrorism and war. In spite of British workers' opposition to wars, the facts show that in recent years we have not stopped them.

Our troops continue to be sent to front Britain's imperialist adventures in Ireland, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Occupation of Afghanistan has led to nothing but impoverishment of its people and a booming heroin crop, much of it being sold on the streets of Britain. No people, in this case us in Britain, can be free themselves if they permit the oppression of other workers in other lands, in this case those people in countries where Blair sends troops in our name.

As before World War I, huge power blocs are forming in the world to fight over control of markets and resources. Oil wars are a given: are gas wars next? How many competing countries need to be placated when fuel pipes cross so many borders?

Yet capitalism has abandoned the concept of energy self sufficiency for Britain. Blair scoffs at it as old-fashioned. Do workers agree? Imagine for a moment how we would defend ourselves, or even live, if the taps were switched off in some other country. National independence is impossible without our own energy production. Three decades of self-sufficiency in gas supply, and generations of self-sufficiency in coal stocks frittered away by an enemy class concerned only that our energy is not supplied by British workers.

Food is now described by Blair as a "global commodity". No need to produce our own, then. Let farmland be concreted over, for property development. A deliberate policy to weaken our independence as a nation now and in the future. Oil wars, gas wars, food wars?

The bloated giant of the EU grows ever fatter, gobbling up countries not even in Europe (but making sure they join NATO first) riven with internal contradictions and corruption, its members incapable of keeping their peoples onside to vote for a constitution. If those peoples pushed further, the whole tottering edifice could collapse. Eventually it will have to be done.

The world is plunging into chaos. A time of great danger, but also of great opportunity for our class. Will we go with it, or take the opportunities presented to assert a decent future?

International class forces

What is the state of class forces in the world today?

Tiny Cuba still survives – in spite of the US "super" power's attempts to finish it off. It survives by using a form of internationalist guerrilla struggle, by strategic thinking combined with sheer grit and determination, using the tools at hand – the ingenuity and commitment of its people – and winning over neighbouring countries to its side. As they say, their most powerful weapons are ideas. That is as true in Britain as it is in Cuba.

Argentina shows what is done to a country if it refuses to be bound to an IMF debt; nothing! The big guns have to back down. The peoples of Latin America have killed FTAA, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the equivalent of our Eurozone.

For us the lesson from this part of the world is clear; you can exist without the IMF; you can exist without being in a wider power bloc. You can thrive by being independent.

Yet worldwide the working class is at its lowest ebb. With the collapse of socialism in the once great bastions of the Soviet Union and China, capitalism appears all-powerful, rampant. The lessons of Russia 1917 are being forgotten by our class and by the new generation in the ex-Soviet countries which have consciously opted for capitalism. Yet the ruling class does not forget the cataclysmic shock of having its power wrested from it. It lives in fear of the people it must exploit. The economic reality of



modern capitalism is that they are weak and we hold huge potential strength.

Although the Soviet Union transformed the world by destroying Hitler's armies on its own soil, its brave experiment in creating a dictatorship of working people came to an end. That does not make the experiment a mistake. The choice in 1917 was stark, and the Russian people chose the brave path, never before tried, of leaping straight from feudalism to socialism. Similarly in China, in possibly even more difficult circumstances. In both cases, revolution had to be made in non-capitalist societies by a people made up of a small (in China, tiny) working class and a large peasantry. In each case, the revolutions lasted for only one generation. Did the inherently backward, petty-minded thinking of the peasant finally win out over the progressive thinking of workers? Or was the thinking of workers not progressive enough? In both countries, the changes in ideology proved not established deeply enough to survive.

Now capitalist economic forces are growing in China with extreme rapidity, and with them an industrial working class. Trade unions are not permitted in the new mines, factories and building sites. The Communist Party is using the old structures to rule over this rampant growth in the interests of capital, yet remnants of the massive Communist educational drives must survive on the bookshelves and in the minds of people.

Inevitably there will be a development of workers' movements in factories, as is beginning in the new industrial cities of India and South East Asia. Will it reach Africa? It is already developing in South America.

In its need to exploit the labour power of workers, capitalism cannot help but create its own gravediggers. In its apparent resurgence it has nothing new to offer the world, just more of the same, no revolutionary dynamism of its own, just the familiar tired old story of war and exploitation, ripping out the country's natural resources to create mostly cheap shoddy goods. What happened in Europe in the 19th century is being replicated in Asia and South America, and probably Africa is next. Wherever there is capitalism, there must be a working class. The 21st century will see significant growth in working class forces throughout the world, and, eventually, of huge potential for revolution.

British working class

In early 21st century Britain the degeneration of working class politics is manifest. Thought either advances or declines. Workers here view politics either as spectator sport or with extreme distrust.

The sight of a G8 summit in Gleneagles, a bunch of capitalist predators, posing as latter-day Knights of the Round Table, ready to save Africa from poverty, when they were just gearing up to work out how best to exploit its peoples, was gut-wrenching. For workers it was politics without politics. A few pop concerts and millions of wristbands later – Disney politics with celebrities – and capitalism continues as before, as if it could do anything else.

The level of debate about poverty was abysmal. Is it a disease for which a cure might be found? Is it a defective gene? Or is it the consequence of a system which puts profit first, middle and last?

They can't help it, capitalists. They are caterpillars, eating machines without the metamorphosis at the end, just bigger caterpillars.

British workers see through the motives of politicians, and this extends to anyone who sets themselves up to represent their interests. That's why they won't vote for them. Not in parliamentary elections, not in local government elections. And not in their own organisations, union elections. Leftist posturing in unions is an excuse not to get involved, when it could be dealt with easily if workers decided to.

Politics are a big turn-off. There is a massive turning away from trade unions, which shelter together in ever-larger US-style "super-unions", the proportionally smaller the membership, the seemingly larger the organisation and the more strutting with self-importance on the national and even, at its most corrupt, EU stage.

Trade unions are increasingly incorporated into the state machine through the continued adherence to the centralised power of Downing Street. There, of course, they are ignored, and to hell with the working class. A result of, and a reason for, workers showing contempt for their own organisations. For sheer treachery, witness the joint statement by Number 10, the CBI and the TUC about how good migration is for the economy.

We have said before that the worst mistake British workers made was the creation of the Labour Party a hundred years ago. The politics was: you do our thinking for us, you represent us in the house of the enemy. As if this were possible. It is the ultimate superstition. We'll organise at work, you get on with the politics on our behalf.

Now that workplace organisation is at its lowest level, involvement in unions similarly, cynicism about the Labour Party absolute, what remains? A class doing its best to turn its back on class politics. There is a whiff of the peasant mentality, of doggedly bowing our shoulders under the blows of fate in the face of the terrible reality of Britain 2006, with its disappearing industry, terrorist menace, declining wages, bankrupt hospitals, an impoverished old age.

With workplace organisation at its lowest level in generations it should come as no surprise that the level of class-consciousness among workers in Britain is also at its lowest level for generations. To believe that class-consciousness improves as things get worse is the same dangerous illusion that pretends that the poorer you are, the more revolutionary you are. This lack of class-consciousness is at the root of the failure of all working class organisations – bar none – to recruit and thrive. It must be reversed for growth to come.

As a class we are clear about regionalism and the euro, but less clear about the EU and war. We are clear about the value of manufactured goods but unclear about the importance of manufacturing them in Britain. How do we imagine a country without industry or agriculture can sustain itself economically? We respond with calm and collective skill to dying and injured workers attacked by terrorists on tubes and buses, but are unclear that we – only we – can prevent barbarism. The fascist attack on London in July 2005 was met by a heroic working class response. If we do not root out the cause though, political



fundamentalism, it will happen again. And again. No such attack was possible during the time of the Soviet Union, even though we were lied to and told that it was they that made the world unsafe. It was precisely the removal of Socialism in Europe that made such obscenities ever more likely.

Blairism is the shrug of the shoulders – "What can you do? It's all beyond us." "We can do something about it" becomes the most controversial – and revolutionary – thought.

What's missing is the recognition that if capitalism wants to abandon us, we can do without capitalism. That we have to work out what is needed and get on with it. As the song puts it, we have nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. We are not suicidal, so have no choice. Workers today clearly do not want a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers in power, but this is what is necessary.

Energy

If we put our minds to it, what kind of future might we create?

Energy was and is key to the development of capitalism, and therefore of the working class. The next hundred years will determine whether global warming is a real threat, and if it is, we will have to learn how to deal with it. Capitalism by its nature wastes resources and fritters away energy, but ludicrously calls on workers to cut down on energy consumption by turning down the heat (in chilly Britain) and not going out.

Similarly, assumptions that in the growing capitalist economies of countries like India and China, with their huge populations, people will not want to drive cars and have air conditioning in sweltering temperatures, if such things become generally possible, is outrageous. Energy needs are set to grow, massively, inevitably, and workers are perfectly capable of finding solutions to these problems.

We need to develop new forms of energy. The Stone Age did not come to an end because we ran out of stone. Steam, gas, electricity, nuclear – what next? In Britain we have resources which could still be exploited, and we need to overcome the irrational fear of nuclear energy, but this will not be enough for the future. Who could want a return to the past, even if it were possible? Did miners aspire for their children to spend their working lives digging coal in the dark?

We need to recognise what is special about British inventiveness. We have a sophisticated working class – highly literate, skilled, rational, experienced, creative. At the highest level, a group of scientists in Britain led the way to the complete sequencing of the human genome, finishing the task in far fewer years than were dreamed to be possible, a magnificent achievement. This scientific discovery is proving of great significance for human progress, even under capitalist conditions, with knock-on effects on research and development in the fields of medicine, food production, fertility.

This was only possible because of the particular conditions in Britain, with an intellectual, educational and scientific infrastructure created by workers here, and run by workers here, just about surviving although with serious difficulty, used for the benefit of all.

A similar thing could be done in the field of energy technology – a

great contribution to Britain's future economy. In wartime Britain, scientific inventions and productive progress were rapid because of the concentration of creative energies devoted to what was needed in a desperately urgent situation.

Now we should harness this attitude for the future. Like the human genome project, we need an energy project, with the best minds concentrating on it, to assure the future energy needs of the country are met and that Britain no longer depends on buying in energy from other countries. There is no reason why this could not be done. It requires a capacity, which we have, and a commitment to the future, which we must have to survive.

Party

The Party has something to say to workers that nobody else will. For many, our message is the most unappealing possible. No illusions, no seductive idealism; away with all your superstitions. Nobody else can tell you what is to be done, it's down to you. This includes our Party – never a substitute for the class. For honest, worried workers, this message is the only one which can make them listen.

The Party is unique in its honesty, audacity and integrity. Never self-serving, as a party or as comrades: only the class interest matters, so Party first. Persistence over years and decades has enabled us to survive where others have not.

WORKERS is a magnificent organ of thought and tool for the class, if we use it. A voice of reason in the morass.

As a Party, we reflect the class in its current state. Workers in Britain never did flock to the CP, even post 1945 when workers were preventing the ruling class from ruling, and will not do so now. Yet we must stimulate growth. The situation is grim, but communists never can be because we take the long view of history.

Like many communists elsewhere, our challenge is to pass on our thought to a new generation, ready to take up the reins as Party members.

The future

In this chaotic world how can working class power be achieved? Only by setting the agenda for what we need and forcing the pace. There is huge weakness in the capitalist system. Working class struggle can have a powerful effect in this situation.

The enemy is tiny in number, we are millions.

Our working class and this, its Party, are the only live force in Britain. What might be the economic future for Britain? First we need to do the simple, primitive things – join the debate, organise workplaces, fight locally, struggle for wages – to reassert our dignity as a class. Such struggles may look different from what has gone before, but new times require new solutions and the class will find them.

21/22 April, 2006

Largely unknown to the broader memberships, lawyers are devouring union funds – aided and abetted by some union members...

Equal value spells an end to collectivism

AN EMPLOYMENT Tribunal recently ordered the GMB union to pay around £1 million in compensation to some women members employed by Middlesbrough Council. How did this come about and what are the consequences?

The Equal Pay Act originated in EU law. Women could claim at a tribunal that their work was of equal value to that of a man on a higher rate, and if successful would be entitled to the same pay. In the early days, especially in the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s, many trade unionists thought that this was the answer to Thatcherism – at last we could win pay increases by paying lawyers to take up equal value claims. Experts were paid small fortunes to give evidence on relative value of work, and specialist lawyers made big killings.

But most unions decided to deal with this legislation through collective bargaining, working as a collective rather than an individual. The big agreements came in local government, the NHS and the civil service. Unions used the threat of mass claims submission to pressurise the employers into reaching agreements.

The employers knew from their lawyers and from cases that were taken that the settlements could be enormous. Their only solution was to negotiate deals with unions or get rid of the jobs through privatisation.

First deal

The first deal was for local government manual workers in 1986. A new grading structure based on equal value saw big pay increases for most women workers. But then came the legal maze: the deal was vulnerable to claims for six years' back pay, and bonus schemes had been negotiated for some jobs – skilled workers in construction, engineering and heavy manual work – that were almost exclusively male.

In 1997 came a new local government agreement for a national job evaluation framework with local negotiation, the Single Status Agreement. The problems became more obvious. For the unions, there was the threat to jobs if successful claims led to more privatisation, and there was the employers' threat to withdraw bonus schemes from potential male comparators. The legal bills would be astronomical for both sides. By 2000, the

local government employers had got rid of many in-house services.

In the NHS, the agreement became known as Agenda for Change, and by now the unions had learnt how to get more control of these negotiations. Equal value claims were lodged on behalf of a large number of women workers in Carlisle transferred to a PFI contract. It was assumed that these cases would pressurise the NHS to settle through negotiations. In fact, the government put a few million pounds to one side, and negotiations were concluded on the basis of a form of job evaluation, tied to changing roles and skills, equal value and significant pay increases for the vast majority. The key to this agreement was that unions had to agree to any change and outcomes – they were in control.

When the unions, in particular Unison, tried to retake control of the Carlisle cases, they were stopped by a Counsel's Opinion obtained by their lawyers. The lawyer handling the case then set himself up as a separate law firm and with the aid of disaffected union reps solicited and lodged equal pay claims against local government employers where unions were in the process of negotiation. Accusing the unions of selling their women members short, the new law firm went on to undermine collectivism and collective bargaining in local government and the NHS by posing as the champion of underpaid women, submitting hundreds of Employment Tribunal claims on the basis of no win no fee but taking 10 or 15 per cent of any settlement.

In Carlisle itself, the individual settlements are said to be between £1,500 and £300,000 with most being less than £30,000, but the total is expected to be more than £80 million (just imagine 10 per cent of that). Many of the women have already identified the Spanish villa they will buy when they receive their settlement and hand in their notice. The management of the new merged NHS Trust (not the PFI employer) has told the three Unison branch secretaries that they will have to return to work as the new Trust does not intend to have union branch secretaries, but will organise an election of a "Workers Champion"! You might have expected the Unison membership to have vigorously and

loyally defended their union reps, but because the branches had abandoned bargaining to lawyers and individuals, there is no loyalty or organisation.

In Middlesbrough, the GMB and UNISON had reached collective agreement with the council on Single Status. The unions sought to protect those members whose pay would be reduced and to avoid contracting out of jobs. The new law firm then took the GMB to an Employment Tribunal claiming the union had failed to represent its members' legal interests. The tribunal decided that "If necessary, the employer must lawfully reduce the wage of the higher earner to a level at which equality can be maintained. ...if that involves contracting out services, reducing pay or cutting hours or jobs or hours...that is a price which must be paid in order to ensure equality." It then ordered the GMB to pay around £1 million in compensation to a number of its women members.

Appeal

Should the GMB lose its appeal against that decision it and other unions will be at risk to identical claims throughout the country. Collective bargaining will be out of the window with employers looking to contract out jobs as soon as possible to avoid the scale of these claims, and the lawyers will make a fortune. One local official has described the new atmosphere at union branch meetings: some women members arrive to take notes to pass on to their lawyer.

Employers say that there is no point negotiating with the union – only the lawyer. Members whose cases the lawyers reject go back to their union to be told that there is nothing they can do and so they leave the union. The men know that it is only a matter of time before their pay and conditions are attacked or they are privatised. The unions' insurers have withdrawn cover and as more lawyers join in the rich pickings frenzy, the financial threat to unions becomes unsustainable. Barristers tell the unions they must not discuss this at union conferences so it goes broadly unreported to the rest of the membership. Ironically, it was the unions who welcomed "better" EU laws to strengthen their negotiating hand...

In a new book, an Indian Marxist looks back at the development of the twentieth century...

The crisis of socialism

RANDHIR SINGH is the retired Professor of Political Theory at the University of Delhi, India. As a Marxist scholar who has been actively involved in political affairs, he has devoted this book to a full exposition of the nature and history of socialism from Marx and Engels to the present time,

He begins with Karl Marx himself. "At the core of Marxism, best illustrative of its scientific character and continuing relevance, lies Marx's critical analysis of capitalism, its structure and contradictions and the laws of its movement, which as he foresaw, almost inexorably led to its worldwide extension, a global domination of capital . . ."

In discussing the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution, Randhir Singh describes Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades as knowing their Marx and Engels well and, indeed, a lot better than their contemporary or later Marxist critics. As Lenin himself said, "We do not at all regard the theory of Marx as something complete and inviolable. We think that it is particularly necessary for socialists independently to analyse the theory of Marx, for this theory provides only general guiding propositions which must be applied differently in England from France, in France from Germany, in Germany from Russia."

Socialist transition

Lenin's project of socialist transition in Russia was beset with difficulties – Russia's history, peasant traditions and consciousness, the need for rapid industrialisation, the constant military, economic and political pressure of hostile capitalist encirclement. Randhir Singh discusses Lenin's commitment to democracy, with its role for the Communist Party resting on the vanguard of the proletariat whilst maintaining contact with the entire mass of the proletariat and peasantry.

He is critical of the Five Year Plans during the Stalin period but recognises the rapid industrialisation and the development of military power which enabled the Soviet Union to continue



Petrograd, 1917: Lenin and his comrades "knew their Marx and Engels well".

growth when the capitalist world was mired in the economic depression of 1929-39 and to achieve its epic victory against fascist Germany.

He emphasises the crucial role of democracy. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the years following Stalin's death he attributes to the failure of democracy under the various governments of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The people were kept at a distance from political power and laws brought in encouraging the growth of private entrepreneurs. Capitalists wheeling and dealing turned Russia into an oligarchy.

Critical of China

Randhir Singh is also very critical of what he describes as China's "road to capitalism" following on changes initiated by Deng Xiaoping after Mao's death.

Under Mao there had been

tremendous progress. "The socialist nature of the Mao era's economic progress had also enabled China to feed, clothe and house, educate and provide adequate health care to its vast masses, nearly a quarter of the world's population, in its first fifteen years." However the so-called economic reforms in the post-Mao period have meant an effective abandonment of socialism as Marxism understands it.

For Randhir Singh, Cuba is the "hopeful legacy". In the midst of the worldwide crisis of socialism, with the former communist regimes and parties succumbing one after another to the lure or power of the market, Cuba has stood almost alone and defiant, so far, against the global offensive of capitalism. This despite the continuous attempt made by the US government to destroy the Cuban revolution and the crippling embargo imposed since the Kennedy

t of socialism through

administration in 1959. "The hoped-for coup has not materialised and Cuba remains defiant in defence of its revolutionary project, a source of inspiration to the poor and oppressed everywhere, immediately and most importantly in Latin America."

Singh analyses globalisation not as something new or a major discontinuity in capitalism but as capitalism "coming to maturity, with capitalist imperative of accumulation and competition reaching into every corner of the world".

He sees globalisation as another phase of US hegemony over global economy and politics. He discusses the dependence of economic globalisation on US military power. "The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist."

Failure of capitalism

But US military hegemony is far from being absolute and the triumph of capitalism far from assured. Evidence given by Singh of the failure of capitalism, is that "poverty, mass unemployment, destitution, hopelessness, racism and violent crime, and an abnormally large number of people in jail seem to have become fixtures in the world's richest and most developed countries".

In a section on the world's growing ecological awareness, Randhir Singh points out the failure to recognise that capitalism is, "a system of production whose structural imperatives necessarily degrade the environment". Talk of sustainable development is nonsense unless it means a break with capitalism and a re-ordering of our socio-economic system so as to base production decisions on needs.

The book of a thousand pages is a profound analysis of socialism in our time, worth studying by all who are committed to the cause.

CRISIS OF SOCIALISM. NOTES IN DEFENCE OF A COMMITMENT, by Randhir Singh is published by Ajanta Books, Delhi, India, UK publisher Amit Atwal, Birmingham, 2006

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

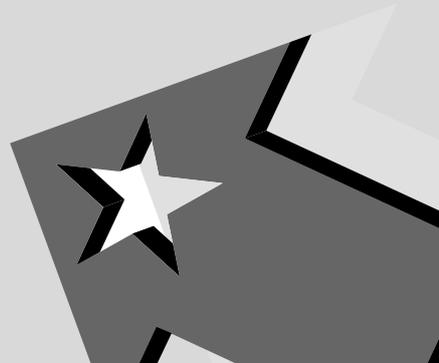
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Back to Front – Supply and demand

‘So where are the extra workers coming from, if the number of UK unemployed is rising so quickly?’

IF YOU wanted to put young people off higher education, you couldn't make a better fist at it than the Labour government. Figures published in August suggest that sixth-formers with their A-levels are contemplating an average cost of £33,512 to get a degree. Not government figures, of course – don't expect them to reveal anything; these figures come from the NatWest bank.

Not surprising, then, that 31 per cent of students admitted skipping lectures (lectures that they have paid for!) because of the pressures of part-time jobs. At the same time, the average starting salary for a first job after graduation actually fell this year, to £13,860 from £14,090 last year.

Well, that's market forces for you. But how can it be, when Britain – we are continually told – is suffering a skills shortage? Surely supply and demand should be tending to force up wages?

You'd think so, but there are other forces at play. Other interesting figures out in August revealed that unemployment has risen by 250,000 in the past 12 months (according to official figures, it's now at its highest since 2002), while the employed workforce has also risen by a similar amount. According to International Labour Organisation yardsticks, it stands at 1.68 million, or 5.5% of the workforce.

In one of those typically unpleasant expressions of how the capitalist mind works, the rise in UK unemployment was seen as a plus for Britain, and the pound rapidly rose in the foreign currency markets, reversing previous losses.

So where are the extra workers coming from, if the number of UK unemployed is rising so quickly? The answer is simple: in the main, the

additional workers are coming from Eastern Europe, about 400,000 of them in the past year. Many of them are working for wages so low (£40 a day for decorating tradesmen in London) that workers in normal housing simply cannot afford to stay in the trade.

And many of those unemployed never get told of the jobs that are available, as privatised job agencies increasingly advertise vacancies solely in Poland.

That's the government's solution to capitalism's age-old problem of the supply and demand for labour.

Traditionally – and records on this go back centuries, to the Black Death at least – tight labour markets have enabled workers to band together to raise their wages. Now, through the European Union, the government has effectively created a limitless supply of labour.

And there's Bulgaria and Romania to come. How nice, for employers, at least.

The two countries are due to accede (as the language has it) to the European Union at the start of next year, and already government ministers are facing all ways on whether they should have carte blanche to enter the British labour market.

Listening to the debate, you'd think there was some kind of EU law saying we had to allow it. There isn't, not yet, anyway, and most EU countries don't even allow workers from the last tranche of accession (which included Poland) to work freely inside their borders.

Blair spent most of August in Barbados. Now he's back, expect more preaching from him about the benefits of immigration for the labour market. Perhaps he should spend some time on the labour market himself. Soon.

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