

WORKERS

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TUC: BACK TO CLASS - US AGAINST CAPITALISM



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WORKERS

Unfinished business

AFTER A 97.1 per cent 'YES' vote by Unison members for the renegotiated local government pension scheme, a scheme which covers over 1 million members in local government, further and higher education, transport, police civilians and the Environment Agency, Unison regards the fight to defend the scheme as drawing to a close.

The ballot, reflecting a response of approximately 25 per cent from members, was fairly stunning in dealing with critics of the negotiations – the 4,862 (2.9 per cent) who bothered to vote No. But it does raise questions as to the more than 70 per cent who didn't bother to vote at all. Unison accounts for 80 per cent of the members involved in the scheme.

The improved scheme has seen off government attempts to disband the final salary scheme, has improved death benefits and has avoided a two-tier scheme for new entrants. Consultation on protections are still ongoing but are more than likely to continue until 2020. Unfortunately, as with all pension schemes, the downside to the improved benefits is that you have to die to receive them!

Though the negotiations have dragged on for over 18 months and seen one national strike day last April, all the protections and improvements that Unison and the other trade

unions involved in the scheme sought have been delivered.

The unions are now campaigning for a greater trade union involvement and participation in the running of the pension scheme, with a view to ensuring ethical investment and better returns to scheme members. That also has to include a recruitment campaign to the scheme itself, as many young and lower-paid public sector workers do not automatically opt in.

The unaddressed issue is that the original attack on public sector final salary schemes started with the European Union directive on final salary schemes in May 2002. Legislation to undermine such schemes was passed almost without comment in the 2004 Finance Act. In 2010 the earliest possible retirement age will be 55.

And it's not just in the public sector. Workers at Westland helicopter plant in Yeovil went on strike on 9 August against company plans to close the final salary scheme and lower pension benefits, with three further one-day strikes planned for the end of August and September.

Meanwhile, the EU directive remains on the books and will return, and it is no accident that the Department for Work and Pensions in its March 2007 report called for lifting of the regulation of pension schemes.



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The never-ending war

THE WAR on Iraq has now lasted longer than World War One. 165 British soldiers and 3,674 US soldiers have been killed, and 25,000 wounded, with the last two months being especially costly.

The war is costing the USA \$10 billion a month. It has cost the US taxpayer \$500 billion so far, and the war on Afghanistan has cost another \$100 billion.

Bush's 'Surge' of 20,000 extra troops has failed, as everyone knew it would. The USAF dropped 437 bombs and missiles in the first six months of 2007, compared to just 86 in the first six months of 2006. But this increase in bombing has failed as well. This June, attacks on US and Iraqi forces, civilian forces and infrastructure peaked at 177.8 per day, higher than in any month since May 2003.

The US state sponsors US companies, to the tune of \$20 billion so far, including \$1.6 billion to Halliburton. The US occupation spends more on administration than on education, construction, health, sanitation and clean water together. As a result, Oxfam reports:

- 43 per cent of Iraqis are in absolute poverty;
- 28 per cent of Iraqi children are malnourished;
- 32 per cent of internally displaced persons who need food rations can't get them;
- 70 per cent of Iraqis don't have adequate water supplies;
- 80 per cent don't have effective sanitation;
- 4 million Iraqis are in dire need of humanitarian assistance;
- 11 per cent of newborn babies are underweight.

Now 70 per cent of the American people want to withdraw the troops from Iraq. On 12 July, the US House of Representatives voted 223–201 to bring combat troops home by 1 April 2008.

•Last year, NATO air strikes killed between 2,000 and 3,000 Afghan civilians. In the first six months of 2007 NATO forces killed more Afghan civilians (359) than the Taliban did (279).

The USAF carried out 750 air strikes in May alone. A total of 66 British soldiers have now been killed there. The upper house of the Afghan Parliament has called for a ceasefire and a date to be set for the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

UNITED STATES Falling wages

IN THE USA, wages have been forced down by 2 per cent since 2003. And workers' share of Gross Domestic Product is the lowest since records began in 1947, according to official figures.

In 1970, wages and salaries were 53.6 per cent of GDP, in 2001 50 per cent, but in 2006, just 45 per cent. Each percentage point is worth \$132 billion, so between 2001 and 2006 workers lost \$660 billion to the capitalist class. The share allotted to corporate profits increased sharply, from 17.7 per cent in 2000 to 20.9 per cent in 2005.

From 1992 to 2005, the pay of chief executive officers of major companies rose by 186 per cent. The equivalent figure for median hourly wages was 7.2 per cent, leaving the ratio of CEOs' pay to that of the average worker at 262. In the 1960s, the figure was 24.

Between 2000 and 2005, workers improved their productivity by 16.6 per cent, but this only boosted profits to the record levels, not their pay. Over the same period, the median family income fell by 2.9 per cent. New entrants to the labour market fared particularly badly. Average hourly real wages for both college and high school graduates actually fell between 2000 and 2005, and fewer of the jobs they found carried benefits such as healthcare or company pensions.

Meanwhile, a large section of the workforce – the unemployed or those not seeking work – have not benefited from economic growth. Unemployment has remained stubbornly high, with the latest figure at 4.7 per cent compared with 4 per cent at the end of 2000.

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

EUOTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Little red lies

THE GOVERNMENT has privately admitted its claim that keeping a veto over taxation as one of its "red lines" was "purely presentational": it was never up for negotiation. Yet Gordon Brown still says that the government will ensure that its "red lines" are defended in coming negotiations over the final form of the new European Union treaty.

Brown claims this treaty is not a constitution, but slipped up in a comment after talks with the Irish Prime Minister: "We have discussed the European Constitution and how that can move forward over the next few months."

The Treaty is the Constitution

Other EU politicians are more direct. Chancellor Merkel of Germany said, "The fundamentals of the Constitution have been maintained in large part." Politicians from many of the EU countries have all said the same in one way or another. The Danish Prime Minister said for example, "All the symbolic elements are gone, and that which really matters – the core – is left."

After the constitution was rejected, Jack Straw (then foreign secretary, now justice secretary), set out a simple test for any new treaty: if the treaty had a president and a foreign minister then it would in essence be the constitution. The new treaty has those posts.

Intentionally unreadable

The new EU reform treaty will not be as clear as those comments suggest. The text was deliberately made unreadable for ordinary citizens – to defeat calls for a referendum, according to one of the key people drafting it. A single text was rejected only because it would look too much like the constitutional treaty.

Worse still

The EU has effectively now abandoned its inter-governmental and treaty obligations. New treaties in the EU should be negotiated by the member states' governments and their representatives. But in June the European Council, which is an EU institution, issued a mandate to the inter-governmental conference; that breaks the EU's own rules. In effect the European Council says that member states no longer have the right to decide what will be in the coming treaty.



Amicus official Gail Cartmail at the Defend Council Housing Conference (see Crisis point, p5)

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

And not even a tender...

THE WORD "marketisation", an attempt to prettify the word "privatisation", itself an attempt to beautify the phrase "flogging off", is often not strictly true. Sometimes contracts are awarded without the tender ever appearing in any kind of market.

Recently such an example was uncovered with a £12 million deal to set up the joint venture between the Department of Health Information Centre for Health and Social Care and the private company Doctor Foster which portrays itself as a "healthcare information analyst".

The Public Accounts Committee went so far as to say that "there was no fair and competitive tendering competition" and that Treasury guidance on joint ventures between the public and private sectors was "ignored". The report goes on to say "without the competitive pressure inherent in a tender process [sic] the information centre simply cannot demonstrate that it paid the best price for its 50% share of the joint venture. The £12 million that it paid, £7.6 million of which went straight into the pockets of Doctor Foster's shareholders, was between a half and a third higher than its financial advisers' evaluation."

That was written by Edward Leigh, chair of the PAC, which shows how corrupt our public life has become. Leigh is an ardent Thatcherite. Things must be bad when he feels obliged to point out that corruption verging on criminality is now rife in the NHS – like Edward Heath's description of Slater Walker all those years ago as being "the unacceptable face of capitalism".

CUBA

HEALTHCARE ON FILM

EARLIER THIS summer the Royal College of Nursing and Unison hosted their first joint meeting on international health issues. The meeting, at the RCN headquarters, featured a short film, *ON THE SLOPES OF THE HIMALAYAS*, a documentary about the work of Cuba's medical brigade in Pakistan following the massive earthquake which devastated the country in October 2005.

After the screening, the audience was addressed by a special guest from Cuba, Dr Juan Carlos Dupuy Nuñez, leader of the 2,465-strong Cuban Pakistan medical

brigade featured in the film.

The event was part of a nationwide tour to promote a Unison and Cuba Solidarity Campaign DVD and information pack, *MADE IN CUBA*. It uses film to show how Cuba is delivering free healthcare and hope to some of the world's poorest people, despite 47 years of the US blockade.

RCN members were invited to see this for themselves on a Health Study Tour to Cuba which is being led by Unison executive member and Cuban health service specialist Bob Oram in November 2007. Details on this study tour and copies of the DVD *MADE IN CUBA* are available from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign on office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk or by calling 020 7263 6452.

MINING**Kellingley's future confirmed**

KELLINGLEY PIT at Knottingley near Pontefract, West Yorkshire, facing closure two years ago, is now confirmed as having at least another 20 productive years as new coal seams are opened. Some 700 mining jobs have been secured at the Big K, the vanguard striking pit during the 1984-1985 miners' strike, following a £60 million new investment from UK Coal.

In the short term 3 million tonnes of

coal from the closed Askern Colliery will be mined, while two years' work and investment will open up new coal faces in the Beeston seam. Kellingley, threatened with closure due to geological difficulties, has seen mining engineering ability overcome the obstacles.

Britain uses 68 million tonnes of coal a year, 50 million of them imported. Our coal reserves are estimated as being equivalent to 1,000 years' mining resources. We have to keep the few pits open and alive to save the skills and knowledge vital for this future industrial reserve.

A bonanza for the lawyers

THE NATIONAL Audit Office has revealed that two-thirds of former miners – 296,000 out of 430,000 – suffering from lung disease or other coal-mining industrial diseases have received less in compensation than the lawyers administering the scheme. The Labour government's acceptance that compensation should be paid to miners after the historic 1998 High Court decision against British Coal (rather than appealing against the decision) was a great step forward.

But the administration of the £4.1 billion compensation scheme plus the £2.3 billion administration costs, the largest personal injury settlement scheme to-date in the world, has resulted in hundreds of millions of pounds going to lawyers. In total over 575,000 coal-related health claims were lodged by ex-miners. The average settlement per miner was £3200; the lawyers received a sum of £2,000 per case as a flat rate starter payment.

The ten top-earning legal firms have tended to be the labour movement's own legal firms. These firms have benefited from the scheme when traditionally they have had to fight each case individually, whether for "black lung" or "white finger" vibration.

Though these firms are not to blame as to how the scheme was established and run, there remains the whiff of scandal associated with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, the scab union which the Tories set up during the 1984-85 strike, which has further eaten into the compensation to ex-miners by charging costs to claimants.

HOUSING**Crisis point**

UNIONS AT the TUC will draw attention to the UK housing crisis, with average house prices in excess of £200,000, and rising at 11.3 per cent over the year.

The Defend Council Housing Conference in July showed how trade unionists and tenants across England, Wales and Scotland have stepped up the pressure for the "fourth option" agreed at the 2006 Labour conference, but subsequently reneged on. This would allow local authorities to retain and finance their own stock from ring-fenced housing revenue, without the government siphoning it off to subsidise the national budget.

Unions will call for a major programme of investment in affordable homes for rent and for sale, noting that the number of new households continues to outstrip the number of new homes every year. This shortfall helps to create an increasingly overcrowded section of the working class struggling to retain a roof over its head. Homelessness is an economic and political consequence of

capitalist enterprise, such as buying to let or for speculation – a fact denied by many with a "caring" conscience in the unions, for whom the dispossessed are simply a naturally occurring social phenomenon.

There will be a council house building programme again after 30 years. Hundreds of thousands of local authority homes are needed annually, yet under Labour just 54 were built in 1999. A target of 3 million new homes has been set by 2020. But Unison in particular will warn that with people priced out of the market right across Britain, with inflation massively outstripping wages, and with increasing levels of personal debt, the Gordon Brown response does not match the scale of the problem. He has already said that he will be relying heavily on housing associations – a form of privatisation.

In August the number of homes repossessed rose to its highest level for seven years – up 30 per cent over the past year. But we have been here before: capitalist economics will never provide enough homes. How refreshing it would be if unions were to start talking about building a working class strategy to achieve this.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****SEPTEMBER**

Sunday 2 September, Burston, Norfolk.
11am to 4.30pm.

Annual Burston Rally

This year's rally celebrating the school strike again takes place at the Church Green, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk.
Admission free. Speeches and music.

MULTINATIONALS**The takeover of Britain**

DO FOREIGN multinationals promote British firms? New research shows that attracting foreign investment and foreign companies actually tends to stifle promising indigenous firms.

Britain is the largest recipient of foreign direct investment in Europe and second only to the USA worldwide. In 2006, it attracted record levels of foreign investment (the fourth year running that the record has been broken) and 1,431 investment firms came to Britain. In 1998, 12 per cent of our jobs were in foreign-owned firms. By 2002, this share rose to 17 per cent, a 42 per cent rise.

The researchers, from Nottingham University, found that in sectors of the economy where companies compete on the innovation of products or services, the likelihood of failure increases substantially as a result of competition from multinationals locating in Britain.

The research is based on data from 179,000 start-up businesses between 1997 and 2002, compiled by the Inter-Departmental Business Register held at the Office for National Statistics.

REMPLOY**Steward sacked**

FOLLOWING THE announcement of 2,500 redundancies in the Remploy Factories (see *WORKERS*, July 2007), comes the sacking of a Remploy GMB steward in Newcastle, seen as part of a continued assault on GMB shop floor activists by Remploy to maintain a climate of intimidation.

The steward was sacked after complaining of bullying and harassment by Remploy for her trade union duties and activities. Some see disabled workers as "victims", but the workers at Remploy, established to accommodate severely disabled service personnel from the First World War, are showing that disability is no bar to fighting for your job, dignity at work and trade union.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Safety on the River Thames

A PARLIAMENTARY Select Committee set up to head off protests about implementing an EU Directive reducing safety standards on the River Thames has let the government off the hook. The key issue is whether or not a new “harmonised” licence will be brought in for captains on the Thames.

In its report *THE BOATMASTERS’ REVOLT*, published on 25 May, the committee concedes that it would be foolish to change a well-proven system of licensing and local knowledge requirements unless people can be completely confident that safety would not be compromised. Following publication, ministers recommended suspension of the new licence until government “has resolved problems with the scope of the EU Directive on harmonisation, potential damage to the inland shipping industry by increased training costs, and concerns about safety on the Tidal Thames”.

On the face of it, this all sounds quite positive and, as watermen’s leader Alex Hickman of the T&G says, there must now be a push for these key points to be taken up from the report. A closer look at the report, however, reveals that the committee has handed the government a number of excuses to retain the disputed licence. This is only a temporary suspension.

The excuse of the EU

It is not true to say, for example, that government “unexpectedly found itself obliged” to implement the EU ruling. The right to insist on UK standards was cleared with the EU in 1994 and any government can put up a fight if it wants to – in fact both the German and the Austrian governments supported the boatmasters of the Rhine and the Danube respectively – but our ministers (including four union MPs) have simply rolled over. In the absence of a real revolt, the EC can go back on its word at any time. A legal challenge from just one individual operator – in this case from a Dutch master wishing to sail up the Thames without meeting UK safety standards – is all it takes.

There are also too many reservations expressed in the report about the cost of training, as well as insinuations about lack of access to a career on the river due to the high professional standards and experience required from the outset. From the crude capitalist viewpoint, the cost of investment and training to high standards eats into profits – hence the drive is to ever-lower qualifications and pay.

Nor is a comparison with the pre-industrial watermen of 1641 helpful in 2007, when unions are arguing for a modern integrated transport system with passenger boats under the regulation of a unitary authority (TfL).

Most cynical of all is the suggestion in the report that the even higher standards of boatmasters on the Rhine should be lowered to enable access by their Thames counterparts, and that this piece of horse-trading might render the new licence acceptable. This should warn all workers that politicians (and trade union leaders) will only put up a principled fight for standards if they are forced from the grass roots. Support for workers abroad fighting for high national standards is vital in strengthening the case at home – just as the fight for sovereignty at home is key to international solidarity.

It is no coincidence that this dispute is happening just as the government has abandoned an inland waterways freight policy and is preparing to sell off British Waterways to the highest bidder.

Facing in two directions at once amalgamation with the T&G – against its consequences...

The state of Amicus

THE LAST AMICUS conference as a union distinct from the T&G took place in June. It was a rushed affair, with four days’ worth of business crammed into two-and-a-half days. Motions drafted two years ago and debated over a year ago appeared dated, and were, with a few exceptions, rubber-stamped, with conference waiving the right to speak. Seventeen motions out of a total of two hundred (plus NEC statements) went unheard – voted through automatically at the end, by a membership that had lost the will to live.

A major reason for this compression of business was that too many speakers were invited to address conference and spoke for far too long. These included not only the inevitable British line-up – the general secretaries of Unite, Brendan Barber of the TUC, Gordon Brown, Jon Cruddas – but also a bevy of foreign trade union officials, anxious to demonstrate their working class credentials in pursuit of a globalised union. However impressive they may be in their home territory in Australia, South Africa, the USA or Canada, it is an affront to British workers to take up their precious time.

Back to the workplace

When Conference finally got down to the preoccupations of the members, two or three main themes were identifiable – protection of jobs, standards and pay, assertion of the national interest as opposed to the EU, and the future of Britain as an industrial economy.

For a few, Conference was not “political” enough – it was too “bland”. Certainly there was a worrying degree of unanimity, even in areas where there were clear ambiguities and contradictions in policy, often contained within a single motion. But there was also a real attempt to drag the problems of the workplace to the table via the lumbering mechanism of the 2006 Branch, National and Regional Sectoral Conferences.

A prime example of muddled thinking came in the international debate on migrant workers and asylum seekers. The virtue of anti-racism was used to justify the vice of mass migration. Motions from the Black and Ethnic Minority section, Ireland, Shipbuilding, Yorkshire and Humberside, Metals and Foundry, amended by London and the Women’s Section, were composited to accommodate such diverse issues as unregulated agencies, establishment and enforcement of union negotiated wages and conditions (particularly in the engineering sector), undocumented workers, and trafficked women and children.

Free movement of labour

A token attempt was made to distinguish between genuine refugees and economic migrants, but the two were essentially conflated, and the London amendment

...ce was a theme of the last Amicus conference before its
 ...-like being in favour of the free movement of labour, but

... Conference 2007



Amicus motor industry members from Peugeot, Land Rover and Jaguar demonstrating in London in July for a “level playing field” with Europe as concerns mount over the export of jobs to Europe.

Photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

“welcomed all moves to allow free migration of working people”. In the same motion, Conference called for “migrant workers not to be seen as a back door solution for Government to plug national skills shortages at minimum cost”, yet demanded a campaign to support ‘vulnerable workers’ – a term distorted to mean migrants, not vulnerable British workers facing lack of skills training and replacement by an alternative, cheaper workforce.

An earlier motion opposing the EU Services Directive was passed unanimously. This pointed out the government’s false promises of job creation, and the myth of migrant labour helping the economy.

On the contrary, Conference believed

that “the opposite will happen, with well paid, secure employment being substituted by low paid insecure jobs ...the dilution and destruction of the role of the trade union movement ...anda harmful effect on health and safety”. The proposer highlighted the dangers of all EU legislation on free movement of labour and politely took the NEC to task for its misleading assurances that Amicus has successfully dealt with the directive.

Be less polite

Perhaps we should be less polite. Amicus has had plenty of time and warning from its members that the Services Directive is historically unprecedented in creating a revolving door of cheap European migrant labour with the capacity indefinitely to

uproot and supplant the indigenous working class.

To discourage debate, a London Region speaker tried to compare the situation with the 1950s and 60s when notices saying “No coloureds” prevented West Indians from getting jobs or accommodation.

This comparison was a deliberate anachronism; union members and the TUC have yet to wake up to the reality of capitalism in 21st-century Britain where out of 28 million workers, only 6.6 million are in unions – and even union membership is no guarantee of security or stability.

The truth is, a working class in perpetual motion cannot organise itself, and capitalists know it.

Concerned workers should look at the state of our trade unions, European Union...

TUC Brighton 2007: time to wake up to the



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Delegates at last year's TUC singing "We shall overcome." But what do British trade unionists now see as the enemy?

WHAT REALITIES is the Trades Union Congress considering in September 2007? What is reality for the delegates, anyway? A fad, the trend of the day or just...treacle?

Is the reality the one in Germany, where wind farm capitalists are suing one another about who owns the wind? Is it the 6 billion people who are supposedly fixated with how the parasite Paris Hilton survived her drink drive jail sentence? Or how The Quartet – a shadowy group: the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, the USA – employ a failed British PM as a Middle East troubleshooter (more

likely troublemaker)?

Concerned workers should look at the state of our trade unions, at separatism in Britain and at the ceaseless threat from the European Union. All of these ideas centre upon and return to the theme of how the British working class can survive and refocus its hopes in the 21st century.

Sometimes piecemeal change is seen as just that. Is it tunnel vision we have? What happens if we are actually in a cul de sac and there is no light at the end of the tunnel? Our biggest error under the Thatcher years was to see each struggle in itself and not all linked together.

Change in the past 11 years has come with machine-gun like rapidity and has been constant, like a permanent Battle of the Somme with ceaseless casualties. The bigger picture of where we are going has been lost. We need to stand back and re-evaluate.

The traditional working class that built Britain is gone, is dead. The traditional majority manual manufacturing industrial working class ceased with the triumph of Thatcher, compounded by Blair and Brown. The past 30 years have transformed our class, changed its consciousness and altered its

at separatism in Britain and at the ceaseless threat from the realities of Britain

organisations beyond recognition. We need to get to grips with the “new” working class.

The concept of class – those who work and those who exploit, worker versus capitalist – has more validity now than ever before. We are a nation of workers – more numerous than ever – but with less sense of purpose, identity, direction, with greater division on grounds of race, religion, gender, language and origin than at any time in our history. All the things around which we have historically united in opposition to the boss are now used to divide us; also ironically, the division emanates from our unions.

If the old working class is dead, then it has to be “Long Live the New Working Class”. In 1979 we had over 12 million trade unionists – the only country in the world outside of the socialist countries to have ever reached over 50 per cent density of a voluntary coming together of workers. (Ignore the Scandinavian unions as their role is different from the British unions.) Today the figure is about 6.5 million. The overall number of members continues to decline (despite growth in some areas) and has done every year since 1979.

Going global

Everybody in the unions is trying to address this issue, and there are confusing and differing lines. Do we huddle together to create super unions not only in Britain but in Europe and North America? And why not globally or inter-planetary?

There’s a trend towards touchy feely campaigns. Let’s patronise the poor, let’s pursue cleaners at Canary Wharf, even better if they are illegal migrants, or black, or Eastern European, women, etc. But there is no strategy for organising the 400,000 other workers at Canary Wharf; perhaps the question is too difficult, perhaps the mind-set is wrong (and if so, whose?). Let’s represent “vulnerable” workers – there is a TUC/government pilot in London to do exactly that: not to unionise them but to enshrine individual, legal, employment and human rights.

‘We have the largest number of workers ever employed in the UK – 28 millions. But consider what is the value they are creating.’

Individuality versus the collectivity of the trade unions is taken to insane levels.

There are many questions we should ask:

- What’s wrong with just organising workers – any workers, not categorised, separated, patronised but any and every worker?
- Do workers need to be organised by organisers? Don’t we have a history of doing it ourselves for the last 250 years?
- Do workers want to be organised by a select caste of organisers? Workers have always self-organised. Are they consciously walking away from responsibilities?
- Do workers believe that trade unions are worth having?
- Do workers believe industrial action can deliver?
- Has the working class become so confused, so directionless that it has not only forgotten but abandoned its history?
- If we did organise 50, 75 or 100 per cent of workers in Britain, what would we do with that power?

We have the largest number of workers ever employed in Britain – 28 millions. But consider what is the value they are creating. The largest source of wealth creation in Yorkshire is horse racing and stud breeding – in the south east it is luxury yacht building, and in London, finance. Some two million workers are engaged in creativity and media industries.

One in four workers in London is an agency worker – that’s effectively the modern day pool of the unemployed and casualised. Unemployment in 1982 was 3,070,621 and everybody clamoured “No

return to the 1930s”! Today it is over 4.4 million and not a peep. It’s described as “worklessness”. Interesting term – the unwilling, the incapable, the denied, the dispossessed, the invisible?

At the same time the TUC says it is economically good to bring more migrant workers in – they do all the jobs you lot won’t do. Do we really have a working class too royal to work? Or is it the case, as the Bank of England says, that migrant labour undermines wage rates, terms and conditions.

In Britain and worldwide we are seeing what has been described as “the race to the bottom”. Capital is trying to drive all down to the lowest common denominator by reducing wages, undermining living conditions, destroying dignity and diminishing skill. This is not new but ably described by Marx and Engels in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO 160 years ago.

Wanted: flexible slaves

Capitalism does not want an independent-minded, literate, healthy working class but a nation of flexible slaves drowning in debt, popping abroad to sit in the sun for two weeks a year, with a cultural mindset of some US celebrity jailbird.

Likewise, take the European Union – the greatest example of British schizophrenia in history. We are against it – 70 per cent of the electorate are against it, say polls – but the British ruling class has fed the EU since its inception with ideas, direction and purpose.

The European Union was an ideological concept of the Fascist dictators of the 1920s and 1930s. Britain was the only major player in pre-war Europe, outside of the USSR, that defeated the rise of fascism – the only country where the working class defeated fascism.

After the defeat of Nazism and the huddling together of those wrecked capitalist countries, one idea emerged: stop the working class – in the USSR, the people’s democracies or any independent working class. British capital was at the

Continued on page 10

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heart of that concept. In simple terms – “Unify the Continent to attack Britain; develop a fifth column in Britain to then deliver that objective”. And in this the TUC has played a shameful role.

Every strategy, directive, law emanating from the EU and its predecessors was about breaking organised labour, most probably written or connived at in London. The directives on privatisation and competition resulted in the destruction of our industrial manufacturing base. They are now pioneering the present attack on our social care infrastructure with the privatisation of health, education and welfare.

These directives have also overseen the attempted physical destruction and separation of Britain into three countries and the English Regions – the logical consequence of reducing Britain to an off-shore finance tax haven surrounded by parkland and heritage centres.

The renewed “old” EU constitution reduces Britain’s (and other European nations’) sovereignty, takes control of foreign policy, policing and criminal justice, creates an EU presidency, reduces the ability of nation states to have an independent voice, and consolidates the 3000 laws and directives issued annually

from the unelected, unaccountable EU Commission – a tidal wave of change. British voters are opposed to these changes and want a referendum. The response from the listening Brown – the Nelson touch – is to turn a deaf ear as opposed to a blind eye.

So what have we got? We have trade union direction focusing on every conceivable pious do-gooder victim-culture driven issue imaginable but missing the wood for the trees. What about wages? What about employment and unemployment? What about the next generation and the future? What about health and education? What about debt – ours not the Third World’s? What about unity?

What is to be done?

So what are we going to do? We should say goodbye, farewell to that first industrial working class. We should say thank you for the lessons learnt and weapons provided. We should say to this new working class: this is your heritage and armoury:

- A united class not division on grounds of race, nationality, gender, religion, age, occupation, etc;
- We stand for unity and solidarity because divided we fall;
- We are for independence and scientific minds not superstition or religious bigotry.

The recent establishment of the Council of Ex-Muslims should be applauded – the Reformation in Europe started with similar small and heroic acts;

- We must reassert Marxist ideas and thought as the answer to capitalism;
- We must ensure that every campaign, every missile of thought and deed is directed against the EU;
- We must muster our international allies: recent polls indicate opposition to the EU from 75 per cent of Spaniards; 71 per cent of Germans, 70 per cent in Britain, 68 per cent of Italians, 64 per cent of French. “Out of EU membership” has to be the rallying cry.

What of the future? Listen to the analysis from the Ministry of Defence, whose Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre report on strategic trends from 2007 to 2036 states: “Global Inequality – disparities in wealth and advantage will therefore become more obvious...Absolute poverty and comparative disadvantage will fuel perceptions of injustice among those whose expectations are not met, increasing tension and instability, both within and between societies and resulting in expressions of violence such as disorder, criminality, terrorism and insurgency [which] lead to the resurgence...of Marxism.”

Good! So be prepared.

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 there is low rainfall in the South East in any winter, then by the following summer much of South East England will be using standpipes.

Severn Water, for example, has seen an 18 per cent rise in profits as complaints against the company rose by 55 per cent 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 over £1 billion 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”.



Judge us after ten years, said Peter Mandelson in 1997. The decade is up, and the verdict is in...

A legacy story – booming Britain?

THE IDEA OF a Labour Government, deep in the pockets of the bourgeoisie, claiming to produce more equality at the same time as it is helping to make the conditions for it more and more distant, is nothing short of laughable – if the consequences weren't so tragic. Nonetheless, Labour will keep on trying to fool us, so we will have to keep on pointing out where they have failed, even according to their claims and predictions. These stand in sharp contrast to the reality.

Tony Blair has desperately been trying to leave a legacy for the people of Britain to remember him by. WORKERS is happy to provide him with one. Not really a legacy though, as Brown is now Prime Minister and this is equally his story . . .

In 1997, Peter Mandelson wrote, "I say to the doubters, judge us after ten years in office. For one of the fruits of that success will be that Britain has become a more equal society. However, we will have achieved that result by many different routes, not just the redistribution of cash from rich to poor, which others choose as their own limited version of egalitarianism..."

A new report, CLOSER TO EQUALITY? ASSESSING NEW LABOUR'S RECORD ON EQUALITY

House prices – up, up, up

- Abbey Bank now offers mortgages of five times earnings to "help out" hard-pressed first time buyers. This has the effect of keeping property prices high. Specialist broker firm Mortgage Lender is launching a 50-year mortgage. 20 year-olds on this deal will still be paying off the debt in their 70s
- In rural areas such as the south west and Norfolk, properties are being sold at 14 times the average local salary
- "Buy to let" landlords are pushing up prices, using government tax breaks (unavailable to ordinary buyers) to buy up new and existing housing then letting, frequently to multi-occupation tenants, in urban areas often creating slum conditions. High rents are subsidised by you and me in the form of Housing Benefit.



Putting profit and capitalism first: the only Blair legacy.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

AFTER TEN YEARS IN GOVERNMENT, published by Compass, examines Mandelson's claim. It finds growing inequalities in health, housing, wealth and wages.

"Health inequalities have increased year on year under New Labour. ... Regional geographical inequalities have risen faster under New Labour than they did under Margaret Thatcher." The mortality rates of infants born into manual workers' families have risen faster than the average. The differences in life expectancy between the best-off and worst-off areas of Britain have grown to record highs: 9.5 years for women and 12.3 years for men.

Houses have increasingly become speculative investments, their gains unearned and virtually untaxed. Consequently, "housing inequality has risen and decent, affordable housing is increasingly inaccessible for a growing percentage of the population. ... The demand for social homes has increased – yet supply has fallen. Despite the huge

Personal services jobs boom; design and creative jobs fall

- 4 million people work in domestic service (cooks, cleaners, nannies, gardeners) – the same proportion of the population as in the 1860s
- Fastest growing occupation is hairdressing
- People employed in the "design workshop of the world" (Blair's words) fell by 15 per cent between 2002 and 2005. In the same period, overseas earnings from design fell by more than half
- "Creative industries" seen by Blair and Brown as future for Britain: value of exports in music, the visual and performing arts fell by 20 per cent between 2000 and 2003. Advertising employment fell by 20,000 in the same period.

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

Hidden unemployment and wasted skills in 2007 (according to report by Sheffield Hallam University, June 2007)

- Official unemployment 900,000 (on Jobseekers' Allowance) but the real rate of unemployment is probably at least 2.6 million
- 2.7 million claiming sickness and disability benefit (largely concentrated in ex-shipbuilding, ex-mining and ex-steel making areas) – at least 1 million of these could be working
- In former coalfields, five times as many claiming incapacity benefit as claim unemployment benefit
- 40 per cent in higher education, therefore “parked” out of the reach of unemployment
- Just under 8 million are “economically inactive”
- Apparent growth in numbers working largely accounted for by increases in mothers returning to work after childbirth, pensioners, immigrants: all tending to depress wage rates.
- Growth in McJobs – casual, low paid, unskilled work (in shops, bars, hotels, domestic service, care home assistants)
- 750,000 estimated illegal agency workers
- Labour’s “flexible” uninspected, ununionised labour market subsidises employers through government tax credits (i.e. by other workers) to workers who cannot live on what they earn.



Photo: Andrew Wiard / www.reportphotos.com

Gordon Brown's policy of “open borders” for capital and jobs

- £75.5 billion spent by foreign corporations on buying British firms in 2006
- Steelmaker Corus sold to Indian company
- Liverpool football club sold to American company
- West Ham Football club youth academy sold to Icelandic company
- London Stock Exchange under threat of being sold off to Nasdaq
- British Airports Authority, Abbey National and O2 now Spanish-owned
- Pilkington Glass now Japanese-owned
- Smiths Electronics bought by US firm General Electric
- Thames Water bought by German company, stripped of assets, raised tariffs for customers, managers paid themselves £10 million in bonuses, sold on to Australian company
- One million jobs lost in manufacturing, construction and allied industries since 1979
- 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost in past two years alone
- 8,000 manufacturing jobs lost in January 2007 alone
- Deficit in traded goods (things made in Britain) in 2006 was £60 billion – the highest by far since World War 2. In this period Germany ran a record trade surplus as the highest exporting country in the world, and Japan's trade surplus stood at £50 billion.

waiting lists, every year since 1981 has seen a net loss of social homes, as right to buy sales have far outstripped new homes built.” So 1.6 million children are living in bad housing.

The government has kept the key elements of Thatcher's anti-trade union laws. It has boasted that “British law [is] the most restrictive on trade unions in the developed world.” So now too few organise in their unions to win better wages and too many borrow themselves into debt. But the CEOs of Britain's ten biggest firms are not restricted: last year,

they gave themselves rises three times the rate of the average wage rise.

The government encourages the immigration of cheap labour from Eastern Europe to undercut trade unions: as the report warns, “Employers...are increasingly using low paid agency workers, often migrant workers, to drive down wages and conditions and undermine collective bargaining arrangements.” Weaker unions mean more poverty and inequality. As even the OECD noted, “a stronger bargaining power of

trade unions is associated with lower relative poverty and income inequality”.

The government has given the very rich all the tax breaks they could want: minimal capital gains tax, non-domicile tax rules that cost us £16 billion in lost revenue every year, tax breaks for property developers (Brown's Real Estate Investment Trusts).

As a result, the share of wealth owned by the richest 1 per cent rose from 20 per cent in 1996 to 21 per cent in 2003; the poorer half's share fell from 8 per cent to 6 per cent. In 1996–97 the richest 10 per cent

A new book focuses on Blair's romance with Bush...

Blair the groveller

got 27.8 per cent of all income; the poorest 10 per cent got 2 per cent.

By 2005–06, the richest 10 per cent got 29.5 per cent; the poorest 10 per cent just 1.6 per cent. The richest 1,000 people had £98.99 billion wealth in 1997 and £360 billion in 2006, a 263 per cent rise. The share of national income going to labour is at an historic low; the share going to capital is at an historic high.

So, when we judge Labour after 10 years in office, what has their “unlimited egalitarianism” actually produced? Judge for yourself.

Blair and Brown's “booming economy” – awash on a sea of debt

- Personal insolvency (formerly known as bankruptcy) has risen from nearly 22,000 in 1999 to nearly 600,000 in 2006. Personal insolvency is now much higher than business insolvency
- Between 2000 and 2005 consumer credit (the amount we owe on our credit cards etc) rose by 65.8 per cent
- In the same period net mortgage lending rose by 94 per cent while average earnings rose by 22 per cent
- Total student debt now around £18 billion – more than the gross domestic product of Slovenia
- Student loans to be privatised by Brown – banks, pension funds and other investors keen to buy student debt as it guarantees a steady long term income collected by government
- There are calls for the interest rate subsidy on student loans to be scrapped
- Students graduating this year owe on average about £15,000
- Medical graduates owe about twice the average
- Students beginning university this September (40 per cent of 18-year-olds) will graduate with around £30,000 of debt
- UK Insolvency helpline has a student debt website on how to become bankrupt.
- Credit Action, a money education charity, calls student loans “government endorsed debt on a massive scale”



Yo, Blair!, by Geoffrey Wheatcroft, hardback, 154 pages, ISBN-10: 1-84275-206-5, Politico's, 2007, £9.99.

IN THIS BRIEF and brilliant essay, journalist Geoffrey Wheatcroft tells the story of Blair's premiership, focusing on the disastrous alliance with George W. Bush, which he pursued against Britain's interests and the views of the British people.

Blair lied that Saddam Hussein was a ‘serious and current threat’ to Britain. He claimed to be pursuing diplomacy, but as early as July 2002 a Downing Street memorandum decreed, “We should work on the assumption that the UK would take part in any military action.”

Even Thatcher had warned that we should only “use our force to preserve our way of life. We do not use it to walk into other people's countries, independent sovereign territories.” If wherever there is an evil regime, “there the United States shall enter, then we are going to have really terrible wars in the world.”

Wheatcroft rightly argues that Bush and Blair should have focused on destroying Al Qa'ida in Afghanistan. Instead they attacked the Afghan people and their government, maximising the number of enemies.

On the EU, Blair was equally dishonest. On the Constitution he said in May 2005, “Even if the French voted no, we would have a referendum. That is a government promise.” Just three weeks

later, the French voted no and he broke that promise: “there is no point in having a referendum, because of the uncertainty it would produce”. And he pledged that the EU's scheme for devolution would strengthen the Union between England and Scotland, whereas it really provided the opportunity for secessionists to break up Britain.

All these facts raise the question, why has this government (like all other previous governments) consistently, systematically, produced results that are the opposite of what they proclaim to be their intentions? Is it just because they are pathological liars? No, it's because they represent only a minority ruling class that is consistently, systematically, opposed to the interests of the majority of Britain's people, and this class could not safely maintain its rule if it owned up that its interests were opposed to the majority's interests.

In September 2006 Blair promised the Labour faithful – all too apt a phrase – that he would dedicate his last months in office to peace between Israel and Palestine. Blair says, “I only know what I believe.” Think about it – it's the wrong way round. But neither God nor history is his judge; in a democracy, we would be.

Grovel to Bush, grovel to the EU, grovel to the über-rich. Is this how we want an independent sovereign country to behave? Wheatcroft sums up Blair's rule: “the most dishonest and disastrous prime ministership of modern times”.

A new review of healthcare for London has some interesting suggestions but also some questionable premises and serious omissions...

The future of healthcare for Londoners

“A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION” – Professor Ara Darzi’s Healthcare for London Report – was publicly launched on 11 July. Professor Darzi has gone from being an internationally renowned surgeon and clinician to a junior minister in Brown’s Health team, with a brief that started out as an independent review of London’s health service and broadened to review the rest of England’s health care provision.

Each chapter of the Framework has been written by a group of clinicians who have decided what is best for their part of the NHS. This approach has much to recommend it. But now it is essential that the wider NHS workforce, its trade unions and the wider public take charge of the process. Already one fundamental premise of the document is being questioned by both clinicians and patients. On page 7 it states, “The whole thrust of this report is to tackle health inequalities by improving services across London giving everybody access to best possible care.”

Yet since Sir Douglas Black produced his report “Inequalities in Health” in 1980 and Margaret Thatcher tried to suppress it, NHS workers and researchers have known that health care services have little impact on health inequalities. Employment (or lack of it) and income are the key determinants of health – and without addressing the widening income gap in London, no amount of health care planning will make any difference. Tackling health inequalities in 2007 involves looking at employment patterns, poor housing and issues such as the role of EU migration on overcrowding and suppression of wage rates in the capital.

New models

The proposed health care delivery models, the new centres of specialist excellence, improved out of hours services, new urgent care centres, new thinking around GP services – polyclinics, proper workforce planning and training, enhancement of skills, plus closer working with the GLA and Mayor’s Office, are all to be welcomed and will provide a basis for discussion.

However, effective planning always



The review takes place against a backdrop of public unease over health reorganisation.

Photo: Workers

starts with a good understanding of the current situation. The deficiencies of the current services are well illustrated in the Framework but major obstacles to rational planning are not mentioned, for instance the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). London hospitals and clinics are now peppered with PFIs – inflated mortgages that will need paying for several decades. Services at these locations will need to be commissioned to pay the bills, even if a rational planner might wish to develop services elsewhere. A “framework for action” must address this issue. The Chancellor now turned Prime Minister put us on this path and now needs to be forced off it.

Another detail omitted from the Framework is the number of hospital beds that the capital needs. Of course the way in which a bed is used is also important, and conditions that used to require admission can now be treated as day cases. But a rational planner must have a number in mind and should also be open about the fact that London has fewer hospital beds per head of population than France, Germany or the Netherlands. European countries that have the lower

rates of diseases such as MRSA have more single rooms and generally more space between beds. Yet every PFI-built hospital has had fewer beds and less physical space. Any decision that leads to patients being physically crowded and beds being used more intensively is like a decision to build on flood plains.

One section of the document that has puzzled community nurses is about long-term health conditions and maintaining patients in their own homes. They would support this, but at the moment their numbers are being cut as trusts struggle to manage budgets. The Framework suggests, for example, that London will require 570,000 more asthma appointments with specialist nurses – potential ammunition for those currently facing job threats.

More profoundly, many district nursing services across the capital may be privatised in the next twelve months, disrupting their relationship with local authority social services, with which they typically share a boundary at present. Here too the Framework faces two ways. While advocating public sector partnership, it also praises the work of the

uggestions – as well as

American company Kaiser Permanente.

The response by district nurses to the current privatisation plan has been generally muted, with some rushing off to set up their own businesses and others hoping to retire earlier than expected. The Framework offers district nursing and other community services a possible lever.

The Framework correctly calls for more workforce planning in London – just at a point where any remaining expertise in this area has recently been made redundant after London's four previous strategic health authorities were merged into one NHS London authority. It assumes there should be centralised planning for London. But processes already in motion such as PFI and Foundation status give individual units more power to dispose of their estates as they wish, fragmenting services. All these processes are antagonistic to the sort of controlled change envisaged. Unless we deal with the political blocks to service development, improvements will not be achieved.

Consultation

This independent report will be tabled at NHS London's Board in August and consultation will commence across London in September. Health trade unions have welcomed the general objectives of the report and hope, jointly through partnership working arrangements with trusts, to look at how service provision, as far as possible, can be provided in a public sector framework. Professor Darzi is on record that this model need not rely on marketisation or private sector provision for delivery, and the challenge for health unions and patients in London is now to work with both commissioning agents and trusts to ensure that any reconfiguration of services remains within the control of the NHS.

The Darzi Report talks of a 10-year strategy to deliver world-class health care provision in London. That's a goal to support – while ensuring it is in the context of public service not marketisation, privatisation or the multinational private health corporations.

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.

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Back to Front – A subprime system

‘This is the system that the Labour government loves so much. It idolises the rich. It makes a fetish of the so-called free market. Greed is good...’

EVERY SO often, the hidden workings of capitalism come to light, and what strange workings they are. The latest example – as usual, it seems to take a crisis to winkle out these odd practices – is the US subprime market.

A few weeks ago hardly anyone knew what subprime might be, leave alone that it was something to do with American mortgages. Now the subprime crisis in the US has led to turmoil and tumbling on the world’s stock markets.

But there were those who did know. “All of the old-timers knew that subprime mortgages were what we called neutron loans – they killed the people and left the houses,” one US mortgage expert told THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Killing people and protecting property is what capitalism does best. It’s had centuries of practice doing it, and making a lot of money along the way. Until things start going wrong, this is what is called “wealth creation”.

In fact, the subprime market is the mirror image of those people condemned by capitalism to make their living sifting through garbage, with the same stench of decay. It starts with selling mortgages to people who almost certainly can’t really afford them on the basis that if they default, the bank gets the house. And then those mortgages, especially the dodgy ones, are sold on to others at cut prices, and on to others still, until you end up with a lot of banks holding potentially worthless pieces of paper.

The financial world is full of such “products”, often called “derivatives”, It’s a merry-go-round that fuels large City bonuses, which in turn fuel house price rises, and creates a lot of rich people (an old-fashioned description, apparently:

the new formulation is “high net worth individuals”). Yet all the time no wealth is created.

The irony is that when things go wrong, real wealth is destroyed. People lose their houses. Pension funds slip into deficit. We must all tighten our belts.

This is the system that the Labour government loves so much. It idolises the rich. It makes a fetish of the so-called free market. Greed is good.

When the TUC meets in Brighton this month, it will doubtless condemn “corporate greed”. But surely now the British labour movement has had enough experience of capitalism to mature just a little and understand that attacking capitalists for “corporate greed” is rather like criticising sharks for eating fish, or trees for growing leaves, for that matter.

That’s what capitalism is. Live – and die – with it, or destroy it. Just stop going on about its “excesses”.

The Labour Party certainly has. It has finally shaken off its aim of redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor. Instead, it’s redistributing from the poor to the rich. From those who create value to those who own the means of creating it, who own the means of production (see “A legacy story”, page 11).

It has also taken us back to Victorian values in a way Thatcher never was able to: there are now 4 million people in Britain working in personal service, the same proportion of the population as in the 19th century. It’s amazing the National Curriculum doesn’t include a course on the correct way of doffing the cap and touching the forelock.

Social democracy has failed. The task for workers is not to reinvent it, but to strike out on their own: for socialism.

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