

WORKERS

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WAR AGAINST THE PEOPLE



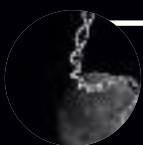
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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

Talking about a referendum

ON 7 NOVEMBER, a Rally for a Referendum on the European Union's proposed new constitution was held in Westminster. It was very well attended, with representatives from across the country.

This proposed constitution gives the EU the sole legal authority in all the member countries. This is quite new — all the EU's earlier treaties left sovereignty in the hands of the member nations.

Its Article 9(1) says, "the Constitution, and law adopted by the Union institutions...shall have primacy over the laws of the member states."

The European Court of Justice would become our Supreme Court, and the repository of sovereignty. No longer would we the British people have sovereignty over our own affairs.

Article 16 allows the EU to take 'appropriate measures' to enforce the constitution's aims even where the constitution 'has not provided the necessary powers' — a very dangerous, and quite new, catch-all clause.

Article III-157 of the constitution would give the EU new powers over energy policy, the 'security of energy supply' and the management of the energy market. Voting

would be by qualified majority voting, with no vetoes. This would allow Brussels to control our oil and gas reserves, which comprise 90% of the total in the EU. Thirty years after Heath gave away our fisheries, and having virtually finished off our coal industry, Blair is scheming to give away our energy reserves!

Speakers at the rally urged that we use "the power of the collective will of our nation" to save our nation, and that we 'don't leave it to others'. Edmund Burke was cited as saying that the people were the "perfect sovereign judges".

There was a warning that Blair, being frightened that he would lose any referendums, might insert in his general election manifesto some phrase such as "we must support the work of our European partners". He would then take an election victory as assent to endorsing the constitution, and consequently to joining the euro, giving away our energy reserves, submerging our army into a European army, and so on.

The new constitution clearly gives the EU major new powers over its members, so we must demand a referendum on whether to accept it or not.

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Christmas lights?

APPARENTLY UNBELIEVABLE COMMENTS from US power companies operating in Britain that Britain would face power cuts by 2004 have been reinforced. The US companies forecast power cuts because the rate of return on their profit was being restricted by government regulation. Now British Energy is teetering on bankruptcy – administration is coming near again as debts reach £1.3 billion...and still rising at the last count.

British Energy accounts for 20% of Britain's electricity generation. The European Union is investigating the government's bail-out of British Energy as being illegal under European directives. In addition the European Union's Large Combustion Plant Directive, which targets sulphur emissions, will effectively close all of Britain's coal-fired power stations.

Unless the generating companies are willing to build the hugely expensive gas flue desulphurisation capability that the coal-fired stations need, then the stations will be closed. As the generators have refused such action since the 1980s, the future of coal-fired generation looks bleak. Correcting problems caused by an unstable power supply and a lack of back-up options could take 10 years or more if new power stations have to be constructed.

Government strategy is based upon four principles: no further construction of new nuclear plant; no dependency on Britain's vast coal reserves; experimental development of Heath Robinson wind and wave schemes; and almost total dependency on imported gas from Norway, Russia and the Middle East. The only logic for the dependency on imports is if the government has totally subscribed to and accepted that it has no energy policy other than that which is driven solely by the European Union.

- A report published by the Adam Smith Institute – an anti-working class, anti-trade union, Thatcherite organisation – on alternative energy poses some awkward questions.

The report, written by an alternative energy expert, suggests that dependency on imported energy and renewable sources such as wind and wave power, combined with the closure of home coal and nuclear power generation, will lead to unreliable and unpredictable energy supplies. This policy, now being considered by government, could result in a tripling of energy prices and routine black-outs, according to the institute.

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

CUBA**United States condemned**

THE UNITED NATIONS General Assembly has yet again condemned the US blockade of Cuba and called for the lifting of all economic, financial and political blockade sanctions at its annual vote on 4 November.

For the 12th year in a row and by an ever-increasing majority, the USA, not Cuba, is isolated on the world's stage. The three nations which voted to maintain the blockade were the USA – "the empire of darkness" in the Americas; Israel – the USA's puppet regime in the Middle East; and the Marshall Islands – a bombed and nuked-out ex-testing ground for the US military.

In 1992, the vote was 59 in favour, 3 against, abstentions 71. Eleven years on this had been changed to 179 in favour, 3 against, abstentions 2. After 42 years of illegal sanctions the world supports Cuba's right to sovereignty.

NUCLEAR INDUSTRY**Strike at Sellafield**

OVER 500 GMB and AMICUS members struck at the end of October at the Sellafield nuclear recycling plant, run by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. The strike, the first stoppage in over 30 years, centred on the failure to harmonise wages. GMB and AMICUS members regard the employer's refusal to implement the harmonisation agreement until 2009 as renegeing on past promises to deliver the deal in April 2004.

The dispute, rumbling since 1999, has now been translated into action. Further rolling days of stoppage are planned.

NURSING**Regulating the regulators**

NURSING AND MIDWIFERY unions recently overturned proposals from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) that every nurse and midwife should take out personal indemnity in case they were personally sued.

The climbdown followed opposition from all the nursing and midwifery unions, who argued that it was up to employers to provide that indemnity.

Now the NMC has made another unpopular proposal. It wants to double the fees that individual nurses pay the NMC when they re-register every three years.

Why such a high increase? Have the costs of maintaining the register and dealing with misconduct cases rocketed? No. The real reason is that the NMC has been gambling on the stock market — with devastating consequences.

Running costs have always been funded from the interest on assets accumulated from years of donations from generations of nurses in order to have an independent statutory body.

But none of the assets were in more secure government bonds or other types of savings. So the historic savings of nurses have been squandered and the next generation have been asked to stump up the running costs.

The increase will not be sufficient to build reserves, so this year's hike in registration fees may be the first of many.

As with the attack on pensions in other areas of the economy this financial scandal has been presented as something beyond the control of mere mortals.

Around a century ago nurses decided they needed to take control of their own professional standards and regulate the profession. Now the task is to regulate the body that has the responsibility for regulating them!

ENGINEERING**Train manufacture**

5000 JOBS are under threat at the train builders, Bombardier. Manufacturing and engineering jobs in Derby, Crewe, Doncaster, Wakefield and numerous other traditional bastions of train building in Britain are faced with extinction. The crisis stems from the time delay in the replacement of trains for London Underground — scheduled for 2008 - and Connex South Eastern trains.

Ironically the tube- and train-using public of London and the South East, who

Government wages crackdown

THE GOVERNMENT is looking to make workers pay for its re-election. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, will present his pre-budget statement on 10 December, but civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) already know that headline spending plans will come at a cost to them.

The government's ambitious plans for education and health spending have been criticised by workers in those sectors for not paying enough attention to finding and paying the staff to carry them out. Now the government is taking a leaf out of the private sector book in the way it is paying its own employees. Tax revenues are falling, welfare payments and tax credits are costing more than planned.

The message has gone out from the Treasury that money is tight and that the way is to cut costs. An increasing proportion of central government running costs is locked into PFI and private partnership style contracts. What is left is to crack down on wages, which is not so much new Labour as old ruling class.

On 20 November managers in DWP imposed a pay award on their 90,000 workers just days before a delayed postal ballot was due to close. The offer they were voting on was worth only 2.6%, with nothing to deal with low pay prevalent in DWP. It also included a controversial bonus scheme.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) was furious, suspecting its members in DWP were being goaded into a dispute. Civil service pay has been split up into many separate negotiations since the days of Thatcher. PCS has set its aim this year to bring bargaining back to the national stage. It knows that the Treasury sets the rates anyway, and that departmental managers have little say.

The DWP pay deal was due on 1st April, and civil servants working there are getting frustrated at the delay. Some departments, the Inland Revenue being the largest, signed up for 3-year deal in 2002. Few others in the civil service have finalised pay for 2003. DWP is one of the largest departments waiting to settle, which is why they suspect they are being used.



Marching against Bush and Blair, London. See feature, p11.

Photo: Workers

have suffered most from derailments, shortages of rolling stock and chronic overcrowding during the last 12 months, are now likely to face not only more of the same but worsening conditions if the train builders are axed. If an example were

required of government inaction and a 'non-transport' policy, then the failure to preserve manufacturing jobs, resolve the crisis in public transport and ease congestion in one fell swoop, readily springs to mind.



Inside the postal dispute

Northampton was deeply involved in the postal workers' recent pay ballot and unofficial action. *WORKERS* spoke to one postal workers from the town to hear their side of the story.

Why did the union fail to get a yes vote in their recent pay ballot?

The vote was actually quite close. Many branches such as Northampton delivered an overwhelming yes vote. However, management made it very hard. We couldn't hold meetings on the premises, so had to go outside. Workers were bombarded with propaganda, so it was really important to keep up the counter-propaganda on our side. They brought in consultants to help them get at our members.

How did Royal Mail react to the result?

The managers took the vote as a sign that they could completely ignore the union. The national union leaders were called to a meeting which lasted 8 minutes! Management basically said that the world had changed and we had to sign their deal and accept restructuring — we would be sidelined. The union refused and left! There were no further talks then. All the local managers were called to huge meetings at Birmingham and Wembley and given the go-ahead to take the same line.

How did the unofficial action start?

In London there had been a big vote for action over London Weighting. In the old days mail would have been diverted to other areas and this might have provoked unofficial action, but Royal Mail didn't do this. However, a couple of drivers were suspended and this triggered the action. Things snowballed as other areas came out in support until it affected about 30,000 workers, even some who voted no in the original ballot.

What happened in Northampton?

Diverted mail came to us and we refused to handle it. Normally we would be suspended, but this time management just put it all into a huge articulated lorry, as they were desperate not to escalate the strike. We could have asked them to provide us all with cream buns and they'd have done it! Although some members wanted to go out too, it was important to hold back at that stage.

The dispute has been resolved. How does this leave the union?

The union is alive and kicking. There won't be local implementation of any conditions not agreed to nationally. No members will be penalised for the action. We have shown that we will not allow them to destroy the union. It's interesting that the company has announced a pre-tax profit of £55 million. So much for the company pleading poverty a few weeks ago! It should now drop its threat of 30,000 job cuts - the letter side of the business is in profit, but that won't last unless you've got the staff.

What does the future look like?

Union and management will now have to reach a new agreement on pay and London Weighting. The two sides have to reach agreement through ACAS on single delivery by December 10th.

Although we've stopped privatisation in its tracks through the use of ballots, we still have to tackle the opening up of services to the private sector which will happen in 2007 or earlier. They want to hive off bulk mailing - that accounts for 30% of the business, which would signal the end of our monopoly.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

SPRING 2004

Burning Issues — the Miners 1984 – 2004

Starting March 2004 the Birmingham-based Banner Theatre will be touring a new production, *BURNING ISSUES*, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Miners' Strike. The show will be based on in-depth interviews with former mineworkers, their families and friends and people living in former coalfield communities. Banner Theatre is actively seeking bookings, too. For further details please contact Banner Theatre on 0121 682 0730, via email at office@banner@blueyonder.co.uk, or visit the website at www.bannertheatre.co.uk.

MINING

Grim future

THE 4,500 MINERS left in Britain are facing a grim future. Government support to the industry over the next 3 years will be £60 million. A modest figure of £140 million has been identified by UK Coal, Coalfield Communities Campaign, mining unions and other business analysts as being a realistic figure.

One wind farm experiment in the North West — the blighting of Morecambe Bay — is to get £59 million alone.

The Selby complex, with over £1 billion in investment, is to close in April 2004. Only Kellingley pit will be left in North Yorkshire with a workforce reduced by nearly 75% to 550 miners.

The European Union's Large Combustion Plant Directive will threaten the closure of all Britain's coal-fired power stations. A conundrum — wrong type of coal, hence no coal burn means no coal power stations, no coal burn means no mining — hence everything is closed.

ENGINEERING

Pay fight at Merloni

IN LATE OCTOBER, 700 Amicus/AEEU and GMB members at Merloni UK, formerly the Creda factory at Blythe Bridge in North Staffordshire, imposed a work to rule and overtime ban in pursuit of better pay.

Merloni had offered only a below-inflation 2.5%. Mick Stevens, Amicus/AEEU's regional organiser, asked, "Why is management not talking to us? This dispute is not just about pay but about respect."

Turkey's stand against terrorism

IN RESPONSE TO a call from trade unions, peace protests were held on 22 November in major Turkish cities including Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya and Batman. The protests expressed revulsion at the horrific suicide bombings in the Turkish capital Istanbul, four in one week, which tore through two synagogues, the British consulate and HSBC bank.

Protesters showed their deep anger at the terrorist outrages, which they saw as attacks on the whole Turkish people, and they again called for an end to Turkey's alliance with the US over the Iraq war. Strangely, the trade union protests were hardly mentioned at all in British and US press reports, which concentrated on the statements of political "leaders".

A chilling al-Qaeda statement exulted in the destruction and misery caused by the bombings, saying "the cars of death (are) reaping the souls of the allies of the tyrant of the era" and defined their suicide bombers as "people who love death". In fact, the cars of death killed and maimed ordinary workers going about their everyday lives in the Turkish capital. The desire to terrify and blast the Turkish people back into a repressive, medieval era is the mirror, not the opposite, of US attempts to dominate and subdue Iraq. As the protesters said, both are enemies of progress who need to learn that people are not easily cowed by bombings.

Blair and Bush

Also chilling was the press conference in London, where Blair stood beside Bush to hear him express the US's right to wage war anywhere it chooses, under the guise of "not flinching" in the face of terror: "We stand absolutely firm until this job is done – done in Iraq, done elsewhere in the world."

In Britain, Foreign Office minister Denis MacShane caused a furore when he called on British Muslims to choose "the British way, based on political dialogue and non-violent protests" instead of the values of terrorism. Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, declared that the phrase "the British way" was offensive.

That depends on who defines it. Is it a government which decides to abandon British interests in subservience to the US, sending its troops to die in a "pre-emptive" war abroad in the teeth of massive opposition from its people and even before it had fixed the vote in parliament? A government which has made Britain a far more dangerous place to live? Or is it the many thousands of workers who marched in London to oppose Bush's visit, a cross section of society speaking with a united voice, disciplined and dignified?

The latter, just as in Turkey the peace protesters rejected terrorism in their own "Turkish way", on the streets of their cities.

What was supposed to be one big raging torrent sweeping all before it has become many little shallow streams, with fewer and fewer involved.**Once upon a time in London**

Once upon a time there was a Fairy Gang. The Gang were very arrogant. They thought they could bully, manipulate and deceive people into doing what they wanted. They dreamt up a plan to have a fight over London Weighting — paid to public sector workers in local government, health, education, transport in the capital. The plan sounded and looked great so in 2001 they launched their dispute.

The Fairy Gang had a secret weapon — the firefighters, whose separate pay dispute was to be a rallying cry. The Fairy Gang had read about a previous war involving the miners and they thought they could recreate the same world.

Unfortunately from day one things started to go wrong. The Fairy Gang outside of London didn't want to sacrifice themselves for those in London and so refused to be drawn in. The firefighters were out-manoeuvred and had to change strategy mid-dispute. The legal advice given to the rail workers, nuclear power station workers and myriad others, that if there was no fire cover they could just go home and not be punished, flopped at the first test.

Setbacks

The inner London Fairy Gang had more setbacks. Some of the Gang, due to their arrogance, forgot their Generals' plan and wanted to do their own thing, hence would not march with other Fairy Gang members. Some of the Gang were so stupid, ironically in Higher education, that to show 'solidarity' they went on strike when they were on holiday. What merriment and succour this gave to the employers. What was supposed to be one big raging torrent sweeping all before it has become many little shallow streams, with fewer and fewer involved.

Did that matter? Of course not! The biggest element of the Fairy Gang, UNISON, kept voting for action but kept hiding behind others. The big Fairies from the Town Halls retreated behind cleaners and school meals assistants and even members of the lesser Fairy groups — TGWU and GMB. But did that matter? Of course not! Fairies are fearless and know no pain, especially when they are leaving the action up to someone else.

One heroic Fairy group from Newham have carried the dispute — for most of the time bearing the brunt of the brutal employers. Did this matter to the others? Of course not — there is room for Fairy Martyrs in mythology as long as it isn't those who see themselves as the loud-mouthed Fairy Generals hiding behind someone else.

Desperations

Out of desperation the Fairy Generals have now launched their most dangerous weapon — an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons. Even more raucous laughter from the employers — since when did clutching at MPs' coat tails win any dispute — a bit like running to the TUC for advice?

So what is to happen? Fairies don't exist. The London Weighting dispute started with a genuine grievance of public sector workers. There has been disciplined and loyal commitment to the strike days. But note where the commitment has come from — not the so-called bastions in the Town Halls, but the low paid, for example dust workers and cleansing staff.

The strategy and tactics adopted have been reactive and full of posture. After 18 months either no offer or a minimal offer remains on

raging torrent sweeping all before it has become many little
 power involved....

London...



High hopes: campaigning in the London Allowance struggle in November last year.

the table. UNISON has bled its coffers nearly dry. The density of union members across all public services in London still remains at 30%-ish. London has failed to capitalise on the old adage, "If you want to recruit, have a dispute."

Why is this? Because the strategic thinking behind the dispute was stuck in a time-warp of 1970s tub-thumping. It did not recognise the changes in the workforce — fragmentation, contracting out, the fact that many local government workers had broken away from long-gone national pay structures some time ago.

Or probably more significantly, this is the generation of Thatcher's children. We have not won them over. They have not

'UNISON has bled its coffers nearly dry. Union density across all public services in London still remains at 30%-ish...'

learned that the unions are relevant to themselves, their children or their future. The rhetoric of the arm-chair Generals did not take this lack of understanding into account, that in fact they had no

army. More so, even though there are more workers employed in the public services than ever, the Generals could not translate those numbers into recruits around the most basic issues of trade unionism.

The London Weighting dispute in higher education is drawing to a conclusion. The acceptance of local offers will see the dispute peter out. In local government, despite strike days set well into spring 2004 and early day motions, there is much searching for a face-saving retreat. The guerrilla action by postal workers may have given fresh heart to some, but the postal workers like the firefighters before them, cannot fight someone else's battles.

The occupying American and British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have managed to kill more civilians than all of al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks...

War against the people



Photo: Workers

IN THEIR 'WAR against terrorism', Bush and Blair have killed even more innocent civilians than al-Qaeda. As of 20 November, the total number of Iraqi civilians killed since the start of the war is estimated at between 7,898 and 9,729. The occupying troops continue to kill and injure Iraqi civilians. Between 3,073 and 3,597 civilians have been killed so far in the US/British attack on

Afghanistan. If, as Ronald Reagan said, killing civilians in the struggle against terrorism is 'an act of terrorism itself', then the occupying forces are terrorists.

The loss of life for which they are responsible, of course, does not end there. 13,500 Iraqi soldiers were killed in the original US/British attack on Iraq. 252 US soldiers were killed, plus 125 in non-combat situations; 19 British

soldiers were killed, plus 32 in non-combat situations.

Between the war's 'end' on 1 May and 20 November, 171 US soldiers were killed in combat, and 102 in non-combat situations; and 11 British soldiers were killed in combat, and 7 in non-combat situations. 17 Italian soldiers, three Spanish and one Polish, have also been killed.

This totals 648 US soldiers dead and 69 British, so far, including the 273 US and 18 British since the war's 'end'. 17 journalists have been killed, and 25 aid or UN workers.

The US ruling class has plans to extend its 'war against terrorism'. It wants to attack Libya and Syria, among other countries, accusing them of being states that sponsor terrorism. But Libya was the first country to file an international warrant for bin Laden's arrest for a terrorist offence, in 1998.

The US government has suggested that it has to attack Syria to destroy WMD that Iraq's leaders took with them when they fled to Syria. By contrast, Bush and Blair do not describe Saudi Arabia as a state sponsoring terrorism, although Saudi Arabia for years funded bin Laden through phony Islamic charities, and 15 of the 18 hijackers on 11 September were Saudis.

Occupation

In 1998 a book was published which assessed US policy in Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991. "Trying to eliminate Saddam, extending the ground war into an occupation of Iraq...would have incurred incalculable political and human costs...There was no viable 'exit strategy'...Had we gone the invasion route, the US could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land." Who wrote these prescient words? A certain George Bush Senior, in his modestly entitled book *A WORLD TRANSFORMED*.

Britain had earlier been 'an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land'. British forces occupied Iraq during the 1920s and 1930s, supposedly to protect oil wells owned by British firms and RAF bases against what the government called 'the growing threat from Bolshevik Russia'. There is nothing new about using fake threats to justify a bloody, costly and futile occupation of Iraq.

Blair said the threat this time was from the still-missing 'weapons of mass destruction'. Lieutenant General James

'Rumsfeld: "They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south, and north somewhat"....'

Conway, commander of the First Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq, recently reported, "We've been to virtually every ammunition supply point between the Kuwaiti border and Baghdad, but they're simply not there." Why didn't he follow Donald Rumsfeld's clear guidance? "We



Above and left: images from London on 20 November, when well over a hundred thousand people marched against Bush and Blair in the largest workday demonstration in Britain's history.

Photo: Workers

know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south, and north somewhat."

Bush asked Congress for \$87 billion for Iraq, Afghanistan and the war against terrorism, \$20 billion for 'reconstructing' Iraq. However, US Treasury International Under-Secretary John Taylor said, "much of the US financial contribution to Iraqi reconstruction will be earmarked for

American companies." The US government has ordered the former Chief Executive of the US division of Shell, Philip Carroll, to run Iraq's oil industry. Bechtel has gained \$680 millions' worth of contracts for infrastructure projects. A senior executive of Cargill, the world's biggest grain exporter, is in charge of Iraq's 'agricultural reconstruction': his remit is to bust open the Iraqi market for US firms. If he ruins Iraq's agriculture, presumably his company can export more grain. In view of the invasion, Iraq's \$150 billion debts should be cancelled, but won't be.

Foreign ownership

On 15 September, the Coalition Provisional Authority passed 'laws' allowing 100% foreign ownership of all sectors of Iraq's economy, private and public (except, for now, oil, gas and minerals), cutting corporation tax from 45% to 15%, and imposing a low 5% tariff on imports.

The 'Governing Council' appointed by US gauleiter Paul Bremer is preparing to sell off Iraq's massive oil and gas reserves. Shell and BP are pressing for their cut, but US firms are in the lead. This 'Governing Council' has now appointed a 25-member 'Cabinet', all without elections or any participation by the people of Iraq. Bush will almost certainly postpone any elections until 'stability' has been established in Iraq, that is, indefinitely.

A sea of oil

Bush's priority is control of Iraq's oil. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz recently explained, the reason why "we went after Iraq" was that "the country swims on a sea of oil". The occupation is intended to last as long as necessary to maintain this control. Any government allowed by the USA would not have sovereignty over Iraq's resources, or over the occupying troops, so it would be a US puppet, not an Iraqi

Continued on page 10

A new book brilliantly exposes the campaign of systematic mendacity before and during the attack on Iraq...

Mass deception

Continued from page 9

government.

The fraudulent behaviour of Bush et al is mirrored in Britain where we await the findings of the Hutton Inquiry, with a judge facing a dilemma. On 13 October, Sir Kevin Tebbit, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, told the inquiry that Blair had chaired the “decisive” meeting that agreed the “naming strategy” which led to Dr Kelly’s exposure and death.

The judge will have to decide how this fits with Blair’s claims that. “I did not authorise the leaking of the name of David Kelly.”

Criminal

Under US federal criminal law, it is a felony “to defraud the United States, or any agency thereof in any manner or for any purpose”. Under the US Constitution’s impeachment clause, manipulation or misuse of national security intelligence data is “a high crime”.

Bush could and should be impeached. Of course, we order things differently in Britain, but didn’t Blair defraud us all, and misuse Britain’s intelligence services, by linking Iraq with al Qa’ida, even though MI5 had concluded in February that there was no such link?

Misuse

Didn’t he also defraud us all, and misuse Britain’s intelligence services, by stating that attacking Iraq would weaken terrorism, although the Joint Intelligence Committee had told him before the war that “al-Qaeda and assorted groups continued to represent by far the greatest terrorist threat to Western interests and that threat would be heightened by military action”?

Such questions are beyond the remit of the Hutton Inquiry, of course.

The deception of both the Bush and Blair regimes and the word-twisting they use to support it are now clear.

ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2002, Bush claimed that an International Atomic Energy Agency report said Iraq was six months away from developing a nuclear weapon. An IAEA spokesman said, “There’s never been a report like that issued from this agency.”

The UN agency had actually said that it “has found no indication of Iraq having achieved the program goal of producing nuclear weapons or of Iraq having retained a physical capability for the production of weapon-useable nuclear material or having clandestinely obtained such material.”

This did not stop Bush’s spokesman Blair from repeating the lie. As the authors of this brilliant book remind us, in February MI6 said there were no links whatever between Iraq and al-Qaeda, contradicting the other big Labour/Republican lie.

These, and the many other examples that the authors cite, raise the question, what did the working class do about the Labour government’s warmongering? In particular, Labour Party members should consider whether they are complicit in the war crimes of their chosen leader.

Before the war, we all knew that Blair was flying the globe, lying for war. What did Labour Party members do? Then their Parliamentary Party voted for war. Did any members act to stop him, even if only by resigning from the party? Without the continuing support of his party, Blair could not have gone to war against the wishes of the majority of the British people.

At the Labour Party Conference some members feebly tried to soothe their guilty consciences by debating the war that they allowed, trying to weasel out of their

responsibility for the war that they made possible. Deprived even of this token vote, did they resign? No, the Conference gave Blair a 2-minute standing ovation before he spoke, 58 rounds of applause during his speech, and a 7-minute 35-second standing ovation at the end.

Thanks to excellent books like this, no generation has ever been better informed about the wars that we let our rulers wage. But this only increases our responsibility. The United States

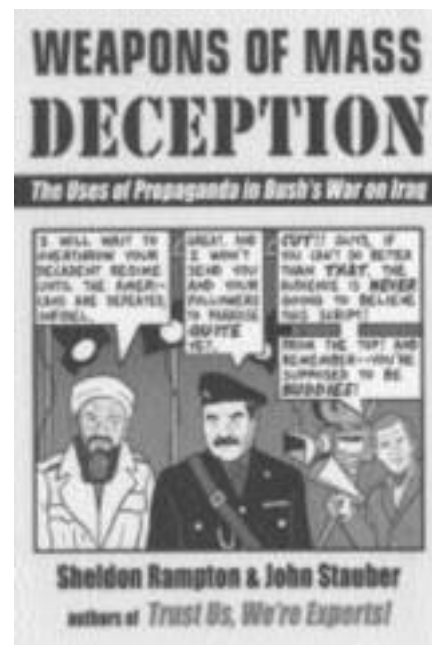
Committee for a Free Lebanon, staffed by members of the US ruling class, urges “overwhelming, non-surgical, non-proportional military force” against Sudan, Libya, Iran and Syria. And what if Bush attacks Cuba? What do we plan to do to stop future wars?

Earlier this year, our rulers had to allow us to march, meet, petition and play electoral and parliamentary games. We won all the arguments, we won in the opinion

polls, but then the rulers attacked Iraq anyway, as if we did not matter. Why did all our efforts make no difference whatsoever?

Because these kinds of activities are all based on the delusion that we live in some sort of democracy. Blair’s war against Iraq, waged against our wishes, is the proof that we the people do not rule here yet.

Our capitalist class rulers will make wars till we take away their power to do so. Only revolution, seizure of power by the working class, will do the job.



Weapons of mass deception: the uses of propaganda in Bush’s war on Iraq, by Sheldon

Ten years after the act that started the breakup of British Rail, it's time to look at the rail system we are left with...

Our railway — or their profits?



Photo: Workers

A DECADE HAS now elapsed since the 1993 Railways Act emerged, a piece of legislation which began the process of breaking up and privatising Britain's railways. A suitable moment, perhaps, to take stock, examine the state of the railways, and look at what the future has in store.

The last few months have seen developments which are both positive and negative. The European 'high speed club' has been joined at last, as Britain's rail speed record was smashed by a

Eurostar train reaching 208 mph (335 kph) on the new high speed link from London to the Channel Tunnel. Passenger trains are now routinely cruising through Kent at 186 mph (300 kph), as they have been doing in France, Germany and other countries for years.

Tunnel

Of course, the day that Blair officially opened the new Channel Tunnel link, Jarvis managed to grab the headlines and ruin a rare good news day for rail by

arranging for a passenger train to fall off the track at Kings Cross! And it is the latter incident which looks like the key turning point for rail! — but we'll return to this later.

The other irony associated with the record run is that the Alstom factories in Britain, which built the Eurostar trains, are to close. Don't be fooled by the superficial resemblance of the Eurostar

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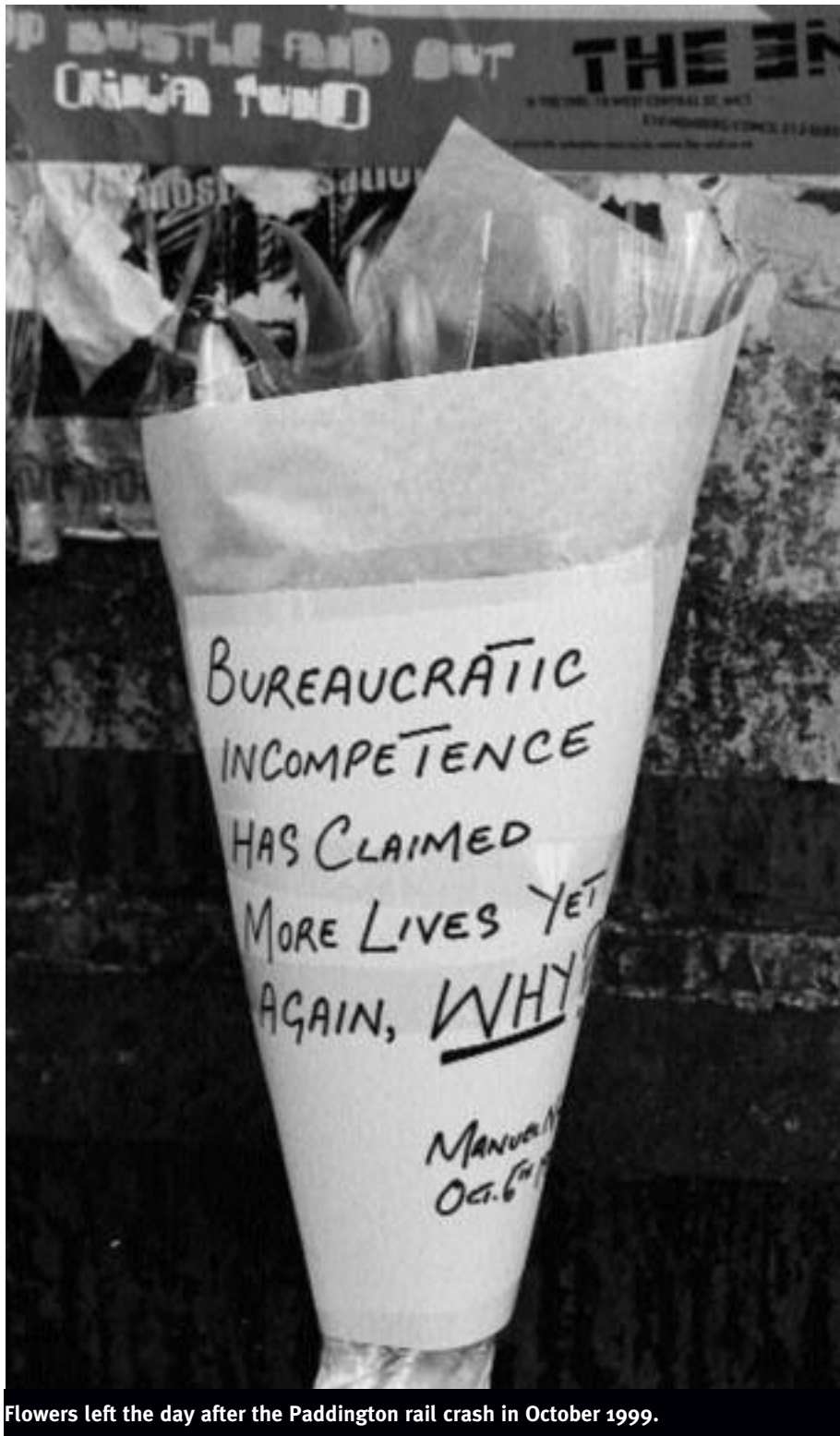


Photo: Andrew Wuard/www.reportphotos.com

Flowers left the day after the Paddington rail crash in October 1999.

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to a French TGV — the complex engineering incorporated in the design was developed by British engineers, much of which came from the ill-fated Advanced Passenger Train. The French-based company has since spent many years quietly transferring this high-tech know-how from Britain to France, and is now using the firm's financial difficulties to justify withdrawing from Britain altogether.

Underground export

Alstom's Birmingham works is currently completing work on Virgin's new Pendolino tilting trains which are capable of 140 mph. The company has just won a £100 million order for new London Underground trains. London's tube trains have been built in Birmingham for many years, but the next order looks likely to be built in France or Spain.

Within weeks of Alstom's announcement, Bombardier, soon to be the last train manufacturing company left in Britain, has said that it too is considering shutting up shop, with final decisions being made any day now (see News Digest, p4).

Factories at Derby and Doncaster which were inherited from British Rail, and which have both seen over a century of train manufacturing, look set to close. The country that invented the train will no longer make any. Meanwhile, Japanese train manufacturers are lining up to join the likes of German company Siemens in filling the gap.

Exporting jobs

Britain is not only exporting its train manufacturing capacity. Plans are afoot to export hundreds of rail call centre jobs to India. Want to know what time the next train is to Guildford? — just phone someone in Bangalore! (See Back to Front, p16.)

Since rail privatisation, the task of providing information has been de-

skilled, and the enquiry service has deteriorated.

Yes, a simple timetable enquiry can indeed be done just as well in another country, thanks to modern technology. But deviate from the script, ask about something which is not straightforward, and you will often be disappointed. And that's now!

Just how much will someone in India be able to tell you about when the ticket offices at Aberystwyth or Greenock will be open?

Scandal

The real scandal is that rail companies, which are in receipt of millions of pounds of public subsidy, are moving much needed jobs away from areas which have already experienced high unemployment due to the disappearance of mining and steel jobs.

And there doesn't appear to be any end to the gravy train. The private rail companies now receive in real terms three times the subsidy that British Rail was given to run its services. Arriva and National Express have both been given massive dollops of public funds to carry on in the same old bad way.

Renationalised

One glimmer of hope is that Connex, the worst of all the train companies, has been sacked and sent back to France in disgrace. Having lost South Central to another private operator, its South Eastern franchise has been effectively renationalised.

Unfortunately, the Strategic Rail Authority says it is planning to seek bidders for South Eastern later, to include new domestic services to St Pancras using the new Channel Tunnel link via east London when it is complete.

The most positive news in a long time came when Network Rail recently told contractors such as Balfour Beatty and Amey to hand back the maintenance work. From next year, Network Rail will directly employ the 18000 staff involved.

So why is the railway being put back together in this way? There are a

'So why is the railway being put back together in this way? There are a number of reasons, but the biggest is cost...'

number of reasons, but the biggest is cost. British Rail received around £1.325 billion at today's prices in its last year. This year, the railway will cost the taxpayer £3.84 billion. Costs have exploded, without any tangible improvement in services.

Back in house

Earlier this year, Network Rail said they would take a couple of contract areas in house "so they could better understand the way in which costs were incurred". It apparently didn't take them long to work out what many rail workers could have told them a long time ago — the extra £2.5 billion has found its way into the pockets of private shareholders and fat cat bosses! The contractors are literally bleeding the industry dry.

Derailing

It seems that Jarvis (of Potters Bar fame) precipitated Network Rail's dramatic move on maintenance. Having embarrassed Blair on his big day out by derailing a train at Kings Cross in an almost identical fashion to a previous incident in Yorkshire just a few months before, it seems that the patience of Network Rail and government ran out — Jarvis had to go!

So Jarvis cobbled together a settlement and exited before they were pushed. But such momentum had built up that only days later, Network Rail decided to take the lot back, much to the chagrin of the other contractors.

But Network Rail weren't brave enough to take back signalling and track

renewals work — at least not yet. Many believe this will come soon. It certainly needs to. Renewals are where the big bucks are made. The West Coast Main Line is currently being more or less rebuilt, with lines and stations being closed every weekend. Jarvis is one of the major players.

£10 million a mile

The costs of this have become a national scandal; it is costing £16.68 million per mile to do the work. BR used to do it for a fraction of the cost. The brand new high speed 186 mph line being built through difficult and hilly terrain in eastern France is only costing £10.84 million per mile.

Even more scandalous is the fact that the new Pendolinos rolling off the Alstom production line will still not be able to achieve their design speed of 140 mph because an upgrade to allow such speeds would have cost even more! That's why Virgin has been compensated to the tune of millions, and unless you want to leave the country, 125 mph will be the maximum speed you will experience on trains for many years to come.

Small wonder then that in a recent RMT survey, 72% said that the railways, including the train operators, should be renationalised. Even the Strategic Rail Authority is beginning to understand what the first word in their title actually means, arguing in a document entitled "Everyone's Railway — the wider case for rail" that the nation's railways are vital to the economy.

Change

Support is there for change — everyone sees the state of the roads. An election is coming soon, and transport will be a major issue.

The political pressure must be kept up to kick the privateers out of the railways, get investment up to the levels of other western European countries, and re-establish a manufacturing base in Britain capable of supplying the needs of a modern railway.

Amid the despair of Thatcherism, a group of scientists laid their Britain a world leader in the new science of genomics. This autumn celebrated a landmark achievement...

One giant step for mankind

TEN YEARS OLD this year, the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute announced in October that they had broken a genetic decoding record — they had completed two billion letters of sequenced DNA.

Housed at the so-called “Genome Campus” around Hinxton Hall, a few miles outside Cambridge, the institute has put Britain at the heart of the worldwide endeavour to crack the secrets of the genetic code of living organisms.

Inside its modern, well-equipped laboratories scientists at Hinxton sequenced a third of the human genome, but they have also been heavily involved in cracking the DNA secrets of more than 25

microbes that cause some of the world’s deadliest diseases, including TB, typhoid, plague and malaria.

The institute, named after Fred Sanger, the only Briton to have won two Nobel prizes, was conceived during the darkest days of Thatcherism by a small group of Cambridge scientists, led by John Sulston, who were determined that Britain would remain at the forefront of genetics research. The idea was to set up a centre to lead the world in genomics — the new study of whole genomes.

The scientists simultaneously approached the government’s Medical Research Council and the biomedical

charity the Wellcome Trust, looking for a commitment of at least £100 million. The Medical Research Council had nothing like this amount free to spend, and knew that the government would not put its own hands in its pockets to fund this research. So it was left to the Wellcome Trust, the richest biomedical charity in the world and one run by scientists themselves, to come up with the money.

Sir John Sulston, founder director of the institute, admitted that it had been a gamble: “I don’t think any of us could have thought we would have come so far, so fast. Now the challenge for the world is to use these sequences wisely and equitably - for the advancement of knowledge and for the universal human good.”

Power

Anyone who doubts the power of science and scientists to advance knowledge and the universal human good should note what happened with the sequencing of the human genome.

In the mid-1990s, a private US company called Celera, led by Craig Venter, an American scientist, decided to do its own sequence, with the aim of patenting and protecting what it found and making a fortune selling information to scientists around the world. He lobbied hard, even telling the US Congress that they should stop funding the public effort to sequence the human genome.

With the resolve of the US members of the public consortium sometimes wavering — funded by politicians, they rarely felt able to say in public what they felt about profiting from the genome — the Sanger scientists stiffened the sinews. They told their partners that they would up their planned contribution to the sequence from one-sixth to one-third, even saying they would do the whole job themselves if they had to.

The result was the binding together of an international consortium of scientists devoted not only to sequencing the human



Picture: Wellcome Trust

An astronomical achievement: the two billion letters of DNA sequenced at the Sanger Institute would stretch from the Earth to the Moon

plans to make
mn, they

genome, but to making the sequence publicly available without cost. To counter private plans to patent sequences, they announced that they would make theirs public in a daily updated stream, deposited simultaneously in three public databases around the world.

The latest major scientific output from the Sanger Institute came at the end of October, with the publication of the analysis of the complete sequence of human chromosome 6, which determines among other things the molecules that help our bodies to discriminate between our own cells and those of invaders.

The analysis identified 1557 genes, more than half of them previous unknown, using, among other techniques, comparison with the genomes of mice, rats and three species of fish.

Today the Sanger Institute employs 700 staff and does indeed lead the world in genomics research. And the human genome has been sequenced, in full, while Celera stopped its sequencing with an incomplete draft version in 2000. The myth of private sector efficiency had been exploded by the power of scientific professionalism and priorities.

The Genome Campus is more than a centre for sequencing. It also houses the European Bioinformatics Institute, which has become a world leader in the analysis of sequence material, and the UK Human Genome Mapping Programme Resource Centre. It has become a magnet for bright scientists from around the world to come to Britain to study and research.

The commitment to the public good has not waned. The US Patent Office is still allowing private companies that claim to be the first to determine the function of a set of genes to gain patents to any invention, such as a diagnostic kit, that uses that knowledge. Yet here in Britain Sanger scientists are strong voices among many around the world leading the fight to stop companies from patenting knowledge gained from the human genome.

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

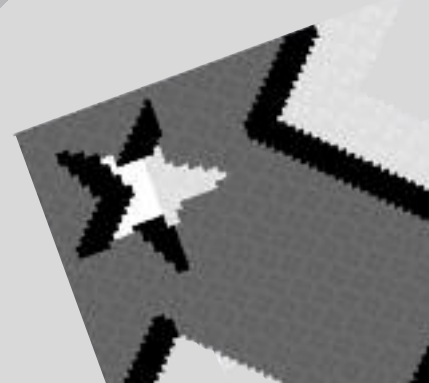
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Back to Front – Floating away

‘Strange that anything positive comes out of the USA, but a number of States are outlawing the transfer of work “off-shore” ...’

IT IS ESTIMATED that during the next ten years 800,000 jobs including at least 50,000 senior management jobs will be ‘off-shored’. This abuse of the English language essentially means that 800,000 jobs will be exported from Britain — off our shores.

Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s imports of cheap goods from the Far East undermined Britain’s textile, car vehicle, machine tool and manufacturing base, we are now seeing a new twist. The British capitalists who brought in cheap imports are now exporting jobs to the Far East so that they can profit from returning the services to Britain. What started with the export of call centre jobs will now increase and include technology-driven jobs.

Job losses will accelerate over the next ten years. Lloyds TSB, 1,000 jobs; Barclays, 350 jobs; HSBC, 4,000 jobs; National Rail Enquiries. 600 jobs — these companies are joined by British Airways, BT, BUPA, Reuters, Standard Chartered, Norwich Union, Abbey, Prudential and Avia.

The simple guiding principle is profit. The average call centre wage in Britain is £12,000, in India £2,800. India, China, Malaysia and Sri Lanka are willing

recipients of this type of work, returning the services by satellite and internet to the enquirer in the UK.

Low-wage jobs in Britain are to be replaced by lower wages in the Far East. This new form of colonialism will set India at China at Malaysia at Sri Lanka — all with the intent to drive down wages even further.

If the strategy of Blair and Livingstone for London and the South East is based on finance and technology, and these are the jobs to be targeted for ‘off-shoring’, what future for London and the South East?

It is estimated in the United States that 3.3 million jobs will be ‘off-shored’ by 2015. Strange that anything positive comes out of the USA but a number of States are outlawing the transfer of work ‘off-shore’.

To save jobs and prevent the undermining of national economies workers are going to have to use the power of consumer boycotts to cripple ‘off-shoring’. Make them answer good old-fashioned letters; drive up their costs and make this 21st century slave trade in people and technology uneconomic — make it nationally, answer it nationally.

FINANCIAL APPEAL: June 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the death of Reg Birch, founding Chairman of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). In commemoration of Reg’s life, the first biography of this Engineer and Communist is to be published.

Drawing upon speeches, articles, previous unpublished photographs and family reminiscences this will be a major

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