

# WORKERS

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JUNE 2014



## UK PHARMA AT RISK



**Buy-to-let The road to riches | 04**



**Local government Pay under further threat | 06**



**Obituary Bill Ash, 1917 – 2014 | 14**

# WORKERS



## Still plotting against Russia

WHEN NATO swallowed up most of eastern Europe's countries, it agreed that it would not put bases or troops in. Now it is deploying planes, ships and troops to Poland and the Baltic region. Doubtless it is also running agents into Ukraine. NATO is escalating threats while demanding that the Russian government de-escalate tension.

NATO and the EU are trying to split Ukraine from its historic partner Russia, following a long-standing US strategy. Former CIA Director Robert Gates noted, "When the Soviet Union was collapsing in late 1991, [Defense Secretary Dick Cheney] wanted

to see the dismemberment not only of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire but of Russia itself."

NATO/EU aggression poses a grave threat to any countries seeking to determine their own future. Look at what they did to Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. All three have become terrorist safe havens. All three are divided on sectarian lines and regional warlords rule the rubble.

Russia has demonstrated no threat to Britain or British people, but the bellicose mutterings of Hague, Merkel and the other EU wannabes show us where the danger really lies. ■

## The politics of minority

NEWS IN April that Cornwall has been granted minority status by the Council of Europe was met with joy by some groups. Many locals are much less keen. The status puts Cornwall on a par with the Welsh, Scots and Irish as a minority entitled to protection against "assimilation", whatever that means. It brings no legal status or money.

Typical of reactions on BBC Cornwall's online discussion was Ben Lean: "I already knew I was Cornish. I don't need some European mumbo-jumbo to tell me that."

European bodies are not alone in promoting the politics of separate "identity". Enthusiasts are now

keen to promote the Cornish language through bilingual roads signs to strengthen the Cornish "brand", even though fewer than 1,000 of the 532,000 inhabitants speak it.

Cornwall has its particular problems with seasonal unemployment and housing bought as second homes. But it has far more in common with the rest of Britain: destruction of industry, lack of decent jobs and wages for locals, especially the young, pockets of real poverty side by side with growth of extreme wealth for a few individuals. The only identity we should recognise is that of the British working class. ■



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## Lecturers vote for rise

MEMBERS OF the University and College Union have voted overwhelmingly to accept a 2 per cent increase for the next pay round, which takes effect from this August. The offer came after a protracted struggle by academic and academic-related staff (such as librarians) in the universities and other higher education institutions.

That fight had been for the previous year's claim, where the employers had imposed a 1 per cent rise. In response, lecturers and other staff began a series of one-day and two-hour strikes, backed up by a work to contract. Action began in October last year, and preparations were in place for a marking boycott to begin after Easter.

Since 2009 pay in universities has fallen short of the cost of living by an estimated 13 per cent, leaving those at lower grades on very low wages. This is potentially damaging to Britain's higher education system. The case for a decent pay rise to maintain numbers of highly qualified staff and sustain the reputation of Britain's universities hardly needs stating.

Given the case for a much larger rise, some members viewed the vote with concern. But 2 per cent for the coming year exceeds other offers across the public sector for 2014/2015, and it would not even have been on the table without the sustained campaign of the past year. And the employers have been responding to industrial action more aggressively than in other disputes, with many docking a full day's pay for a two-hour strike and threatening the same if staff refused to mark.

The consultative ballot came without a recommendation either way by the UCU executive. In the end members voted to accept in large numbers – 83.7 per cent of those voting – and they clearly feel they need to move on. Pay is not the only issue facing university staff. When asked what concerns them most, they often cite the erosion of working conditions and reduced pension entitlements and job security. But a fight for pay is often the best preparation for tackling those other issues.

Meanwhile, the dispute has led to an overall rise in union membership. Branches have become better organised and more prepared to take on their employers locally in defence of members' rights and conditions, which remain under threat.

It's not as if the universities don't have the money. Higher education financing has changed rapidly since tuition fees were introduced by Labour in 1998 and progressively hiked up to their current maximum of £9,000 by this government in 2012. Latest estimates from the universities' own statistical records show that the sector has over £1 billion in operating surpluses.

Many institutions have been building up cash reserves as student fees have risen, and the number of students being admitted is rising steadily – up by 7 per cent last year. The proportion that the sector as a whole spends on staff shrank to 55 per cent of their expenditure in 2011/2012 from 58 per cent in 2001/2002. ■

## FRANCE

### The trains won't fit

IT EMERGED in May that the 2,000 new trains ordered by French train operator SNCF are too wide for many regional platforms. The bill for this blunder, including modifications to platforms, is 50 million euros and rising.

It transpires that the information given to SNCF by the infrastructure agency RFF failed to recognise that many French regional platforms were built half a century ago, when trains were narrower. Consequently the new trains will not fit.

This farce is a direct consequence of EU directive 91/440, issued in 1997, which compels the separation of tracks and signalling from train operation to enable private operators to enter the market. Few have yet appeared in France, unlike Britain, but the underlying damage is done.

RFF had to make the shame-faced admission that they had "...discovered the problem a bit late". French Transport Minister Frédéric Cuvillier pointed to an "absurd rail system" for the problems. "When you separate the rail operator from the train company, this is what happens." ■

## EU

### Trade benefits 'imaginary'

A REPORT for the think tank Civitas, published on 5 May, argues that the "trade advantages of the EU are imaginary." It showed that Britain's membership of the EU has not increased our trade with EU countries. In fact, the proportion of trade Britain conducts with the EU has fallen since we joined the EEC in 1973. ■

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## NEWS ANALYSIS

### The housing market

AS A direct result of government policy the housing market is overheating, with average prices rising at nearly £10,000 a month according to the Bank of England. The number of mortgages for more than four times annual salary is at an all-time high. This debt will be effectively unrepayable if interest rates move back to their usual 10-year average.

Private sector renting is the norm for young people as ownership drifts further from their reach and social housing lets are almost impossible to find.

There were 115,000 housing completions in 2013, a record peace-time low and less than half of the 240,000 needed just to meet the rise in demographic demand.

Home ownership in England has fallen to its lowest level for a quarter of a century, down from 71 per cent in 2003 to 62.5 per cent last year according to the government's latest English Housing Survey Headline Report, issued in February. Meanwhile, the number of households where people are living in private rented accommodation now stands at 4 million, almost double the 2.2 million in 2003.

More than a third of England's 14.3 million homes are owned by people over 65, with just 1.4 million owned by people between the ages of 25 and 35, the cohort most likely to be raising a young family. The proportion of people under 25 owning or buying their own home has fallen from 36 per cent in 1991 to just 11 per cent now.

Some 66 per cent of those on benefits are in social housing, while over the past four years the proportion in private rented accommodation has increased from 19 to 25 per cent.

The number of private tenancies now exceeds those in the public sector for the first time ever; half of those renting privately are under 34. There are no statutory controls on the rents that private landlords can charge leading to a steep increase in the number of tenants claiming housing benefit since 2010, including for those in work.

Without a single extra pound of taxpayers' money the £130 billion in mortgage loan guarantees could fund a programme to build the required 240,000 homes a year. But if, as now, new homes are mostly built for the wealthy, or snapped up by buy-to-let landlords, things will only worsen. Regulation of the housing market is sorely needed. ■

Workers



## Buy-to-let, the road to riches

THE PERVERSITY of capitalism was demonstrated in a report by mortgage lender Paragon Mortgages published at the end of April. Its analysis of the housing market shows that the return to landlords on their buy-to-let investments averages 16.3 per cent a year since 1996.

Playing the roulette wheel of the stock exchange would have yielded 6.8 per cent, buying bonds 6.5 per cent, and old-fashioned savings in the bank a mere 4 per cent. Forecasts for the next decade indicate a return of 11 per cent or more.

Since 1996 buy-to-let landlords have taken out mortgages worth £174 billion and now control almost 20 per cent of the housing stock. A survey in March by Generation Rent indicated that a third of tenants surveyed were cutting back on food so as to pay increasing rents. An estimated 9 million people live in the private landlord sector.

Buy-to-let landlords hardly existed before 1996, when the then Tory government introduced legislation that manipulated the housing market to cover up economic stagnation, as George Osborne is doing now with the Help to Buy scheme. ■

## DEBT

### A new bubble swells

ACCORDING TO an article in the business section of *The Daily Telegraph*, alongside fears of technology bubbles and housing bubbles, another sort of bubble is inflating. The amount of debt that US private equity firms are loading on to the companies they buy has risen to its highest level since the latest slump began seven years ago.

A year ago American regulators warned Wall Street banks that they would run into trouble if they financed acquisitions that saddle companies with debts more than six times their earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (the writing off of assets over time), which is known as the EBITDA ratio.

Banks were also cautioned to move away from offering loans which stretch repayments over a very lengthy period of time and not to sign deals which lack covenants allowing lenders to step in if the loan becomes risky.

Many banks have ignored these warnings. According to research by S&P Capital IQ, around 40 per cent of the private equity deals in the US this year

have breached the recommended debt-to-profits ratio, the highest level since 2007 when 52 per cent of private equity deals exceeded the EBITDA ratio.

Even after the recent crash, finance capital is still making merry and dancing ecstatically to the next phase of the economic crisis. ■

## PRIVATISATION

### George's friends

IT'S ALL right for some. On the eve of May Day, it was revealed that the hedge fund headed by George Osborne's best man Peter Davies netted £36 million from the privatisation of Royal Mail in under six months. That's £210,000 for each day since the sale in October last year. Davies sits on the management committee of Lansdowne Partners, which bought shares at the offer price of 330p.

The National Audit Office criticised the government for the sale, which saw City firms walk off with two-thirds of the public asset: "The [government] was very keen to achieve its objective of selling Royal Mail... Its approach, however, was marked by deep caution, the price of which was borne by the taxpayer." ■

## OUTSOURCING

### Barnet health fight

ON 14 MAY dozens of Unison members employed in catering, portering, cleaning and security by Medirest, part of Compass, staged a two-hour lunchtime protest at Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust, north London. They are fighting the continued failure of the Trust and privatised company to fully pay Agenda for Change terms agreed nearly 10 years ago.

The Trust has had the money to fund the wage rises, sick pay arrangements and other enhancements, but has directed its government funding elsewhere. Ten years

of stalling, tinkering with the agreement, broken promises, even swapping the privatised service between contractors, have all resulted in some of the lowest-paid Trust workers carrying the bill.

Medirest is a wealthy section of Compass outsourcing, and workers are saying enough is enough. Supported by other NHS staff, they staged a disciplined protest, seeing off scaremongering tactics from the Trust over public disorder and disruption to patients. Services were maintained, Trust staff and public support harnessed and the employers made to look miserly and stupid. Further protests are planned in conjunction with other Barnet and Chase Farm staff on 5 June. ■

## Cabbies mass their ranks

TAXI DRIVERS in London will hold a demonstration on 11 June which promises to throw the city into chaos. It follows action in May, when a number of drivers blocked a street in Southwark in protest at the Shard building preventing them from stopping at its entrance. It only took this one protest to secure changes in favour of cabs, as opposed to the private hire vehicles favoured by the Shard. But the June action is a harder battle. Its aim is to force Transport for London to enforce the law regulating taxis and prevent American corporations ruining the London cab service.

Goldman Sachs and Google are attempting to introduce an app-based system called Uber and run a car-for-hire system. This will allow someone with a smartphone to contact a nearby car. The fare will be deducted from a pre-registered credit card and be based on a metered calculation via a smartphone. Even Boris Johnson has admitted this is metering.

The law allows only licensed taxis to perform metered journeys, to be hailed in the street and to use bus lanes, and so on. But Transport for London is not prepared to do its job and bar Uber, which has faced bans, court cases or protests in Paris, Brussels, Berlin and numerous US cities. American capital bargaining around the world riding roughshod over local rules and regulations, and paying no tax in the process, is OK by those who run things in Britain.

This is not about technology as black cabs already have a similar app. It is about the destruction of a regulated and skilled service provision for people in London. Taxi drivers have a rigorous training and are vetted in every way. The licence they hold is hard won and passengers can be confident that they will do nothing to lose it.

All in London should oppose cowboys being allowed to make a fast buck by our cowardly regulators. Anything that helps the chaos on 11 June is to be welcomed. ■

## THAMES BARRIER

### Staff reductions planned

THE ENVIRONMENT Agency has produced a graphic map showing the impact of flooding on London if the Thames Barrier were to fail or not be upgraded in the future. The view from the hills of Greenwich and Charlton would be of a vast area of London transformed into a tidal lake. Canary Wharf and the City of London would be under water.

Nearly 2 million people would be affected. Transport, business, food distribution, schools, and hospitals would cease functioning.

Environment Agency plans to reduce staffing levels at the Thames Barrier to one staff member per shift on nights and weekends. That invites the flooding of London should a member of staff be taken ill, a ship collide with the Barrier or a terrorist incident occur, or unprecedented spring or winter tides swamp the defences.

The Romans used slave labour to build the first flood defences on the Thames. The Environment Agency wants to abolish labour on the 21st-century flood defences. Pressure from Unison members at the Barrier is now seeing the employer enter meaningful negotiations over staffing levels. ■

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### JUNE

Wednesday 4 June, 7.30pm. Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. "Britain one nation: say no to division"

CPBML public meeting. With the Scottish referendum only months away, discuss why the British working class must stay united. All welcome.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

### SARS-like virus found

THE THREAT to public health by proposed cuts in staffing and screening at Heathrow and Manchester airports was highlighted in the last issue of *Workers*. Within days of the article Heathrow was at the centre of emergency procedures to identify and track hundreds of passengers travelling back from Saudi Arabia as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) had been found in passengers.

MERS is a lethal SARS-like virus which has now taken on global significance due to the volume of air traffic. More than 150 people have died from it worldwide. It places fresh emphasis on public health services at Heathrow and other airports in danger of being diluted, deskilled or understaffed.

Unison's fight against the proposed cuts continues. It's not a scare story, but deals with potential public health disasters of epidemic proportions. ■



### Workers on the Web

• Highlights from this and other issues of **WORKERS** can be found on our website, [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk), as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.

Workers in local government are to be balloted for strikes, been given to any variety of ideas and activity that could c

# Government threat to c

THE REAL value of wages for public service workers has fallen since the election in 2010: by 20 per cent in local government, 10 per cent in health and 18 per cent for the civil service. That decline continues. And government and employers have thrown down a challenge to the trade unions by promising to cut wages even further.

In local government, we have been caught out by our own stupidity in seeking to tie wages to the national minimum wage or “living wage”. Employers have declined to make an offer until October, when the reviewed national minimum wage is due to be enacted.

A 1 per cent offer from the health sector pay review body has been contemptuously cast aside by the Treasury. The result is that between 60 and 70 per cent of NHS staff will receive no pay award. That divide-and-rule tactic plays wages off against terms and conditions. The picture is no better for civil servants (see Box, right).

## Tactics – or lack of them

The local government trade unions, Unison, GMB and Unite, are to ballot their members for strikes, with 10 July as the date set for action. This shows a sterility of imagination on tactics. No thought has been given to any variety of ideas and activity that could be used to challenge the employer or harness our members’ ingenuity. Before the

planned strike and even before the ballot has begun, such narrow, barren thinking can only contemplate the calling for another strike day in the autumn as the next step.

Local government workers have handicapped their cause by balloting just for a strike, rather than a combination of differing types of industrial action. Employers and government will be able to sit that out.

There’s also more behind the choice of dates and tactics. Choosing 10 July means the schools can be brought into the dispute before their summer break. And a further date in the autumn looks right to the false generals because schools are then back at work. They seem to be relying on school staff, probably because the town halls are fragmented, outsourced or worse still have terrifyingly low trade union density.

## Short-sighted

That’s a short-sighted approach from the unions, even if it were a valid short-term tactic. The drive for academies and free schools aims to further fragment our ability to deliver unified industrial action across local government and education. At the moment it is probably a greater danger than the government’s ideological mumbo jumbo about bringing the market into the education sector.

The splintering and separation of workers with common interests has been



Workers  
March 2012: Local government workers on the T

## Alemo Herron: the legal trap

THE ALEMO-Herron case was an example of wanting to replace class organisation with recourse to the law. Former employees of Lewisham council now working for Parkwood Leisure had kept their conditions through several TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)] regulated transfers. Parkwood wanted to break the link between their employees’ pay rises and those determined through local government national agreements.

Instead of fighting, some in Unison made a poor decision: to go to law, and ultimately to the European Court. This

invited the EU to kick the trade unions even harder and establish further bad legal precedent. So it turned out.

The decision was that the protection of TUPE will only last for one transfer, even if the employment is continuous. As a result tens of thousands of workers are now outside of previous agreements.

They will have a hard fight to re-establish what they thought was guaranteed, never mind making any improvements. And this opens a way for outsourced employers to side-step TUPE easily by quickly making a second transfer of engagements. ■

worsened by outsourcing, fragmenting service delivery and outright privatisation. That’s made possible by further anti-union legislation here and ever more hostile anti-union rulings from the European Union. The Labour Party’s election campaign supporting the European Union lauds the social rights introduced by EU law. That’s a hypocritical, anti-working class stance.

## Social ‘rights’

EU social “rights” make it almost impossible to have a legal strike. The same social rights led to the recent Alemo-Herron European Court decision (see Box, left), which broke the historic link to pay uplifts for outsourced workers. Without automatic uplifts, workers wanting wage increases will have to fight for them. And to do that they must be in the union. And to support its members in pay

with 10 July as the date set for action. But no thought has challenge the employer or harness members' ingenuity...

# cut wages further still



UC march in London.

battles, the union must function as a workplace power and not an insurance club.

Workers in health are angry over the recent Pay Review Body decision, a mere 1 per cent, and the government's response. Health workers have been further split by devolution, with the Welsh and Scottish assemblies offering the 1 per cent without strings. Unison has designated 5 June as a day of protest in the NHS as the start of a campaign to raise membership awareness and engagement with the union over pay.

## Supportive

That engagement has to overcome the obstacle that pay in the NHS has effectively not been bargained over since 1982. The first protest day will be followed by activities around the NHS birthday on 4 and 5 July. That could be combined with supportive

## Civil service: strategy needed

THE GOVERNMENT has stopped incremental scales and announced a 1 per cent cap for any rise in pay bill costs for civil servants well into the next parliament. No Westminster party will go against that at the general election next May.

Civil service unions have yet to develop a strategy or even fresh tactics to counter this attack. They have been partly distracted by the attack on conditions flowing from Francis Maude's Civil Service Reform Plan. (See the report in *Workers March 2014* on action by the FDA, representing senior staff.) But as with others areas in the public sector, there's a void in our thinking.

The largest union, PCS, held its annual conference in late May. The debate on pay saw no farther than coordi-

nation with other unions and possibly joining in with the 10 July action. There was no consideration of what tactics are necessary to building strength and support amongst the membership.

Nor did the conference face up to the challenges to be overcome in order to embark on that course. These include the long-standing fragmentation of pay bargaining into departments; the impending break up of a national service; and above all falling membership and union density.

The position is similar to that for local government and health workers, yet no sector is really taking the lead. There's no advantage in sharing weakness in an attempt to look militant. That merely hands the advantage to the government and employers. ■

protests on 10 July should the local government workers' strike go ahead.

Unison health workers are likely to be balloted for industrial action in the autumn. Other health trade unions are likely to be supportive even if they do not have provision in their rules for industrial action. That group includes the Royal College of Nursing and smaller NHS professional organisations.

Health workers recognise that the financial crisis in the NHS, orchestrated and constructed by the government, means that a protracted campaign over pay and saving the NHS needs to be developed between now and the general election in May 2015 and sustained beyond that.

The government doesn't need to privatise the NHS as such. Its manipulation of funding, its outsourcing of contract

procurement, and the way it plays off Trust against Trust and community provision against acute provision, all contribute to an ever-widening state of chaos and collapse.

## Harness anger

The government would then wash its hands of the NHS and let the free for all or free-fall which will follow from their market economics destroy the NHS. Harnessing the anger over pay and the anger over the continuous government attacks on the NHS means a reassertion of the concept of "National" in the title of the service. National as in one pay system; national as opposed to competing trusts; national in the quality of care across the whole of Britain.

Health workers have to make healthcare provision and the preservation of the National Health Service impossible for politicians to oppose, especially for the government, as Britain nears the general election. Every extended waiting list, every nightmare story of failed quality care, every decision to deride skill and proper and adequate staffing ratios, every decision to not pay the rate for the job by lowering pay bands, has to land on the Secretary of State for Health's desk. ■

**'Narrow thinking can only call for another strike day in the autumn.'**

There could be no clearer case than Pfizer to show just how the capitalist system. It will kill what is left of our productive industrial

# Pharmaceuticals: success



Marco Betti/AstraZeneca plc

British scientists discuss one of AstraZeneca's research compounds, AZD9291, a potential lung cancer treatment.

THE WOLF has gone away, for the time being. US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, the largest drug company in the world, has abandoned its bid for AstraZeneca, and under Britain's takeover rules won't be able to make a new bid for at least six months. But the saga has shown just how fragile the country's productive base is, how little the government can do about it – and how little the government wants to be able to do anything about it.

Unions in the industry welcomed the news that Pfizer's "final" bid of £55 billion had failed. Unite and GMB, mindful of the catastrophe that unfolded after Kraft took over Cadbury and gutted that old-established British company in 2010, have been campaigning to stop the takeover. At stake are thousands of jobs – AstraZeneca employs 6,700 workers here – and the country's industrial base (see Box, right).

AstraZeneca is a crucial part of what is left of Britain's research and industrial base.

On its own the company accounts for around 9 per cent of Britain's entire spending on research and development (R&D) – a figure which reflects not just the costs of pharmaceutical development but also how little many other companies spend on innovation.

For its part, AstraZeneca has been no angel. In March 2010 it closed down its Charnwood research centre near Loughborough, destroying 1,200 jobs. It followed that in 2013 with the announcement that it is to close Alderley Park research centre, making hundreds redundant and moving the rest to Cambridge, where it plans to set up a global cancer research facility.

But it is a British-based company that sees its future in Britain. It was formed in 1999 out of a merger of Astra, an 86-year-old Swedish company, and Zeneca, itself created in 1993 when ICI hived off its pharmaceuticals (and other) businesses.

**'On its own AstraZeneca accounts for around 9 per cent of Britain's entire spending on R&D.'**

AstraZeneca still has major facilities in Sweden, employing 5,900 people there, many at its Mölndal research centre outside Gothenburg. It also has a big site at Gaithersburg, Maryland, US, with around 3,000 workers.

Pfizer hadn't even bothered to give "guarantees" about employment or R&D outside Britain. So US and Swedish workers



How predatory and rotten is the international finance industry and starve us in its prison until we break free...

# Business breeds insecurity

## Whatever happened to the national interest?

IF BRITAIN is to survive we need industry, and in the 21st century (as in the last) industry requires innovation, which comes from R&D.

The disproportionate size of the finance and service industries means that R&D accounts for a scant 1.7 per cent of Britain's GDP (compared with 3 per cent in Germany). Much of that comes from pharmaceutical R&D, which employs 27,000 people according to the industry body ABPI, and accounts for 28 per cent of all R&D by British companies.

Without pharmaceuticals, Britain's already dire balance of payments would be catastrophic. According to industry figures, pharma is Britain's leading manufacturing exporter, contributing a positive £35 million a day to the balance of payments, while the rest of manufacture represents a negative £300 million a day. That's as much a reflection of the decline in manufacture generally as of the growth of pharmaceuticals.

Labour's shadow industry secretary,

Chuka Umunna, talked about the need for a "public interest" test in takeover bids. Actually, there is an interest in the health of Britain's R&D base, though it's not "public". It's actually the national interest, but Labour politicians would rather walk barefoot over broken glass than use the dreaded word "national".

### Unite poll

Even Unite picked up the "public interest" idea when it commissioned a poll by Survation on the Pfizer bid and published it on 10 May.

Asked whether all big takeovers should be subjected to a "public interest test", 73.6 per cent of those polled agreed, with just 8.9 per cent against. Likewise, 66.8 per cent said they were not confident that the government is doing enough to safeguard British jobs and skills.

Yet the national interest is precisely what is at stake in the Pfizer bid. Britain as a nation would be severely damaged

should Pfizer get its claws into our pharmaceutical industry. As a nation, we need the power to shut the door to such predatory bids.

Once upon a time there was a more or less shared concept of national interest. During the Second World War, for example, politicians thought it mattered. So much so, that in 1952 the Conservative government of the day told Pfizer that if it wanted to sell medicines to the NHS it had to make them in Britain. That led to Pfizer's first plant in Britain, in Folkestone, later to be moved a few miles across the Kent countryside to Sandwich, where the company had set up an R&D site.

Less than 60 years later another Conservative government stood aside while Pfizer shut down its Sandwich operations with the loss of some 1,500 jobs.

A good step would be to reclaim the word "national" in the interests of the working class. We are the only class with an interest in the nation. Unlike capital, we have nowhere else to go. ■

will share the delight of those in Britain that Pfizer has failed to have its way.

Swedish trade unions are still smarting from Pfizer's takeover of Pharmacia more than 10 years ago. "It is enough to look at what happened after Pfizer bought Pharmacia in 2003; the Swedish operations are dramatically scaled down, and today only a fraction is left," said unions Unionen, Akademikerförbundet and IF Metall in a statement.

Corporate lawyers, accountants and PR firms will be distraught. Their slice of the pie, according to City experts, would have been around £350 million, perhaps more. Tough.

### Handcuffed by the EU?

Anyone who thinks that when it comes to the crunch it makes any difference whether we have a Labour or Conservative government should just look at what they say and what they do.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2010:

"We are determined that the levels of investment that take place in Cadbury in the United Kingdom are maintained and we are determined that, at a time when people are worried about their jobs, that jobs in Cadbury can be secure."

Prime Minister David Cameron in 2014: "The government quite rightly should be neutral in this. What we should do though is always be engaged with both companies – as we have been – to try and make sure that whatever the outcome, British science, British jobs, British manufacturing, that they get a proper and deserved attention."

Peter Mandelson, business secretary at the time of the Kraft takeover of Cadbury, at least had the grace to acknowledge that he was powerless to prevent the takeover. One reason he was so impotent then and Cameron is now is the Enterprise Act of 2002, brought in under a Labour government, which enshrined in UK law EU definitions of when governments can intervene in

mergers.

Those definitions in British law are precise. They refer to mergers involving national security and defence, media plurality and (following an amendment after the 2008 crash) banking stability. The notion of "public interest" touted recently by Labour business spokesman Chuka Umunna in relation to AstraZeneca is in fact specifically restricted to media ownership.

To put it another way, the EU's rules are not designed to permit Britain to defend its industrial and research base. Politicians don't like to mention this, because it shows how impotent they are and how much the EU rules our lives.

The other reason they are impotent is, quite simply, choice: they believe the free market is the best of all possible worlds, and government intervention the worst.

*Continued on page 10*

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That's why Labour and Coalition governments have consistently implemented EU directives and regulations about competition and merger into British law in ways that ensure we cannot defend our industrial base (unlike France where, to a very limited extent, the law allows a certain degree of protection).

So when politicians say their hands are tied, they are right. But they crafted the handcuffs and put them on themselves.

## 'The government's low taxation encourages takeovers and dismemberment.'

Among other things, the takeover bid highlighted the fragile existence of workers in pharmaceuticals, an industry awash with cash in search of profit-generating investment. Pfizer, for example, is holding \$49 billion in cash, and needs to find a home for it.

### Destruction

It may seem a paradox, but the only way of finding a home for that amount of money involves destroying value on a giant scale. Capitalism's way forward is to spend vast amounts of cash buying a competitor company, then to strip the assets and dump a large part of the workforce. Merger and acquisition is its essential mode of operation and the cancer in our economy – it really has no interest in R&D.

If all of this sounds crazy, well, it is. Pfizer in particular has a track record of shelling out a fortune buying companies, hollowing them out, and finding itself back where it started: full of cash but devoid of promising new products to fuel the next generation of profits. Because the company has so much capital it must choose M&A not R&D.



Packaging blister strips of stomach drug Nexium at AstraZeneca's Macclesfield facility.

AstraZeneca plc

Since 2000 Pfizer has bought large and innovative pharmaceutical companies, most notably Warner-Lambert for \$90 billion, Pharmacia for \$60 billion and Wyeth for \$68 billion. As David Barnes, former chief executive of AstraZeneca told the BBC on 6 May, that spending spree didn't lead to more research. On the contrary: the combined R&D spend of the merged companies is \$3 billion less than before the acquisitions, according to official EU figures.

To put that in context, Pfizer's R&D spend in 2013 was \$5.7 billion – so it has effectively reduced its combined R&D activities by a third or more. The result is that while Pfizer is the largest drug company in the world, and probably the richest, it is only the fifth-largest spender on R&D.

### Call that investment?

Among the laws any sensible country would possess would be one banning the use of the word "investment" to cover asset stripping. One reason Pfizer was so keen to buy AstraZeneca was because its corporation tax in Britain is just 10 per cent, against 35 per cent in the US. Buying AstraZeneca would have allowed Pfizer to domicile itself in Britain and save between \$1 billion and

\$2 billion a year in tax. That's not investment, it's tax avoidance.

The government says its low company taxation is great because it encourages investment. It does nothing of the kind: it encourages takeovers and dismemberment, and does nothing to safeguard jobs or Britain's future.

However much politicians tell us our existence as a class depends on making capitalists rich, Karl Marx was bang on the nail back in 1849 when he wrote: "Even the most favourable situation for the working class, the most rapid possible growth of capital...does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie, the interests of the capitalist." (*Wage Labour and Capital*, 1849.)

At the end of 2011, according to analysts Compustat, US firms were holding cash assets of \$5 trillion – to put that into context, it's double Britain's total annual Gross Domestic Product.

With that amount of money sloshing around the global economy, no worker is safe. And when the last acquisition and merger goes through the international financiers will absolutely have to have a war, a quite big one, to invest in. ■

## CPBML/Workers

### Public Meeting, London

Wednesday 4 June, 7.30 pm

**"Britain one nation: say no to division"**

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

With the Scottish referendum only months away, come and discuss why Britain must stay united. Everybody welcome.

# 10 REASONS TO LEAVE THE EUROPEAN UNION

**1 Because we can only survive and prosper outside the EU.** EU trade represents just 20 per cent of global trade – we can trade with the other 80 per cent, and still trade with the EU outside it, as do Norway and Switzerland. They talk about “little Englanders”, but in truth the “little Europeans” are perverting and narrowing Britain’s trade and industry.

**2 Because the EU is for capitalism, not the working class.** It was set up to enforce “free” markets – the free movement of capital, labour and goods – to provide greater and greater profits while suppressing wages.

**3 Because the EU wants to break up Britain.** The EU exists to destroy national sovereignty. Nations are seen as obstacles to the unfettered rule of global capitalist markets. The EU wants to dismember nations, dividing us to leave the field to finance capital.

**4 Because the EU is a danger to peace.** It meddles dangerously in other countries’ affairs and incites reaction and war on behalf of US capitalism. Only Britain prevented an EU attack on Syria. The call for a European state echoes Germany’s World War 2 aims.

**5 Because the EU is a failure – and an expensive failure.** It has created only chaos and destruction, while its grand plan founders on the resistance of awkward national electorates. In 2013 Britain’s net contribution to the EU was £8.624 billion. We can use this money for ourselves.

**6 Because the idea of a “European people” is a lie.** Each nation has its own people and its own working class with its own interests to assert. Without strong nation states the peoples of Europe cannot control their own destinies.

**7 Because the EU is a capitalist prison.** The EU shackles its inmates with Directives and Regulations intended to govern every aspect of our lives – imposing their laws, undermining our liberties, enforcing privatisation of public services. The EU’s “Free” Trade Agreements with non-EU countries extend its tentacles across the world in the attempt to prevent workers from defending their pay and conditions.

**8 Because the euro is causing economic chaos in its member countries.** The euro was intended to be the chain to bind us as prisoners of finance capital in perpetuity. The euro is falling apart, and the bureaucrats are out of control. The EU ensures banks pocket their huge profits while workers bail out the losses incurred by their disastrous speculation.

**9 Because inside the EU we cannot control our own borders.** The EU promotes the movement of vast numbers of people in search of dwindling work. Immigration and emigration deplete some countries of skills while undermining pay in others. Capitalism intends us to be rootless and powerless as we move from country to country.

**10 Because Britain must focus on its own problems.** We can make what we need, grow what we want to, control our territorial waters, trade with the world, be a sovereign nation. They say global capitalism can’t be resisted. Not true – look at developments in Latin America. Like Cuba we must assert workers’ nationalism as the true basis for internationalism. We only have to decide to do it.



# 10 REASONS TO OPPOSE THE BREAKUP OF BRITAIN

**1 Because capitalism wants to break up the British working class.** The industrial revolution created one working class in Wales, Scotland and England, whether we worked in a mill in Yorkshire, a mine in Wales or a shipyard in Scotland. We have been united for 300 years. The ruling class has abandoned Britain. The only people who care about Britain are the working class.

**2 Because our unity is essential for the war against capitalism.** One class, one voice. The demand of construction workers for British jobs for British workers should be echoed throughout Scotland, Wales and England.

**3 Because separatists have no idea about how the currency of a breakaway Scotland would work.** The EU insists that new member states must join the euro – look at Greece to see what that can mean for smaller economies. A sterling currency union would bring huge difficulties and would probably be refused. Disentangling the financial and economic institutions of a 300-year old Union would bring meltdown.

**4 Because a separate Scotland would face bankruptcy.** Salmond claims grandly that Scotland would keep the oil money but offload its debts. His financial nous is typified by his advice as a former RBS economist, when he wrote to Fred Goodwin urging him on to the disastrous deal that caused the bank to fail. Scotland cannot survive alone economically. Increasingly economists and companies such as BP are speaking out to voice huge worries.

**5 Because separatists would surrender Scotland's identity.** The EU breaks up nation states, splitting the working class for ease of exploitation. Scotland would not be independent – it would be run by Brussels and Washington.

**6 Because there can be no real plan for a separate Scotland.** The so-called White Paper “Scotland's Future” is in fact a vague SNP wishlist and series of wild assertions with no basis in practical reality, and no possibility of ideas about how such a future could look.

**7 Because the referendum gives a say about a potentially catastrophic breakaway of part of Britain only to those living in Scotland.** The impact on England and Wales would be huge – there has been no debate about this. So we should all have a vote, and while we're at it let's also vote on whether to abolish Holyrood.

**8 Because we know from past experience that the break-up of nations is dangerous and can lead to unpredictable consequences.** Break-up can lead to the increasing assertion of narrow interests over common interests, and the loss of a sense of a collective future.

**9 Because though the SNP argues “We Scots didn't vote for the Coalition”, the truth is that this government was not elected at all.** It was imposed on all of us. Only all of us, united, can fight for a decent future. To imagine that somehow Scotland alone can opt out of rule by finance capital is a fantasy.

**10 Because we are one nation with common interests.** Workers have forged the nation of Britain, its culture. All of it is our common legacy. Our common interests remain the same and are far more important than any regional differences.



**Two friends of Bill Ash, who died last month aged 96, share some memories of the Party's first editor...**

# Bill Ash, 1917 – 2014



**Bill Ash, a founder member of the CPBML and the first editor of *The Worker*.**

BACK IN the mid-1960s when we first met him, Bill was talking about a failed and farcical attempt to set up a new communist party in Britain. He said that in his opinion success would only come if led by Reg Birch, toolmaker and veteran leader of the London Region of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and he was waiting for Reg to make his move.

Bill had grown up in Texas and found himself in the late 1930s with a university degree and a conviction that the most worthwhile thing to do in life was to fight fascism. The problem was that fascism was in Europe and he was in America.

In September 1939, reluctantly, the British Government declared war on Germany. Suddenly Bill saw a way forward. Canada, which in World War 1 had lost brownie points by not joining in until two years after the war started, this time waited only one week.

Bill made his way to Canada, signed on in the Royal Canadian Air Force, learned to fly, turned out to be very good at it, and in 1941 was sent to Britain to fly Spitfires with 411 Squadron. In 1942 he was shot down over France and spent the rest of the war either as a prisoner-of-war or an escapee from prison camps. His

adventures, including twice being sentenced to death, also his postwar life in India just after its independence and then in London, were later described in his autobiography, *A Red Square* (London: Howard Baker, 1978).

## **'The Party needed a journalist and an editor, so Bill became both.'**

Bill was not the typical show-off autobiographer, carefully shaping his past to fit his present aspirations; he presents himself as in many ways a clown, socially inept, just happening to find himself in extraordinary world-significant events in Europe and the Indian subcontinent, yet the observant, cultured and humorous person is always there.

Bill had learned a lot fighting fascists, neo-colonialists and racists but he had no experience of an organised working class such as the British. When he got to know Reg Birch and began finding out about the class here and its long history of struggle,

he was very surprised.

He and Birch used to meet in a Camden Town wine bar, where he said he couldn't hear half of it for the noise, and couldn't quite understand the other half. But he knew it was important enough to be worth the struggle to understand. And he understood enough that, when challenged that the Party was too small, he used to reply, "It isn't the Party that makes the revolution, it's the working class."

At Easter 1968 Bill attended the founding Congress of the CPBML, called by Birch. In January 1969 the Party launched its newspaper *The Worker*, with Bill as its editor until he retired in the mid-1980s. First a monthly, he moved it in the early 1970s to fortnightly and then weekly publication.

### **Journalist and editor**

This man was an established novelist, a poet, a playwright and a moral philosopher. He wrote later: "I always intended to be a writer but I never intended to be a journalist". But the Party needed a journalist and an editor for its newspaper, so Bill became both, overseeing the production of each issue and, in the early days, writing much of it himself – and unpaid, because no member who works for the Party gets paid.

In time, as the Party grew, the external printers tried to interfere with the content, so all production processes were taken in-house. (In 1997 the publication format changed to that of a magazine, the title to *Workers* and its frequency back to monthly, as it remains to this day.)

When Bill was in India he was there as the BBC representative. He worked for the Corporation for the rest of his career but, where others hope to progress upwards, his movement (the BBC being the BBC and Bill not covering his political tracks) was ever downwards. At the end he was a script reader of other people's radio plays – a job he actually found extremely fulfilling and stimulating (but that paid very little).

Bill was always active in his trade union, the Writers' Guild, its co-chairman twice, and in his honour the Guild is introducing what it plans to call "B ASH" awards for new writers. ■

**The detested Poor Law Act of 1834 was not just a feature of the past. It was still in use well into the 20th century...**

# 1921: The 'Poplarism' strike

THE AIM of the Poor Law was always to punish the poor with the threat of the workhouse, or "indoor relief", but by the start of the 20th century that policy was beginning to erode. The Boards of Guardians who administered the Poor Law increasingly used "outdoor relief" to keep the poor out of workhouses. It was cheaper to give out a sack of coal or a voucher for boots than to put a whole family into the workhouse. But it took working class resistance to finish them off.

After World War 1 the British economy was shattered and unemployment rose. Ex-servicemen had priority for jobs, often replacing women who in wartime had done those jobs to keep their families. In the East End of London many men had worked on the Docks throughout the war, but in the post-war period markets collapsed and dock work slumped. During 1921 and 1922 fewer than half of registered dockers had work on any one day and other local firms were laying off workers too.

Unemployed ex-servicemen were entitled to a small stipend, but dockers got nothing. Poverty affected many London boroughs, but was particularly acute in dock areas like Poplar. Men tramped the streets looking for work; their families went without food.

## Election

In 1919 a hitherto unknown kind of council was elected in Poplar, east London. For the first time it reflected the local electorate. The Municipal Alliance (Liberals, Tories and Coalitionists) was soundly defeated; 39 of 42 seats went to Labour. Industrial workers and trade unionists made up most of the council and Board of Guardians.

This council's actions on local poverty became known as Poplarism. Two policies in particular put them on a collision course with the London County Council (LCC) and central government: the level of outdoor relief set to keep the destitute out of the workhouse and the rates to pay for that. In the words of Poplar mayor George Lansbury their aim was to "use the poor law machinery to the utmost extent to maintain in decency and comfort the sick and the aged, the orphaned children and the able-



**Mural in Hale Street, Poplar, depicting the rates rebellion. Painted by local resident Mark Francis in 1990, it was recently restored.**

## 'As protests fell on deaf ears, Poplar council voted to take action.'

bodied unemployed – in fact, all who for one reason or another were unable to maintain themselves”.

The council also refused to pay starvation wages to workers they directly employed. London local authorities had agreed to recommend a minimum wage of £3 10s 6d (£3.52p) weekly in 1920. Poplar decided on £4 as a minimum, applicable equally to men and women. In practice this meant a 25 per cent rise for men, and nearly 70 per cent for women. A scheme of public works on roads and sewerage was planned to provide local jobs.

The Poplar Board of Guardians introduced a more generous system of outdoor

relief, including extra allowances for unemployed families with children. It rejected the household means test that used the income of wider family members to determine relief. There were some government grants and subsidies, but most of these costs had to be borne by the rates.

This caused a huge problem in Poplar. The amount collected for each penny on the rates was much lower than most other London boroughs. That was due to widespread poverty, higher unemployment and poor quality housing with low rateable values. A further disparity was that all London boroughs had to pay the same central precept for water, Poor Law hospitals and the police. The council would have had to put rents up by 3s a week to collect enough rates to relieve the poor and pay the precept. They knew people could not afford that.

Poplar councillors protested to the LCC that this was grossly out of date and unfair: "the poor had to keep the poor". As their protests fell on deaf ears, Poplar council voted to take action. It would refuse to pay

of the Victorian era.

ruggle

the precept – an illegal action that councillors knew could lead to prison. It did.

The government was reluctant to imprison the councillors, but the Labour-dominated LCC refused to back down in their legal claim for the full precept. In the face of massive local support, the councillors marched to court on 29 July 1921 holding banners which said “Poplar Borough Council marching to the High Court and possibly to prison”.

Conditions were harsh for the 31 imprisoned councillors, but they did not back down despite the health of some councillors suffering badly. This became a huge embarrassment to the government. The rates protest was gathering massive public support and spreading to other boroughs. The ruling class feared increasing working class action only a few years after the Bolshevik revolution.

### Refusal

Attempts to get the prisoners to agree to face-saving compromises met a united refusal to leave prison. Eventually the government found a way around the law. It freed the Poplar councillors after three months’ imprisonment and their convictions were quashed. A conference called to discuss a more equitable way of paying for services agreed a rebate mechanism for cross-London services.

The councillors had won. They marched out of prison triumphantly to the cheering of huge crowds. The Labour party was irritated by George Lansbury and by like-minded councils and trade unions who made decisions without waiting for the word from above.

Much later many of Poplar’s policies became the norm. The Beveridge Report of 1942 accepted the principle of full maintenance for the unemployed. The Family Allowances Act of 1946 recognised that families with children needed extra allowances whether working or not. The hated household means test ended in 1941. The Equal Pay Act 1970 prohibited paying women less than men for the same job, although this law, like the others, has only been as good as the strength of workers fighting to enforce it. ■

# 6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

**Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist has recently held its 16th Congress, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk).**

### 1: Out of the European Union, enemy to our survival

The European Union represents the dictatorship of finance capital, foreign domination. The British working class must declare our intention to leave the EU.

### 2: No to the breakup of Britain, defend our national sovereignty

Devolution, and now the threat of separation, are both products of only one thing: de-industrialisation. Any referendum on the break-up of Britain must be held throughout Britain.

### 3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

Unions exist as working members in real workplaces or they become something else entirely – something wholly negative. Take responsibility for your own unions.

### 4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

The fight for pay is central to our survival as a class, and must be central to the agenda of our trade unions.

### 5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

The regeneration of industry in Britain is essential to the future of our nation. Our grand-parents, and theirs, knew this. We must now reassert it at the centre of class thinking.

### 6: Build the Party

The task of the Party is singular: to change the ideology of the British working class in order that they make revolution here.

### Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
- Get a list of our publications by sending an A5 sae to the address below, or by email.
- Subscribe to Workers, our monthly magazine, by going to [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk) or by sending £15 for a year’s issues (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

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# EU: the real work is yet to be done

**'For all the hatred and distrust of the European Union, workers in Britain are not yet ideologically, politically or organisationally equipped to force an exit.'**

THE ENTHUSIASM of Britain's political establishment for the European Union – echoed so enthusiastically by the TUC – is not shared by the people. UKIP, proving that all publicity is good publicity, burst that bubble when it topped the poll in the elections to the European Parliament in May.

Even more deflating was the turnout, a scant 34.19 per cent, just lower than the meagre figure attained at the previous elections in 2009. So try this, the results expressed as a percentage of the electorate: UKIP 9.4, Labour 8.7, Conservatives 8.2, Greens 2.7, LibDems 2.3.

The media love elections, and the headline on the BBC website on polling day was "Voters head for the polls". Not so. Voters were heading for work, to the pub, off for an early Whit break – anywhere but the polling booths.

Add UKIP's 9.4 to the 65.8 per cent of abstainers, and less than a quarter of the electorate were motivated to cast their votes for parties with any love for the European Union. That's hardly a surprise to anyone who talks to the people around them.

The EU is no friend to the workers of Britain. It exists to hamstring the ability of workers to combine and improve their lot. Its main weapon is the free movement of labour.

It is blindingly obvious that unless unions can control the supply of labour, they can't control its price. The results are all around us: low wages, zero hours contracts, limitations on the right to strike, lack of protection.

Yet we have allowed our unions (with some honourable exceptions) to act as cheerleaders for Brussels. Worse, many unions talk as if every advance workers have made has been gifted by the EU.

If a fraction even of those who voted in the election turned up to their union branches to demand their own organisations speak on their behalf, that would represent a real political earthquake. And that is what workers are going to have to do.

For all the hatred and distrust of the

European Union, workers in Britain are not yet ideologically, politically or organisationally equipped to force an exit.

And we might not have long to get our act together. If there should be a referendum in 2017, a failure to win a No to the EU vote would be a disaster: integration with the euro would surely follow. We might have just three years to reach the level of organisation and thought required, or face the consequences.

That's if there is a referendum. Labour don't want one, and nor do the Conservatives, who have always wrapped themselves in the Union Jack while selling Britain out.

Recalling what he learnt as a journalist in the early 1990s, Boris Johnson told the *Daily Telegraph* shortly before the election that Margaret Thatcher's rhetoric was often a cover for conciliation, and worse.

As we know, Thatcher (with US encouragement) played a leading role in the formal completion of the European single market guaranteeing free movement of goods and labour throughout the EU, including signature of the Single European Act of 1986. That also laid the foundations of a single currency – and led, disastrously, to joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism.

Thatcher was merely anticipating the advice from the "socialist" candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission, Martin Schulz, in a secret meeting during the euro crisis of 2011 (German magazine *Der Spiegel* published a transcript of the tapes): "When it becomes serious, you have to lie." Schulz also wants a United States of Europe, describing it as both "possible and necessary".

We've had the lies and the hypocrisy. Now no country is more compliant than Britain with EU rules on ownership of industry, competitive tendering of contracts, farming and medicines legislation, and so on. Our borders are open to migrant labour. Our industries are open to foreign takeover. And we pay through the nose for the privilege.

Putting two fingers up to the EU is a start, but only a start. There is work to be done. ■

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