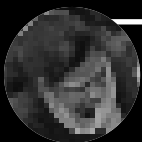


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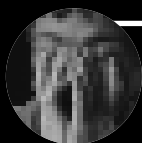
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THE MESSAGE FOR THE TUC: BACK TO THE WORKPLACE



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WORKERS

“ London bombings: CPBM-L statement

THE BARBARIC BOMBING of Londoners on Thursday 7 July is to be utterly condemned, without reservation. This massacre of British workers, deliberately timed to kill and maim people travelling to work on tubes and buses, succeeded insofar as many died and were injured. But the brilliant skills, creativity, indomitable spirit and rationality of British workers displayed in London on the day, and since, give the lie to the inhuman fascists who carried out, or connived in, these acts, wishing to push us into a dark age of unreason and fear.

They will try to blame their inhumanity on

others. But terrorists are responsible for their crimes and we must hold them to account. There can be no excuses given. All workers must assist to unmask these mass murderers.

The state in its increasing corporatism will attempt to use this atrocity to impose further controls on our lives, in the name of protecting us against terrorism. But the only defence against terrorism is the working class itself. Terrorists are tiny in number: we are millions. We have the power to make it impossible for them to operate in Britain, and this must be the responsibility of every one of us.

The poverty of sanctity

ONE OF THE Make Poverty History campaign's demands is "make laws to stop big business profiting at the expense of people and the environment." This reveals the naivety, not to say connivance, of those behind the campaign. Big business exists in order to profit at the expense of people. It has no other purpose. No law is going to stop it doing what it depends on doing.

The government is trying to exploit this campaign, covering itself with the odour of sanctity. But what is it really doing?

At the World Trade Organisation, the Labour government led the EU, in alliance with US financial companies, in drawing up the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), whose

purpose is to enforce private capital's access to whatever it defines as services. This covers just about everything, including schools, hospitals, social services, energy, food supply and 157 other areas. The European Commission confirmed, "GATS is...first and foremost an instrument for the benefit of business." GATS would impose privatisation everywhere, overriding nations' sovereignties.

The EU has identified those countries that oppose GATS and is whipping them into line, with the Labour government's full approval. This is what Labour is really doing, behind the clouds of saintly rhetoric. Have we not yet learnt that the Labour government is committed only to maximising big business's profits?



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Cover: Gate Gourmet workers on the picket line. Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

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The fight at Gate Gourmet

WHEN WORKERS AT Gate Gourmet were faced with an ultimatum requiring them to sign a new contract they rejected it, rather than accept worsening conditions and cuts to their already low pay. Gate Gourmet catering assistants, who produce food for BA planes, earn around £12,000 annually, and drivers just below £16,000. The T&G workers’ rejection set in motion a course of events that led to strike action, whereupon they were sacked and ground staff at Heathrow came out in sympathy (see Back to Front, p16).

What might have been a little-reported dispute came to national attention as all BA planes at Heathrow were grounded for 24 hours, affecting 100,000 passengers and leading to delays for several days.

Of course, this dispute has not emerged out of the blue. Over the years, union recruiters and organisers in the Gate Gourmet factories and among Heathrow Airport staff have worked to build a strong organisation. During negotiations about the catering company’s financial crisis, the company unilaterally re-graded and then made 147 workers redundant. After seeing this the workforce rejected the company’s proposed rescue plan by nine to one. Despite union opposition, the company then brought in 120 temporary staff. When the permanent workers walked out, they were sacked out of hand. Gate Gourmet informed them of this by megaphone, and sent out letters of notice to employees who were not working, including those who were off sick or on maternity leave, which is illegal. In further talks Gate Gourmet remains intransigent.

BA management, having chosen to outsource catering to Gate Gourmet in 1997, is pretending to distance itself from Gate’s management, although BA likes union-busting tactics as well. BA has considered ending the contract with the US-owned company when it comes up for renewal in 2006, which of course would still cause the 800 staff to lose their jobs – call it the logic of capitalism. BA itself is not averse to sacking workers, having cut over 10,000 jobs in a restructuring plan over the past few years, and plans to sack 300 to 400 baggage handlers by 2008.

Some 1,000 BA ground staff at Heathrow bravely walked out in support of the Gate Gourmet workers, ignoring Thatcherite laws against secondary action. Messages and offers of support have been received from around the country and around the world. Tony Woodley of the T&G has argued that solidarity action should not be illegal and questioned why employment laws brought in by Thatcher should still be in place. It’s obvious – because they suit Labour well. British union leaders may be cautious but the IUF, the international organisation for food workers’ unions, has no misguided loyalty to Blair – it will be initiating international action against the Gate Gourmet.

KARL MARX

Still the most influential

FOR THE THIRD time in as many years, Karl Marx, long dead founder of communism, has been named as the most influential philosopher ever – first in a German poll, then in a Europe-wide poll and now Radio Four!

The German-born communist won ‘The World’s Greatest Philosopher’, with more votes than all the opposition combined, with a turn-out seven times higher than expected and a percentage higher than many Labour MPs managed in the last General Election. Karl Marx triumphs again.

STUDENTS

Debts soar

AS A-LEVEL STUDENTS around the country celebrate record results, the future for them looks increasingly debt-ridden. Student debts for the year 2003/04 were seven times as high as they were nine years before. According to the Student Loans Company, students’ publicly owned debts have risen from £1.89 billion to more than £13 billion. The average student debt was £8,430 for 2003-04, up from £3,530 in 1999-2000.

A survey by the Association of Investment Trust Companies found that students expected to leave university with an average debt of £7,208.

The research found that parents estimated the likely debt at £9,741. However, both were well short of the actual average debt a student now has on graduating, which is £13,501.

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

EUROTRASH**The latest from Brussels****Stick it**

MUCH IS made of using treason legislation against advocates of terrorism. However it is still illegal to display the national emblems of England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on your car in place of the EU – GB symbol. Despite government promises to amend EU legislation, they have not initiated any action.

In typical Blairite double-speak, the DVLA has said, "The regulations make provision for the voluntary display of the European flag. They do not allow for the display of any other flag or symbol."

Tsunami failure

SIX MONTHS after the Asian tsunami, the EU and the US government have delivered barely a third of the "aid" that they promised. A survey has also found that, across the region, most of the aid from the EU and others has gone to businesses and landowners. The poorest people have gained the least.

Unions say no

OVER THE SUMMER, Unison's annual conference voted unanimously to welcome the French and Dutch no votes and to recommit the union to opposing the EU's "liberalisation and marketisation policies". Unison is also set to launch a high-profile campaign against the Bolkestein Directive on Services, supported so passionately by the government. The RMT conference voted to oppose the EU Constitution and to continue to oppose privatisation of public services across Europe.

Terror bombs "positive"

IT'S NOT ONLY the BNP that tries to exploit the London bombs. Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament, hopes the attacks will "have a positive political effect in making Europeans realise the importance of the European project to better guarantee their safety".

Still not dead

BLAIR IN LE MONDE of 24 June argued that voters in France did not actually reject the EU Constitution, but voted instead on other issues. Asked if the Constitution was dead, he said, "I continue to think that the Constitution is a set of rules perfectly apt for Europe to function better. We will have to reflect on it again."



Photo: Workers

The banners of the Dorset branches of the Agricultural Workers Union (now part of the TGWU) leading the annual Tolpuddle march in July. The rally and march drew a historically large number of people – more than 5,000 according to police estimates.

Sedgefield tenants say no

ALL IS NOT well in Blair's back yard. Tenants in his Sedgefield constituency delivered a stunning blow in July to plans to privatise council housing. Sixty percent of those voting (on a 73% turnout) rejected the council's plans to hand over 9,000 homes to the Sunderland Housing Group, which spent a reported £720,000 in publicity for the ballot.

Alan Walter, chair of Defend Council Housing, said on hearing the result:

"This vote shows how deeply unpopular privatisation of council housing is amongst tenants. John Prescott should now keep the promise he made at the Labour Party conference last September and agree a 'level playing field'. We're willing to sit down with him and the Prime Minister to constructively work out a formula that allows all council tenants to choose to remain with the council and get the improvements to our homes."

All local authorities were supposed to submit their "stock options" intentions by July 27. More than 70 have already decided to retain their homes. Many others, including Birmingham, Southwark and Camden – where tenants have also voted No – are backing the campaign for the "fourth option".

Those councils proposing to sell off their homes or go for the "two-stage" privatisation option of ALMOs are likely to face strong resistance from an alliance of tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs, says Defend Council Housing.

MINING**NUM wins 200 jobs**

TWO HUNDRED new mining jobs are set to be created at the Kellingley pit in West Yorkshire. This decision comes after redundancies in the spring and dire management warnings over the future of the pit due to geological problems.

Now, after closer working between the NUM and the management, a five-year survival plan for the pit has been agreed, productivity has increased, planned compulsory redundancies abandoned and new miners, including apprentices and trainees, are to be employed. Management blunders have been openly criticised by the Chief Executive as "wrong-minded" and the "unforeseen geological faults" seem to have disappeared. So who really manages

the pit and who could be got rid of overnight? The miners or the privateers?

- UK Coal has now twice denied it is holding takeover discussions with Alchemy Partners. Is the bride playing hard to get? Alchemy Partners is an investment fund holder group, specialising in property management and real estate development, not coalmining.

Apparently UK Coal and Alchemy Partners could not agree a basis for talks over the continuation of coalmining, the miners' pension fund and the property portfolio, which is where Alchemy's real interest lies.

The portfolio consists of the vast area of land UK Coal inherited from the privatisation of British Coal. Originally valued at £50 million, it was worth £174 million by 2002 – turning base metal into gold?

PORTS**Another import facility...**

P&O IS proposing to re-develop the moribund Shell Haven refinery site on the Thames. Amid great fanfares the new super-container facility, costing in the region of £1.5 billion, will become Britain's largest port.

Each year 3.5 million containers will be brought in, a third more than come through Felixstowe, currently Britain's largest container port. Most of the imports are destined for London and the South East.

The P&O propaganda machine revels

in the fact that no child will ever be short of that "must-have" Christmas toy again because of the volume that will be available from China, along with all the consumer goods High Street shoppers will ever need.

Nothing nasty, dirty or unpleasant is to be exported through the new super-port because Britain will not be involved in making such things.

If the super-port is an import facility, how long will British manufacture survive? Although 16,500 container handling jobs are created, how many hundreds of thousands of jobs will be destroyed? How long can a nation of shoppers survive?

Adult learning places cut

ABOUT 15,000 evening classes and part-time courses are being scrapped following the 3% cut in government funding for adult learning announced by the Learning and Skills Council in June.

More than 200,000 adult education and training places on courses ranging from A-level English to painting and decorating will disappear in September, with further closures expected in 2006. The Association of Colleges said fees for many of the remaining courses will double or even quadruple as colleges try to make up shortfalls in their budgets.

Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute, in the London borough of Barnet, is axing half its provision for people with severe learning difficulties. "By giving us £120,000 less in funding this year and by making it clear that the funding of education for adults with severe learning difficulties is not one of their priorities, the Learning and Skills Council have effectively forced us into this position," said the principal, Fay Naylor.

David Collins, principal of South Cheshire College, said, "We are getting 2.2% less than we were meant to. We will cut our adult programme by around 1,000 places."

SHIPBUILDING**Last Scottish yard under threat**

THE EXISTENCE OF the last shipbuilder in Scotland – Ferguson in Port Glasgow – is at risk now that the Scottish Executive has awarded orders to a Polish company, Remontowa in Gdansk. Under investigation for illegal subsidies, the Gdansk yard was privatised in 2000 and uses cheap labour from Russia – which costs even less than native Polish labour.

Breaking ranks, MSP Trish Godman criticised her colleagues, saying, "The Scottish Executive have cut these men and women adrift in their over-cautious and spineless approach to the EU and its rules."

These rules meant opening up tendering for (the cheapest) bids from Europe despite the possible classification of fishery protection vessels as being needed for the protection of national interests – which would have made them exempt as naval ships.

The other lost order was for a ferry for Caledonian MacBrayne, itself subject to

privatisation.

Despite losing half its workforce in the past year, Ferguson is determined to survive – in the meantime upgrading ships for the Northern Lighthouse Board.

PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE**Research campus abandoned**

THE £1.1 BILLION PFI healthcare and research campus planned for St Mary's in Paddington, West London, has been abandoned.

Eight years after being announced and £14 million spent without a brick laid, a sod turned or a patient treated, the project has been dumped. £7.8 million went in fees to private companies, all of which will be picked up from the public purse.

The real cost of PFI is much higher. A smaller PFI project in Sidcup, South London, could end up repaying the PFI consortium over £975 million during the first 30 years of the contract – no one has yet dared to cost a 60-year contract!

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

Sunday 4 September, Burston, Norfolk
Burston Strike School Rally,
11am–4pm.

Another commemoration demonstrating Britain's history of rural struggle. On 1 April 1914, 66 of the 72 pupils of Burston school walked out on strike in support of their two sacked teachers – both strongly associated with the Agricultural Workers' Union and hated by the local squirearchy and the Church (which ran the school). The strike lasted for 25 years, with local pupils being educated at the Strike School in Burston. Headline speaker this year is Tony Benn. For updated information on the programme ring Peter Medhurst, TGWU: 01603 618314.

NURSERY NURSES**Action against pay cuts**

A WELL supported one-day strike by Dudley Council's nursery nurses and teaching assistants took place in July. The action by Unison members in the West Midlands borough followed a "Schools Remodelling" proposal by the employers which had unsatisfactory pay grades and, worst of all, proposals to stop paying nursery nurses during the summer break. The pay cut would vary between £1,000 and £3,000, according to the grade.

The plans were rejected in a ballot, and later a second ballot approved industrial action by 4 to 1 – an initial one-day strike, followed by selected action.

The employers' proposal protected the pay of those currently employed, but it would be cut as soon as any of them changed job by moving school or even within the school. The cut would also mean that new entrants would be paid less, extending the two-tier workforce. Already, unqualified teaching assistants are not paid during the summer break.

The employers want to stop paying during the holidays altogether. In some councils, such as Solihull in the West Midlands, this has been done through the "single status" pay agreement, using equality as the argument. Dudley nursery nurses have shown clearly that their idea of equality is for unqualified teaching assistants to get pay during the summer holidays, not for them to lose it. Many other Unison branches have already taken up the initiative.

The “modernising” attack on fire services

FIRE SERVICES across the country are under attack as government seeks to “modernise” them under the guise of dealing with terrorism. 46 local control rooms across England are being restructured into 9 regional centres, and both jobs and local knowledge will certainly be lost in the process. For example all 999 calls in the East Midlands will be handled from a business park near Castle Donington from 2008.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has estimated 600 to 900 jobs may eventually go across the country, as those currently manning the control rooms will not be able to travel to work in the regional centres. This will mean vital local knowledge will be lost. The consultancy fees alone for the new initiative have been estimated at £44 million and the overall costs appear to have soared from £734 million to £988 million – a rise of 31% – in just 7 months. There are also huge worries about the reliability of the new technology involved, given the government’s abysmal record in implementing new computer systems.

The government has used the July terrorist attacks to boost the case for regional centres. After 9/11 it became apparent that the UK fire service was not equipped to deal with a full scale disaster. A new urban search and rescue (USAR) capability is being introduced through the New Dimension programme. Nineteen units will be established across the country with each unit containing specialist vehicles and equipment, including decontamination suits. However, although government has provided money for the new appliances, it has refused to give local authorities the money for extra personnel and training. There is an ongoing dispute in Somerset over insurance cover for firefighters who may be injured or killed when responding to a terrorist incident.

Engines lost from Central London

London FBU has also pointed out that 10 extra engines have been redeployed to the suburbs at the expense of 10 engines in Central London and the closure of Manchester Square Fire Station. There has been a net loss of two engines and a further loss of 180 firefighter posts from stations across London. Fire appliances have been removed from stations in the immediate vicinity of the explosions which occurred. The removal of two engines from Acton and Greenwich has impacted both on the locality and on the availability of engines to “backfill” those stations whose appliances are attending major incidents in Central London.

The FBU wants the planned cuts in London halted, and says that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority should review the London Safety Plan in light of the issues highlighted by the events of 7 July.

Cuts are also affecting cities which could be targeted by terrorists. Last year Merseyside Fire Service refused a decontamination unit because it was cutting the number of firefighters. Birmingham has cut the number of available pumps from midnight until 8 am – if the evacuation of the city centre on the night of 9 July had been caused by a real attack this would have had serious consequences.

In Ipswich there has been industrial action over a proposed cut of 12 emergency response posts. The FBU’s claim that this is “cuts driven” is backed by a report by the Audit Commission on Suffolk’s fire service which confirms that the savings will help fund the national pay settlement. In addition the community fire safety budget has been slashed and there has been a 32% drop in fire prevention inspections.

Twenty million workers have to
must herald a rebirth of trade

TUC Congress: back

SHOULD THE TUC Congress meet annually, biennially, or every month, or not at all? Like all organisations in the fast emptying house of British trade unions, the TUC does have genuine financial and organisational issues to face. But as in all such debates, do you decide to prune back or regrow?

Congress, a potential parliament of workers, reflects the level of consciousness and organisation of workplaces. That the media are no longer interested in it merely reflects that workers aren’t either and ultimately the distance between unions and the real interests of workers in their immediate lives at work and in the future of their country has been to blame.

Only a mandate from members

Always subservient to workplace organisation, despite the parliamentary aspirations of many of its hopefuls, the TUC cannot and never has been able to do anything significant about rebuilding trade unions. That is the independent unions’ job.

One tragic role the TUC has always fulfilled has been to facilitate surveillance and intervention in trade unions by the security service. Some at Congress House have never taken their mandate from their members. Another role has been to marginalise the genuine struggles of awkward workers and channel their deeply political struggle into the depoliticised and humiliating processes of lobbying.

The TUC consists only of its affiliates, and there are several notable and excellent trade unions which are not in the TUC – the RCN and BMA are good examples. In their turn, affiliates consist only of their branches and these are currently bereft of active members in most unions. Twenty million workers have to be recruited back into their unions and this need dominates all work and debates of organised workers, or should do. This Congress should herald a rebirth of trade unionism.

State interference

To achieve the rebirth we need freedom from state interference at all levels. This year the call for the repeal of anti trade union legislation will be louder and delegates will also be asked by ASLEF to consider reasserting the right for our unions to draw up their own rule books.

But what will we campaign for once our rule books are liberated? Are unions prepared again to face sequestration in the fight for their own industries and services, and to take supportive action for others as some have done in the past?

It becomes clear when considering the debates at the Scottish and Wales TUC and the motions presented for Congress this year, that we will be able to achieve little unless we grapple with the sources of many of our problems and the obstacles getting in our way. Most of these arise from the concentrated and centralised force of capitalism in our part of the world exercised through the European Union.

to be recruited back into their unions: this year's TUC Congress
unionism...

to the workplace



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

Delegates to last year's TUC Congress in Brighton: this year's Congress must call for freedom from state interference at all levels.

The wealth in pension funds originated in manufacturing production. Frankly none of the manufacturing unions have got to grip with this issue and have largely stood by while jobs, plant and machinery have been vandalised or exported.

EU control

Now Amicus wants an industrial policy based on the European Social Model, and Connect – which represents 20,000 managers and professionals in the communications industry – wants government to spend on British industry through procurement projects. But the EU forbids an independent industrial policy and the control of capital and labour required for it, and it sets the

'The EU forbids an independent industrial policy and the control of capital and labour required for it...'

rules on procurement, which require all contracts worth over certain amounts (depending on their nature) to be put out to tender on the European market.

Some other European countries break the rules, but this is not the point: the point is that the rules are anti-industry and pro-free market in the first

place.

Seeing the President of the European Union (EU) at the recent G8 summit gave perhaps the impression that he was a new head of State. Perhaps it should have been called G9.

It was precisely against the formation of a new superstate called the EU that French and Dutch workers and trade unions led the successful campaign in their countries against the proposed EU Constitution.

By comparison the TUC said last September that it had no view on the matter and wanted it properly debated. The General Council members flew off to

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Europe to vote at the ETUC for the Constitution.

Following this most trade unions in Britain voted at their own conferences against the Constitution. At the coming Congress the already tarnished federalists must be further exposed for the traitors that they are. Congress should reject the proposed EU Constitution and honestly for once on this issue reflect members' views. The RMT has given an opportunity to do this.

We want to make poverty history. Countries in the EU have collaborated to plunder not just Africa, but eastern European countries and the remaining

organised and skilled workers of Western Europe. The gap between the rich and poor at home has never been greater. The EU widens it and mass migrations and broadening immigration policies fuel it.

We want investment in British industries, transport, public services, technology and agriculture. Yet we pay into the EU £3.5 billion to subsidise others, and to fund widespread fraud and corruption each year. Trade unions would be penalised if their annual accounts were suspect. The EU auditors have refused to sign off its accounts for 10 years, so flagrant is the corruption.

The Tory Prime Minister Ted Heath lied to the nation when he took us into

the European Economic Community. Harold Wilson lied to keep us in it at the time of the referendum thirty years ago. Margaret Thatcher lied to get Parliament to sign the Single European Act, which drastically reduced the power of an elected British government. John Major lied to sign us up to the Amsterdam Treaty. Tony Blair lied to us to sign the European Constitution.

Disgraceful

How disgraceful to then find trade unions, conned by this history, still attracted to the European social model of 10% unemployment, privatised services and minimal pensions.

With the recent French and Dutch No

Pensions: the double whammy – our funds are plund

THE TRADE UNION movement wants to do something about the alleged pensions crisis but fails to consider either the causes, or motivation for the situation, where the dead hand of the EU has played a major role.

The EU directly instructed Britain to raise the pension age and do something about costly final salary pension schemes. This of course would make pension provision easier for the employer by forcing workers to continue working even longer.

All completely unnecessary – pension provision was calculated accurately at the time of its inception to cope with all the changes in demography over the decades.

Springboard

In stark contrast to the euro countries, Britain has a potential source of finance which, if properly invested, could act as a springboard to restore national wealth creation, science and industry. Britain has 75% of the European Union's total occupational pension scheme assets, amounting to approximately £750 billion. This occupational wealth, created by past and present

generations of workers, has been put aside to pay present and future pensions, and represents the equivalent of 81% of Britain's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By comparison, occupational pension provision in Germany represents 16.3% of its GDP, with equivalent figures for France at 6.6%, Italy at 2.6% and Belgium at 5.9%.

Already, Britain's pension funds hold record levels of overseas stocks and shares. The average fund now has 28% of its assets invested elsewhere with some funds having as much as 50%.

In the meantime, our country is in desperate need of investment. Now the EU wants to gain access to the rest by further liberalising national investment rules for pension funds and enabling multinationals to provide unified pension plans for their staff, reducing costs by millions per year.

The EU Directive on Pensions, by enabling a financial institution in one member state to manage company pension schemes in other member states, will simply result in the exit of more capital from this country, denying

us the investment we need.

Politics, not age

When you look at why the cost of occupational pensions has increased by some 50% over the past eight years the picture becomes clearer. This has not come about by accident nor because workers are living longer during retirement, but because it has been planned.

In 1995, the Treasury, then run by the Tories, decided that to help meet the EU convergence criteria (required by the Maastricht Treaty to begin preparations for the euro) it would stop the issue of government debt through the UK financial gilt market. A gilt is a promise by the government to pay interest on a loan, which it has raised from the capital markets, with the loan becoming fully repayable at the end of an agreed period, ie gilt-edged security.

At the time, the government said that it was reducing the National Debt. What it really meant was that the government was no longer able to help finance its revenues through the issue of new gilts because that would

'How disgraceful to find trade unions still attracted to the European social model of 10% unemployment...'

votes on the Constitution the tide is turning against the employers' vision of Europe, which is the EU. British workers have an important role to play in accelerating the process of reclaiming our nation.

This is a key internationalist role in an increasingly dangerous world. The EU represents heavily armed globalisation on our doorstep. It represents low growth and high unemployment. It offers no model for British or other European workers.

War or peaceful co-existence?

Can we be free and rebuild our country if we are at war? If £5 billion can be found to invest in killing 25,000 Iraqi citizens, twice that could be found this year by the State to invest in our life giving industries.

In rejecting terrorist attacks on British workers at this year's Congress, delegates will also reject the Iraq war.

The CYWU gives delegates the right to express their views forthrightly on these matters. At the last election only a tiny minority voted to elect a government subservient to the Thatcherite economics of the EU and the imperialist aggression of the United States. What about a government for Britain, for a change?

Congress will support the Venezuelan government in its efforts to utilise its own resources for its own people, just as we have done before in respect of Cuba. How long can we applaud others yet allow our government to squander our resources and skills to the highest bidder? Now it is time to raise the banner of independent trade unionism acting in the interests of British workers.

ered, and they stop us investing in our own industry

contravene the parameters laid down by the EU on borrowing. The result was that the supply of new gilts ended, whilst the financial demand for gilts increased.

Crucially the demand for 15-year and 20-year Government gilts increased. These gilts have always been the ideal financial instruments to underpin occupational pensions whilst in payment. This is because people retiring at 65 tend to go on living for a further 15 to 20 years.

So gilts with a 15 or 20 year term are ideal security to underpin the financial liability of an occupational pension becoming payable over the same period.

Supply and demand

Unsurprisingly, given the laws of supply and demand, the price of the remaining gilts issued in the market prior to 1995 have since rocketed, to the extent that the cost of a subsistence level of pension of £7,500 per annum payable to a male aged 65, for example, now requires at least £100,000 of capital to match the financial liability while in payment.

The policy of no longer issuing new government gilts has continued since 1997 and so it is small wonder that the cost of pension final salary guarantees has increased in the manner they have.

By the same token, the Equitable Life insurance company problems also originate from the same shortage of available gilts whereby they cannot now meet the cost of matching the 4% annualised guarantees under their insured policies. This has led to the same insolvency problems as experienced by our pension funds.

Insolvency

Who would have thought in the 1970s and 1980s when the Equitable Life sold these policies that an underlying 4% capital guarantee would render it insolvent in 2002? This is not a pensions crisis; it has been planned since 1995 as part of the drive to European integration.

Further evidence of this comes from what is known as the Minimum Funding Requirement (MFR to the Treasury) introduced by the Tories in April 1997 but conceived in 1995 at the time the Treasury decided to dry up the gilt

market.

The MFR is a government-prescribed method of measuring the solvency margins of an occupational final salary pension fund. It was put in place to gauge the impact that the government's reduced borrowing requirement would have on our pension funds. In other words: create a problem, measure it and then call it a crisis.

Since 1997 the MFR has identified huge deficits in occupational pension provision. Once identified, the employer then has to make good the deficit by paying in large amounts of capital to make up the shortfall.

Winding up

In practice, what happens is that the MFR acts as an excuse for the employers to wind up their final salary pension commitment. This makes the MFR a convenient hiding place for the employer. It is also a distraction away from the government's failure to issue gilts, and shifts attention from the fact that throughout the 1980s and early 1990s employers were boosting their profits by taking surpluses from our pension funds.

As a new school year begins, the struggle to recruit and retain too many teachers in England and Wales are facing the possibility of Teaching and Learning Responsibility Payments?

Time for teachers to take responsibility for

IN APRIL 2005 school teachers received a 2.5% pay increase on their basic pay – less than inflation. At the start of September the basic pay increased again by 0.7%. These small increases are part of a long-term pay agreement supported by some, but not all, teacher unions. Where does the suggestion of pay cuts come from?

Around 200,000 – more than half of all classroom teachers – currently receive management allowances (MAs). As the name suggests, these allowances are in addition to teachers' basic salary so that they can carry out management and other duties as well as their teaching responsibilities. These payments have been frozen since March 2003 – and now for many teachers could reduce further or disappear altogether. Why is this happening?

Remodelling agenda

As part of the government's workforce remodelling agenda, all schools in England are required to review their staffing structure by December 31st this year and remove all management allowances. (Schools in Wales have been given an extension until March 2006 by the Welsh National Assembly.) A new system of Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments is to be introduced instead.

On the face of it, that doesn't sound too bad. But the government estimates that the new payment system will lead to £49 million "savings" on teacher salaries, and that no additional money is to be provided to schools in order to finance the new payments. The government expects to see fewer teachers receiving additional pay allowances and argues that this will provide funding for increased number of support staff posts in schools.

Unlike the current Management Allowance system there will be no nationally prescribed levels or values for individual TLR payments, but the payments must fall within two nationally prescribed bands: £2,500 to £5,500 and £6,500 to £11,000. Different payments must also have a minimum differential of £1,500. Apart from these two restrictions, schools are free to decide for themselves the number of TLR payments they wish to

make and their individual value.

The minimum payment possible (£2,500), combined with the government's insistence that no additional funding will be provided, leads to the possibility of teachers facing pay cuts. Currently teachers on the lowest management allowance payment receive £1,638. So a school that does not wish to inflict pay cuts will have to increase its salary bill – and at the moment the government is refusing to fund such increases.

The response

So what are teachers doing about this? The short answer is that teachers are divided. But that's not an adequate description.

At a national level teacher unions are divided on this issue. The NUT opposes the introduction of TLRs and is seeking to protect members against pay cuts. The NASUWT and ATL (the other two main classroom teacher unions) support the new system and have worked with the government in drawing up guidelines to schools for their introduction. These two unions (at a national level) have accepted that some teachers will lose pay.

As previously reported in *WORKERS*, the largest classroom teacher union – the NUT – did not agree to the Workforce Reform Agreement, because the union believes that the government has used the crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers as a reason for providing a cheap and low-quality education service employing even fewer qualified teachers. The union is not opposed to workforce reform or to increased numbers of support staff being employed by schools. However the NUT does oppose support staff being required to be in charge of whole classes – as it believes that this undermines the skill and professionalism of teachers and the quality of the education service for pupils.

The Head and Deputy Teacher unions were all original partners to the agreement, but the largest of these (the NAHT) has since withdrawn its support because of the lack of government funding for the changes to schools.

The other teacher unions saw the agreement as a means of reducing teacher

workload and considered this of such importance that they were prepared to accept unqualified staff teaching whole classes. They are also prepared to accept a reduction in teachers' pay as a means of paying for increased numbers of support staff. This is the crux of the division that exists between the teacher unions. It is now down to teachers at school level to decide how they are going to respond.

Consultations on the TLR payments will take place school by school. The guidance to schools from the government and the trade unions that have accepted the new payment system strongly urges schools to reduce their overall teacher salary bill. Teachers will have to be vocal and determined if they wish to counteract this "guidance".

Many teachers who are members of the NASUWT and ALT are bewildered to discover that their unions have agreed pay cuts on their behalf. Alarming, the NASUWT has advised its school representatives not to take part in any joint meetings with the NUT on the issue. Encouragingly, anecdotal evidence

'It is now down to teachers at school level to decide how they are going to respond...'

suggests that where schools have a tradition of holding joint union meetings, this advice is being ignored. The unions may be divided nationally but where teachers are prepared to get organised they can have an impact in protecting their pay. Many school governors have been shocked to discover that they are expected to preside over pay cuts for teachers and will be sympathetic to the argument that enforcing pay cuts will lead to demoralisation, exacerbating the present difficulties in retaining staff.

The NUT has invested a lot of effort in providing its school representatives and local lay officers with guidance and training. The task of school by school

Teachers continues. Yet
of a pay cut. What price

their pay

negotiations is massive, especially when it is shoehorned into such a tight timescale, but it does provide a stimulus for teachers to improve their level of union organisation in schools. Union membership amongst teachers is high, but not every school has a school representative for each of the unions – not surprising when there are so many! Some schools have no lay union representative at all.

Subsidies

Some governing bodies will be in the fortunate position of being able to subsidise any new staffing structure by using budget reserves and so avoid pay cuts. Others may be persuaded to approach LEAs with a request to borrow against future years' budgets. Such responses will depend on the determination of the teachers of each school to defend their pay and to make sure their governing body is aware of their strength of feeling. That said, they are purely defensive and do not tackle the root of the problem – the government's refusal to fund the pay of all the workers and their complementary skills that are required to run our schools and provide our children with a quality education service.

Consider the situation in just one school. This is a large school with 1500 pupils and over 100 teaching and support staff. Union membership among teachers is high and amongst support staff it is reasonable. The NUT and NASUWT are the only unions with representatives/stewards employed at the school. Over the past two years new staff have been recruited to have responsibility for: running exams; invigilating exams; organising cover for absent teachers; monitoring attendance of pupils and ensuring parents are contacted; acting as learning mentors for pupils identified as either underachieving or having special needs; pastoral support for pupils; work experience for pupils.

These were all tasks previously undertaken by teachers. The individual teachers concerned have had their responsibilities renegotiated and suffered no loss in pay. All teachers at the school who receive management allowances do so for responsibilities that are directly



Croydon, March 2004: Teachers, parents and children unite to lobby the council meeting setting the budget and council tax. NUT members took strike action in protest against local authority school funding cuts, threatened compulsory redundancies for education staff and teachers, large class sizes, and workforce remodelling. They demanded qualified teachers.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

related to teaching and learning and can only be carried out by qualified teachers. In addition, the number of classroom assistants employed at the school has increased and there are four new posts of learning supervisors. These four members of staff supervise classes of absent teachers with the agreement of NUT members at the school.

In short, the school has embraced workforce reform to the benefit of all staff and pupils involved. As a result, however, the school is carrying over a deficit in its budget of £14,000. The school governors do not wish to impose pay cuts but do not have scope within the school finances to avoid this. This is a real, not a hypothetical, school. The staff and governors at this school will have to unite

with others to challenge the government's underfunding of school staff pay.

Elsewhere in Britain workers have taken on the government where it tries to fund the pay of some workers by reducing that of others. In the NHS, trade unions and their members made sure that the government's "Agenda for Change" was supported with significant increase in government funding. As reported in July's *Workers*, support staff in schools in Northern Ireland took disciplined and united action and forced the Education Minister to come up with an additional £10 million for special education and the school meals service in NI and to release more money for pay upgrades.

Teachers in England and Wales need to take up the battle on their own behalf.

Work is the source of wealth, so why does it cause ill health for culprit is capitalism...

Stress and mental health in the workplace

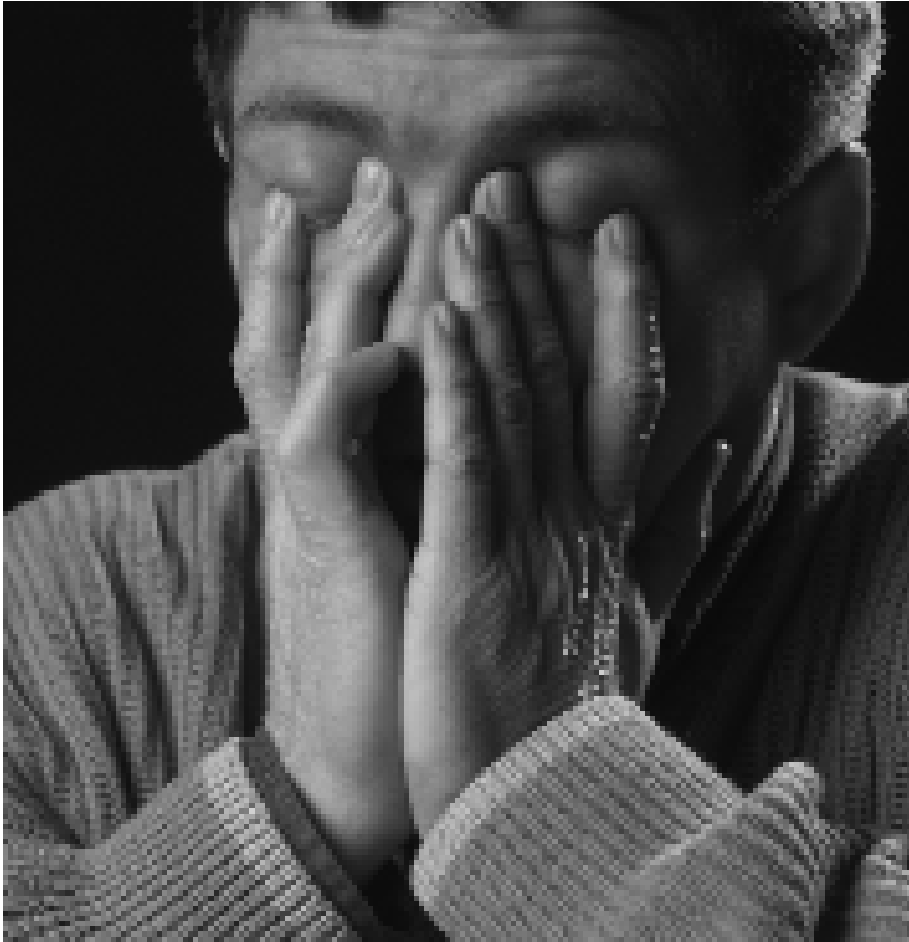


Photo: Jonny Olsson/www.arbeidstilsynet.no

- with over a third (36 per cent) of Britons citing it as one of their biggest stressors.”

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found more than half of employers reported an increase in stress-related absence. Research in Northern Ireland even found that 30% to 40% of all sickness absence is due to some form of mental or emotional disturbance.

The causes of stress

Causes of stress are numerous, including overwork, increasing pace of work, tighter deadlines and increasing pressure, bullying, low job control and satisfaction, job insecurity, new ways of working, and poor work organisation.

The TUC's view is that a workplace with a lot of stress may suffer from high absenteeism, higher risk of accidents, industrial relations problems, demotivation and high labour turnover. Unions have long striven to reduce the working life of workers whether it be in the form of shorter days, or hours per day, sufficient breaks and time between shifts, longer holidays or earlier retirement age.

With respect to the issue of a shorter working life, the government's response to the anti-sex discrimination legislation was to increase the pension age for women rather than decrease that for men. This flew in the face of the widespread understanding that increased life expectancy among women was partly due to the fact that they retired earlier than men.

In fact the government's policy for retirement age is genocidal in nature, as it intends to move retirement even further back, to the age of 70. (See First Thoughts, WORKERS February 2005).

The Blair government early in its third term has encouraged European ministers to support the continuation of the opt out on the maximum 48 hour week. So much for being protected by the EU.

The National Work-Stress network mentions studies from around the world which show that workers tend to have high blood pressure if they work over 50 hours, or have jobs that are both demanding and over which they have little control. Even rumours of impending plant closure can

WHY DOES WORK, the source of all goods, often feel so bad? The Community Service Volunteers (CSV) conducted a survey which indicated that voluntary work helps people to overcome stress. So what is it that causes so many workers to feel stressed and become mentally unwell as a result of working for their employer?

The cost of stress

Psychiatrists writing in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL claim that stress and depression have overtaken back pain as the main reasons for workers claiming incapacity benefit. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed that in 2002 about five million workers in Britain said they experienced stress, of whom half a million felt it made them ill. This costs the nation £3.7 billion. In fact the International Labour Organisation suggests that the cost of stress amounts to over 10% of Britain's

Gross National Product.

In 1996 the Institute of Management estimated 270,000 people take time off work every day because of work-related stress; this represents a cumulative cost in terms of sick pay, lost production and NHS charges of around £7 billion annually. The HSE gives more recent figures of 13 million days a year lost, with an average of 29 days per case.

Two extremely high stress areas are nursing, where three out of ten people suffer from stress, and teaching where the figure is four out of ten. It can be seen that work-related mental health problems account for a considerable proportion of total mental health costs to the British economy which come out at some £40 billion every year. This is borne out in the 2003 Stressed Out survey by the Samaritans. The survey found: "People's jobs are the single biggest cause of stress

workers? The

raise blood pressure. The Network also cites China with its rapid capitalist economic change where there has been a huge rise in cardiovascular disease. There has been a massive increase in work rates, reduction of control over the workplace by the workers, and fear of unemployment.

The June edition of HAZARDS MAGAZINE contains items on increased heart attacks associated with boring jobs, and increasing rates of heart disease, mental illness, bowel disease and diabetes among those workers doing long hours.

It is not just at work that there is stress, for most workers there is the twice daily ordeal of getting to work, often on congested roads. A better public transport system might improve this. But in London the underground system places stresses on the hundreds of thousands who use it daily to get to work. Trains in the South East and other areas are overcrowded and frequently delayed adding to the anguish felt by commuters.

GP services are frequently unable to provide adequate care for the mentally ill. The Royal College of Psychiatrists is presently campaigning to show how consultant psychiatrists are overburdened and are themselves under stress. They aim to improve working conditions for consultant psychiatrists, reduce caseloads and to get more time to deal with emergencies and high risk situations.

The legal response

The TUC has pointed to the costs to the employers who fail to tackle bullying, in lost time, low morale, reduced work output and quality of service, lost resources if staff leave, and tribunals or court costs. In 2002 in the case of Walker v. Northumberland County Council it was estimated that the cost to the employer was over £400,000. The case pointed to a duty of care that employers have to their employees where it was reasonably foreseeable to an employer that his employee might suffer psychiatric illness through stress at work.

Last year union legal services won £330 million for their members, over the whole range of issues from health and safety to discrimination and unfair dismissal. But over reliance on the law or

‘in 2002 about five million workers in Britain said they experienced stress, of whom half a million felt it made them ill...’

the European Union (EU) does not solve the problems in the workshops, classrooms, wards, offices, etc.

Employers have found a loophole that they can exploit by providing confidential counselling services – as happened when the appeal court overturned cases of numerous teachers in 2002. The General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers said around this time that if the employee doesn't like the job because it is proving stressful they must shout or leave. Well most workers don't have the option of leaving, and the working class as a whole certainly does not. So there needs to be a lot of shouting and more. It is therefore up to unions to continue the battle in the workplace for better conditions.

The trade union response

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) see a way to deal with workplace stress and the resulting sickness. They have criticised as a “gimmick” the company's scheme for holiday vouchers and prize draws. They say that only continued investment in Royal Mail's workforce will see further improvements in attendance levels. CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward explained, “Over the last 18 months our members have benefited from pay increases of more than 18 per cent. Their working week has also been reduced from six days to five.”

Ship officers' union Numast is to campaign against fatigue and cuts in crewing levels in response to new research showing almost one-third of ships' masters and officers do not get the legally required daily rest periods. Last year the TGWU campaigned on a similar matter on behalf

of tug masters.

The further education union Natfhe is campaigning on the amount of unpaid overtime worked by lecturers. The union says this has a serious effect on their home lives and their health. A union survey has found, over two thirds of respondents worked unpaid hours averaging 11 hours a week.

In Milton Keynes the wardens in sheltered housing recently won a legal case, after the GMB union stood behind its members who had to work and be on call from Monday morning till Friday afternoon. Meanwhile the GMB has started to highlight the number of workers particularly in retail centres who are having to wear tags to monitor and speed up their work. The GMB says this is dehumanising.

The TUC and many unions educate health and safety representatives and stewards to help them deal with the range of workplace problems including stress. Unions also support campaigning organisations and the paper Hazards which bring news from around Britain and the world about aspects of Health and Safety in the workplace, and how unions are dealing with them. Unions often support or commission reports from leading academics.

Prevention is better than cure. Professor Tom Cox in the late 1990s in his report for Unison manual workers showed that stress was an occupational health issue rather than just a matter of mental health. But we know that under some conditions work can be highly satisfying and even therapeutic. So we must consider under what circumstances work becomes drudgery. Over 150 years ago Marx pointed out that for the worker time spent at work did not belong to the worker, because he sold his capacity to work to the boss.

Despite the best efforts of unions, who day by day attempt to wrest some control over this part of their life in an effort to humanise the work process, capitalism seizes control back in hundreds of different ways. The point then is that it is not work that makes us sick but that it is capitalism's control of work which causes stress in the workplace. To prevent stress and the consequent ill-health and deaths, it is necessary to get rid of capitalism.

For the Labour government, it is not enough to attempt to control we teach or how we heal. They want to control our culture as well.

Cultural imperialism

IN JANUARY WORKERS wrote: "The state machine developing under Tony Blair & Co. is broadening and deepening its campaign and powers to intervene into the lives of workers in Britain, telling us what is good for us..." Then we spoke of childcare, asking Do we really think the state knows best? Now our culture – in a sweeping definition, every aspect of living – is on their agenda for control and meddling.

A prototype has been launched in Scotland. The overblown, rhetorical and divisive devolutionary 2003 speech of Jack McConnell, First Minister of the Scottish Executive, has translated into the expensive Cultural Commission Report (cost: over £500,000).

That report was matched by the Arts Council England exercise to "map creative industries" in 2001 for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, which proceeded to create a five-year plan (2005–2010) entitled "Renaissance in the Regions". This will "enable different areas to tailor the cultural 'menu' according to their local cultural resources". Previous good practice of, for example, free tuition to a high level of skill for young musicians is replaced by diluted "rights" to an "experience" of culture, carrying the usual edicts of a divisive multiculturalism.

"Cultural rights"?

It is this enshrining of "cultural rights" in law (due for legislation in Scotland in 2007) which imposes the dead hand of Labour's state machine on cultural workers and audiences alike.

Worse, it is the key proposal of the Cultural Commission (foreshadowing similar moves in England and Wales) to abolish the relatively objective and "arms-length" civic bodies such as the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen and recreate them as two companies, Culture Scotland and Culture Fund. In a word, privatisation.

This proposal would result in bodies that subsuming all hitherto independent and successful arts ventures, museums, national libraries, etc, and exercise control over two of the most successful festivals



Photo: Dave Arcari

Musicians' Union member George Cuthbertson, left, and MU regional committee member Fraser Speirs handing out flyers condemning the use of recorded music in Matthew Bourne's ballet HIGHLAND FLING at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow.

in the world, the Edinburgh International Festival and its Fringe.

This handing over of national assets, our cultural organisations, to capitalist control is deeply connected to the "liberalisation" of goods and services, hallmark of globalisation and the European Union.

At its outset the report undermines the very notions of workers or resistance: it quotes Richard Florida's RISE OF THE CREATIVE CLASS as indicating a "seismic shift in the global economy away from the mechanical or efficiency improvements driving economic growth, to creativity as the main driver of the economy". In other words, don't bother producing anything in Britain, its workers are past history!

The report quotes "leading business leaders" and Scottish Enterprise as being enthusiasts for this viewpoint, and the EU plans for developing policy on "cultural rights".

In fact, in the key company proposed (Culture Scotland) the report recommends the presence of EU cultural agencies on its

governing council, as well as business representatives.

It is no surprise that capitalism is keen to govern culture, to free it up for greater exploitation – its true value has been revealed. Arts Council England research showed that British creative industries (ie, wider than just arts alone) had 1.3 million workers generating turnover of £112.5 billion, with exports of £10.3 billion. The creative industries now account for 5% of GDP, having grown 34% from 1991 to 2001.

Globalisation

No wonder culture has to be opened up to gold diggers in tow to globalisation, GATS and the EU. Seizing control of proudly skilled institutions, they would weaken resistance to breaking up Britain.

Sending Scotland off with its own blueprint for culture is another step in that direction, further widening division, as if culture is being used as a wedge. And used, too, for a divergent economic and immigration policy – this report wallows in

ol how we work, how
ell...

the role it sees for culture to play in the Scottish Executive's Fresh Talent scheme, which aims to encourage migration of workers to Scotland as "a corner stone of the Executive's current economic policy".

Another function of privatised arts governance would be to gradually wrest control of cultural activity away from the local authorities, where at least a vestige of democratic influence remains. No surprise, then, that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has distanced itself from the report's conclusions.

Resistance

The drive to mergers and rationalisations in the cultural arena is being resisted. The National Trust and Historic Scotland have long defended their roles. The International Festival and the Fringe refuse to countenance merger. Dance and orchestral organisations are on guard against cuts.

In recent years the strongest rejections have come from the Musicians' Union's campaign to stop the loss through merger of the orchestra that performs the Scottish Ballet, and last year's fight for jobs at Scottish Opera (See *WORKERS*, July 2004).

The Cultural Commission's chair was James Boyle. As former head of BBC Radio 4 he should be well acquainted with the successful Britain-wide strike of 1981 to save the six BBC orchestras. Where there is resistance they fear to tread!

Those working in culture are represented by Equity, BECTU, the Musicians' Union, the Artists' Union, the Writers' Guild, the NUJ and the Society of Playwrights. They are now, with their joint body (the Federation of Entertainment Unions) digesting the implications of this extension of government influence.

Indeed, the commission's proposal for a "National Council of the Creative Individual" would seem designed to undermine the influence of trade unions in the sector. But their members continue the task of remaining their own masters, ensuring decent wages and preventing the takeover of their long-fought-for cultural heritage.

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

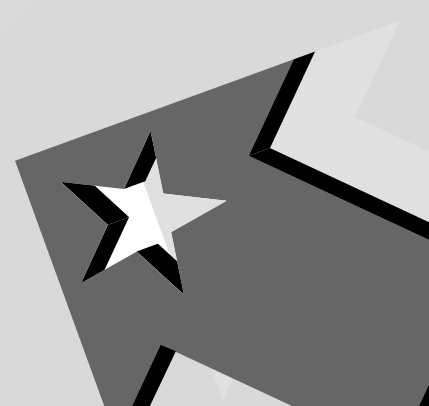
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Back to Front – Migration and power

‘There should be no doubt about what the aim of this open-door immigration policy is. It is to reduce wages and conditions to the world minimum...’

SPEAKING IN BRADFORD in June, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, said, “Immigration has reduced wage inflation:...If the increased demand for labour generates its own supply in the form of migrant labour then the link between demand and prices is broken...Indeed, in an economy that can call on unlimited supplies of migrant labour, the concept of output gap is meaningless...the inflow of migrant labour, especially in the past year or so from Eastern Europe, has probably led to a diminution of inflationary pressure on the labour market...Without this influx to fill the skill gaps in a tight labour market, it is likely earnings would have risen at a faster rate, putting upward pressure on the costs of employers.”

In other words, cheap mass labour from Eastern Europe – the Polish Plumber syndrome – has been used to keep wages stagnant or reduce them. The real purpose of immigration is revealed for what it is: to undermine the wages of British workers.

Anyone who wants a practical example of this need look no further than Heathrow. The workers at Gate Gourmet (see page 3) were just too expensive, and, even more important, too highly unionised for this spin-off of British Airways, itself a product of privatisation. Destroying the union is essential to the project.

The plan is to hire new workers from Eastern Europe at £6 an hour – not a proper living wage, and one that will require the taxpayer to subsidise families dependent on it via the tax credit system. The European Union tells us we cannot subsidise industry to keep it going, but it seems that there’s unlimited money to subsidise union-busting and drive down wages and conditions.

Could this have happened anywhere else in the EU? Well, perhaps not yet. Because

apart from Ireland only Britain – courtesy of Jack Straw and the Labour government – decided to give unrestricted access almost immediately, from 1 May 2004, to workers from the new Eastern European members even though transitional arrangements allowed restrictions for up to seven years. At a stroke, Labour solved most of the problem of illegal immigration...by making it legal!

There should be no doubt about what the aim of this open-door immigration policy is. It is to reduce wages and conditions to the world minimum. Think about it: we are constantly told we will have to reduce our expectations, and our wages, if we are to compete with China. But wages in Britain are 20 times those in urban China – and 30 times the Chinese rural wage. The inexorable logic is that unless we suffer wage cuts of 95%, we’re “costing too much”.

In that regard, cheap Polish or Lithuanian labour is just a halfway house for capitalism. And already their wages are too high – as the article on page 5 of this issue (“Last Scottish yard under threat”) shows, Polish shipyards are using even cheaper Russian labour to undercut Scottish yards.

For too long some in the trade unions have taken a liberal attitude to immigration, so afraid of charges of racism that they have allowed Labour to operate a deliberate policy of weakening workers’ bargaining power on a massive scale. Perhaps those in favour of unlimited immigration could explain what is anti-racist about a policy that leads directly to the sacking of hundreds of British women of Indian origin.

In the face of the Bank of England, the Labour government and the European Union, we in Britain will survive only by asserting our class interests. The working class – of every country – must exercise control over the supply of labour.

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