

WORKERS

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THE GLOBAL WARMING SCARE



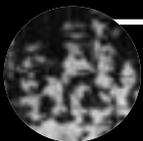
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WORKERS

“ First thoughts

WORKERS IN NORTH EAST England voted decisively against a regional assembly in November: 78% against on a 48% turnout. This result put a stop to referendums due to take place in Yorkshire & Humberside and North West England, and damaged campaigns for votes elsewhere — and may have delayed even further the planned polls on the euro and the European Constitution (see article, page 8). All in all, a stunning result.

Local elections last May showed that EU-inspired English regional government was not popular. At the time the novel postal voting method was blamed, as if workers do not act with thought and consideration. In fact, workers dislike and distrust these regional assemblies. They know they have nothing to do with regional identity. Nor do they see

them as a counterbalance to unelected regional organisations (which Labour has also promoted). And they won't be told how to vote by “opinion formers” — whether politicians regional trade union secretaries or celebrities.

Those favouring a greater role for the European Union believe regional assemblies support a Europe of Regions. That idea promotes the power of the EU at the expense of individual nations. It goes with the new EU constitution, especially majority voting.

The debacle in the North East has been seen as a big problem for John Prescott, who sponsored the idea. But the really big problem is for the European Union: it shows that British workers, like those in Sweden and Denmark, make up their own minds. What chance now of ratification of the European Constitution?

Second opinion

FOR THE THIRTEENTH year in a row the United Nations General Assembly has voted for the US blockade of Cuba to be lifted. The vote was Cuba 179, USA 4. The USA, Israel, the Marshall Islands and Palau all voted against. There was one abstention.

Palau, which abstained in 2003, is known to every school child in the USA as being a tiny scattering of Pacific Islands. Until the

early 1990s it was a US colony, and although now officially an independent state it is still totally dependent on the USA. The Marshall Islands were a nuclear testing site for the US military. Israel survives only by receiving massive US military and financial aid.

So the real vote was 179 for, 1 against. Even Blair had to vote for Cuba — obviously a poodle with a discipline problem!



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Tenants step up fight

COUNCIL TENANTS vowed to step up their campaign in defence of council housing at a packed conference at Congress House, London, organised by the Defend Council Housing campaign on 29 October. The conference was also supported by the TUC.

The conference celebrated the fact that at the Labour Party Conference in September delegates had ignored Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's plea to withdraw their motion and voted by 8:1 in favour of funds earmarked for housing stock transfer to the private sector to be made equally available to local councils. A rattled Prescott claimed his review of the public financing of council housing was conditional on the withdrawal of this motion.

Following massive opposition to housing sell-offs in Birmingham, Dudley, Wrexham and Camden, 250 MPs have now backed the call for direct investment. This line is also supported by the Local Government Association of England and Wales, exposing as a lie housing minister Keith Hill's assertion that "there were simply no takers".

It is widely recognised that the government's agenda is political, not economic. Evidence from tenants, local authorities, trade unions, and professional organisations right across Britain, together with the government's own National Audit Office, has forced MPs to conclude that the government's "dogmatic pursuit of the separation of stock management and strategic management" is not economically justified.

Under EU rules RSLs (Registered Social Landlords, such as housing associations) are allowed to borrow and invest "off balance sheet", whereas borrowing in the public sector is restricted. MPs have finally shown the first sign of resistance to this accounting fiddle by pressing the Treasury to commit additional funding to meet its Decent Homes target by 2010.

Against a background of mounting repossessions and bankruptcies, and with so many young couples unable to afford private rents, the task now is not to let Prescott off the hook, but better still, to take a cue from the people of the North East and reject Blair's agenda in favour of saving local authorities and council housing.

- For more information, see www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

MOTOR INDUSTRY

Rover to be Shanghaied?

IF MG ROVER is going to ship production to China as all indicators suggest, they should have told their auditors, Deloitte & Touche, first. D&T's 2003 report on the accounts of MG Rover and the parent company Phoenix Venture Holdings, highlights the "uncertainty" of the proposed deal with China's Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC). In fact the deal is far from completion, might not be on the financial scale hinted at by MG Rover, and may need statutory regulation.

MG Rover continues to record staggering losses (£77 million in 2003) and production and sales have slumped. The famous saving of MG Rover for £10 in 2000 may turn out to be a temporary reprieve after all, but will the death knell toll before or after the General Election?

Whatever happens, the four "saviours" of MG Rover, now directors, will receive £3.58 million together with £2.5 million loan note repayments towards their own pension trust fund in 2003.

- As WORKERS went to press, union members in the motor industry and beyond were set to demonstrate in Coventry on 27 November against Ford's announcement that it would end Jaguar production in the city after 70 years.

The planned closure comes on top of sweeping cuts in manufacturing industry in the Midlands city, with big job cuts at Massey Ferguson and Dunlop.

The march, under the banner of Jaguar workers fighting for a future, is supported by the TGWU, Amicus and the GMB. For more information on the struggle, email save.jaguar@amicustheunion.org.

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

EUROFRAUD**Investigative journalist raided**

IN MARCH, Belgian police arrested German journalist Hans-Martin Tillack, a correspondent of the German weekly *STERN*, at the request of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). They seized all his computer disks and five years' worth of investigative files detailing his sources, and accused him of bribing EU officials to gain information about corruption in the EU. Tillack had run a series of reports about fraud and waste in the EU, including exposure of scandal at the EU's statistical agency, Eurostat, which saw millions of euros siphoned off into secret bank accounts.

Tillack later asked the EU's supreme court, the European Court of Justice, to stop EU officials looking at his files. The Court backed the European Commission and rejected his application. It has torn up the journalist's right to protect his sources, which is essential to a free press. The EU will probably now use Tillack's list of contacts to identify and sack whistleblowers, making investigative journalism into the EU near-impossible.

The International Federation of Journalists said that the Court's decision was "disturbing". Raymond Kendall, a former head of Interpol, and now head of OLAF's oversight board, said that officials ordering the arrest had acted improperly, "purely on the basis of hearsay", and were "obviously" acting in collusion with Belgian police to identify Tillack's sources. He said, "OLAF can do whatever they want. There is no control whatsoever ... OLAF's D-G [Director-General] has more powers than any law enforcement chief in the world that I know of."

The Tillack case shows how EU institutions, including its supreme court, abuse their existing powers. The new EU Constitution would expand the EU's powers over crime, justice and policing and would give Eurojust, the EU judges group, the power to initiate investigations of all EU citizens.

MANUFACTURE**Dyson's reward**

THE ONCE-BRITISH manufacturer Dyson Vacuums has announced dividend payments of £17 million to the family-owned company for the year 2003.

In 2002 Dyson transferred manufacture from Britain to Malaysia, axeing 800 skilled jobs. Dyson claimed that this was the only way it could break into the US market. In reality it was about



Smirking, Blair and Straw sign the European Constitution in Rome, 29 October. But it will take a referendum to ratify it. See "One constitution to bind us all", page 8

Union's vision for education

THE COUNTRY'S biggest teaching union has set out its vision for education for the next five years and beyond. NUT General Secretary Steve Sinnott said it was time to remove the barriers, especially of social class and low income, that get in the way of giving every child the best chance. *BRINGING DOWN THE BARRIERS* is based on thorough research and evidence and not only represents the voice of the NUT and other teachers, but is aimed at everyone with a stake in education, including parents and young people.

Most parents want good local schools rather than a range of options to choose from, says Sinnott: "It would be profoundly pessimistic to assume that the idea of good local schools for every community is a less powerful concept than the "right to choose". Other proposals include the scrapping of OFSTED (replacing it with an independent inspectorate), Key Stage tests, selective schools and league tables.

Sinnott has called for meetings with Education Secretary Charles Clarke and other politicians to discuss the union's vision. But a spokeswoman for the Department for Education and Skills said the government had already set out its vision for education and that "performance tables and tests are here to stay, parents have a right to this information". This kind of response confirms that government itself is the biggest barrier to progress in education.

- *BRINGING DOWN THE BARRIERS* is available as a PDF file at www.nut.org.uk

using cheap labour and maximising profits, hence the huge dividend.

Dyson doubled its profits in 2003 to £46.3 million. This profit was derived from the technical ingenuity, innovation and design skills of British workers over a 15-year development period, workers whose final reward was redundancy.

POLAND**Health for some?**

A DOCUMENT on the EU's own website reveals that Rafal Nizankowski, Polish Undersecretary of State for Health, recently wrote the following to David Byrne at the European Commission's Health and Consumer Protection

Directorate-General.

"Dear Mr Byrne, Thank you for your document Enabling Good Health for all. A reflection process for a new EU Health Strategy. It is a very good paper and solid base for discussion. Since you suggest the initiation of the reflection process, I would like to make my personal comments.

"I do not like 'for all' for two reasons. First, it is unrealistic. It is impossible to offer good health for all citizens of Europe, because some of them do not want good health, they simply need to be ill to play their social roles; because others have very bad genes or are just not lucky enough. The reason for my dislike of phrase 'for all' is its close relation to communistic slogan."

Opposition to communism leads to some strange places!

HEALTH**Cold weather kills**

LAST WINTER an estimated 21,500 people over 65 died in England and Wales as result of the cold, according to the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics. Scottish deaths are calculated separately. This figure represents a slight decrease on the previous year although the death rate in the North West region rose despite the relatively mild winter.

Since the late 1990s winters have been

relatively mild, and the ONS pointed out that cold winters in 1988 and 1999 saw dramatic increases in death rates with figures of 44,000+ and 45,000+ deaths from cold in the over-65s.

The weather forecasters are having difficulty predicting the nature of the 2004 winter. But it is already clear that all households will see a marked rise in electricity and gas bills, with many companies already sending out letters to households to warn them of the average weekly rise in prices.

Pension schemes dumped

WORKERS WHO have paid into pension schemes all their working lives have a right to expect a decent return during old age. But a comfortable retirement is under threat from companies and government alike. During the 1990s many large companies used the opportunity of a high stock market to keep profits up by robbing workers' pension funds. Now, with a low stock market they are abandoning their pension schemes altogether, investing the funds abroad or demanding higher contributions.

In the public sector the government is forcing through changes which will leave workers facing the prospect of working until 65 (or even 70) with reduced benefits. The government intends to pass the burden of old age back to the workers.

Attacks on pensions are planned across the public sector, showing how predictably hollow were the decisions taken at the Labour Party's policy forum in Warwick. The "pledges" there were geared to win unions around to support the government over Iraq at the Labour Party conference. They succeeded, to the sham of a silent labour movement, and now the promise will be dropped. This is hardly surprising given that both Tory and Labour governments since 1995 have adopted the policy of issuing no more government gilts, which previously underpinned and guaranteed final salary pension payouts. Unison has already indicated that to defend members' pensions it will look to industrial action.

For the heads of large corporations the future has improved. The EU has issued directives freeing them from any notion of responsibilities in Britain. In tandem with this, pension provision for employers and directors is running against the tide. This privileged minority will see secure pensions, often in excess of £1.5 million per individual director. A retirement in luxury for a minority, poverty and more work for the majority — if we accept it.

CHILD SUPPORT**Agency head resigns**

THE HEAD of the Child Support Agency, Doug Smith, has been forced to resign because of the continuing failure of the computer system to deliver child maintenance payments. His departure grabbed the headlines, but this hides real problems for poverty-stricken lone parents and tax-payers.

The £456 million computer system imported from the US firm EDS, after the government refused to "buy British" has resulted in an even greater backlog of cases and delays in payments. The CSA received 478,000 applications but only 61,000 parents have received any money. More than 500,000 parents are owed £75 million, and more than £1 billion of arrears has been written off.

The government has turned a deaf ear to criticism and protests by families and civil service workers over the past four years. A Select Committee report called the EDS system "an appalling waste of public money" and called for the system to be dumped. It has been suggested that the system be administered by the Inland Revenue, but Blair refuses to consider any alternative.

The failure of the CSA makes the government's promise to halve child poverty by 2010 look risible. Kate Green, chief executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, said, "Whoever is in charge, the CSA is a mess and children in poverty are losing out. Other countries have child support managed successfully by the state, and there is no reason why it shouldn't be the same in the UK. The current system is failing children and needs urgent government attention."

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****DECEMBER**

Thursday 2 December, 11am–2.30pm

NUS National Demonstration against tuition fees, the Oval Basin, Cardiff

Called by the Welsh NUS and backed nationally, the march goes past the National Assembly and ends with a rally next to the Welsh Office. For more info, see www.nusonline.co.uk/campaigns/nationaldemo

FORMER USSR**The stench of capitalism**

EVERYONE KNOWS how much better life is in the former Soviet Union since the collapse of socialism — don't they?

So much raw sewage is being discharged into the Baltic sea from St Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) — millions of gallons every year — that about 1500 square miles of the Gulf of Finland on the sea bed is devoid of oxygen and hence of life. Now the EU is using £34 million in grants in addition to three times that in loans from European banks to pay for sewage treatment to stem the flow.

How did things get so bad? In the 1970s the Soviet government built an artificial island in the shallow waters outside the city to process 75% of the city's sewage, and began to build two new sewage works to deal with the rest. In 1991 the Soviet government collapsed. The first works was abandoned, and the second, although it was completed, never ran at full capacity because nobody would pay for a giant connector pipe to link it to the city.

So it's all to do with collapsing socialism... Except that in London, Environment Agency figures show that more than 12 million cubic metres of raw sewage were discharged into the Thames between April and August this year. On 3 August alone, 886,000 cubic metres were discharged, killing thousands of fish and threatening the health of Londoners. There are up to 60 discharges a year.

Experts know how to deal with the problem — an interceptor tunnel, which would take about 10 years to build and cost around £1.5 billion. But Defra, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, turned the solution down in early October. The department had no alternative long-term solution to offer in exchange.

The new Extradition Act

UNDER NEW European Arrest warrants, British citizens could be swiftly extradited to EU countries, where they may not get a fair trial. This measure is part of the Extradition Act, which came into force last January, itself a result of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam.

The act was based on two fallacies: that proceedings under the Extradition Act 1989 were unnecessarily lengthy, and that we should have blind faith in the legal systems of other EU countries.

As Blackstone's, standard guide to the act, notes, the act sacrifices liberty "in the interests of speedy (and cheap) justice" leaving "few remaining safeguards for extradition defendants". The act "aims to speed up extradition by removing protections for defendants". For the first time, defendants can be extradited for conduct that is not criminal under Britain's domestic law and may face unfair trials.

France and Italy are routinely cited for police brutality and non-respect of defence rights. Stephen Jakobi of Fair Trials Abroad observes that British citizens could face "dysfunctional judicial systems" that "virtually guarantee the conviction of the innocent foreigner due to sub-standard interpretation, legal advice facilities and judicial quality". The trial of the British plane spotters in Greece was a good example of this.

Forbidden

Before this act became law, extradition was forbidden if there was a real risk of flagrant denial of justice in the requesting state, for example if the trial was based on evidence obtained by torture, or if there was "a real risk of ill-treatment" of the defendant, or if there was a real risk of the defendant's being sentenced to death. In 2002, a British court quashed the Home Secretary's decision to return a Mr Ramda to France because of unanswered allegations that the French police had obtained evidence against him through torture. Under this Extradition Act, our courts would have to enforce all such unjust decisions.

But, characteristically, this Labour government seeks to subject us not only to the EU's reactionary laws and practices but also to those of the USA. In 2003 the Labour government signed an Extradition Treaty with the USA, in which it was agreed that Britain would extradite British citizens to the USA with no US obligation to produce prima facie evidence of their guilt. Typically the agreement was one way only: there was no similar obligation on the USA. The USA is clearly a state where there is "a real risk of ill-treatment" of defendants, a real risk that defendants would be tortured, and a real risk of defendants being sentenced to death.

In an unprecedented move, the families war...

Labour's war on Iraq must e

On 10 November, Military Families Against the War held a silent vigil outside Number 10 Downing Street. They handed in a letter saying, "This was a contrived war, a war of option, not necessity." They denounced the "illegal invasion" and accused the government of "morally unacceptable conduct". They demanded, "Stop the war, bring the troops home." This appears to be the first time that the families of serving soldiers have protested against a war while it was still being fought.

Ever fewer support the occupation of Iraq. This is shown by the actions of several countries preparing to withdraw their troops as well as by surveys of public opinion here in Britain. The Hungarian government will withdraw its 300 troops by the end of December and the Dutch government its 1,350 soldiers by 31 March.

In Britain, an ICM poll of 28 October showed that 61% disapproved of Labour's decision to send 850 Black Watch soldiers to Baghdad in support of the US attack on Fallujah. Only 30% approved. Meanwhile, the British commander in Iraq says that another 1,300 British troops are likely to be sent to oversee the January elections. The USA is sending another 22,000. Nobody else is sending any.

World reaction

Let us stop pretending. It is Blair who is leading reaction in the world right alongside Bush. He, not Bush, has started six wars in seven years, a series that began before Bush ever got to the White House. Blair launched the 1999 attack on Yugoslavia, without UN authorisation. He, not Bush, flew the world, lying for war on Iraq. Militarily, Blair depends on Bush, but politically Bush depends just as much on Blair. The link with Britain strengthened Bush, saving him from complete isolation, and from

'Blair, not Bush, has started six wars in seven years, a series that began before Bush ever got to the White House...'

electoral defeat.

Labour's war against Iraq (for the Labour Party could have stopped it, but didn't even try) has weakened all that Labour holds dear. The link with the USA is in danger, the EU split, NATO divided, the Labour Party eviscerated, and Parliament, the Foreign Office and the intelligence services all discredited. But worse, Labour's war has made Israel intensify its killings of Palestinians, thrown the Middle East into chaos, worsened the risks of terrorism to Britain and elsewhere, and increased the danger of endless imperialist wars.

Civilians killed

The criminal Bush/Blair attack on Iraq, a country that has never attacked the USA or Britain, has so far killed more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians, mostly women and children, according to the latest estimates. (See "Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey", by Les Roberts, Riyadh Lafta, Richard Garfield, Jamal Khudhairi and Gilbert Burnham, www.thelancet.com) The researchers wrote: "Violence accounted for most of the excess deaths and air strikes from coalition forces accounted for most violent deaths."

The occupation forces caused 84% of the deaths. Air-strikes killed more than 50,000 women and children. The risk of dying a violent death in Iraq is now 58 times as high

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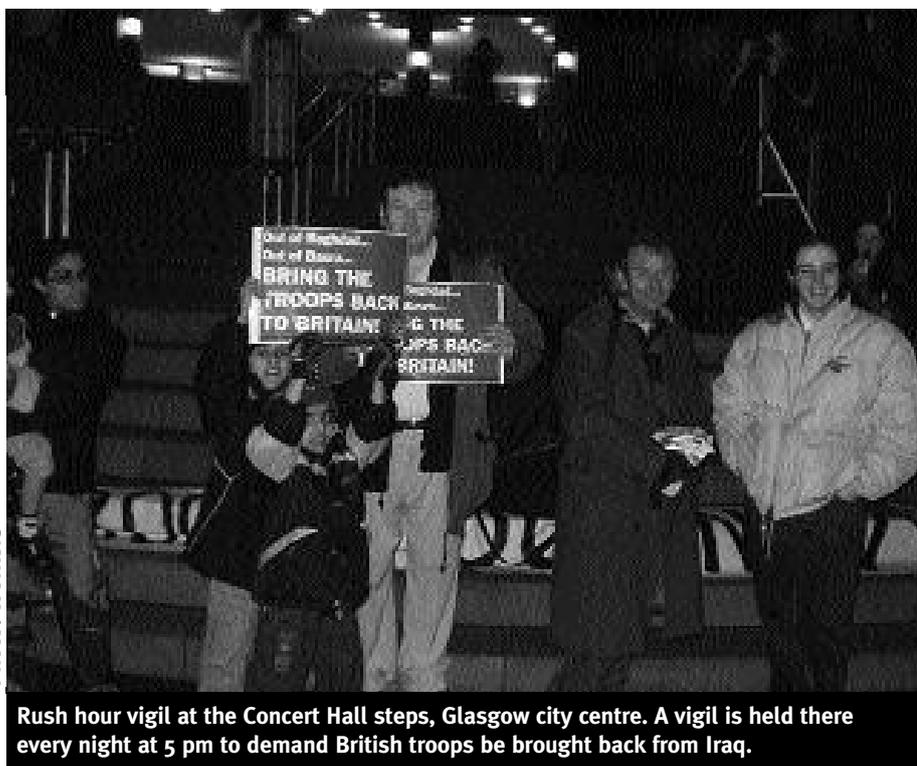


Photo: Workers

Rush hour vigil at the Concert Hall steps, Glasgow city centre. A vigil is held there every night at 5 pm to demand British troops be brought back from Iraq.

as before the invasion.

The war has caused widespread abuses, including torture. Invariably counterproductive, torture is of course illegal, under the Geneva Convention, US federal anti-torture statutes and the UN Convention Against Torture, ratified by the USA in 1994.

Yet in 2001 President Bush secretly ruled, "I...determine that none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or elsewhere throughout the world." When Blair was asked if he agreed with the White House lawyer (now the new Attorney-General) who said that the Geneva Conventions were "quaint", Blair replied, "Of course not. Neither do the Americans." Typically, Blair denies the evidence just given to him.

Abu Ghraib

This contempt for law resulted directly in systematic abuse, torture and murders in US-run prisons. Abu Ghraib was unusual only because it became notorious. The US state organises torture tourism: it

kidnaps suspects then takes them to Egypt or the secret CIA prisons in Pakistan, Thailand, Singapore, etc, for intensive torture.

On 16 September 2004, Annan stated that the war on Iraq was illegal. Recent UN Resolutions have not endorsed the war as legal. The illegal invasion has now become an illegal belligerent occupation. The US occupation government in Iraq and its puppet have kept Saddam's labour laws, banning some trade unions and forbidding all strikes. In June 2003, US troops stormed the offices of the Iraqi Workers' Federation of Trade Unions and arrested its leaders. A senior Foreign Office man described the US's occupation policy as "a catastrophe from beginning to end".

Lessons from Israel

Ex-Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Barak told Vice-President Cheney late last year that the USA had lost in Iraq. He said that Israel "had learned that there's no way to win an occupation". The only issue was "choosing the size of your humiliation".

The Israeli government has also concluded that the occupation cannot bring stability or democracy to Iraq. Yet now, with British support, US troops bulldoze Iraqi homes in Falluja in a terrible imitation of Israeli bulldozers in Gaza.

But Bush and Blair do not intend to withdraw the troops after the much trumpeted but now indefensible January election, any more than they handed over sovereignty last June.

They say they will keep troops there till the end of 2005, but it will be longer than that, if we let them. The US is building twelve military bases in occupied Iraq because it wants permanent control of Iraq's pipelines and oil.

Oilfields

The US government ensured that it, not the UN, seized control of Iraq's oilfields, so that it could privatise them. With the oilfields privatised, Iraq would have to leave OPEC, which requires its members to regulate oil output and export.

This would weaken OPEC's ability to regulate oil prices, undermining the economies of the Middle East's countries. No state invades and occupies another country for ideals, only for material realities; in this case, it's the oil.

So what happens after the fighting is done (if it ever reaches a point where a sane person can say it is done)? What legacy do America and Britain leave the Iraqi workers? A country shattered, a non-existent infrastructure, in hock to the very countries that caused this wasteland.

The words of Tacitus (circa 55-120 AD) neatly sum up the actions of the Americans and British, "They create desolation and call it peace."

Who will help? Not those who created the desolation. Not the Saudis whose oil rich economy is deep within the pockets of America. Not Kuwait and not Iran already staring down the barrel of George W's Bush rangers. The silence of countries like Syria and Jordan is deafening.

Only Iraqi workers can rebuild their country, and they will and do it in their own way. No one can tell them how to achieve this.

Despite the opposition in Britain and the promise of a referendum end of October. But it needs to be ratified before it can come into

One constitution to bind us all



Imperial ambitions: the signing ceremony for the unratified constitution was held, fittingly, in the Julius Caesar Room in Rome

SOME INDIVIDUALS in Britain not only think they know best. They know they know best. Such as those in Parliament and in the TUC, eagerly pushing the European Union project. They are the self-styled political elite who want us to leave everything to them as they plot the disappearance of Britain as a nation state and the end of any national control on the British economy. What they have in common is contempt for national parliaments, institutions and organisations and a fear of what happens when the people intrude into what they see as their own private discussions.

First they tried to stifle the debate on the European Constitution. Then, when they could no longer contain it, they attempted to corrupt the debate. First by trivialising it, saying (and you still hear

this) that the constitution was just a matter of tidying up a few things. Then they tried to pretend (and still do) that it is just a question of economics, nothing political. As if the economic control of a country were not political.

Dutiful Blair

Tony Blair dutifully signed the treaty in Rome on 29 October, along with the other 24 countries of the European Union. But it still needs to be ratified, and perhaps never will be. To date, at least ten countries have announced that they will be holding referenda on the constitution (although they have not said when: they are hoping for a more favourable climate) to determine whether to ratify it. The list of referendum countries includes Britain, Denmark and Poland, all countries

considered problematic by Brussels, as well as Spain, France, the Netherlands and Ireland. Even Germany may hold a referendum, though it will need to change its own constitution to do it.

Meanwhile, the European Union behaves as if the constitution had been ratified, gathering more and more powers into Brussels. Increasingly the Europhiles have become desperate, and nowhere more so than in Britain.

The British working class have not been impressed by membership of the European Union, seeing us lose control of our fisheries, a private foreign takeover of many of our once-nationalised energy companies, and our industry decimated. The obvious strength of feeling against the euro has dissuaded the government from even trying out a referendum. And the

m, Blair signed the new European Constitution in Rome at the o force. The battle has begun...

stunning rejection last month of the EU-driven regionalisation plans for the North East (see article, page 2) has sent alarm waves throughout the pro-EU establishment in Britain and on the Continent.

Blair certainly took a risk by agreeing to a referendum on the constitution. The greater risk, though, would have been to attempt to proceed without one. Now we are approaching the final showdown. "Let battle commence," said Blair at the TUC in Brighton. It is indeed a battle — a battle of ideas the like of which we have not seen since Oliver Cromwell's lawyers pored over the long-dormant Magna Carta.

Power shift

But there is one major difference between now and the English Civil War. Then, power was shifted towards the people. The European Constitution, however, is being imposed on the people and takes power away from us. It diverges widely from what people want or need.

The European Constitution has its origins in 2001, when European heads of state met at Laeken, near Brussels, and set up the European Convention on the Future of Europe.

This convention started work in 2002. In charge was Giscard d'Estaing, a politician whose national career in France had been wrecked by disclosures involving an African country and a quantity of diamonds, and such leading lights as Silvio Berlusconi and the Irishman John Bruton. (Rewarded by being appointed as the EU's ambassador to the US, Bruton was overcome with joy that such a small

country should find such a grand diplomatic role on the international stage.)

At the time, Europe Minister Peter Hain played down what he called "fears". Asked if the government would back a constitution for Europe, he told BBC Radio 4's TODAY programme: "If it means a blueprint for a superstate then certainly not." But superstate is exactly what it does mean.

The stated aim of the convention sounded innocuous: to "simplify decision making" and make the European Union appear more transparent, democratic and efficient. Whatever the aim, it rapidly turned into the opposite of that. The resulting constitution merged all previous EU treaties — Rome, Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice — and endowed the EU with a single legal personality (Article VI), handing all political and economic control to the unelected European Commission. And it is hard to imagine anything less transparent, democratic or efficient than the European Commission.

Disgust

Even the pro-EU Labour MP Gisela Stuart, Britain's sole representative in the convention, was so disgusted by the experience that she said: "The convention was riddled with imperfections and moulded by a largely unaccountable political elite — many of whom see national parliaments as an obstacle." She told the Fabian Society's newsletter: "Not once in the 16 months I spent on the convention did representatives question whether deeper integration is what the people of Europe want." Hers was to become a strong voice calling for a referendum.

The proposal is nothing less than a seizure of power to complete a series, with which our government and unions have been compliant and often complicit. It is about control of our work, our training, our research and development, our ability as a nation to produce both for our own needs and for export. Derek Simpson, Amicus general secretary, and his mates talk of a "democratic deficit", as though there were degrees of democracy up or down a sliding scale and reform could make it acceptable. But this seizure of power is a one-way

The Judiciary

The European Court of Justice is to become a kind of European Supreme Court, given added authority by the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Further judicial power will move to Brussels with the introduction of Euro Warrants and a European Public Prosecutor.

Fiscal and monetary policy

The unelected European Commission will draw up the budget, and the currency shall be the euro. Other countries will have the power to force Britain to adopt the euro, in the interests of the EU. Eurozone countries will have their monetary and fiscal policy dictated by the European Central Bank.

street. As Gisela Stuart acutely observed, talking to the BBC's WORLD AT ONE: "The constitution only allows for powers to move towards the centre."

The constitution is to last for "an unlimited period" (Article IV-446). "A giant step forward," said Romano Prodi, outgoing president of the European Commission. And sweeping new powers that were not part of the original draft were added in. For our Prime Minister to have signed up without a mandate from the people is as treasonable today as Charles I was in the 17th century.

Yet trade union members also bear a heavy responsibility. The content of the constitution and the threat it poses have not come out of the blue. Trade unionists have been in a better position than anyone to see the effects of Brussels economic control over our industries. The throttling effect of convergence, privatisation, liberalisation (which sounds so much nicer) and the Growth and Stability Pact has been felt in workplaces around the country.

Unions have no excuse for not knowing that there has already been a seizure of our industrial policy. Last year the European Court of Justice declared illegal the "golden share" option whereby the government retained strategic control of

'In charge was Giscard d'Estaing, whose national career in France had been wrecked by disclosures involving an African country and a quantity of diamonds...'

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

key industries and service providers. Blair and his cabinet accepted this ruling without a murmur, jeopardising the interests of BA, Rolls Royce, the utilities and defence companies.

And now the government claims its hands are tied, refusing to intervene to save the Corus steel plant at Scunthorpe. Yet all manufacture depends on steel, and now we are told there is a steel shortage and a shortage of recyclable metal — a field where Britain has led.

Where was the trade union protest when Blair signed away the British veto over industrial policy? Our manufacturing is now faced with 3,000 job losses a week, twice the rate as under Thatcher. And next year the EU's Consolidated Public Procurement Directive will enter law, ordering government departments to put projects over £100,000 up for auction among all 25 countries of the EU.

But where is the opposition from Amicus, the union with the deepest involvement in manufacture, and the rest

Energy

There was no reference to energy policy in the Nice, Amsterdam, Maastricht or Rome treaties, but the constitution says that the EU will take over control of energy. That could mean our North Sea Oil being controlled from Brussels "to ensure the security of energy supplies in the Union", as the constitution puts it.

Removal of national powers

According to Articles I and II, countries only have powers where the EU has not claimed them. And exclusive powers that only the EU can wield include: "customs union", or international trade; "the establishing of the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market", or the whole of economic policy, including enforced privatisation; and "common commercial policy" — more or less everything to do with internal trade and business.

'The first real sign of commitment to manufacturing would be NO to the constitution...'

of the TUC? At the end of October, Amicus issued a report showing that only 75% of our trains are made here, while in other European countries the corresponding figure is 100%. Astonishingly, instead of calling for all our trains to be made here, Amicus issued a call for other countries to surrender the right to build their own trains! The first real sign of commitment to manufacturing would be NO to the constitution and YES to protected investment for industries and utilities. This requires a proper debate in the unions that will force members, whatever their union position, to confront reality.

We can win

Industrial closure has set the government on a path of self-destruction. Some MPs may have lucrative futures abroad, but what of those who care about their seats at home? Simple: they must refuse to ratify this constitution. It is possible. To say that the British people will be cowed into line and that a supine parliament will inevitably ratify is defeatist, and underestimates the working class.

The British people stopped the euro even going to a referendum. The people of the North East stopped regionalisation dead. Now popular opposition to the constitution is overwhelming (apparently even in Sedgefield), and not because the government propaganda machine has been slow to swing into action. It is because the arguments against are so compelling, and the arguments for so weak.

As for the best of the bunch, the eurosceptics, we should help them to gain more clarity and turn their scepticism into real opposition. It would be dangerous to

National defence

Under Article I-12, "The Union shall have competence to define and implement a common foreign and security policy, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy." That means Eurocorps, the EU army, now getting experience in Afghanistan and offering itself to Sudan and the Caucasus.

Elections

We are all become "citizens of the European Union", whether we like it or not (Article I-10). The same part of the constitution grants the "right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections in the Member State of residence, under the same conditions as nationals of that State", so residence qualification has replaced nationality. MPs rich enough to afford a second home abroad are already eyeing up their chances.

understate the perils of the situation we are in. The sceptics have yet to realise that this constitution is not simply a further step on the road towards a superstate (we are already there in some respects); it is the final step. It does not merely increase the powers of the European Commission. It hands them control, the "sole power to initiate policy" in crucial areas. It aims to destroy, irrevocably, the sovereignty, independence and democratic control of the nation states.

In 1642 a parliamentary manifesto was sent to Charles 1 demanding complete political and military control. The king did what the government and the European Union will do come a referendum: he tried to play on their fears. "The proposition would destroy all rights and property," he said, warning that government "would end in a dark equal chaos of confusion".

Well, we know what happened to him — the people had an alternative policy for England. In the 21st century, we have our alternative vision: independent unions for an independent Britain.

Reg Birch:

engineer, trade unionist, communist

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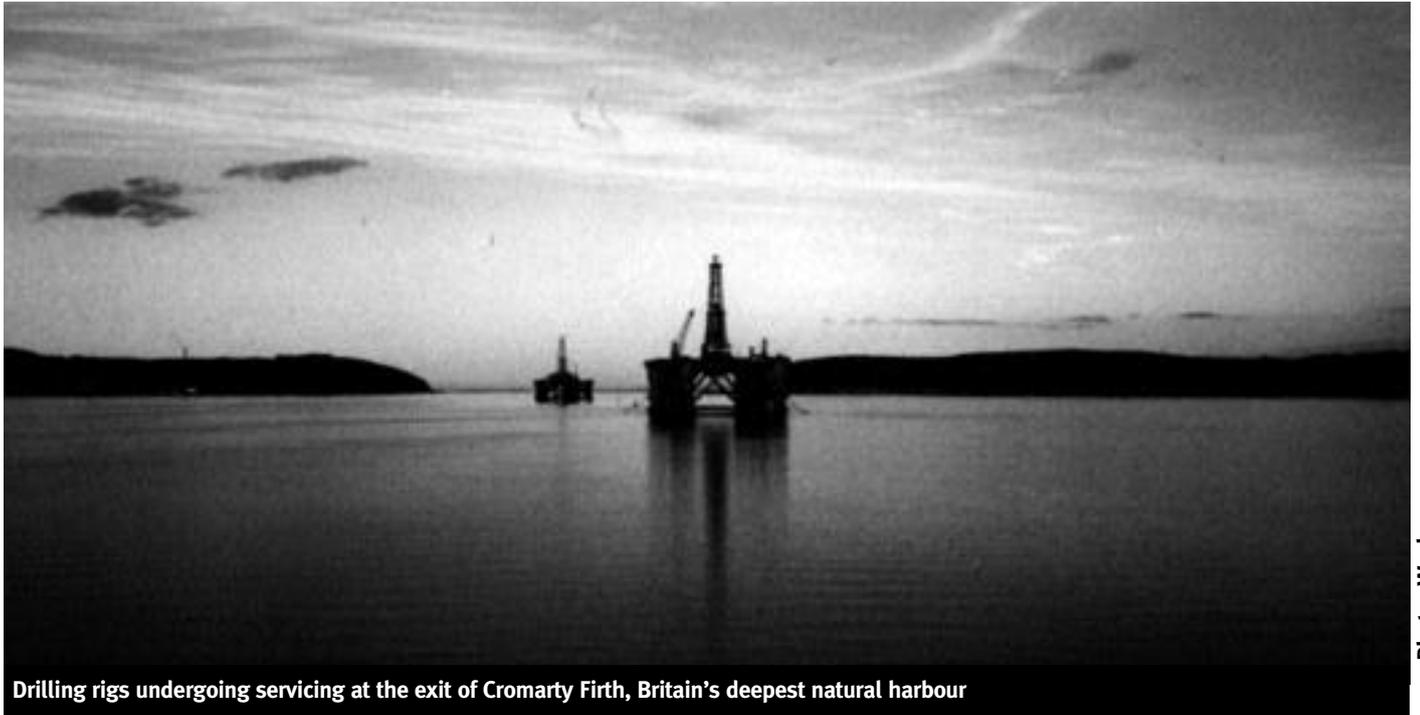
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Will Podmore

Until very recently Britain was self-sufficient in energy. Now, with nuclear power under attack, the projection is that by 2020 we m

Short of energy? Maybe just short of clear



Drilling rigs undergoing servicing at the exit of Cromarty Firth, Britain's deepest natural harbour

Photo: Workers

MOST DISCUSSION of energy now seems to focus on the wrong theme, worries about global warming due to emissions of greenhouse gases. Any warming of the earth from man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will probably be modest, most likely rising by 2 to 2.5°C over the 21st century (according to the UN Climate Panel).

The Climate Panel says that it will not reduce food production or increase the number or intensity of hurricanes. This is hardly the most important problem for any of the world's nations. Nature and humanity will easily adjust to it.

There is only one valid measure of the overall state of the environment: average life expectancy. By this standard, the environment has been improving for a century. More humans are healthier than they have ever been. The biggest improvement in life expectancy of the last 50 years was achieved by revolutionary China, as average life span rose from 30 to 70 years for 1.2 billion people. The second biggest improvement was by independent India, freed at last from the massive famines characteristic of the centuries of

British rule. The most significant manmade worsening of life expectancy, five fewer years on average, happened in post-counter-revolutionary Russia. In Britain our life expectancies continue to rise.

However, the world's nations face huge problems: every year, 10 million children under the age of five die of preventable diseases. 1.1 billion people still have no clean drinking water, and 2.5 billion have no access to sanitation, causing 2 million deaths a year and 500 million severe illnesses. The more spent on measures against global warming, the less is spent on more immediately vital matters, such as access to clean drinking water.

Plan

Britain, like every other nation, needs an integrated plan, using renewables, coal, nuclear power, oil and gas. We cannot leave development to the anarchy of capitalism, where power companies indulge in an EU-driven feeding frenzy of competition, acquisition, merger and destruction. Foreign ownership of Britain's utilities means minimum investment, maximum export of profits. The essential

work of refurbishing the national grid will cost an estimated £10 billion where's the investment going to come from? Foreign utility companies?

So cutting carbon emissions is not the best way to achieve progress. It would be costly, yet ineffective. For example, it is estimated that implementing the Kyoto agreement would cost \$1 trillion, and it would only cut a tiny slice off the temperature rise.

Britain is not about to run out of hydrocarbons. Clean coal technology, in which Britain was a world leader, was abandoned at privatisation, when the capitalist class closed down so many of our pits. So last year, we produced 28 million tons of coal, but imported 32 million tons. We need to reopen viable mines. We need to reassess the reserves of oil and gas in the North Sea and off the West coast of Scotland.

We were self-sufficient in energy until just recently. One projection is that by 2020 we will be relying on imported gas for 80% of our energy needs. We can be self-sufficient again, and we need to be, if we are to be an independent sovereign

With our coalfields shut down, North Sea oil squandered and we may be reliant on natural gas for 80% of our energy...

thinking...

'We cannot leave development to the anarchy of capitalism...'

country. Otherwise we would be subject at any time to pressure or blackmail. Supplies could be switched off at any time should the producer country change its priorities.

Amicus and the NUM recently warned that a growing crisis in our electricity industry will lead to blackouts and further electricity price rises. They warned against relying on oil and gas from unstable regions like southern Russia, the Middle East and North and West Africa.

Powergen confirmed how right the unions are when it recently told us in a leaflet distributed to its customers, "From 29 November 2004 your electricity prices will rise by around 44p a week. Why the price increase? There are many reasons, for example: producing energy is now more expensive, so the wholesale price of energy has risen for all suppliers. The UK's gas supply is also declining so we must now spend more importing gas from around the world."

The unions warned that EU directives would add to our energy problems, particularly the carbon emissions trading directive which would curtail the lifetime of existing power stations. The unions believe it is vital that the nation invests in clean coal fired power stations and in power engineering and manufacturing industries to develop expertise in designing and building new power stations.

In 2003 nuclear power stations provided 23% of Britain's electricity. By 2010, a third of these will have reached the end of their operating lives and will be closed, and nuclear power will account for just 16% of our electricity supply. Only two new stations are under construction. The closures will reduce Britain's ability to generate our own dependable energy supply. We need to plan and build more new nuclear power stations. France's nuclear plants produce three quarters of

the country's power, one of the cheapest energy supplies in Europe.

We need to reduce energy waste, estimated to cost £5 billion a year, and rationally use our resources. We need to develop new technologies to economise on energy use. The government has failed to invest in Combined Heat and Power. We need more R&D into carbon free and carbon sequestration technologies. Biomass crops could be grown especially for use as environmentally friendly fuel. This would boost farm diversity and create rural jobs. It could be competitive against conventional hydrocarbon-based energy generation, and could meet 10% of our energy needs.

Friends of the Earth say renewable energy has the potential to provide all our needs. Not so for the foreseeable future — hydroelectricity, wind and tidal sources provide just 3% of our present energy, and wind and solar energy are intermittent: their annual power output is only 25% of the potential output if operating always at full power; by contrast, nuclear power's output is 90%. Blackouts three quarters of the time, anyone?

Scares

The issue of global warming is scare-mongering, a red herring to make workers take their eyes off the tasks facing us, such as planning our energy production and stopping deindustrialisation, unemployment, the destruction of our services, and the European Union's assault on Britain.

The facts are that continental Antarctica has been cooling and its glaciers thickening for the past 30 years. Global fertility rates are falling dramatically, and with advanced technology, farmers are producing more food using fewer resources than ever before. Environmental pollution accounts for at most 2% of all cancer cases versus 30% caused by tobacco use. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the world's forests covered 40.24 million square kilometres in 1950, and 43.04 million in 1994. 80% of the world's original rain forest is still intact. Sea levels in the region of the Pacific around the island nation of

The EU's energy squeeze on Britain

THE PROPOSED European Constitution would, for the first time, put energy policy under the control of the European Commission (see page 8). Already, before the constitution has been ratified, the European Union is building up its own strategic reserve of oil and gas, grabbed from member states on the pretext of "security" and "high prices". As the proposed European constitution makes clear, this is about control of reserves, not husbandry.

At the same time, privatisation of electricity, driven by the European Union, together with an unscientific fear of nuclear power, have derailed Britain's nuclear strategy. The absurd consequence is that we are now reliant on imported French electricity (via cable under the Channel) of which 80% is produced from nuclear stations. Meanwhile, the enlargement countries are also being forced at their own expense to close their nuclear power stations and become dependent on Western supplies. In the words of the European Commission, this is "to make a re-launch of nuclear power in Europe possible"!

Tuvalu have been falling.

Some see all problems as supranational, requiring supranational solutions, world-wide action through intrusive international agreements like Kyoto, with cartoon cries to save the world through pre-emptive actions. They revive the anarchist slogan — No states, no borders — mirroring the capitalist agenda of globalisation.

Human innovation is the ultimate resource. Workers are wonderfully creative. The Greens, with their contempt for productive forces, line up with the anti-industry parson Malthus against the pro-industry Marx. The working class cannot conduct its present policy on the basis of scares about a possible future ice age in 50,000 years.

Measures for the “relief” of the poor go back to Tudor times. But have been more about the relief of the landowning and employing class.

The unholy trinity: poverty, capitalism...and

DESPITE THE BOASTS of chancellor Gordon Brown about the state of the British economy, many workers are unable to live on what they earn, many more are unemployed or constantly in and out of work. Around 14% of working age households are now in receipt of tax credits.

In total, more than three times more people receive tax credits now than received Family Credit a decade ago.

And temporary work goes with low pay. Two-fifths of those unemployed who get work are out-of-work again within six months. A third of temporary employees would like a permanent job.

Tax credits apparently do not enable people to climb out of poverty by accepting work for pitiful wages. One has to consider whether such measures are really for the benefit of the worker as advertised, or for the benefit of the employer, and it is instructive to look back at what happened when the system

was called poor relief.

The idea of poor relief dates back to Tudor times, when it was organised by the parishes. It was funded from rates raised from local landowners and tenant farmers. The poor had to apply to an overseer, who would only grant relief to those born in the parish.

“Indoor relief” was help given to paupers who lived in the parish workhouse, whilst “outdoor relief” was money or goods given to those living at home. Outdoor relief tended to be more common from the 18th century. In the South, the “Speenhamland” system was often used, when money was granted on the basis of the size of the family and the price of bread.

Opposition

There was opposition to the idea of poor relief from very different quarters. Some, like Thomas Malthus, thought that relief encouraged idleness and large families. “I

feel no doubt whatever that the parish laws of England have contributed to raise the price of provisions and to lower the real price of labour...It is also difficult to suppose that they have not powerfully contributed to generate that carelessness and want of frugality observable amongst the poor...The labouring poor seem always to live from hand to mouth — they seldom think of the future.”

Politicians influenced by Bentham and utilitarianism condemned parish administration of poor relief as inefficient and wasteful, and ratepayers were worried by the soaring bills. Poor relief costs rose from £32 million in the 1780s to £38.6 million in 1832. The enclosures of the agricultural revolution had cast many workers off the land, and domestic industry was in decline, adding to the periodic cycles of capitalism, which brought low wages and unemployment. But was poor relief itself contributing to the problem?

The Whig government appointed a Poor Law Commission, which blamed outdoor relief for farm labourers’ riots: “It appears from all our returns that the discontent of the labouring classes is proportioned to the money dispensed in poor rates, or in voluntary...” The explanation given was that the labourers thought that those administering the funds were committing fraud.

Misery

In fact the farm employers would get rid of the men after harvest and leave them to subsist the best way they could during the bitter winter months. According to W.H. Hudson, who interviewed old Wiltshire farm labourers, “the misery of these out-of-work labourers was extreme ...at night they would skulk about the fields to rob a swede or two to satisfy the cravings of hunger.”

The Poor Law Commission decided that hunger was to be corrected by punishment. It recommended that the able-bodied should no longer get outdoor relief, which should only be paid to the old or sick with no family. Instead, they would have to go to workhouses, where



Poverty in Victorian Britain: commentators at the time were inclined to blame it on the idleness of the labouring classes.

...t they have always
...asses...

...d Poor Laws

...conditions would be harsher than those
...outside, to make them less desirable than
...any work outside, however seasonal or
...pitiful the wages. The parishes were
...grouped under Guardians and a Central
...Board supervised them. This was the
...basis of the Poor Law Amendment Act of
...1834. It was in fact very difficult to
...implement. By 1837 the administration
...had largely been put in place, and
...workhouses built in the South and the
...Midlands, despite resistance in some
...places.

Trade depression

A severe trade depression in the late 1830s brought growing opposition to the Poor Law, especially in the North. The Chartists attacked the law, and women joined in the fight. Family members were separated from each other in the workhouses. Fergus O'Connor, in the NORTHERN STAR newspaper, urged taking up arms if necessary, to rid the country of "this damnable law". In Yorkshire at a public meeting in 1838 a Mrs Grasby asked how a mother could be expected to forget her suckling child. A month later the female reformers mustered in strong numbers and treated the Guardians to a roll in the snow.

In fact the Guardians increasingly resorted to outdoor relief, which was often cheaper to provide than indoor relief, and so by 1850 only 110,000 paupers out of a million were in the workhouses, mostly the old and the sick. But the law created a fear of the workhouse and made poverty seem an even greater disgrace than in past. Many would prefer to rely on friends and relatives, and others put their energies into self-help schemes through friendly societies and later the trade union movement, which were later to form the basis for a social welfare system administered by the state.

Thanks to their efforts, we have come a long way from the workhouse, but we are still living with outdoor relief and the employers who use it to profit from offering temporary or seasonal work and poverty wages.

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

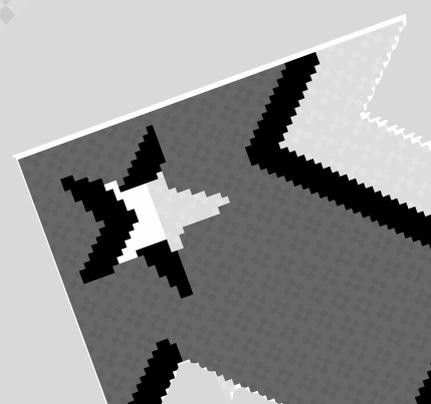
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Back to Front – Foxes and chickens

‘It seems almost unbelievable that MPs are prepared to provoke a constitutional crisis over the Parliament Act on such an issue...’

WHAT BRAVE men and women our MPs are! Too cowardly to stand up to Blair over Iraq, over tuition fees, over industrial destruction over...well, you name it, they have finally stood up for a vicious if rather cute-looking bit of carnivorous vermin. (At least, it looks cute if you’re not a real chicken.)

It seems almost unbelievable that MPs are prepared to provoke a constitutional crisis over the Parliament Act on such an issue. Had they wanted to demonstrate their independence and assert their duty to speak for their constituents, they had ample opportunity to do so over the past seven years, on issues of the future of the country and of life and death for human beings.

Those workers in the countryside who are dependent on hunting are now faced, virtually overnight, with the loss of their livelihoods. Whatever people think of hunting, this is no way to end it.

It is the disgraceful outcome of a shabby process riddled with self-importance, pursued by a political class that has consistently allowed

the countryside to be trampled on. Thanks to Westminster’s subservience to the Common Agricultural Policy, work is hard to come by. Good land is “set aside” for subsidy rather than producing food for the nation. Housing is too expensive for those that do find work. And what do MPs do? They ban hunting with dogs.

With Christmas coming, it should be the time to show goodwill to all men before favouring foxes. Instead British troops occupy Iraq, supporting the Americans as they lay waste to whole towns and cities. Reputable (and US-based) research shows that at least 100,000 Iraqis have died since the start of the war, with Falluja in smoking ruins. How could we begin to explain this to someone in Iraq? Even to think of MPs’ determination to flex their muscles over foxes rather than the war should make everyone in Britain deeply ashamed.

If the countryside now sees the House of Commons as the enemy, MPs have only themselves to blame. The whole gang deserve to be hunted down — with hounds, preferably.

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