

# WORKERS

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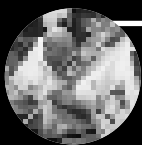


## THE EU, UKRAINE – AND LATIN AMERICA



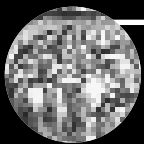
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# WORKERS

## “ Caught in the French slipstream? ”

FRENCH PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac warned on 19 January that France was ready and willing to use its nuclear weapons against any state that mounted a terrorist attack on French soil. This is a clear departure from France's professed policy of no 'first strike' – and if you follow his logic through, it could also embroil Britain in a nuclear attack. That is the logic of the EU.

Chirac announced that France's force de frappe had already been reconfigured to allow it to destroy the "power centres" of any state that sponsored a terrorist assault. He also declared that France should regard its allies and its sources of strategic supplies (in other words, oil) as covered by the French nuclear umbrella.

Worryingly for us – and anyone else in the EU – the French president described France's nuclear weapons as a "key element of the security of the European continent" and went on to call for a single EU military policy, "We will have to, at the right moment, ask ourselves about a Common Defence, which would take into account existing deterrence forces in the perspective of a strong Europe, responsible for its security."

Chirac called again for the British and French nuclear deterrents to be redirected for the defence of the whole EU. So a terrorist attack in Turkey could in future elicit the use of British nuclear weapons against any state that the EU chose to decide had sponsored the attack! That, indeed, is the logic of the EU.

## Back up into the trees

WITHOUT DARWIN, the Galapagos Islands would not be such a tourist magnet. But now, we hear, the manager of a resort on the Galapagos has told a guide not to bring up the topic of evolution, because of complaints, mainly from Americans convinced that Darwin is the devil.

The guide was told that if asked about evolution, he could have a drink with the

passenger in the evening and discuss it privately. The passengers should just be told what they wanted to hear. The guide subsequently resigned.

And American tourists in London have also started to complain or hiss when guides mention Darwin while passing the Natural History Museum! Perhaps some of our species are regressing rather than evolving.



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# Cross-border anti-EU talks

FRENCH LEADERS of the successful anti-EU Constitution campaign in France met recently with the leadership of Trade Unionists Against the European Constitution (TUAEC) and the Campaign Against Euro Federalism and Centre for a Social Europe in January in order to increase cross-border cooperation in the anti-EU struggle.

The participants combined a philosophical exchange of views with practical strategies. It was generally recognised that the EU's attack had intensified and in a vain attempt to bolster the ailing euro, the EU Commission was progressing with directives aimed at privatising as many public services as possible. Bob Crow of RMT particularly highlighted the implications of the current plans to privatise railways throughout the continent by 2010.

The meeting did not shy away from the question of mass migration either, and the close links between the freedom of movement of capital and the migration of peoples throughout the EU. This issue will be considered by the pan-European forum of anti-EU groups, TEAM, at its meeting in April.

TUAEC Secretary Doug Nicholls described the EU as a dying beast lashing out in weakness. It represents failed national capitalisms, which huddle together for warmth, but in reality are on a life support machine. He likened the real motor behind the EU, the "Round Table" of industrialists, to pirates robbing the people ever more greedily, but as their treasure chests rise so their ships begin to sink.

Speaking powerfully of the importance of public services County Councillor Marie Claire Culie described also how the May 29th Committees which energised and organised the No Vote on the Constitution were still in existence and were now taking on the many-pronged attacks on workers. French Communist Party MP Daniel Paul gave examples of how various EU plans had been defeated in well coordinated industrial and political campaigns.

Several delegates highlighted how the EU was a political project aimed at the break up of nation states and therefore democracy. Any belief that the EU can be reformed must be set in that context. Doug Nicholls explained that the EU is doing what it was set up to do. It is time to re-assert the workers' vision of independent nations peacefully co-operating. Perhaps it is also time to reread Lenin on the fallacy of the United States of Europe and James Connolly's essay, WHAT IS A FREE NATION?.

## FURTHER EDUCATION

### Recruiting staff abroad?

A LOOMING crisis in further education could mean that many lecturers may need to be recruited from abroad. This warning was given recently to the House of Commons education select committee by David Hunter, chief executive of Lifelong Learning UK, which is responsible for developing the FE workforce.

By 2010, about 135,000 new staff will be needed to replace an ageing workforce in a growing education sector. But since colleges were taken away from local education authorities, pay and conditions have slumped compared with school teachers – and now 44% of FE teachers are over 45.

The obvious solution should be to improve lecturers' pay and job security to attract new and younger recruits. Hunter has argued for this in the past but been ignored. The alternative, he said, would be to look abroad, probably outside the EU (where workers are prepared to work for much less). Such workers would be unlikely to have the necessary skills, said Hunter, so would need to be trained from scratch. Another case of importing cheaper workers to keep down pay and conditions in Britain.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

### Biggest rise for years

THE OFFICE for National Statistics reports the biggest quarterly rise in unemployment for 12 years, up by 110,000 over the three months to November, to 1.53 million. It also reports that Britain's trade deficit for the third quarter of 2005 was £10.2 billion, the highest since figures were first recorded in 1955.

**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](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)**

## EUOTRASH

### The latest from Brussels

#### Please, can we have some more?

THE EUROPEAN Parliament has overwhelmingly rejected the EU budget deal negotiated by Blair and other EU leaders in December. But, characteristically, MEPs said that the current budget deal is “unacceptably low”! Last year, the Parliament proposed a budget of 975 billion euros, much higher than the 862 billion euros agreed in December. A new draft budget is expected by mid-February.

#### Bolkestein comes back

JOSE BARROSO and the new Austrian EU presidency are set to try to push through the controversial Services Directive (known as the Bolkestein directive). Barroso has said that the Commission will produce a compromise package on the Services Directive for the EU leaders’ economic summit in March.

Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schussel added that getting a speedy agreement on the directive was essential. The Services Directive has come under fierce criticism from trade unions across Europe who warn that it will undermine social and working conditions. The European Parliament is due to vote on the current text of the directive in February.

#### Fascinating, fascinating

THE INCOMING Austrian presidency of the EU looks set to try to revive the EU Constitution, which it calls a “fascinating document”. Austria has announced plans to have a road-map for the revival of the rejected EU Constitution in place by an EU leaders’ summit in June. Chancellor Schussel says, “We have promised ourselves that we will restart the negotiations on the Constitution.” He adds, “The Constitution is hard and difficult to revive, but it’s possible.”

#### Against, but not against?

EU COMMUNICATIONS Commissioner Margot Wallstrom argues that the electorate in Holland and France did not actually vote against the EU Constitution itself: “We know that with each referendum which covers Constitutional issues you do run the risk of getting an answer to a question you haven’t put.” Oddly, she did not argue that those who voted for the EU Constitution did not mean to...



Photo: Workers

**French and British anti-EU Constitution campaigners meet to plan struggle. See story, p3**

## Port liberalisation defeated

THE EUROPEAN Parliament has rejected the European Commission’s controversial plans to liberalise port services, after thousands of dock workers across Europe went on strike on 11 January to protest against the proposals. Some 40,000 people were involved in the strike across 12 countries, including 4,500 port workers in Germany. Hamburg saw the largest strike when between 2,000 and 3,000 workers took part in the 24-hour protest.

This is the second time that the European Commission has brought forward legislation to liberalise port services and the second time that the plans have been forcefully rejected. The vote is a victory for the dock workers, thousands of whom protested on the streets of Strasbourg earlier.

The proposed legislation was first put forward by the Commission in 2001 but has come under fierce criticism from trade unions who warn that any move to liberalise cargo handling will lower safety standards and lead to massive job cuts. The legislation was initially rejected by MEPs in November 2003 but then the Commission returned with an amended version, which scraped through a European Parliament committee by 24-23 votes but was defeated when it came to the full Parliament.

## THE CITY

### Snouts in the trough

THE SNOUTS in the trough of London’s City Square Mile are about to devour over £7.5 billion in bonuses. This is an increase of £1.1 billion on 2004. 3000 individuals will receive over £1,000,000 each in individual bonuses. City bonuses paid since 2000 have been over £34.2 billion.

The profits manipulated or extracted from Britain and the world by the capitalist institutions based in London are phenomenal – big enough to make a dent in the world poverty capitalism has created

The bonuses are more than the entire budget estimated by the government for the Thames Gateway regeneration and

Olympics bid combined. Enough to say that capitalist greed is bleeding the world to death.

An estimated 325,000 workers are employed in the City and its financial operations. Obviously the vast majority of these workers see little of these payouts. But this level of wealth is credited with creating or continuing the so-called London boom, which consists mainly of expenditure on luxury cars, homes costing £6 million or so and cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery operations for men in the City have risen by 40% in the last 12 months.

New York Stock Exchange bonuses are expected to pay out £12.2 billion, so the London laggards have some catching up to do.

## UNIVERSITIES

### Ballot on pay action

ALL THE university academic unions – Natfhe, AUT and the Scottish EIS – are currently balloting their membership with a view to joint industrial action on pay. Last year the unions accepted a 3% offer which saw academic salaries falling even further behind pay in other areas of the public sector.

The unions put their claim in early at the start of the academic year. But by January no offer had been made, let alone a generous offer. Vice chancellors and even the prime minister agree that salary levels are unacceptable. It is not unusual for research staff to be paid less than the security guard who checks their pass.

When top-up fees were first mooted, much was made of how the money would be used to improve academic salaries. Indeed the then education minister Alan Johnson told the House of Commons in 2004: "University vice chancellors tell us that, in general, at least one third of the money will be put back into salaries and conditions of their staff. That will make an enormous impact ...".

This pay campaign will effectively be the first joint action of a new union: Natfhe and the AUT have voted to merge, and higher education in England and Wales will henceforward have one union.

As the ballot was launched many academics were invigilating exams and marking. Local branches will need to ensure some collective discussion before the ballot closes on 16 February.

# Teachers fight pay cuts

ON 19 JANUARY NUT members at Plumstead Manor School in South London went on strike for the second time in their fight against changes to the management structure. Like all schools in England they have been forced by government to make changes to the payment of management allowances, changes that for many teachers will mean a pay cut.

The chaos caused by the new Teaching and Learning Responsibility allowances (TLRs) results from the government's rushed and ill planned attempt to save money. A recent meeting, held by the Local Government Association to explain the implementation of the TLRs to Greenwich headteachers, ended in resentment at the unnecessary measures and accusations of incompetence. Unasked for, and certainly unwanted, all schools have been forced into new management structures, a change that for many schools will cost more than the structures they replace.

The government's attempt to cut the wage bill has for the most part backfired. Although most schools in Greenwich have chosen not to take the stick offered to beat the teachers, some, like Plumstead Manor and a few others, have seen this as an opportunity to make cuts. There are a further six schools balloting for strike action in the borough and all are greatly heartened by the lead shown by Plumstead Manor.

Since the teachers at the school say they are determined to carry on, it must be asked whether the governors have the same determination to fight when so many schools around them have chosen not to take the bait.

## EDUCATION

### Rich pickings in City academies

IF THE CURRENT White Paper on Education becomes law it will pave the way for even more different interest groups and companies to take over schools and run them. One of the latest is US group Edison, the largest company involved with state schools in the USA.

Edison senses rich pickings for those who get in on the ground floor of the proposed scheme to set up a network of new independently run state-financed 'trust' schools throughout the country, whose assets will switch from local authorities to the schools themselves.

Edison's chief executive has already

had talks with Sir Cyril Taylor, who is in charge of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Taylor has said that Edison "could open a showcase academy and be like the United Learning Trust [a Christian charity that runs several academies] with several flowing from that." Edison already has partnerships with 40 schools in Essex, Enfield, Bromley and Southwark.

Steve Sinnott, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers said, "Our attitude to Edison is that it is a for-profit company. Their interest in running schools in this country will ultimately be to make a profit. That's not how we want our schools to be run. They should be run for the benefit of the children and not for the benefit of shareholders and company profits."

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### FEBRUARY

Wednesday 8 February

**Defend Council Housing lobby of parliament**

Defend Council Housing is organising a lobby of parliament to call for direct investment in council housing. Followed by a rally in Central Hall, Westminster. For more details, see [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk).

Thursday 23 February

**7.30pm, Conway Hall, London WC1  
Away with all superstitions!**

An unholy alliance of government and religions is trying to drag the British working class backwards – away from science and progress and back to the days when thinking for yourself was a crime. The aim is to create a class that will be subservient and respectful to its 'betters'. A class that will do as it's told. WORKERS and the Communist Party invites you to discuss the attack, and our response to it. Nearest tube, Holborn.

#### MARCH

Saturday 18 March

**Keep Broadcasting Public, 10am–4pm**

Conference at Congress House, London, organised by the TUC, the Federation of Entertainment Unions and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom to discuss the forthcoming White Paper on BBC Charter Renewal. For details, email [freepress@cpbf.org.uk](mailto:freepress@cpbf.org.uk).

## MANUFACTURING

### Brays shifts out of Britain

A TOTAL of 100 manufacturing jobs at Brays, the Leeds-based manufacturers of gas burners and heating controls, are to go, as the 150-year-old firm shifts production to Mexico and China.

Brays was taken over in 2001 by Italian firm SIT, which has systematically dismantled the booming order book and shifted production overseas. The GMB union has chronicled the asset stripping and lack of investment by SIT but has been faced with competition from cheap foreign labour and production costs.

Brays' factories in the Sheepscar and Meanwood areas of Leeds have for decades been the mainstay of local employment, so the closures will have a deadening impact on the local economy.

## The criminal war in Iraq

THE US WANTS to cut its troop numbers in Iraq from 150,000 to fewer than 100,000 by the end of 2006. The Blair government wants to cut its troop numbers from 8,500 to 3,500. But they do not intend to leave Iraq. A paper in the US state-inspired journal *FOREIGN AFFAIRS* spelt out US state policy as "at least a decade of commitment and hundreds of millions of dollars and ... longer US casualty rolls". So the war crimes are set to continue

During the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the US and British states have breached the laws of war (the Hague and Geneva Conventions and the Nuremberg and UN Charters) many times over – destroying Iraq's civil administration and service infrastructure; seizing its oil fields and industries; attacking hospitals; wrecking museums, libraries and archaeological sites; using hooding and plastic cable ties on prisoners; torturing prisoners; carrying out mass detentions (more than 35,000 Iraqis have been detained by US forces since the invasion, but only 1,300 have been charged with any offence); using cluster bombs and depleted uranium; conducting air strikes (up from 25 a month from 2003 until the end of last August to 62 in September, 122 in October and 120 in November); using mercenaries and private armies; and creating, training and arming death squads.

The recent US attack on a village in Pakistan, killing a number of civilians, has been widely condemned as a war crime and an attack on Pakistan's national sovereignty. The Geneva Conventions forbid killing civilians in the hope of killing enemy soldiers.

### Planned

The *NEW YORK TIMES* reported on 20 July 2003 that Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's approval is required if "any planned air strike was thought likely to result in deaths of more than 30 civilians. More than 50 such strikes were proposed and all of them were approved." This is open admission of war crimes guilt.

The Blair government has connived at the illegal sending of people captured by British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to interrogation centres, and has illegally colluded in 210 (at least) illegal CIA 'rendition flights' through our airspace, taking detainees for torture. The Foreign Office has admitted that these renditions 'could never be legal' and that any cooperation with such flights 'would also be illegal'.

The Blair government is responsible in law for the war crimes committed by its ally, the Bush government. The International Law Commission's Article 16 on Responsibility of States (2001) says, "A State which aids or assists another State in the commission of an internationally wrongful act by the latter is internationally responsible for doing so if (a) That State does so with knowledge of the internationally wrongful act; and (b) The Act would be internationally wrongful if committed by that State."

Case proven?

## Capitalism never tires of finding way spectre of low interest rates, an excu

## The interest rate con tric

CHANGES IN THE rates of interest are often portrayed as part of the decision-making role of the Bank of England. Over the past 8 years or more, the Bank's committee has given the impression that in making 0.25% adjustments hither and thither, it has among other things successfully prevented a mortgage debt meltdown. The image is one of a firm hand on the tiller for the benefit of consumers.

Over the past 14 years interest rates have fallen from 15% to 4.5%. Curiously when they were at 15% no one at the Bank of England wanted to claim responsibility: remember Black Tuesday, 1992. This steep change reflects a host of political and economic factors but the central feature is that rates of interest express a relationship between two capitalists (that is, between a lender and borrower of capital), which in its classic form was between financier and manufacturer. However, increasingly now in Britain it is a relationship between international capital and UK domestic banks where the banks borrow and convert the capital to money and then credit the money to workers as a means of exchange, at usury rates.

A good example is credit cards, where usury rates in excess of 16% apply at a time when the Bank of England base interest rate is 4.5%. This means that capital is currently making an annual return of at least 11.5%, shared between international capital and domestic banks, by simply providing money credit to British workers, who go on to buy overpriced imported goods. No wonder international financiers and importers quietly call Britain "treasure island".

### Holding down wages

Low interest base rates for capital have also served this government and employers well by maintaining consumption through augmenting workers' spending, while keeping wage rises to no more than 3% per annum. Indeed, the current level of debt is so finely balanced that even a 1% rise in base rates would result in many workers falling into penury, which is a slightly different take on "one wage packet away from destitution".

The current historically low rates of interest are not of course confined to Britain. For example in Europe they have stood at around 2.5% for several years and in the US have only recently risen from 2.25% to above 4%. And for many years now in Britain, base rates at 4.5% have been relatively high compared with Europe and elsewhere because we have little real wealth-creating capacity. So a higher risk premium is placed on Britain by international capital markets mindful of the greater possibility of default by their British host.

Another wake-up call revolves around the question of pensions. Government and employers see the current relatively low rates of interest as an opportunity to cost pensions at all-time high projected values. The year 2030 is often used as the pensions doomsday date. But one simple question that never seems to be raised by experts is this: Why is it assumed that a constant rate of interest of 4.5% per annum or below should be applied to cost pensions for every year between 2006 and 2030? After all, there is no such thing as a natural rate of interest. Why not cost pensions assuming a future rate of 7% per annum (this is the average base rate from 1919 to now)? If we did, the current pensions paper deficit would miraculously disappear and with it the alarmist stories in the media that are used to create an environment where it is hoped that workers accept a massive cut in deferred pay.

The pensions crisis is phoney: the lower the interest rate assumed in calculations, the bigger the projected paper pensions deficit, which is then further hidden by Malthusian worries of workers living longer and

s to extract workers' hard-earned cash. Currently it's the  
se to cut pensions. But things can change...

## Bank: laughing all the way to the banks

**'Even a 1% rise in base rates would result in many workers falling into penury...'**

"dependency ratios". It is not by accident that this mock concern first emerged with the stock market collapse of 2001, when the phoney message was easier to project through a combination of low interest rates and a falling stock market. Of course the stock market is back to levels of four years ago, and the trick of fooling workers out of their pensions has become more difficult to pull off.

The fact is that interest rates have fluctuated throughout our industrial history. For example, the summer of 1843 ushered in a period of remarkable prosperity; the rate of interest was 2.5% in the spring of 1842, then fell to 2% in the spring and summer of 1843; in September it fell as low as 1.5%; whereupon it rose to 8% and higher during the crisis of 1847. So why now in 2006 do we assume that low interest rates are here to stay?

Rates of interest express a relationship between two capitalists – namely finance and manufacture – not between capitalist and labourer, yet often now it is implied that the caring Bank of England is helping or is concerned about the consumer when it pronounces on rates. Nonsense. Levels of interest are determined not only by the general rate of profit but also how that profit is subdivided between finance and



Photo: Workers

manufacture, that is, what portion of surplus value will fall to the lender and be called interest. It is this relationship upon which the Bank of England pontificates. Given these variables there can be no such thing as a natural rate of future interest.

The real question is how are we as debt-ridden, lowly paid and lowly pensioned workers going to respond to the likelihood of increasing rates of interest during the coming years, because the current crisis will eventually lead to higher rates. Engels observed in 1894, "Nothing is more amusing than to hear the

directors of the Bank of England chatter back and forth that a high interest rate and a low profit cannot permanently exist." Back to 2006 and the Deputy of the Bank of England last week added his voice to a growing chorus of concern over rising asset prices, saying that "markets have become frothy as investors seek higher returns and growth, in a low interest rate environment".

Are we just onlookers in a casino where others gamble on our future and work out new ways to cheat us out of our cash? It is time for workers to intervene and strike out for something new.

**NO TO THE  
EU CONSTITUTION**  
[www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk)

## Say it with stickers

Let Britain know what you think. No to the EU Constitution stickers are now available free of charge from WORKERS. Just send a self-addressed A4 envelope and two first class stamps to:

Stickers  
Workers  
78 Seymour Avenue  
London N17 9EB.

[Not to be used in contravention of any by-laws]

## Trade unions with members in the Local Government Pension Scheme have to resist the rapacious threats they are facing...

# Local government pensions ballot looms

MEMBERS OF trade unions in the Local Government Pension Scheme will be balloting for industrial action from the first week in February. The ballot is primarily against the government's proposal to scrap the benefit of the "rule of 85", which allows employees over 60 to retire if their age and length of service added together amount to 85 or more (see WORKERS, January 2006).

Unison, the TGWU, the GMB, NAPO (probation officers), UCATT, Amicus, the FBU (subject to a Special Conference) and the CYWU are coordinating their ballots and will also look to deliver coordinated industrial action in the weeks prior to the local elections in May. What that action will consist of, bar an initial opening co-ordinated national strike, has yet to be determined.

The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) embraces workers in local government, criminal justice, privatised utilities, the environment agency and privatised public services such as housing.

### Unholy alliance

Trade union negotiators are facing an unholy alliance of civil servants acting for the government, employers and the Local Government Association, which is dominated by Tories. While the government would probably be pleased to avoid a confrontation, by coming to a compromise agreement similar to that made with teachers and health workers, the Local Government Association and the Tories would make huge political capital out of such a climbdown. The government side is also handicapped by John Prescott's frequent absence from negotiations and the inability of lesser ministers to engage with the complexities of the issue.

The agreement reached with health workers, teachers and civil servants will result in at best a two-tier pension scheme because only current members will remain protected until 60. However, all those schemes are up for renegotiation and could be off the table in the near future – something most union members in these sectors have not been told. For

**'All those schemes are up for renegotiation and could be off the table in the near future – something most union members in these sectors have not been told...'**

the other unions to campaign for a comparable settlement would be to accept a worse position than existing terms.

Union leaders appear to lack confidence in their unions' ability to see off government attacks. There could be various reasons for this. There has been a general decline in union membership and in the number of members who fall under the LGPS. Many seem to have accepted government and employer propaganda that there is a pensions crisis, not understanding that it has been manufactured on purpose to cut pay.

### Levels of unity

There are also worries about the level of unity that can be sustained between the various public sector unions. Perhaps more worryingly, there are fears about the impact of action on the unions, their members and the embarrassment that could be inflicted on the Labour

government.

The government is itself an absentee landlord when it comes to taking responsibility. The trade union war coffers are near empty. Unison, which has donated the most to Labour, must be ruining the day it handed over its money, especially as more than 850,000 of its members face a damaging loss from the government's position.

There is no clear voice about how the dispute will be run – bar the usual ultra left all-out indefinite strike mantra. There is no confidence that the dispute can be won or indeed, what would constitute an acceptable package. Local government trade union tactics over much of the last ten years have given the government a free hand to attack trade union organisation and local democracy all in the name of its modernisation agenda.

### Slow motion

Trade unions with members in the LGPS have to resist the rapacious threats they are facing. The Warwick agreement struck between government and unions in July 2004 was designed to win Labour a third term in office, but is now worthless as a shield against government attacks. Watching a slow motion re-run of the troop trains edging towards one another like another dreadful August 1914 is a recipe for tactical bankruptcy.

We have buried our heads in the sand – ignoring the European Union Directive of May 2002, which initiated these pension proposals, and the government's Finance Act of 2004, which legislated for them. We cannot afford to fail to mobilise members against them over the next few weeks.

## Bring out your badges

Do you have any old labour movement and political badges in odd containers and drawers? Put them to good use and send them to the CPBML – we'll sell them at labour movement events during the year to raise money for the Party. Please send them to:

Badges  
78 Seymour Avenue  
London N17 9EB



It might seem far-fetched to compare Eastern Europe with Latin America, but for British workers two opposite routes are shown. Which way will we go?

## The EU, Ukraine – and Latin America...



Thick as thieves: Oleh Rybachuk, Ukrainian vice-prime minister, and Javier Solana, EU foreign affairs supremo, meeting on 13 June 2005

WHAT HAVE RECENT events in Ukraine got to do with us as British workers? They are the latest in a long line of interventions and subversions of Eastern European countries to make them bend to the will of the US and EU. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Austria and Finland no longer felt their “neutrality” mattered any more and joined the EU though not NATO. There then followed a pattern of events across the countries of the former socialist bloc designed to incorporate them into what is increasingly looking like a Free Trade Area of Europe.

First, in went the non-governmental organisations, the NGOs, almost always funded by the US or the EU. Their mission was to set up new political parties and teach them how to campaign to win elections, or to create new trade unions “compatible” with a market economy, that is, anticommunist, or to create “civil society” (a controllable opposition), or to

advise on market reforms and privatisation. Their job was to create the institutions of capitalism and ensure there could be no prospect of any kind of working class power.

Next, they were incorporated into NATO. Given that the Cold War had ended, why would they want to join NATO? Presumably to tie them in tightly to the US, to fight US wars in places like Iraq, Afghanistan or Yugoslavia, and to extend US military influence and bases eastwards towards Russia.

### Incorporation

Finally, they would be incorporated into the EU which would exploit the new markets and whose capitalists, along with those from the US, would take over their industries and services. They would be welded in with a constitution designed to let the free marketeers completely off the leash and to outlaw socialism. Their

capitals would be reduced to being venues for British stag nights while their workers would become nomadic migrants, depressing wage rates as they hunt for work across Europe, under the guise of “free movement of labour”.

Ukraine is simply the latest battlefield for this process. The so-called “Orange revolution” of 2004 was possible only because of massive funding to the NGOs from the US, Britain and other EU sources. Foreign governments and business funded those forces that would deliver the Ukraine to the capitalism of the EU and US. The following are just a tiny handful of the partners, that is, bankrollers, declared by Ukrainian NGOs:

USAID on behalf of the US government; the World Bank; Freedom House (which advocates free market economies); the Canadian, US and British

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

embassies; the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (which advocates European Unification); the Michigan-based Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (with declared assets of over \$2 billion); the Counterpart Alliance in Belarus and Ukraine (Washington-based and funded by USAID); and the International Development Law Institute (funding sources include Coca Cola and the Microsoft Foundation).

So this is how the “Orange revolution” was funded. And the next step is to get Ukraine into NATO and then into the EU. The US is insisting that Turkey become a member of the EU along with Georgia, because the US sees control of the Black Sea as essential for access to the Middle

East and the energy reserves of Central Asia. Belarus is another target for the destabilisation campaign, but is Russia itself the target? Is this why Russia, quite justifiably, clamped down recently on those same NGOs operating in its territory?

### **British workers and the EU**

So what do British workers and their unions do or say about the EU? There are still those who argue that our place is at the heart of Europe, that EU law is better than British law, that the Euro will make our holidays easier. Then there are those who argue curiously that the EU is a counterbalance to US power. Thompson’s Solicitors, the biggest trade union law firm, sent out a newsletter to unions last year advocating the EU constitution.

British unions have actively taken part in “democracy building” in Russia and Eastern Europe (and now Iraq). They are funded by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the British government body set up to establish the institutions of capitalism in wayward countries, and directly by the British government through the Department for International Development. Let’s imagine the reaction of a British government or British unions if, say, Venezuela funded an imaginary British NGO to use Cuban trade union trainers to come to Britain to teach British union reps how to establish socialism or the “dictatorship of the proletariat”? It would be seen as subversion and interference in the internal affairs of both Britain and British unions. Why then do our unions continue to do this?

## **The Free Trade Area of the Americas: RIP**

THERE WAS a good decision by the TUC conference last September to oppose the EU constitution. The conference should be congratulated. There was also a successful resolution supporting the new government of Venezuela. But Venezuela is at the heart of the fight against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the US attempt to do in the American continent what the US and the EU are doing in Europe.

The US set out its plans at the turn of the century to incorporate every country in the American continent and the Caribbean into the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, also known by its Spanish acronym ALCA), except of course Cuba, which opposed the concept from the beginning. ALCA would have meant a single currency, the dollar, for the continent and economic destruction and bondage to the US for the peoples of the region.

Cuba was later joined in its opposition to ALCA by Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay. Today ALCA is effectively dead. Perhaps, therefore, to fully understand the implications of that TUC resolution, we should understand what is happening in the American continent and see if there are any lessons for us. The election of Evo

Morales to the Presidency of Bolivia last December seems an interesting place to start. At his inauguration on 22 January, he was flanked by miners and farmers, to make the point to his military and the US, that the country’s working class will defend his government.

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America, with a majority indigenous population who, incidentally, for centuries have farmed coca. It has vast reserves of natural gas, and in recent years has seen a range of multinational companies plunder this resource for the benefit of US capital.

The US has been pressuring Bolivia to introduce wide ranging free market reforms in preparation for ALCA, and to control and asset strip the country’s economy.

Popular opposition to this, led by Morales, and to the sale of the water industry to a French company, brought down two presidents. Morales describes capitalism as the world’s biggest evil, and has exposed ALCA as US colonialism. His election represents a rejection of the US, ALCA and capitalist ‘democracy’ that enables capital to control the country. It also represents the abandonment of the

traditional political parties in Bolivia by a majority of the population. He has been elected to nationalise Bolivia’s large natural gas industry and end the US-sponsored coca eradication programme



**The Caracas slums, where much of Chavez’s support comes from.**

that has ruined farmers in many areas while failing to curb drug trafficking. The US can only look on in horror, and will no doubt play the cocaine card, despite Morales advocating the use of coca for medical and scientific purposes.

Morales' first acts following his election were visits to Cuba to sign an agreement on cooperation in health, education and sport, and to Venezuela to sign agreements on energy and health.

Seven years ago, the Venezuelan people also abandoned their traditional political parties to elect Hugo Chavez as their president. He immediately set up an assembly to draft a new constitution, which was agreed overwhelmingly in a referendum. It determined that the country's natural resources, oil and gas in particular, belonged forever to the Venezuelan people, enshrined the integrationist principles of Simon Bolivar, the liberator of much of South America, decreed that industries abandoned because of past neo liberal economic policies would be taken over by the people, and tilted power towards the majority of the population who lived in poverty while the oligarchs and the middle class lived in plenty.

After fierce battles with the US-backed opposition, including an attempted coup d'etat, the state-owned oil company, PdVSA, was rescued from plans to privatise it and brought firmly under the control of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It would now be used for the benefit of the people.

### **ALBA, the new dawn**

The Venezuelan government also opposed FTAA/ALCA and proposed an alternative to it. It was to be the Bolivarian Alternative Area (Spanish acronym ALBA, which is also the Spanish word for "dawn"). It was intended to integrate the resources of the region for the benefit of the people as an alternative to the free market.

The first ALBA initiatives were agreed with Cuba. Venezuelan oil would be sold to Cuba at around half of the market price and would be paid for over many years at a low interest rate. In return, Cuba would construct a free health service for Venezuela's poor, the vast majority of the



**1 May 2005, and Cuban workers express support for Venezuela**

Photo: [www.siporcuba.it](http://www.siporcuba.it)

population who had always been excluded from health care. The Cuban health programme in Venezuela became known as Barrio Adentro, "inside the neighbourhoods". Today, 23,000 Cuban doctors and health professionals offer a first class health service in that country.

Having established primary health care in the poor districts, Cuba now provides state of the art equipment, medicine, and

staff for the 600 new diagnostic centres across Venezuela that give a full range of health care from emergency and intensive care to dentistry and diagnostic processes, all free of charge.

The construction of the centres, funded by PdVSA Cuba, is also providing free medical training for Venezuelans so they might take over from the Cuban medical staff in the country. Venezuela wants to train 30,000 doctors for its new health service and a further 70,000 to be deployed free of charge across the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean alongside the Cuban Medical Brigades. It is not hard to imagine the reaction of the well off who have to pay dearly for this and who so far have backed the opposition to Chavez.

Similar oil deals called Petro Caribe and Petro Sur were signed with poor

**'Morales' first acts following his election were visits to Cuba and to Venezuela to sign agreements on cooperation...'**

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Caribbean and South American nations. Chavez countered opposition criticism that he was giving away Venezuela's resource by arguing that it was in Venezuela's interest to help, for example, poor Caribbean nations whose tourist industries had been decimated by the advent of cruise liners, so as to minimise emigration from there to Venezuela.

In November 2004, the people of Uruguay obliterated the Colorado Party that had ruled the country for a century and elected a new coalition under president Tabare Vasquez. This government has started to eliminate hunger among the poor and tackle housing and education. As well as being an ALBA partner in Petro Sur, it has entered into another ALBA project – TeleSur. This is a television channel whose stockholders are the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Uruguay and Argentina. It is based in Caracas and broadcasts to South America and the Caribbean in Spanish as an alternative to CNN. It mainly broadcasts news-related programmes but includes serials, sport and documentaries, and its philosophy is the promotion of ALBA. It permits advertising only from state companies and institutions.

### Literacy

Uruguay also has an agreement with Cuba on medical collaboration and is a beneficiary of the Unesco-acclaimed Cuban literacy programme called "Yes, I can do it!" This programme has already abolished illiteracy in Venezuela under Plan Robinson (verified by Unesco), and is being applied in Mexico, Brazil, Haiti, Argentina, Honduras and among the indigenous population of New Zealand.

Argentina abandoned its traditional politics when the government's neo-liberal economic policies caused the country to default on its debts. There was nothing left to privatise except the city parks. Personal savings were frozen in the banks. The new president, Nestor Kirschner, also elected to reject traditional politics, told the IMF and World Bank that Argentina would not repay their debts to them, and invited them to



**The Venezuelan people's March for Victory, Caracas, 8 August 2005**

make offers of lower sums.

Whenever a country cannot or will not repay its debts to these institutions, it is excluded from the world capitalist financial system. It cannot trade, borrow or obtain credit, and its currency cannot be traded. Venezuela proposed a barter arrangement with Argentina – oil for cattle. This was successful and Argentina then proposed to the IMF and World Bank that it issue Bonds to raise money. They agreed, assuming that no one would buy Bonds in a bankrupt nation. Venezuela immediately bought \$500 million of the Bonds raising their value, followed by a further \$500 million making the Bonds an attractive

investment. Argentina has now cleared its reduced debt with the IMF.

A participant in ALBA cooperation, Argentina looks to have broken the cycle of dictatorships and corrupt government. Venezuela and Argentina, learning from this experience, are now planning the establishment of a bank, based in South America, to enable countries that cannot or choose not to repay debts to the IMF, to continue to operate outside of the capitalist world financial system.

### Eyesight 'miracle'

Perhaps the most visual ALBA project is the joint Cuban–Venezuelan Operation Milagro ("miracle"), which is restoring sight to hundreds of thousands of the poor from the Caribbean and Latin America free of charge. In most cases, an agreement is struck between governments on the principle that the patients are selected based on low income and the home country pays for the flight. Venezuela then takes responsibility to gather the patients in Caracas, and Cuba then flies them to Havana for surgery at the Pando Ferrar Ophthalmic Hospital.

Some 1,500 patients and relatives are flown daily to Cuba, and the target for the number of operations has been raised from 100,000 annually to 260,000. There are provincial ophthalmic centres operating across Cuba with the Pando Ferrar as the reference centre. The surgeons treat cataracts, glaucoma, short sightedness and undertake cornea transplants, refractive surgery, retinopathy, and ocular plastic surgery.

Those currently participating in the project include Venezuela, Cuba, Honduras, Bolivia, Panama, Argentina, Surinam, St Lucia, Guyana, Dominica and St Kitts and Nevis. The plan is to devolve these centres to other countries to avoid the need for the flights, and the first agreement to do this was signed by Morales in Havana recently. Cuba will build and equip an ophthalmic centre in Bolivia staffed by Cuban surgeons.

Of course there have been setbacks. The government of President Lula in Brazil has recently cancelled a debt of \$15 billion to the IMF but is not yet winning the 200-year-old battle against corruption and the

power of the oligarchs.

In Paraguay, a nation associated with dictatorships, submissive government and second only to Bolivia in the poverty league table of South America, the new government of Nicanor Duarte was welcomed as he began to undo the legacy of the past dictatorship. Medical and educational collaboration with Cuba began to help the country's poor. However, the government was not able to withstand pressure from the US to allow the free transit of US military on its territory. This has now developed into a massive military base close to the point where the borders of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina meet.

### The Bolivarian Revolution

But in Venezuela, the Bolivarian revolution deepens. Land is being redistributed from wealthy landowners to landless peasant farmers. Industries that failed to survive the economic policies of the previous government are now running under new ownership – 50% by the state and 50% by the workers of those plants.

Illiteracy has now been eradicated. Radical changes in the distribution of health, education and food have been introduced. All immigrants have been granted citizenship, winning them to the revolution.

A majority of Venezuelan states are now controlled by Bolivarian revolutionaries. All national elections and referenda have been won by the Chavistas. The first “Bolivarian” universities are accepting students from the poor majority without charges instead of limiting access to higher education only to those wealthy enough to afford it. Some 1,500 CITGO petrol stations in the US, owned by the Venezuelan state, have begun to sell cheap heating oil to the poor of the US, who are also being offered free eye surgery under Operation Milagro.

The Venezuelan opposition, which controls most of the TV, radio and press, is now in a state of disarray but desperate, and is in contact with the Colombian right-wing death squads. The revolution will, however, now try to win over the middle class.

The US has barred Spain and Brazil from selling planes to Venezuela – marking

## ‘It’s of no value shouting “Solidarity with Venezuela” if you are not prepared to fight for Britain’s independence from the EU...’

the beginning of a US embargo. As for ALBA, there are now proposals for continental oil and gas pipelines (Venezuela has the world's biggest known reserves of natural gas and a recent audit suggested that oil reserves may be equal to Saudi Arabia's). Venezuela has entered Mercosur, the South American trading organisation. In April, Peru may well elect as its new president Ollanta Humala, like Evo Morales, an ally of the Bolivarian revolution and a firm enemy of FTAA/ALCA.

The unity of these nations with a common colonial past and, in most cases, a common language, is the absolute opposite of the EU or the Free Trade Area of the Americas. It is voluntary, based on the welfare of its people and mutual respect for each nation's sovereignty. The common theme is the jettisoning of the old political parties and traditions, and an understanding by the people of those countries that neo liberalism is a death sentence. The concept and language of neo-liberalism is widely understood across South America.

### EU = FTAA/ALCA

So what can we in Britain learn from this? Firstly, that a better world is possible, and we don't have to accept the EU as inevitable. Secondly, we should not cling on to the existing traditional political parties – let go of Labour.

But what practical lessons are there for us to learn to tackle the EU in the same way that they have tackled the Free Trade Area of the Americas? Well, we can start by recognising that the EU and FTAA/ALCA are one and the same. It's of no value shouting “Solidarity with Venezuela” if you

are not prepared to fight for Britain's independence from the EU, in the same way that Venezuelans have fought for their independence from FTAA/ALCA.

We could also stop our unions being used as partners in colonial-style “nation building” in Eastern Europe and Iraq. We should demand that our unions are free of government influence and control, refusing funding from government front organisations to help promote their agenda. This is, after all, what the TUC demands of foreign unions.

We could, for example, demand that Britain refuse to accept doctors and nurses from poorer countries, be they Malawi or Poland, and that no British-trained doctors or nurses be allowed to take their qualification to richer countries such as the US. This would protect poorer countries and force Britain to train more of its own doctors and nurses. This would, of course, be illegal under European Union law on the free movement of labour and would require us to take control of our own borders.

What about a demand that British natural resources should be owned by the British people in perpetuity, like in Venezuela? This would mean nationalising (or maybe Venezuelan style co ownership) North Sea oil, what remains of our coal industry and our water industry. Does that sound so bad? But it would contravene the Human Rights Act (an EU creation) that protects capitalist property rights, EU regulations and the proposed EU Constitution.

How about the state and the workforce taking over industries laid waste by Blair's continuation of Thatcher's economic policies? We could start with Rover, move on to the coal industry (investing in Clean Coal Technology) and then tackle all those manufacturing companies that have gone to the wall. However, the EU does not permit the state to ‘subsidise’ these industries, and EU regulations would deem it to be ‘anti competitive’.

So it becomes clear that we cannot make progress, we cannot do these basic, simple things whilst we remain in the EU. Let us learn and take hope from events on the American continent. But the buck stops here with us.

The heresy that there is only one life was a crucial step in the B struggle to assert its right to think for itself...

## Death comes alive: the end of the afterlife

ONE OF THE most important native English heresies was the idea that when a person died that was it, they died. Or in a milder form, their soul slept until humanity arose from the condition of exploitation. Either way, the English tradition of appreciating that all things die was profoundly revolutionary, and always linked to the struggle for social change, science and culture.

Radicals who believed in this “mortalist” idea – first expressed, perhaps, by William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English in the early 16th century – were considered by all others, including the grandees of the Reformation, beyond the pale. And rightly so. To say when you’re dead, you’re dead, challenges all religious ideas of whatever denomination. It represents the beginning of fighting for a decent collective life on earth. Animals live on earth, but the idea that you died and could return as an animal did not take hold in a land that had dealt with its tribal and pre-agricultural heritage quite early on.

Mortalism was a long-standing intellectual tradition in England that gained a simple expression at the time the first trade unions were born. William Blake wrote in *THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL*, around 1810: “Thou art a man: God is no more: Thy own humanity learn to adore.”

### Where did it come from?

But more interestingly where did it come from in the first place? It was a humanist tradition, which stemmed from the survivors of defeated peasant rebellions of the 1380s who recognised that the struggle to improve things on this earth was the primary thing and any illusion that there was another world to fight for was daft. This was especially sharp in their minds as they had seen monarchy and Church, believers in this other world, disembowel their fellow rebels.

Around the same time, a group called the Lollards, interestingly one of the first to respect women’s democratic political contributions, was also one of the first to disseminate this simple idea. Humanity, not divinity, forced its way onto the agenda through them and many other craftsmen



The Ploughman, from Holbein's DANCE OF DEATH

and enlightened peasants who had endured the mud and superstition. Instead of rewards and punishments bestowed by the church, society was really controlled by the consciences of people. The Muggletonians, who arose in the aftermath of the English Civil war and were also known as radical Puritan, and who were by far the most revolutionary force ever known in England until the formation of a

Communist Party, particularly extended the logic of the death of the afterlife into all aspects of morality and behaviour. In so doing, they paved the philosophical way for English materialism.

At death the body returns to the elements, hence no such thing as heaven, purgatory, or hell. This thinking laid the basis of opposition to Catholicism, and was also essentially scientific. The Bible, once a

# WHAT'S THE PARTY?

source of external control, could then be made into poetry, an allegory, an account in reality of human beings and their beliefs, rather than a creed or a dogma.

Many woodcuts survive from the medieval period called THE DANCE OF DEATH. The most famous sequence is by Holbein. What you should look out for are firstly those sequences which try and frighten you by the thought of death to make you "obey the priests and the Church or when you die you will go to hell", and on the other hand those sequences which depict death as a liberated happy character levelling the rich and undermining existing social hierarchies. One tradition stems from the feudal ruling class and its clergy; the other comes from the feudal socialist tradition.

One early expression of this thinking would be the opposition to church marriage. The most precious bond of social relations would be formed in a civil, non-religious ceremony. People came together in the eyes of friends and society not in the eyes of non-existent gods. The poor old Church of England has been seeking to recoup the ground, and donations to the offertory, ever since.

Interestingly, a sect that combined such views was called the Familists, early dissenters who arose in the mid-1550s. In turn their ideas greatly influenced the progressive forces in the mid-16th century who in turn influenced the revolutionary forces of the English Civil War. Remember, throughout the period people holding such views were hideously tortured in the name of God. There was about a 400-year Inquisition in England, Scotland and Wales with thousands of progressive people being slaughtered for their views.

The trends called humanism, the Reformation and then the Enlightenment, were pale reflections of deep-seated and forcefully revolutionary ideas. A few fanatics apart, who really believes God created the earth and who really believes that there is a heaven and a hell?

**In a future issue of WORKERS we will look at the origins of religion itself and the reason why it continues to replicate itself long after its reasons for being have gone.**

**We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.**

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via 'faith' schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

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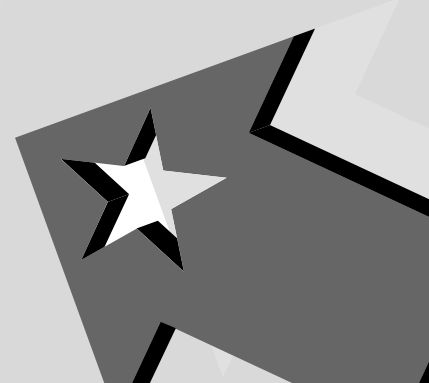
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# WORKERS



## AWAY WITH ALL SUPERSTITIONS!

**Public meeting  
Thursday 23 February, 7.30pm**

**An unholy alliance of government and religions is trying to drag the British working class backwards – away from social progress and science, and back to the days when thinking for yourself was a crime. The aim is to create a class that will be ignorant, subservient and respectful to its ‘betters’. A class that will do as it’s told. The Communist Party invites you to discuss the attack, and our response to it.**

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**Public meeting**

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