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LIFE AND SOUL

SO, WHAT CLASS
ARE YOU?

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Fire: alongside the night shift

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TRANSPORT: OFF THE RAILS



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

First thoughts

THE GOVERNMENT'S white paper on energy is expected early in 2003. The anarchy, bankruptcy and uncertainty affecting the electricity utility companies is well documented (see feature, p6). The death rattle of the coal industry seems to be unheard in Downing Street.

There are 16 deep coal mines open in Britain. One, Ellington, has a life expectancy of five years. Three have a life expectancy of ten years: Clipstone, Thorseby and Wellbeck. Four have a life expectancy greater than 10 years: Kellingley, Rossington, Tower and Hatfield.

In 10 years Britain may have only 4 deep mines working: 3 in Yorkshire, 1 in Wales. Millions of tons of coal will remain unmined. Coal imports still flood the country from the USA, South Africa, South America — 30 million tonnes, equivalent to 30 pits, 30,000 jobs.

It is estimated that 2020 will see 70% of Britain's electricity produced by gas generation, with 90% of that gas imported. The government's white paper on energy will make interesting reading...an epitaph to the coal industry, perhaps?

Second opinion

FOR THE ELEVENTH year in a row, the United Nations has supported a motion condemning the US blockade of Cuba. In 1992 59 nations opposed the blockade, 3 nations supported it.

In 2002, 173 nations opposed the blockade, three nations supported it: the United States, Israel and the Marshall Islands. Israel as the US's military gauleiter in Palestine is to be expected. But the Marshall Islands? An even sadder US ally, this was a US colony until 1986, with the dubious honour of being the US missile and nuclear test site. It is no more than

a string of tiny islands totally dependent on US for trade, aid and defence, and following the piper's tune.

This vote is more significant than in previous years because it shows that 90% of the UN reject the US position over Cuba. This must also include Bush's continued accusation that Cuba is producing weapons of mass destruction including biological and chemical weapons — a lie that could be used to justify not only the economic blockade but also military intervention by the US.



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WORKERS is published monthly — and we wish a happy new year to all our readers.

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Fishermen fight back

FISHERMEN are up in arms over the European Union's fishing policies, and the dissent is not confined to Britain. Wednesday 11 December saw action in three countries — Britain, France and Belgium — against what the fishing fleets see as EU plans to destroy the fishing industry.

In all three countries there was fury at the European Commission for continually ignoring the suggestions and advice of the industry professionals in drawing up management plans. Europeche, the European fishermen's representative body, has described the commission as conducting "one way pseudo-consultation".

In Britain one of the biggest demonstrations was in the North East, where 200 boats assembled off the Tyne Piers at 9am and set off 1,000 distress flares. Boats from Amble, Alnwick, Newbiggin and Blyth north of the Tyne and from Sunderland, Hartlepool and Whitby to the south formed the demonstration.

The action was part of an increasing pattern of activity. On 5 December over 1,000 people from Supporters of Scotland's Fishing Communities (SSFC) had descended on the Scottish parliament. Buses came from all over the north east of Scotland. For the first time in its history the Fraserburgh port market was closed during a normal working week to allow buyers, salesmen and harbour employees to join the fishermen in the protest.

The immediate demand of the fishermen and the whole fishing industry is very simple: they want the European Union to step back from imposing any more restrictions until the results of current technical measures and decommissioning have been assessed.

An insight into the mood and aspirations of fishermen might be detected in a two-sentence letter to the editor of FISHING NEWS on 6 December from a Lowestoft correspondent:

"Dear Editor, Here we are in 2002, a nation standing on coal and surrounded by fish, yet we can do nothing without Brussels' say so. Rule Britannia."

PRIVATE FINANCE

Claims without evidence

THE GOVERNMENT likes to claim that its Private Finance Initiative will help to reform public services. Yet Paul Maltby, the author of a new report by the Institute for Public Policy Research, has pointed out, "There is currently no evidence about whether the PFI delivers in practice."

The IPPR found that only 23 of 378 completed PFI projects had been independently audited, contrary to government claims that the programme is closely monitored. The government claims that its many opponents are dogmatically wedded to 'the old ways', but clearly it is the government that is dogmatically imposing an untested policy, in obedience to its paymasters.

The IPPR backed calls for an independent financial review of the PFI, as the Labour Party Conference voted for in October, but which the government ignored. But we do not need a review: we need to strengthen our union organisation, so that we can deal with any government-imposed schemes.

MANUFACTURE

Record deficit

BRITAIN'S DEFICIT in the trade of manufactured goods, food and oil reached a new record in October: £3.6 billion, up from £2.7 billion in September and £3.5 billion in August — the worst figures since records began in 1967.

Exports have declined by 8% over the past three months, giving the lie to all of Gordon Brown's claims of economic success.

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

NATO**Ever expanding**

THE PLANNED NATO expansion from 19 countries to 26 by 2004, taking NATO military operations up to the border of Russia, has been described by the Russian Communist Party as the greatest threat to Russian security since the Nazi invasion in 1941.

Though the government of Russia appears to be signalling appeasement to the Bush administration, no one can ignore the continuing war preparations within Europe. The US-led attempt to unravel post-Second World War Europe is arming and fanning dangerous elements just as the US armed Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden when it suited them.

Europe now has an increasing number of multinational armies, including the EU Rapid Reaction Force (60,000 strong), the International Stabilisation Force, various UN 'peace-keeping' armies and now another NATO-sponsored 20,000 strong multi-national strike force.

Firefighters are not the only people being told "modernise or die". All wannabe members of NATO have had the same message — modernise or be marginalised from Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General and one-time Labour MP. In other words if you want to be in my gang you need not only US GI uniforms, helmets and offensive hardware but also the economics and culture of the US market-place.

Robertson dismissed the European Union's military muscle flexing as "pygmy" and the EU defence budget of £100 billion as "a waste of taxpayer's money". All may pay lip service to the war on terrorism, but the contradictions between US and EU interests, let alone the sovereignty of individual countries (vividly demonstrated by the ongoing USA-EU trade sanctions), can easily become war of a bloody nature. Nobody maintains and continues to create armies unless the intention is to use them.

The dismantling and razing of every brick associated with socialism and the old USSR, is still the goal of US interests. Here EU and US interests coincide, with support for German eastward expansion and appeasement of Germany by Britain and France.

Sabre-rattling and war-games in Europe, played by morons with deadly weapons, will bring the danger of war nearer just as the mobilisations on the eve of the First World War coupled with the once efficient railways took millions to their deaths. The goal must remain the same: Britain out of Nato, US bases out of Britain.

EU-US police in data merge

MORE PROPOSALS from the US and Europol (the EU's police force) have resurfaced to produce a protocol for the exchange of all data held electronically. The US and EU security services would be able to exchange all information held on individuals, irrespective of source, validity or accuracy. An agreement was signed a year ago to "enhance the strategic and technical cooperation between Europol and the US law enforcement authorities" and this protocol is the next step down the line.

The protocol ignores other national or international legislation protecting privacy or data protection and would not be referred for any consultation or ratification at any level within the EU. What the USA is determined to have, in the name of the war on terrorism, is the ability to spy on everybody. There is almost no data protection or privacy legislation in the USA. All data is seen as legitimate for use in the market place.

Yet again the proposed protocol has been hastily shelved in face of criticism from civil liberties organisations. But it has been merely shelved and could easily be dusted off and presented again (as has happened in previous years), until the US eventually gets its way. If implemented this would extend the terms of the US Patriot and Homeland Security Acts, which essentially set up a police state, to countries within the EU.



PEOPLE OF NORTH KENT on the march in Chatham last month on a wet Saturday, demonstrating against proposals to site an international airport at nearby Cliffe. Campaigners say that the airport would cost over £16 billion, destroy nature reserves and have a major impact on the environment. Most of the affected boroughs, and a large majority of North Kent's residents, are against the plans. Cliffe is closer to the Continent than to the North of England, raising concerns that part of the inspiration for the project may be simply to provide an entry route into Europe.

AMBULANCE SERVICE**Pay victory for staff**

LOW PAID AMBULANCE staff in Lincolnshire have just won impressive pay rises, with no loss in jobs. Staff were six hours from an overtime ban when the deal was struck. They have won backdated pay rises of between 11 and 17%, and a 39-hour week.

The deal will see pay for ambulance technicians rise immediately from £16,191 to £18,883, with another rise to £19,283 next April. Paramedics and health

transport workers have also won big rises in pay.

The deal does not include an expected 3.25% increment under Whitley guidelines (the Whitley council is the national pay body for NHS staff).

Staff have agreed to a modernisation agreement with changes to rosters, but no reduction to staff numbers.

"This is a cracking deal for our staff," said Unison's East Midlands regional organiser, Richard Parker. "For the first time key workers have won the pay and recognition they deserve for their excellent public service."



Alongside the night shift

With firefighters under government pressure over shift patterns, **WORKERS** has received this report from a local authority structural engineer called out during the night to advise the Fire Commander at a big fire in a large commercial building on the border of Sandwell and Birmingham.

"THE COMMANDER had mobilised 12 fire engines and their crews and by the time I arrived at 12.45, fire fighters had been tackling the fire for two hours. I saw the breathing apparatus crew had been in to rescue people; they were now recuperating.

"At first I could not see the fire although I could smell smoke from afar. Having reported to the control centre I was asked to assess the likelihood of various parts of the building collapsing so that the Commander could plan the strategy to tackle the fire while minimising the risk to firefighters and others.

"Walking around the building with the Commander I could see that the building on fire was a six-storey structure with other buildings surrounding it, so no direct access by fire engines was possible. One of the concerns was that the front elevation above a courtyard had a large number of metal windows and fire could be seen inside.

"What was the likelihood of debris and masonry falling? The sides of the building were enclosed by adjacent buildings with some fire doors. Behind the building were long single-storey factory buildings so that some crews had to pump water through a long building onto non-fragile parts of the roofs from where the firefighters were directing their water jets.

"With the advantage of mobile access equipment we got to the top of the adjacent roof and sufficiently near to inspect the structure, which turned out to be a steel framed building encased in brickwork with early design concrete floors. I was able to assess that it would not collapse for at least four hours and discussed various structural issues. The commander said I would not be needed for several hours and that they could call me again later.

"As I left I noticed the community women volunteers had already set up a mobile kitchen and were handing out hot drinks to tired firefighters as they were relieved by others maintaining steady effort. Some crews left and were replaced by others all fitting quickly into an overall plan.

"I returned to the fire at 7.30 in the morning. When I arrived the fire had been largely extinguished and a new shift was at work. The issue for me was to advise to what extent the fire damaged structure was stable and safe. The structure had not collapsed and although it was not economically repairable it had retained integrity.

"As I walked through the structure with the commander it was clear that the fire fighting had prevented spread to all neighbouring buildings and even to parts of the affected building. I could see large amounts of potentially highly flammable plastic materials wet. Had they caught fire the smoke would have been highly toxic, pollution great and damage to other buildings severe.

"Meeting the insurance assessors on my way out, I said, "By controlling the fire so effectively they have saved you lots of money." "No," he replied, "they have saved all of us increases in premiums." Workers were arriving at their workplaces in the surrounding buildings; they would still have jobs. Residents had not had to be evacuated saving the local authority much needed resources.

"The success occurred because at the critical time sufficient resources had been mobilised. The fire had not been chased but controlled. Twelve tenders meant six fire stations fully mobilised quickly. As some were key stations, other stations had to mobilise to replace their tenders, moving crews all over the west midlands. Communications, training, specialisation had made a huge emergency into routine.

"Only crass ignorance would take such resources for granted and cut fire cover at night."

STUDENTS

On the march for grants

THE NATIONAL Union of Students held a national demonstration on Wednesday 4 December. 20,000 students from all over the country marched in driving rain from Malet Street in central London to Kennington Park in South London.

The government wants to introduce the market into higher education, to let different universities charge different levels of fees. But the students were calling for decent grants, and vigorously opposed the government's schemes for top-up fees.

COURTS

Stoppage over restructuring

STAFF in the newly created West Midlands Magistrates Courts Committee have held a largely unreported half day stoppage — the first stoppage in the service's 800-year history. Seven courts have been re-structured and 'modernised' into one, with wage cuts introduced for over 150 staff.

PORTUGAL

Strike against EU plans

PORTUGUESE WORKERS in private and public sectors, in transport, the fire services, hospitals and local government all stopped work on 10 December. The massively supported one-day strike was called by the CGTP trade union confederation as the new government moves to carry out the dictates of the European Central Bank. It has raised taxes, cut public spending and wants to 'reform' Portugal's labour laws.

RUSSIA

Return to Stalingrad?

THE RUSSIAN State Duma (parliament) is to receive a formal request for the renaming of the city of Volgograd to its previous name, Stalingrad. This follows extensive campaigning by war veterans who wish to see the site of one of the pivotal battles of the Second World War honoured on its 60th anniversary in February 2003. It also follows increasing public support for the achievements of the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin. The 60th anniversary of the victory at Stalingrad and the 50th anniversary of Stalin's death will see major commemorations in Russia in 2003.

Inside the unemployment figures

HOW MANY PEOPLE are really unemployed? The government counts only those who claim unemployment-related benefits, one million people. But the Royal Statistical Society, among others, has pointed out that this understates the number of unemployed.

A recent study, *THE REAL LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT 2002*, by Christina Beatty, Stephen Fothergill, Tony Gore and Anne Green of the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, concludes that the real figure in January 2002 was not one million, but 2.8 million people, 9.5% of the potential working population. The extra 1.8 million have been pushed onto other benefits or out of the benefits system altogether. As the authors write, “where jobs are in short supply many people are realistic enough to know that they are unlikely to find suitable employment. They therefore give up looking for work, but that does not make them any less unemployed.”

Destruction

The authors get their figure of 1.8 million by comparing the numbers getting sickness benefits in 2002 with those in 1981. But in 1981 we were already two years into Thatcher’s destruction of industry, and three million people were unemployed. The authors say that 1981 was “before the onset of large-scale hidden unemployment”, yet elsewhere they acknowledge that “the far smaller number of sickness claimants prior to the 1980s and 90s indicates that far more people with health problems for example were once in employment”. So most likely many (how many?) of the 570,000 people on sickness benefit — according to the 1981 Census — were actually unemployed rather than sick.

By 2002, 2.65 million people were on sickness benefit, 2.08 million more than in 1981. But the authors estimate that just 1.1 million of these were actually unemployed. They get this figure by taking as a benchmark for sickness claimants the proportion of people of working age who claimed sickness benefits in what they call ‘fully-employed’ parts of South-East England. They define three per cent unemployment as fully employed, which is itself highly questionable. Why not count all the extra 2.08 million people as unemployed?

Also, the 1991 Census showed 600,000 people of working age as retired, and the authors say there has been “a modest subsequent increase” (how many?) in these numbers. But for 2002 the authors identify only 120,000 people as “excess early retired”, again, by counting against the doubtful 1981 figures.

Full employment?

In a genuine full employment economy, the extra 980,000 people on sickness benefit, and the extra 480,000 (plus) people early retired, could all have been working. Add this 1.46 million to the authors’ estimate of 2.8 million, and we get a figure of 4.26 million unemployed, which, as we have seen, almost certainly still understates the reality.

As the authors show, more than 20% of people in Liverpool, Glasgow, Middlesbrough, Tower Hamlets, and parts of South Wales were unemployed. Unemployment is unevenly distributed, but it is wrong to conclude from this, as the authors do, that ‘a strengthened regional economic policy’ will solve the problem so we do not need to change macroeconomic policy. A policy focused on the North-West, the North-East, Central Scotland and South Wales would ignore London, which has the highest single regional total — 382,000 unemployed — and would not solve the general unemployment problem.

The vast scale of the problem, at least 4.26 million workers unemployed under a capitalist Labour government, demands a national, not a regional, response. We need to create millions of jobs, and there is plenty of work that needs doing to rebuild Britain.

The government says that its figures prove that a Labour government works. But in fact the real figures prove conclusively that capitalism doesn’t work, that it doesn’t satisfy everybody’s right to work, and that it cannot deliver full employment.

The government is due to publish a white paper on energy in March. The process has already commenced.

Electricity supply: the road to anarchy

THE INSANITY and chaos of the market’s impact on productive forces are probably best shown by the present anarchy running unchecked throughout the British power industry. The autumn months of 2002 have seen companies devouring companies, companies teetering on the edge of administration — the polite term for bankruptcy — with the road map as to who owns whom changing daily before the ink has dried.

The road to anarchy started with the Thatcher government adopting the European Union directives in the mid-1980s to ‘liberalise’, ‘deregulate’ and ‘privatise’ the electricity supply industry.

The subsequent sell-offs and takeovers by multinationals removed any national control over the strategic direction of the industry. Tory determination to burn gas for electricity generation had a dual impact, with a licence to print money for their company friends and the deliberate obliteration of the British coal industry as an act of vengeance against the miners. It also ensured that overcapacity in the electricity supply industry ran at about 25%.

Excess

Changes introduced by the Labour government, via the New Electricity Trading Arrangement (NETA) in 1998, were intended to curb excess profits and pass genuine cost savings to the consumer. The cost of producing electricity has fallen in real terms between 25 – 40%. This has had a huge impact on the profit returns of the generating companies.

The changes were also intended to meet internationally agreed reductions in carbon emissions — by driving out power stations based on present “old” technology. No coal-fired power station had ‘clean coal’ technology as such. So under the guise of being environmentally friendly this government has ensured that Britain’s coalfields remain sterile. Britain is to have only one coal-fired station by 2020.

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The lower cost of producing power has raised output and resulted in a situation where there are now too many power stations and too much competition, though cost reductions have not been passed back to the consumer. Further, debt burdens and sheer company greed on an international scale have gone into overdrive. As quoted in *WORKERS* (July 2002) a senior US utility manager employed by Dynegy forecast there would be power cuts in Britain by March 2003 caused by too much productive capacity and a low profit rate. It could be a direct quote from Karl Marx.

Meltdown

The government is due to publish its white paper on energy in March. Already, as though scripted by Groucho Marx, the meltdown of the industry had begun. British Energy (BE), the nuclear generator subsidised by the taxpayer, has set the pace by desperately seeking additional government funding to stave off bankruptcy.

Despite having somewhere in the region of 25% of the electricity market, BE could not meet the NETA edicts. For BE to have been privatised in the first place, the guarantee of a licence to print money had to be writ large to bribe the City. Once this guarantee was removed BE was in dire trouble. The £650 million loan was ushered in to stop the company going into administration. To repay the loan, it is trying to sell its share of Bruce Power, a Canadian nuclear subsidiary, for £500 million.

The government loan has been referred to the European Union — which initially declared it unlawful and a breach of EU subsidy regulations. Ironically, the Canadian subsidiary is seen as a gold mine because Ontario province, to prevent power cuts during this summer (!), in circumstances similar to the scandal in California following electricity



‘At the height of the crisis, Drax power station was threatened with disconnection for not paying its electricity bill...’

deregulation, had to import electricity at up to 40 times the market price.

So BE staggers towards collapse with further revelations, such as the £13 million shortfall which has opened up in the pension fund, affecting the security of 10,000 BE pensioners.

Hot on the heels of BE is another company, Texas Utilities (TXE). TXE has defaulted on its £130 million debt bond. Almost overnight, the value of TXE shares collapsed, with share trading suspended. The shares are now being referred to as ‘junk bonds’. Suddenly the predators are in for the kill and Powergen has devoured TXE.

At the height of the crisis, in true

pantomime fashion, the Drax power station (which supplies 60% of the electricity TXE sells to its 5.5 million-customer base) was threatened with disconnection for not paying its electricity bill! Likewise UK Coal threatened to cut off coal deliveries to Britain’s largest power station because the coal bill had not been paid.

Pensioners

Powergen’s acquisition of TXE may have prevented the company from being placed into administration but it does not necessarily save the 10,000 pensioners or alter the fate of the £1.2 billion pension fund, which is likely to be swallowed up to meet TXE’s debt crisis, with echoes of the US Enron scandal from earlier in the year.

Though Powergen (German owned by Eon) may have snatched the TXE customer base, so claiming a market penetration of 23% of domestic customers, all is not well. A senior Powergen executive has deemed the market as “bust” and two power stations

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— Isle of Grain and Killingholme — have been promptly mothballed to cut costs.

Four of the electricity companies that entered the autumn season — BE, TXU, AES Drax and First Hydro — have debts in the region of £1.46 billion. The market is crucifying them. Their only solution is to destroy the means of overcapacity. Back to Karl Marx again: “enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; the conquest of new markets; more thorough exploitation of the old ones”. The treadmill is in hyper-drive.

Storms

And yet the companies that were hit by storms in October could not restore power to over 18,000 homes for nearly a week. Why? Because they had gambled

‘The companies that were hit by storms in October could not restore power to over 18,000 homes for nearly a week. Why?’

that they could reduce the numbers of skilled staff and skimp on or avoid routine maintenance — and that the impact would only be felt in a major storm maybe once every ten years, thus providing huge savings. This proved to be a serious miscalculation.

The company 24Seven, part of

Electricité de France (EdF), had to ship hundreds of French electricians and line staff into Britain to ensure reconnections. The estimated cost of re-furbishing the national electricity grid is £10 billion. The grid is taken for granted, but it brings head to head two diametrically conflicting concepts: an essential to civilised life versus the market.

The government White Paper has to address the impossibility of reconciling the ‘market’ with the need to plan strategically over a significant number of years. It needs to assess all fuel options: nuclear, coal, oil, gas, tidal, wind, solar, etc. It needs to ensure that all technologies will maximise cheap, efficient exploitation of resources for the benefit of the people of Britain in a safe and environmentally sustainable manner.

Overcapacity

This produces a series of major problems for the government. If there is overcapacity (roughly 25%) and British Energy is bankrupt, do they let it go to the wall as demanded by its competitors and political opponents such as Greenpeace? You cannot just switch a nuclear power station off and put the closed sign up.

Likewise, to use the estimated 1,000 years of coal reserves in an environmentally friendly fashion you need ‘clean coal’ technology. Such technology requires significant investment, the use of industry to keep industry clean and productive for society. This presents a major difficulty as the coal industry and the heavy engineering required to build such plant have been abandoned.

So the real change needed by the government is ideological. It has to spurn the market economy. It has to give a steer to planning resources whose use and life expectancy will run over decades. It has to demonstrate commitment to a geographic entity and national sovereignty — not to some transient boardroom. Its continuing failure to do so means it will have to go the same way as Thatcher and Major.



If their demands are not to be mere idle aspirations, teachers will have to plan their own modernisation agenda...

Standing up for professional education



WHY ARE TEACHERS being so precious about government proposals to employ an extra 20,000 support staff in schools every year? After a long and successful campaign to get the government to recognise teacher shortages and the intolerable nature of teacher workload, the teacher unions are now, unreasonably in the government's view, reluctant to cooperate with their proposals.

The Pit

In fact there is not really a shortage of teachers — there is just a shortage of those already trained who are willing to work unacceptable hours for inadequate pay. They occupy what is known cynically by government as “the PIT” — the Pool of Inactive Teachers.

Face-to-face talks are continuing, with the government wanting to link their proposals (such as they are) for workload reduction and teacher preparation and marking time with a rapidly accelerating recruitment of staff

‘There is no teacher shortage, just a shortage of those already trained who are willing to work unacceptable hours for inadequate pay...’

without teacher qualifications.

The government is contemplating the recruitment of 10,000 additional qualified teachers by the end of this Parliament. That's an average of less than half an extra teacher in each of Britain's 23,000 schools over the next three to four years. But they propose to recruit 20,000 extra teaching assistants every year. And they recommend that many of these should be able to take sole charge of whole

teaching groups — 30 or so pupils — under the notional ‘supervision’ of a qualified teacher who may not even be in the building.

The unions are concerned that the professionalism of teachers and the quality of education will be undermined, with a cheap solution to the teacher shortage imposed under the ever present “modernisation” agenda. This is what the government calls the “remodelling of the school workforce” and what teachers call the dilution of the profession.

Valued

Of course, many of the government proposals for extra support staff are very welcome. Teachers value the contribution of such staff as part of the team, and want to see their numbers expanded alongside the tens of thousands of extra teachers needed to end the teacher shortage.

The drive for higher standards needs

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to be accompanied by a drive for more professionally trained teachers, with the time and resources to do their jobs properly — and supported by education support workers as part of the school's integrated team.

Such a team is not a group of people who all try to do the same thing at the same time, or who are interchangeable. It is a collective in which team members respect and protect each other's roles and skills.

While teachers would be glad to see extra non-teaching staff supporting their professional role, they will not accept that role being replaced by unqualified staff.

The government want to see support staff of three types: administrative and organisational; behaviour and guidance; and "pedagogical" (which to you and me means teaching). Each of these three types of support would be delivered at all levels of responsibility, with appropriate training through NVQ and higher qualifications.

For admin and organisation support,

teachers would have "personal assistants", who would provide them with technical, clerical and admin support, while the school as a whole might employ a bursar, a business manager, a buildings and site manager etc, at senior management level.

To help in behaviour and guidance, the support staff might take on some work with pupils around registration and individual counselling, with senior manager support staff employed as "behaviour policy coordinators".

Much of this would be welcomed by teachers, as would aspects of the "pedagogical" strand of support, with additional teaching assistants supporting the teacher by working with small groups of children, or one to one with children who have particularly pressing needs.

Substitutes

But the government insists that "advanced teaching assistants" should take on and substitute for the role of the teacher in some classes — with no professional teacher training, less understanding of the learning process, and, of course, considerably less pay.

Over four years ago, Margaret Hodge MP, then Chair of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education, now Higher Education Minister, wrote:

"We should be thinking of employing fewer teachers, not more. Over the next few years information technology will revolutionise our schools...and the use of interactive software could replace more formal lessons... If pupils are working from lessons on the Internet, a trained classroom assistant may be as useful as a teacher... The teacher's monopoly in the classroom will be brought to an end." ("Fewer teachers, please, not more", *NEW STATESMAN*, May 1998.)

Margaret Hodge was then flying the "remodelling" kite, which is now well and truly airborne, and threatening to tear education from the grasp of trained professionals. But is there yet another agenda, apart from staffing schools on the cheap, and undermining teachers' and parents' demands for more qualified teachers along with the pay and conditions that would recruit and retain them in the service?

Clearly, with the deliberate fragmentation and deregulation of the

It's all going to end in tiers

The development of different curriculum "pathways" at 14 for children of different aptitude and abilities has led to fears of a two- or three-tier education system developing.

The promotion of specialist schools and city academies, preferentially organised and funded, has added to concerns that this return to selection and inequality will be reflected not just within schools, but between schools. A case of divide and rule if ever there was one.

The vocational pathway much advocated by government for pupils considered to be disengaged and disaffected from school has the look of the rather rough and stony surface of the secondary modern about it, while the academic pathway is likely to give a considerably smoother ride.

The activities and emphases of the vocational pathway — practical activities, project work based on competencies rather than a thorough understanding of a body of knowledge — will lend themselves more to supervision by unqualified teacher/advanced teaching assistants than would the demands of the academic pathway. So...guess which pathways and schools are going to be populated by qualified teachers, and which by the professionally unqualified. We want equally good education for all our class, all our children.

Here we may have insight into Labour's plan for a "modernised service" with a "remodelled workforce". Is the tardy recognition by government of teacher shortages to be the excuse for differential staffing, as well as funding, children's education?

Will we see many children's education, vocationally oriented, provided on the cheap with unqualified staff, while other schools, focussing on academic studies for high flyers, maintain the professional role of teachers as central to education — using their preferential funding through private sponsorship and matched government funding to do it?

schools system under the Labour slogan of autonomy and diversity among schools, there would be diversity in the level of use of teaching assistants substituting for professionally qualified teachers.

The publication of the government proposals in a suite of documents from the DfES coincided almost to the day with the sudden resignation of Estelle Morris as Education Secretary. She was replaced by Charles Clarke, a clear case of unqualified staff substituting for a teacher.

Was it the prospect of implementing policies for the “post comprehensive era” and “workforce remodelling” that finally proved too much for her? Had she had more than she could stomach from No. 10?

Political lesson

There is a lesson here for all those who have got so used to taking one more step back in the name of staying at the centre of politics. Capitalism’s imposed parameters — low public spending, deskilling, deregulation, division of the class — are ever-present, and if you choose to do no more than try to eat away at them from within, eventually you’ll find what you are eating will stick in your throat and make you sick.

In order to do the best she could, Estelle Morris found herself presiding over the dismantling of the schools she once served as a teacher — and finally over the threatened dilution of her own profession.

Now teachers are unpicking the government proposals. We need to find a way to take what is positive as a result of our long campaign on workload reduction, while at the same time defending our professionalism, and the educational standards it underpins.

As part of all this we are discussing in our schools and in our union branches how the roles of education workers other than teachers might be developed in a way that genuinely builds an education team. Teachers want reduction in workload, and they want a modern



Stranger danger? Keep this man away from your classroom

workforce, properly using all colleagues’ talents and skills.

The government is trying to drive a wedge between the teacher unions, and we must not allow any division. They hope we will fall out, accusing each other of not negotiating properly, or of sell-out. We must not walk out, or be bounced out of the talks.

Strategy

At the same time we need to unite around an action strategy to pursue the reduction in workload if the talks should not come up with the goods. In order to make all this more than an idle hope, we need our own modernisation agenda and item one on it should be professional unity. Without it we could see the fragmentation and deregulation not only of the education system but the teaching

profession itself.

But we need to go further. We need to undertake our own analysis of the successes, problems and challenges of comprehensive education — and to develop our own clear vision and professional strategies for schools in the 21st century.

We need to examine how they fit the picture of the economic, social, cultural and political life of capitalist-ruled Britain, and how we and other workers can develop our own strategies aimed at meeting the needs of the people — and particularly of youth — and tackling the obstacles and blocks to meeting such needs that we will inevitably find in 21st-century capitalism.

It’s not so much the schools workforce as the whole nation that needs a remodelling exercise.

Transport workers are now under attack as a government policy lies in ruins. But they are fighting back...

Transport policy runs off the rails

LABOUR'S COMMITMENTS to invest in integrated transport in Britain were in ruins last week. Alistair Darling's announcement of a return to the failed policies of piecemeal roadbuilding is a sure sign of a government which has run out of ideas on how to solve a transport crisis which grows bigger by the day.

This followed the admission by the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), Richard Bowker, that the 10-year plan for rail investment announced only a year ago simply isn't going to happen. Essential new rail projects for London such as the desperately needed Crossrail and enhanced Thameslink lines look set to be put on ice yet again — leaving the creaking tube and the congested roads to take the strain.

Meanwhile, the prospects for the privatisation of the London Underground become ever more bleak as the construction firms and consultants realise that the hoped-for profits simply aren't there. So desperate is the government to keep the firms on board that it is willing to underwrite losses of up to £9 billion which could result from a successful legal challenge from the Mayor of London.

Safety

The funding shortfall now seen in the railways is also affecting safety improvements highlighted as necessary following accidents at Southall, Ladbrooke Grove, Hatfield and Great Heck. Health and Safety Commission boss Bill Callaghan has recently complained that few of the recommendations made by public inquiries have been implemented. He has made the link between effective overall performance and good health and safety practice. Given the woeful performance of many of Britain's train companies, the inaction on safety is hardly surprising.

The government is apparently saying that it is not possible to have a national plan for transport in Britain, that the best that can be afforded is a bit of tinkering here and there — this in the country which per capita is the fourth richest in the world!

And yet Labour was elected immediately following privatisation of the railways. Promises to renationalise made by the likes of Prescott in the preceding years had been watered down in the run-up to the election. But fine words followed. A 10-year transport plan was announced, the watchword was integration, and Prescott promised to resign if car usage was not reduced.

The initial optimism soon evaporated as the daily experience of rail workers got worse rather than better. The pay and conditions of rail staff began to diverge in the myriad of private companies. There was no sign of investment.

'The government is apparently saying that it is not possible to have a national plan for transport in Britain...'

The train drivers' union ASLEF quickly realised that the finances of a train company could be wrecked if services stopped for even a few days. Starting with the better off employers, it successfully negotiated modernised terms and conditions yielding large increases in basic rates of pay in a focussed national strategy. It then went on to the less prosperous companies, demanding that pay rates were increased to match.

The success of ASLEF inspired RMT to seek to close the gaps that had opened up between members in the various companies. TSSA then joined in.

The SRA has the right of veto over expenditure increases in those companies in the last stages of their franchise agreements. Although it was never envisaged that this power would extend to industrial relations, the authority has been using this power to directly interfere in negotiations between unions and managements in an echo of the government interference seen in the fire

brigade dispute.

ASLEF and TSSA have both condemned the SRA for acting in a way that has prolonged industrial action. The SRA has declined to deal with the rail unions directly. The response of all the rail unions has been to call again for the reintroduction of national bargaining.

Two disputes in Arriva Trains Northern involving conductors on the one hand, and station staff on the other, have seen 24 and 48-hour strikes taking place since February. Significantly, this is the first rail strike by TSSA in 30 years, as members joined their RMT colleagues.

Having spent three months considering an offer for station staff from Arriva, the SRA has now authorised the company to put the offer to the unions. As a result, negotiations have re-started, and the industrial action was suspended.

Vicious

But there is no sign of an end to the conductors' dispute, where parity is being sought with colleagues in other companies. Arriva has been vicious in its attacks on the union, victimising staff, withdrawing facilities from union reps including attendance on TUC courses, and spending vast sums finding ways to break the strike.

ASLEF continues to take strike action in First North Western, where it has accused the SRA of scuppering a deal with the company. The threat of strike action in the Wales & Borders company seems to have resulted in an acceptable deal.

Bowker now seeks to blame anyone other than the government and the SRA for spiralling costs, in particular lecturing unions about "excessive" pay demands. He says the government will not give a blank cheque to the railways. That is code for saying that the government is not prepared to invest in rail, instead throwing a few crumbs to the road lobby.

Instead of attacking workers attempting to improve their pay to catch up with other colleagues in the industry, the SRA needs to tackle the spiralling costs of projects like the modernisation of the West Coast Main Line. This is a



Harassed commuters in Charing Cross station: and they said things could only get better...

cool £9 billion overspent, and still won't deliver a railway capable of allowing Virgin's new Pendolino trains to reach their 140 mph design speed. It would have been cheaper to build a brand new TGV railway up the middle of the country than it has been to upgrade the West Coast line.

Meanwhile, West Coast Main Line contractors like Jarvis (which recently donated a large sum to Labour) are making vast profits at the taxpayers' expense. Is it any wonder that the Treasury still puts around 50% more public money in real terms into the railways than it did when British Rail was in existence? The profits have to come from somewhere!

Target

The SRA's target is to increase rail passengers by 50%, freight by 80%, and reduce overcrowding on London commuter services. This has recently caused Bowker to rethink the policy on rail franchises. The Tory dream of entrepreneurial risk taking has been junked as unworkable.

Instead, the SRA has assumed effective control of Network Rail and reinvented itself as a kind of third way British Rail in the image of Labour, with a national timetable, a hands-on approach to rolling stock specification, and tight control of fares. Like the Tory dream, it is

destined to fail because it avoids the basic issues of investment and control.

Darling boasts that 1.5 million more people have been put to work under Labour, and as a result, people are better off and therefore travel more often. The CBI, meanwhile, says that congestion is costing more than £20 billion a year.

Professor David Begg, Chair of the government's own Commission for Integrated Transport, is deeply sceptical about increasing road capacity, pointing out that an extra lane on the M25 resulted in 33% more traffic in a year, cancelling out the improvement.

So how should Britain deal with the transport crisis?

Stop blaming workers for seeking a decent wage, for a start. End the gravy train on the railways by taking the network back into public ownership. Recognise that private capital simply isn't going to deliver the necessary investment. Of the world's 19 banks capable of lending more than £1 billion, 9 are lending to the newly created Network Rail, which has taken over the railway infrastructure from Railtrack, at massive rates of interest. The government should use public funds instead, at a much cheaper cost.

The RAC got it right when it said roads should be seen as part of integrated transport. Yes, there are improvements that should be made. But

we cannot continue to cover the country in tarmac. Alternatives have to be found if Britain is to be kept moving.

The new high-speed link to the Channel Tunnel opens next September, Britain's first 186mph railway. Why not extend it up the middle of England as far as Glasgow and Edinburgh? And a branch across to South Wales? France and Germany have a network of such high speed lines, so why not here?

Positive

The one positive feature of Darling's recent announcement is its authorisation of more light rail (tram) lines in Manchester and Liverpool. We should see many more light rail schemes which could be linked into and enhance the existing 'heavy' rail routes, providing a real alternative to commuting by car.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone is showing how the bus can provide real public transport gains in a short space of time, recognising that enhancements to the tube will take time to bring about.

What is needed is a government committed to public services, a government that says no to Euro stability pacts and EU directives aimed at bringing about further privatisation, and a government that stands for industry instead of big business. The people of Britain deserve a government with a vision for the future.

Can having more than one kind of pasta in the kitchen cupboard class? We look at the limitations of pasta politics...

So, what are you — working class, or middle class?

A FEW MONTHS AGO John Prescott caused a something of a stir when he told an interviewer: “We are all middle class now.”

His own father was quick to disagree in public.

Then in August (quiet news time), THE GUARDIAN reported that 68% of people surveyed agreed with the statement: “I’m working class, and proud of it.” The newspaper report suggested that this must reflect a large amount of self-delusion as it was so hugely at odds with the careful division of society — by sociologists, advertisers and others — into socio-economic groups such as A, B1, B2, C1, C2, C3.

This led to a silly, if amusing, spate of letters grappling with the definition of “working class”. One correspondent declared that you were only working class if you remembered your mother’s Co-Op number — suggesting a dying breed and so, presumably, agreeing with John Prescott.

Others rushed to respond that, while they remembered and could happily quote their mother’s Co-Op number, they were now highly educated and earning good money — thank you very much.

Other definitions that have been suggested are:

- if you have more than one type of pasta in your kitchen cupboard you are middle class.
- you are middle class if you spend the week-end doing DIY to save money - but if you spend it decorating someone else’s house to make money, you are working class.

One positive thing about the above is that they are at least trying to come up with objective definitions.

Common assumptions about the two terms are:

- if you supervise or manage someone else’s work you are no longer working class, but a class traitor.
- if you earn more than £x a year

you are middle class (the x can change depending on the speaker’s income and self-perception)

- you are only working class if you pay or owe rent and are a manual worker
- all professional and white collar workers are middle class.

However common these last four are, they are false. And they are extremely divisive. So they need challenging.

It is actually very simple. Anyone who must work for wages, or seek such work, in order to live, is a worker. Anyone who, through their ownership of capital, can live off the labour of others (usually making a fortune in the process) is a capitalist.

Two classes

There are just two classes in modern Britain: a working class made up of more than 95% of the population, and a capitalist class which is small, crafty and currently in the driving seat. Capitalism developed at different rates across the world, so while there are still some countries where there are more than two

classes, in Britain there is no “middle class”, no third group separate from workers and from capitalists and strong enough to be a significant force.

The working class includes all the different types of worker that the ruling or capitalist class has done its best to divide. It takes in everyone who must work for a living: shop workers, doctors, cleaners, engineers; salaried workers, waged workers, freelance workers, cash-in-hand workers; and the unemployed. The factors that make us into one class and set us apart from the exploiters are far greater than the things that divide us.

Workers in Britain, whether new arrivals or the hundredth generation, share a debt to previous workers. The working class as we know it today first came into being around 1800 as small-scale agriculture and industry was usurped by industrial manufacture and capitalism.

In this period the working day increased from around 10 hours to sometimes 18. In the 1833 Factory Act, 12 hours was set as the limit for children



Strikebreaking students in 1926 — but times, and students, have changed

make change your

middle class?

under 18, there being no limit to the working hours of an adult. Without resistance the working class would have been exterminated.

Self-extermination in the process would not have deterred the capitalist class — it would not have been the first parasite to destroy its host. But workers did resist.

Gains

This determination to improve things shaped our country and our lives today. All the gains were fought for, not given. The struggle was long and bitter. Workers were imprisoned, deported and killed. Our ancestors realised that unless they stood together they would always be powerless — played off against each other and treated like cattle.

Everything we take for granted, from education and healthcare to leisure time, even the right to listen to music, has been fought for by previous generations. Far from being a “separate” or “privileged” section of the population, professional or white collar workers are living examples of the success of past generations.

With this success — survival with dignity — came the seeds of weakness. The weakness of believing that reformism is all that we can aim for and that living with capitalism is natural, normal or inevitable. Alongside this, the mistaken idea of a “middle class” can be a convenient fiction. Either “I’m middle class so I can’t take a role in changing things” or “I’m working class but the middle class will always let us down, sell us out”.

More than 95% of us living in this country are workers, yet we rarely recognise our collective strength. In terms of being powerful enough to provide everyone with a good life, Britain has everything that we need: a skilled population, unique resources and a favourable climate and land.

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.

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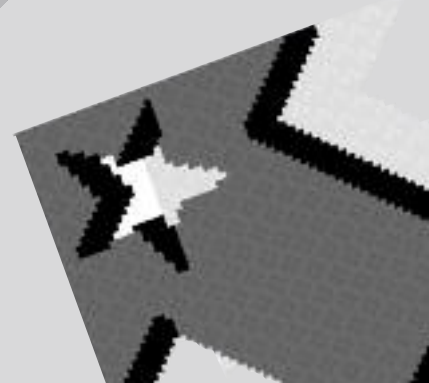
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Back to Front – Doomed youth?

‘The report should be read by all workers who voted for Thatcher, and those who tolerated her government, as a lesson on what their generation visited on their own children...’

HAVING ALLOWED Thatcher to stay in power for over a decade, we are well on the way to committing the same mistake with this lot. Whatever we thought we were electing in 1997, no one could have any doubts at the next election. We now have a government committed to the basics of Thatcherism — subservience to market forces, to the US, and to the EU.

In policy terms, we see the results everywhere. In the hamfisted attempts to introduce top-up fees for students. And in the extraordinary announcement by Jack Straw in December that anyone from the new European Union countries to the east can straightaway come and work in Britain — somehow, he argues, we have a labour shortage, this in a country with millions of people unemployed.

This government, though, has made a political choice: instead of investing in our own young people and encouraging them to stay in education, it scours the world for people who will come to Britain and undercut wages here.

We have said it before, but it bears saying again: importing skilled labour from abroad is imperialist asset-stripping on a grand scale, robbing the exporting countries of the basis of their own future. If it is true that Britain has a skills shortage, is it less of one than Poland or India, Latvia or Zambia?

And all the while, our industrial base is disappearing, leaving whole communities without work and sending the trade deficit to record highs.

Where does all this lead? A study from the Rowntree Foundation in December reveals the desperate results of the first

wave of Thatcherism. It reports that young people born during the 1970s and reaching maturity during the Thatcher era are twice as prone to depressive illness as those born 12 years earlier. The report should be read by all workers who voted for Thatcher, and those who tolerated her government, as a lesson on what their generation visited on their own children.

The earlier generation, raised in the 60s, tended to move into jobs or apprenticeships at 16, if they did not remain in education, with a clear sense of what their work patterns were likely to be. By 1986, the youth labour market had collapsed, with official unemployment soaring to 4 million. Young people not in education faced unemployment, casual jobs or the dreaded YTS, which was simply a device for artificially reducing the unemployment figures.

During this time the traditional apprenticeship system was virtually destroyed. The four- or five-year induction into the skills of a trade, which was also a transition into the adult world of work, controlled by and with standards defined by the organised working class through its trade unions, became a thing of the past. The new-style introduction into adulthood was provided by YTS, unemployment and homelessness for many 16 and 17-year-olds no longer eligible to draw dole.

The sight of young people begging on the streets and living in doorways became common in British cities. Today we hardly notice them. We have allowed all this to happen, and now our task is to turn it around. There is no alternative: Rebuild Britain!

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