

WORKERS

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CHILDCARE: THE STATE KNOWS BEST?



The capitalist takeover of Russia

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Government vs public railways

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The name of the democracy game

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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts: Organised, rational

THERE IS a lot going on. There is a malaise of hyperactivity. Everyone is at it: Elections in the United States creating hysteria; 100,000 killed in Iraq; savage wars over minerals; retail markets and of course oil and gas. Fiddled elections in the Ukraine to keep fascists out; then clamour in the streets as if respectable; separatists murdering school children in Russia; the Israeli Apartheid Wall to which terrorists obligingly respond; terrorist MI5 doubling its budget and agents; agriculture and productive industries closed and run down every day; super profits made by the US and the Bin Laden family on the destruction of Iraq and Ian Paisley, aware of Protestant weapon stores, but demanding photographs of republican gun destruction!

As civil disobedience and terrorism by the state and others become the political order of the day, we here in Britain have to reassert the importance of reason and organised political action rooted in the democratic struggles of workers, extending out from the workplace to questions of power. The debate on fox hunting took up 700 hours and more of parliamentary time. This shows how depraved the bourgeois Parliament has become. Protest by the hunters is an irrelevance to most workers. Protest against the Government's plunder of the countryside through the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policy is another matter. Protesters on these issues

will be expressing a genuine class interest. You have to be able to live and work and afford housing and food in rural areas or you have nothing worth fighting for.

Action without thought is blind. And thought without action means nothing. This was a straightforward lesson learned by the Diggers and Levellers in the struggles against the expropriation of the countryside by the aristocracy and bourgeoisie over three hundred years ago. It was a materialist form of thinking handed on to the guilds and early trade unions. Glorifying mindless and chaotic action, blind to purpose and social responsibility, is the hallmark of the terrorist.

In Britain, on the other hand, a long tradition of responsible action and protest has enabled the bourgeoisie to survive largely unchecked for decades. It can always be contained, especially when like the class warriors busting up McDonalds shops on May Day, it doesn't connect with anyone or represent anyone.

Neither anarchist protest, nor social democratic complaint and reform will release either the countryside or the cities from the grip of capitalism. Only reasoned, highly organised action will do this. No to terrorism. No to social democracy. No to anarchy and chaos. New Labour must go and not be re-elected. Predictable radicalism against it and lots of huff and puff won't help this.



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Scottish fleet in fight for life

A REPORT by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution is demanding that 30% of the North Sea's fishing areas must be closed to British fleets. If the report is adopted the effects will be devastating, especially in Scotland, where it will kill off the Scottish fishing industry and the 40,000 jobs dependent upon it. As one fisherman said, "We could become the first island in history to sacrifice its fishing industry."

While the government pays fishermen to tie up and then destroy their boats, Spain and France are commissioning ever-larger factory ships to fish the deep seas of the Atlantic, where cold-water coral reefs are being destroyed, threatening species of fish that may never recover. In contrast, off the north coast of Scotland, better management has brought back herring and mackerel, and haddock stocks are high.

The EU-run International Council for the Exploration of the Sea has continually antagonised British fishermen over the years with its numerous short-sighted and ruinous interventions. Their catastrophic decisions have very little to do with science. If stocks of cod had been properly conserved in 1998 they would be sustainable now. But the ICES allowed a massive increase in the plunder of the fishing grounds, only to introduce quotas in a hurry when they realised their mistake. Savage cutbacks have meant the scrapping of 69 of the most modern boats in Scotland, worth over £1 million each.

The fishermen and their communities know that they cannot look to Brussels for aid: they themselves are the best-placed to save it through direct action on land and sea.

- When Greece joined the European Union, it signed up to stringent budget deficit commitments. Now it is facing punitive measures from the EU over its alleged failure to meet its obligations to adopt monetarist practices. This has prompted action to takeover Greece's financial institutions. Of course, no action was taken against France or Germany in similar circumstances.

Not only is the EU interfering in the affairs of Greece, it is also blatantly intervening in the Ukrainian elections — and Ukraine is not an EU member. In a similar move, the EU has decided to instruct the Romanian authorities that it does not accept recent electoral results, despite them receiving approval from independent observers. Romania is planning to join the EU in 2007, and the European Commission obviously wants a government of its choice. After Greece, Ukraine and Romania, comes Bosnia. Blatant EU meddling is trying to determine the shape and direction of the government, to make sure that the EU (and NATO) maintain a military presence — occupation remains in place.

While the world's attention is focussed on Iraq, the sabre-rattling and refurbishment of European Imperialism continues apace.

SECURITY Draconian measures

ALMOST HALF of the proposed bills in the Queen's Speech in December unveiled draconian law-and-order measures for the country. Britain may soon have the largest prison population in Europe — all in private hands, of course, following Blunkett and Blair's proposals to extend police powers of arrests, courts without juries, make sweeping changes to the prison and probation services and introduce compulsory ID cards.

Blair's "war on terror" will be code for further spying and harassment of workers, with the equivalent of the FBI over-seeing this attack on civil liberties. Political witch hunts under the guise of attacking terrorists or BNP racists will be extended to communists, socialists and trade union movement in general — anyone not 100% behind Blair and his warmongering.

RUBBISH Outsourcing the sifting

THE SEPARATION and collection of "green" waste is nothing new in Leeds and other cities in West Yorkshire. Nobody got hot under the collar about the new wheelie bins provided for the selected recyclable items when they were introduced a few months ago.

What has given pause for thought is the news that "green" waste from Leeds is being exported for sifting in India. Having exported call-centre jobs and, more recently, high-tech engineering jobs to India, our Leeds politicians are going to keep those kids working on the landfill sites in the name of "free" trade.

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

EMPLOYMENT LAW**Bosses win, again**

THE COURT OF APPEAL has overturned the agreement struck between BMW in 1997 that guaranteed 'jobs for life', no compulsory redundancy, with workers employed by MG Rover.

The case began when an Amicus member was presented with a potentially compulsory redundancy. Though alternative employment with Rover was found, the union decided to test the agreement to its final degree.

The judges have ripped up the agreement and ensured that future redundancies at MG Rover will be that much easier.

HEALTH**Drug money bonanza**

CERVICAL CANCER is one of the most distressing diseases of our time. Yet, a new drug to deal with it is seen by GlaxoSmithKline in terms of \$15 billion dollars in profit it will bring the company.

New drugs certainly cost a great deal to research and produce, and it is future research and production must be safeguarded. But there can be no justification for a situation where the top ten global drugs, controlled by just seven drugs companies, generated profits in excess of \$48 billion in 2003.

Four hundred million women are the potential beneficiaries of the new cervical cancer drug, in the USA and Europe alone. Health or wealth looks like becoming literally be a life-defining question for millions of people in the early years of the 21st century.

CONSTRUCTION**9/11 safety toll**

MANY CONSTRUCTION workers who laboured to clear and make safe the site, after the 9/11 in New York, are attack are sick and dying. They have been poisoned by asbestos and other pollutants, because they were not provided with protective equipment or other safety gear.

But they are being forced to sue their employers and the site owners in order to get recompense for their injuries, giving "notice of claims" to New York City and the US Environmental Protection Agency, which jointly have legal responsibilities for the site. Their lawyer said, "Thousands of workers are getting sick, they had absolutely no protective equipment in what is the most toxic site in US history."

Teaching assistants strike

An overwhelming majority (over 90%) of teaching assistants (TAs) in Brighton & Hove, members of both Unison and the GMB, voted to strike over the local councils' proposed pay and grading offer in November. This follows lengthy negotiations between the council and the unions under the single status agreement. Originally the agreement was to discuss a fair appraisal and re-grading of this group of staff. But the council decided to introduce a reduction in paid weeks worked — a long-standing issue for non-qualified support staff in schools — after the grading and negotiation process had begun and without consulting either union. The effect was to nullify the pay rises resulting from the re-grading.

This led to two initial full days of strike action on 25 and 26 November. All special schools in the city and a significant number of primary schools had to close and, despite the disruption caused and the council's entirely inaccurate press releases, parents and local people in the main offered support to the TAs' dispute. There was a further strike days on 10 December, with the next scheduled for 6 January.

The council head of the Children, Families and Schools department also accused the unions of misinforming its members over the dispute and claiming 90% of TAs would be better off, despite their proposal to take away 5-7 weeks' wages for out-of-term times, something unions fought hard for in the first place and particularly unfair as there is no recourse to claiming any benefits for these periods. TAs attending the November meeting also spoke of some heads intimidating and bullying them and of one headmaster who had even asked them to "vote again on whether they wanted to strike"!

The TAs are firm in their wish to fight this issue, despite the council stating they are being duped into it by union officials. There is also a lot of support for them from other unions' members within the council. The unions may do better in their campaign to highlight this as an example of how capitalism is unable to provide the kind of educational system that is vital to our country, rather than emphasising the unfairness of this grading and wage offer in comparison to the chief executive's pay rise. There is also a need for union officials to avoid attacking teachers and other unions, especially the NUT had encouraged members not to cross picket lines. The action continues.

BEER**Trouble brewing**

STRIKE ACTION from Manchester, Northampton and Scottish breweries is set to accompany the run-up to Xmas and the New Year. Boddingtons, Carlsberg, and Scottish and Newcastle brewers are all

intent on introducing two-tier workforce employment practices, and/or transferring production to non-organised breweries or abroad. Boddingtons, "The Cream of Manchester", has already proposed closing its city-centre brewery. The Transport and General Workers Union has been registering significant strike votes across the three employers.

PENSIONS

Carpet workers robbed

OVER 500 WORKERS and pensioners at Abingdon Carpets, South Wales, are threatened with their pensions being slashed by 60%. This follows the collapse into administration of the parent textile company, Carpets International, in 2003 — after seven years of continuous “pensions holiday” where the company

(but not the workers) stopped contributing to the fund.

Elsewhere, 2,290 pensioners of Henlys Bus Company are similarly under threat, with 500 former employees facing up to 70% cuts in their pensions. Another 1,800 are losing inflation-linked rises.

In recent months, over 40,000 workers have had their pensions obliterated as employers scramble out of pension schemes.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

FEBRUARY

Friday 25 February, the working day TUC ‘Work Your Proper Hours Day’

The TUC is urging people who do unpaid overtime to “work your proper hours” on that day so that they take a proper lunch-break, and arrive and leave work on time. This should remind Britain’s employers just how much they depend on the good will and voluntary extra work of their staff, the TUC says.

Somewhat optimistically, the TUC is calling on all employers to take their staff out on the same day “for lunch, coffee or a cocktail”, to show how much they appreciate their workers’ commitment. What we should have is a “Work Your Proper Hours Year”, or working life, but it’s a start.



McEntee School, north east London, where teachers and parents have seen off an attempt to privatise it into a ‘city academy’

Community ousts ‘Conman’

THE CAMPAIGN by local parents and trade unionists against turning a local school into a city academy scored a notable success this month, when its private sponsor withdrew. McEntee secondary school in Walthamstow, north east London, was to become part of the government city academy programme with £2 million from fashion millionaire Jasper Conran, and £24 million from the public purse. In return for his stake, Conran would have gained effective control over the school and its curriculum through powers to appoint senior staff and a majority of governors. In return for handing over the school, public money would meet ongoing running costs!

Parents and campaigners were furious at the effective privatisation of their school, which was to entail closing it until 2007, leaving pupils to travel to other schools around the area. The campaign targeted Conran, planning a picket of late night Christmas shoppers outside his Oxford Street Debenhams store with placards which read “Give £24 million to all our schools not to Jasper Conman”. But before the campaigners could get on the tube from Walthamstow on 2 December 2, Conran pulled out, saying: “We have come to the conclusion that this is not right for us.” A parent of an 11-year-old McEntee pupil said, “If he hadn’t pulled out we were planning to visit his stores around the country until he changed his mind”. Now Waltham Forest local education authority — itself run by a private consortium EduAction — says it is in talks with a religious group, the United Learning Trust, to take over as sponsor.

The small handful of existing academies is beset by problems and controversy. Greig Academy in Haringey is on its third head teacher in less than a year; King’s Academy in Middlesbrough teaches creationism in science lessons (Blair said this was up to them); Bexley Business Academy in south London has received a highly critical Ofsted report; and the sponsor for a new academy in Enfield, north London, the Oasis Trust, declared that “the example of Jesus Christ would pervade every aspect of school life”.



AT THE start of December the impending collapse of the Jarvis construction company took a great forward leap as the company sacked 50% of its head office staff in a desperate bid to stay afloat. The fate of Private Finance Initiatives linked to Jarvis – hospitals, schools and youth centres hang in the balance. One of the schemes affected is Phase 2 of the Whittington hospital in North London (see picture, above) currently under construction and due to be completed in 2005 is in jeopardy. Jarvis claim that it will now be completed in 2006 but if Jarvis’ position worsens further will it ever be completed?

The inside story of the former European Commission accountant...

Euro-fraud flourishes

Marta Andreasen, the sacked European Commission Chief Accountant, who was voted Accountant of the Year in 2003 after refusing to sign off the Commission's accounts, addressed a large gathering of VOTE NO (to the Constitution) supporters in Westminster in December. The meeting was entitled "Europe needs real reform, not the EU Constitution".

Andreasen began by pointing out that the EU notion of "shared control" over finances in fact meant no control, but rather the shifting of responsibility and blame to the various member states. She said that out of the total EU budget, 15% went towards control of the use of funds, and it was precisely within this area of the 15% expenditure that fraudulence was suspected. It was therefore quite wrong to pass the buck to member countries.

Investigation

Andreasen recalled how in 1998 an investigation concluded that there was mismanagement, and the whole Commission was forced to resign. Reform was promised, but when she joined in 2002, nothing had been done. In particular, a vulnerable computer system open to fraud had been allowed to remain in place. Year after year, auditors repeated their reservations about the regularly recurring errors, and every year it was someone else's fault. Accountants know that an underspend in a budget can hide fraud. Andreasen discovered not just one, but a whole series of underspends. On one occasion the underspend was 15 billion euros, yet in public statements the Commissioner changed this to 10 billion.

The situation today is, if anything, worse. Eurostat, the EU statistics office responsible for crucial decisions on contributions as well as funding, has failed to provide high standards of audit training. The computing issue remains unaddressed; the most recent report of the Court of Auditors confirms the continuing lack of security. Yet OLAF, the anti-fraud office, "cannot find proof to prosecute". And the current anti-fraud commissioner has a conviction for fraud!

Most shocking of all, is the EC's abandonment of the principle that an accountant should see all documentation

before signing off accounts. When Andreasen refused to comply with such irregularity she was dismissed as "disloyal" and "not a good European".

Her right to petition the EU Parliament was fiercely opposed. It was not easy to create a petition comprehensible to the Parliament, because it had no knowledge of accounting. But that document is still before the Parliament, and is still opposed by LibDem MEP Graham Watson, who implied on the TODAY radio programme that we should not worry about corruption in Brussels as it was a problem everywhere!

People should not think that just because the European Parliament recently asserted itself on behalf of minorities this makes any fundamental difference. Far from providing checks and balances, EU politicians continue to tolerate a corrupt system and are happy to join the Commission in blaming member states.

The independence of the Court of Auditors was equally questionable; they too joined in the blame game. The great majority of European taxpayers are being ignored, said Andreasen. She went on to suggest that the job of a Constitution should be to provide an institutional structure, rather than to dictate policies, as this one attempts to do. The Constitution could have been drafted better, but more to the point, there was no need for a Constitution at all in order to arrive at common policies.

Funding

A councillor from Liverpool questioned the value of structural funding. There was no evidence that such subsidies had ever been received in Liverpool. Andreasen replied that the Commission does not care what happens to the money. It cares only to be seen as a fount of generosity, controlling the amounts doled out, but not the use to which funds are put.

Andreasen would not be drawn on wider political implications of the EU. There was no need. Speaking purely from a sense of pride in her profession, she was able to communicate the rotteness at the heart of Brussels. If every profession, industry or trade were to do the same, the defeat of this pernicious Constitution would be assured.

By 2002, five capitalists her copper, 20% of he

The capitalist ta

IN THE 1990s, Russia's new capitalist class seized, through privatisation, the enormous wealth that the country's workers had produced during the Soviet era. By 1996, 80% of Russia's 22,500 industrial enterprises, employing 80% of Russia's industrial workers and producing 90% of Russia's industrial output, had been privatised.

The Yeltsin government's programme, strongly backed by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, allowed directors and workers to buy 51% of the voting shares in their workplaces, at a nominal price, using the enterprises' own funds. All too often, workers agreed not to interfere with the directors, in exchange for promises of job security, soon broken. Often, the directors bought workers' shares before they had any market value or, in collaboration with banks, they outbid the workers. In some cases, President Boris Yeltsin issued special decrees to aid his cronies by excluding others.

The directors used joint ventures, shell companies and offshore havens to leach cash and raw materials out of public enterprises. They created banks and trading companies that seized the factories' output and stripped their assets. They stole Russia's wealth, putting the money into thousands of offshore bank accounts, real estate holdings and offshore companies. Capital flight totalled possibly \$150 billion just between 1991 and 1999.

Stealing the energy

But the biggest money-spinner for the new capitalist class was the theft of Russia's immensely rich natural resources through the Loans for Shares scam. The capitalists lent money to the deficit-ridden state. In exchange, they bought at auction, for a fraction of their market value, the shares that the government put up as collateral for the loans. When the government could not repay the loans, the capitalists sold the shares to themselves very cheaply as repayment for the loans. In these corrupt insider deals, the government let the capitalists seize the companies.

As the basis for these auctions, the

... controlled 95% of Russia's aluminium, 18% of her oil, 40% of steel and 20% of car production...

Rever of Russia



Photo: BOBO

Bush and Putin meet in Slovenia, June 2000: partners in asset-stripping

government used companies' book values as fixed in January 1992. That month, Yeltsin's Deputy Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar, had freed prices, causing 2500% inflation. This meant that the capitalists could buy Russia's energy resources for tiny fractions of what they were worth. (It also wiped out workers' life savings — seventy million accounts in the state-owned Sberbank alone.) The capitalists later admitted that they paid easily 40 times less than the enterprises were worth.

Stealing the companies

So in November and December 1995 the government sold off twelve of Russia's biggest companies. A handful of private banks, owned by the new capitalists, ran the auctions, disqualified their rivals, excluded foreigners, bid in the auctions and — surprise, surprise — won the auctions. For example, in a closed

auction run by his own bank, Uneksimbank, Vladimir Potanin (the deputy prime minister in charge of finance) bought Norilsk Nickel, the world's biggest producer of nickel and platinum, for just \$170.1 million. Its profits that year were \$1.2 billion. His bank had disqualified a rival bid of \$350 million, on a technicality.

In 1995, Yeltsin's friend Boris Berezovsky loaned the government \$100 million for 51% of Sibneft, Russia's sixth-biggest oil company, worth \$2.8 billion, then sold it to himself in another sham auction 18 months later for \$110 million. Russia's Audit Chamber later reported that the sale was conducted with "multiple legal violations" and "should be considered invalid".

In 2000, Sibneft bought 27% of its shares for \$542 million from shareholders. Less than a year later it secretly sold those shares, for far less,

back to the same shareholders. It then announced a \$612 million dividend to the shareholders — one of whom, Roman Abramovich, was lucky enough to own 87% of the shares. The Blair government recently gave Berezovsky political asylum, while Roman Abramovich owns Chelsea Football Club,

Stealing the rest

The Yeltsin government sold off other national assets cheaply, including tax concessions, TV channels, radio frequency licences, export licences and government bank accounts. Yeltsin privatised the TV company Channel One, which reached 200 million Russians, without the legally required auction, selling it to his friend Berezovsky for a knock-down price of \$2.2 million.

The capitalists also looted state funds and the Soviet Union's gold reserves. The new banks took billions of roubles of party, government and trade union funds, transferring the money to foreign bank accounts and offshore tax havens.

The handful of arrogant capitalists made billions through pillage and privatisation. All great fortunes begin in crime. Anatoly Chubais, head of the State Privatization Committee, said of Russia's capitalists, "They steal and steal and steal. They are stealing absolutely everything and it is impossible to stop them."

By 2002, five capitalists controlled 95% of Russia's aluminium, 18% of her oil, 40% of her copper, 20% of her steel and 20% of car production. Mafia gangs ran nearly half the private sector and owned half of Russia's largest banks

Workers and their unions lost hugely from privatisation. The nation's wealth ceased to benefit the working class who produced it; instead it benefited the tiny capitalist minority. So now more than 40% of Russia's people live in poverty, 90% endure worsening conditions and average life expectancy has fallen by five years.

The Soviet people had to make a revolution in 1917 to throw out the Tsarist autocracy; they need a new revolution now to throw out the new capitalist autocracy.

The state machine developing under Tony Blair and Co. is broadening the lives of workers in Britain, telling us what is good for us...

Childcare: the state knows best?



Private nurseries are expanding all over the country, fuelled by government subsidy

ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED? No decent jobs where you live? Rents too high? Can't afford the basics for your children? Don't worry — the government will send you on a free parenting skills course to find out how to bring up your children. If it doesn't work too well, and your kids end up hanging around on street corners in the evening — all the local cafes and youth clubs have closed down and they can't afford the fare or entry money to go to the cinema — the police now have powers to send them away.

The state machine developing under Tony Blair and Co. is broadening and deepening its campaign and powers to intervene into the lives of workers in

Britain, telling us what is good for us, and making us do it if we are unwilling. Meanwhile, they use the army to take “democracy” to other countries too ignorant or wicked to do it for themselves.

Childcare strategy

If you and your children are categorised as “disadvantaged” (i.e. poor) you are doubly likely to be pushed around and told what is good for you. Take the new 10-year strategy for childcare and early education announced in early December. Margaret Hodge, the children's minister, had just announced that there was no question about whether the state should intervene in people's lives: “For me it's not a

question of whether we should intrude in family life, but how and when. . . The state can be a powerful force for good in families and communities and we should celebrate, not denigrate, its role.”

So just what kind of intervention does Hodge have in mind? She announced further plans to extend the Sure Start children's centre programme, providing day care, education and health services for under-fives. That could be good, presumably.

An authoritative government-funded long-term research project on which early years provision best enables children to achieve at school at age 7, known as EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-school

ning and deepening its campaign and powers to intervene into

Education) is consistently showing that such integrated centres are good for children and families. EPPE also shows that the centres are best when well-trained staff run them, and employ qualified specialist teachers.

No surprises there then — and generally children's centres seem a good thing for workers and their children. But government has picked the bits it prefers from the research.

Local authorities have had some funding to help create children's centres, but so far only in Sure Start areas ("of high deprivation"). They have to be "self sustaining" so parents have to pay for the childcare element of the day (two-and-a-half hours' education per day is free).

There are no plans to improve wages and conditions for the staff — and childcare workers are so notoriously badly paid that, as they point out, they can't afford day care for their own children in order to stay in work. There is a significant turnover of staff in day care centres, because they can generally earn more at the Tesco's checkout.

Parent training

The central theme of the childcare strategy is "lifting children out of poverty". Government plans to do this by attaching training and education opportunities for parents to children's centres, and to Job Centre Plus offices. So while your child is being cared for, you are learning basic literacy and numeracy skills (which you should have learned at school), taking NVQs, and learning how to be a good parent. There is any number of parenting courses on offer: Happy Parenting, Healthy Living, Community Parenting, Childhood Illnesses, Managing Behaviour. Then you will pop into the Job Centre, and get a job.

Notice the fallacy in this scenario? Parents in the Sure Start areas are generally poor because there are no jobs. The utterly hollow heart of the government's so-called poverty strategy is that there is no mention whatsoever of decent, real, skilled work for people to do. And children born into families where nobody works do far less well at school,

'The hollow heart of the government's so-called poverty strategy is that there is no mention whatsoever of decent, real, skilled work for people to do...'

not because they are stupid or because their parents don't know how to bring them up, but because they live in families and communities where there is no assumption that the next generation will be able to work, that the future will be better than the present.

So instead of real training for real skilled work, parents attend classes on parenting and "life skills". The Sure Start centres running them are in the poorest parts of Britain, largely the ex-industrial regions, towns and villages originally laid to waste by Margaret Thatcher. There were jobs at one time — in mining, steel making, shipbuilding, the motor industry, engineering, and all the local jobs which depended on those manufacturing centres. Now they are getting the boot from this government. It bears repeating that more industrial jobs have been destroyed under Blair's government than by Thatcher's. Britain's true unemployment figures are hidden behind statistics about long-term sickness and disability, and the "economically inactive".

Intervention

The true test of a government anti-poverty strategy would be the extent to which it prevents jobs being destroyed or being shipped abroad. Yet on this front this highly interventionist and interfering government shrugs its shoulders. Economic intervention to protect or promote British jobs, regulate rents and property prices, reduce transport fares, is not on the cards — remember Margaret Thatcher's "you can't buck the market"?

Every baby a capitalist baby?

Does Gordon Brown think that being dipped in capitalism at birth will make us all capitalists? Every child born after 1 September 2002 is being entered into his baby bond scheme.

Two million parents are receiving notice that an initial £500 will be allocated to their child under the Child Trust Funds in 2005. This will be followed with an undisclosed sum in seven years' time. The baby bond can be allowed to be topped up to £1200 tax free.

The sum will remain in proscriptive savings accounts with complicated tax or tax-free riders until the child reaches 18 years old. The idea of putting hundreds of millions of pounds of workers money into banks, building societies, savings schemes for up to 18 years must have the financiers drooling like babies.

Brown claims he will eradicate child poverty in this way. Fat chance. Better the money was spent on poor housing, health, road safety and heating — the biggest killers of children in Britain.

Blair and Co. support the untrammelled working of the market — capitalism unconstrained — and capitalism means poverty like night follows day.

When it comes to capitalism, government likes to drone on about globalisation and forces beyond its control. Yet the state will tell you how to deal with your children's behaviour, what to feed them, how to play with them, which nursery rhymes to sing, how to deal with stroppy teenagers, and if you don't volunteer for the course it might even force you, with a parenting order.

Do we accept this? Remember John Major and his family values? He was laughed out of court — you only had to look at the way Tory MPs behaved towards their partners and kids. Yet now

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Continued from page 9

we have a government, which includes David Blunkett, determined to lecture a section of the populace about how to manage their families. Forget the right to a job with decent pay and conditions, with working hours that permit you to get home to collect your child from school and spend time with your family. Instead you are offered “extended schools” and “wraparound care” which enable parents with jobs to work long hours (the longest in Europe), with somebody else looking after their children.

Parent-friendly?

Why is it considered progressive and “parent-friendly” to have nurseries and childminders offering overnight care for young children (one of the new initiatives being funded)? And day care all through the school holidays? Are we giving up on the idea that mothers and fathers should have working hours that suit family life and enable them to spend time with their children? In future, grandparents will not be able to help out — they will not have enough pension to retire. This tells us something about the kind of future the state is planning for parents.

Or forget the right to a job at all. Even if you are unemployed, the state apparently prefers your young child to be out of the home. When Secretary of State for Education Charles Clarke talks about “equality of opportunity”, what opportunity is he talking about? Are young children best kept away from their

‘The government’s apparent concern about the well-being of children is combined with a callous attitude to them when they grow up...’

feckless working class parents in the extended day care of a worthy children's centre? One prominent Labour backbencher was quoted in the press as saying: “The more you can get these toddlers out of their home into more stimulating environments, the better.”

The government’s apparent concern about the well-being of children in its childcare strategy is combined with a callous and brutal attitude to them when they grow up. Children are criminalised and locked up more under this Labour government than under any previous post-war administration, and more than almost any other industrialised country.

Overall, the number of under-18s in prison has more than doubled since 1993, in spite of a decline in the number of children convicted or cautioned for offences. Britain has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in the world. The Prisons Minister informed Parliament in March 2004 that “inmates” in young offender institutions (under 21s)

received an average of 7.1 hours of education a week. The official target is 20 hours.

Blunkett wants to put away even more of them. His Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) purports to deal with “troublesome gangs”. Yet it gives police the power to require any group of two or more young people hanging around a town centre (where are they supposed to go?) to leave. If they refuse or return within 24 hours, they can be arrested. If they are under 16, they can be taken home or to a “place of safety”. These dispersal orders can be extended to six months. And children subject to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (asbos), as young as 10, can be named and vilified in the press.

Our agenda

Our children deserve much better, but it is up to us to demand it and make sure they have a decent future. The children's centre agenda could be excellent. It is already excellent, where the workers concerned have taken control and insisted on the best quality in qualified professionals, resources and buildings.

But they need to be built and run according to our agenda and not the government's — this is within our power. Part of the agenda needs to be unions insisting on a real future for Britain — the best possible “childcare strategy”.

On a number of fronts workers have shown they are unwilling to be told what's best for them by Blair. We know what is best for our families — decent jobs. in real British industry and manufacture.

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Will Podmore

Who says Blair just goes for popularity? If he did, then he might party as well as the country. But where would the profit be in th

On the wrong lines: the government's oppo



Photo: Workers

Rushing for a train at London's Waterloo Station: passengers and staff are on the sharp end of the growing transport crisis

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party Conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of returning the railways to public ownership. This decision has predictably been ignored by the government, who have instead published yet another Railways Bill which industry observers, even those opposed to renationalisation, consider completely inadequate to address the problems. Transport 2000 commented, "the Bill lacks any vision for growing the railway".

Transport Minister Alistair Darling announced that his review and said that the subsequent Bill was the "chance of a lifetime to radically restructure the industry". "What a letdown," was the reaction from transport specialist author and broadcaster Christian Wolmar.

The motion to renationalise was taken to the Labour conference by the rail union TSSA and supported by ASLEF. Both unions have recently announced votes in favour of maintaining their political funds,

following campaigns by their leaderships who have spoken loudly of the benefits and influence that flow from affiliation to the Labour Party.

Having seen how completely impotent Labour's conference really is, members will surely wonder what that campaign was all about. The forthcoming debate in those unions, and in RMT, will surely now recognise the reality of what little can be achieved through involvement in the Labour Party, and instead begin to explore the alternatives.

Renationalisation

What has been achieved so far by the rail unions is a clear demonstration of the fact that renationalisation of the railways is popular. Opinion polls show it is popular with the public as a whole, especially those who use the railway. It is popular with rail workers who are now once again suffering as the industry is gripped by

further convulsions and job losses. It is popular with trade unionists in general (a non-contentious policy, it was carried at TUC 2004 Congress). It is even popular with Labour Party constituency members.

Yet this government is resolutely and ideologically opposed to renationalisation. Its latest bill simply doesn't recognise that privatisation and fragmentation lie at the heart of the railways' problems. It doesn't recognise that the runaway costs to the taxpayer of simply running the railways as they are now arise from having to provide profits to the myriad of railway companies. And there is no promise of the sort of massive investment that government envisaged, and even Stagecoach boss Brian Soutar says is necessary if the railways are to cope with future demand.

Giving more power to local and regional authorities to substitute buses for rail services will not solve the problems. Taking safety away from the HSE and

consider renationalising the railways and pleasing his own
t?

Transition to public control of public railways

‘The government, unwilling to tackle the real cause of spiralling costs, is tightening the screws...’

transferring responsibility to the Office of Rail Regulation will only ensure more power in the hands of commercial interests. Tinkering with the number and composition of the passenger franchises is the equivalent of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. The government is even giving serious consideration to schemes that would bring volunteers in to run some rural routes, adding insult to injury. Pay more taxes for running the railways, then run some of them yourselves for nothing!

The benefits of public ownership and control are being demonstrated by South Eastern Trains (SET), a publicly owned company that took over services from London to Kent. Connex, the previous private operators, were shown the door by an exasperated Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), fed up with their abysmal service and frequent demands for more and more handouts from public funds. SET has greatly improved the quality of services, but the government now wants to fly in the face of common sense and re-privatise.

The integration of infrastructure and trains is being seriously considered by the government for the Merseyrail network following the transfer of franchising responsibility from the SRA to the local Passenger Transport Authority.

Interestingly, James Sherwood, American boss of Sea Containers (the company that owns GNER), has recently stated, ‘the cost of operating separate infrastructure and train companies is much higher than if we had an integrated railway’. Other private train company bosses have supported this, apparently missing the fact that the logic of their argument is to recreate a national integrated railway! Unions are, however,

worried that this proposed integration would involve the transfer of staff from the ‘quasi-nationalised’ Network Rail to a private company.

Meanwhile, having taken maintenance ‘in-house’, Network Rail is making hundreds of staff redundant, some of whom are long-standing skilled engineering staff, the sort of people most needed to put the railways right. Many other engineering staff still employed by contractors face a very uncertain future as Network Rail starves their companies of work. The government, unwilling to tackle the real cause of spiralling costs, is tightening the screws on Network Rail, which is then doing likewise to the contractors. Our money goes for the profits of the train operating companies while the skilled engineers are sacked.

Squeeze

The rail unions continue to argue that all engineering activities, especially track and signaling renewals, should be taken back into Network Rail as a first step to renationalisation. The continuing involvement of the private sector in rail means that the workers will pay the price of the government’s squeeze, not the shareholders and senior directors.

With so much of the railway still suffering from many years of under investment, the industry can ill afford to lose highly skilled engineers. Several recent accidents highlight the need for greater technological protection for level crossings, and on high-speed lines, the replacement of level crossings with bridges.

And it is not just the rail workers who are paying the price of the government’s failures. Passengers have greeted with dismay news that rail fares are to rise this month (January 2005) by up to 7.2%. A bitter pill to swallow given the fact that very few rail users can see much in the way of an improved service.

The government has demonstrated that they are not willing to deal with Britain’s growing transport crisis. It is now time for the rail unions to recognise that fact, and to organise and plan an alternative strategy for the railways.

Skill centres wiped out as contracts for rolling stock go abroad

“The country that invented the train will soon have no capacity to build trains for its own tracks unless there is urgent action.” This comment on the axing of 560 Bombardier rolling stock jobs in Derby by Derek Simpson, General Secretary of the trade union Amicus, is no exaggeration.

The Derby factory has been making trains since 1876 and is the only rolling stock plant left in Britain. The job losses — a total of 750, including 165 maintenance jobs at Ilford, in East London — are life-threatening to the industry when such a highly skilled, irreplaceable workforce is destroyed.

The government appears to have no strategy for replacing rolling stock and seems hell-bent on ensuring that such work goes to EU companies or Japanese companies. It has now created the possibility of a shortfall of orders which could close Bombardier. This lack of long-term planning is not a new phenomenon but was epitomised in the “stop, start, mothball, re-open, close down” strategy which destroyed British shipbuilding.

Decisions need to be taken now to replace the 30 year old 125 Inter-City fleet, speed-up the replacement of London Underground rolling stock and provide the engines and carriages for cross-London rail infrastructure developments.

The government may regard Bombardier as having been successful in securing one-third of the replacement orders for Britain’s rolling stock. But that still means that two-thirds has gone elsewhere.

The only other train builder in Britain, Alstom, closed its Birmingham plant early in 2004 with the loss of 1,000 jobs. When you are down to the last train building factory in Britain there is no leeway. Closure will be terminal for the rolling stock industry.

The end result of losing your nationhood is the same no matter it is done. Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish has put the experience

No nation — the poetry of the future

SO MUCH of our culture is linked to the stability and peace of being a nation without outside military incursion, let alone massacre and theft of land, that we find genuine nationalism hard to understand. We hate the American sort and we know little of the genuine attempts from Ireland to South Africa to Palestine to Cuba to create it. So British people will struggle badly as they are being deprived of their nation. They may turn in civil war upon themselves before this matter is resolved. The existing political order will be immeasurably damaged.

Invaders

We have warded off invaders for a very long time. But more than that we have allowed British capital to take away nationhood throughout the world. Now the United States has adopted this role of nation stealer. They need Britain because our armed and secret services have such rich experience, in fermenting division. To complement this, under the influence of the EU, Blair's Britain seeks to create chauvinist identities around regions like

Scotland and Wales and also to feign an involvement in six counties of Ireland while the 26 are in hoc to the US. Fortunately the people of the North East of England, previously electors of the worst of pro-EU has-beens like Mandelson, Byers, Blair and Millburn, saw through the ploy and voted down the proposed regional assembly. But even they may not appreciate what loss of nation is really like.

Our national identity as workers has never been strong, particularly in the last thirty years. So in the extremity of the situation now, where a Labour government is seeking on the one hand to obey the United States and on the other to put Britain under the control of the European Union, we have to consider various expressions of nationalism in history. We have to look at the other end of the spectrum even to begin to imagine the problems and prepare ourselves for the potentially devastating losses of confidence and homes.

We have not been bombed since the Second World War, except by tin pot terrorists, and not lost land since the

Roman invasion. As a nation, we are, however, losing control of the economy, manufacturing, natural reserves, fishing, agriculture and utilities, though sadly this fact does not yet seem to be affecting the outlook of sufficient numbers of people. By signing up to the EU constitution we will lose our independent national status. But signing up, or not signing up is so dignified: it hardly touches the experience of seeing your children killed in front of you because you want a nation, somewhere to live in peace and work. So that's all right then.

Loss of nationhood

But the end result of losing your nationhood is the same no matter how nicely or cruelly it is done. So it is worth the time to read about the experiences of those who have written about it.

Mahmoud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet, provides a good start. He expresses feelings and concepts that in Britain we probably find difficult to imagine. Reaching out to understand his poetry provides an insight into what would be in store for us.

Darwish's place of birth, a village called Birwe, was obliterated. Every effort imaginable was expended on obliterating Palestine. His first poem, addressed to a Jewish boy and written at the age of 8, had the lines: You can play in the sun as you please, and have your toys, but I cannot. So incendiary were the words that he and his family were chastised by the Israeli military.

This began years of jail, exile and persecution. His crime was always the same: reading poetry or travelling without a permit. He began a life abroad translating for communist papers, studying in Moscow and setting up journals in Paris and elsewhere. Returning to Ramallah in 1996 he published his twentieth collection of poetry in 2000.

Throughout he was a stylistic, classical, musical, powerful and popular poet, loved and recited by the Palestinians. His sense of loss haunts the world. He identifies with the hidden hands of destroyed nations and cultures



Palestinian families leaving behind their homes, olive trees and planted fields in Al-Faluja Village, 1948.

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throughout the world and writes lines, however skilfully translated, beyond the imagination of those who have nonchalantly taken their homelands for granted.

Succulent, fresh, learned, overpowering, sensual, bitter, optimistic — Darwish's works deserve a British audience. He writes of the catalepsy of expropriation:

Since the day you were expelled from Paradise a second time
our whole world changed,
our voices changed,
even the greeting between us fell
echoless, like a button falling on sand.

He expresses the loss of homeland by identifying with the fate of the North American Indians in the past:

Don't kill the grass any more,
It possesses a soul in us that could
Shelter the soul of the earth.

Better than any other poet he describes the effect of national loss on the psyche and history:

Winds will recite our beginning
and our end
Though our present bleeds
And our days are buried in the ashes
of legend.

Simple words in his poems say so much. 'Goodbye to our history' is a throw away line that you find yourself returning to. Without his land and nation he is permanently exiled and living in the illusion of a past that has to be so strongly imagined it will recreate a new national future: 'I leave jasmine in a flowerpot, my small heart in my mother's cupboard, I leave my dreams in water, laughing'. In a world in which his nation is lost he constantly records the physical experience of isolation and alienation: "They returned from a tunnel's farthest end to the closeness of mirrors."

Our homelands make us. Without them we lack place, sense and sanity. The madness infecting Britain and the alienation of our people reflects this developing removal from our own land which poets like Darwish so eloquently and painfully chronicle.

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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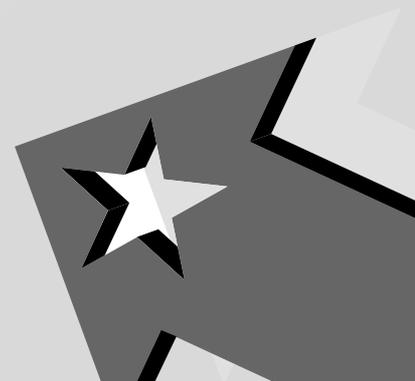
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Back to Front – The name of the game

‘Every time you see or hear the word ‘democracy’ think ‘capitalism’. It works in nearly every case...’

WHAT WILL 2005 hold for us? Will the Russian mafia buy the Premiership title? Will Britain overtake North America and Australia in the World’s Biggest Gamblers league? Well, apart from anything else, we’re told 2005 will be a general election year. We should be pleased, grateful even, as 2005 will have more than the usual store of ‘democracy’ in it.

The rulers of Britain have always wanted to change the name of things. Exploitation in factories was to be called free labour; forced migration to be called free movement of labour; and the economic system, which even its supporters like Adam Smith called capitalism, they now want to call democracy.

Try this – every time you see or hear the word ‘democracy’ think ‘capitalism’. It works in nearly every case. Those well-heeled ‘revolutionaries’ in the Ukraine don’t want more democracy as they say: they want more capitalism. Those criminals and their allies trying to overthrow the government in Cuba – probably the most truly democratic in the world – don’t want democracy there: they want capitalism.

We could take this further, apply it to another misnomer. Whenever you see or hear the word ‘globalisation’, use instead the word ‘Americanisation’, because that’s really what it means. US capitalism is trying to take over the world, but would have us believe it’s ‘globalisation’, some inevitable process. That’s already

fooled the ‘anti-globalisation’ lobby, just as the ‘democracy’ scam has fooled the thousands of our own trade union members who will be urging a greater turn out for Labour in the general election.

When workers run their country’s economy in their own interests, then shall we see democracy, and not before. Organisations run by workers, such as trade unions, can practise democracy (if the members turn up), but no others can. Wherever the profit motive of capitalism holds sway, there can there be no democracy. None.

2005 then will contain not more democracy, but more capitalism, if we’re not careful. Elections are what happen when you haven’t got real democracy, which most people think means ‘government of the people’, but dictionary definitions now add the following words, ‘or their elected representatives’. So democracy need not be the government of the people, but government of those elected by the people. Maybe then it’s time to stop electing them and govern ourselves.

Let 2005 be the year of the resounding abstention. Not voting would be a step towards real democracy. The next would be to organise in our workplaces to discuss real progress, taking government away from the profit-mongers and giving it to no one else.

That would be a Happy New Year for workers!

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