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THE FIGHT FOR THE ARTS



Pay The fiasco of the 'living wage' | **08**



Aerospace A vital industry for Britain | **12**



Nelson Mandela Lifelong revolutionary | **14**

WORKERS



Pimping for foreign capital

MAO TSE-TUNG, writing about classes in Chinese society in the 1920s, defined “the comprador class” as “wholly appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth”. And the Chinese know a comprador when they see one.

So David Cameron strutting around China talking as the apostle of free trade, using the language of British capitalism from the 19th-century Manchester school of economics, must have struck his hosts as even more of a buffoon than they had thought.

“Comprador” is a useful word. It originated in China, of Portuguese origin, to denote the native manager of a European business house – and by extension a class of people owing their allegiance to foreign capital. And few are more comprador than Cameron. (It comes from a Latin word meaning “procure”, making Cameron also a procurer, a pimp, for foreign interests. How apt.)

British imperialism no longer dictates to China. Instead, the representatives of British capitalism act as the foreign managers and company representatives of Chinese capitalism in Britain. How far has the wheel turned!

Perhaps someone should have reminded Cameron that the largest investors in Canary Wharf, home of born-again capitalism post-Thatcher, are Chinese companies.

Chinese capitalists are expanding at unprecedented speed into London’s real estate. Chinese entrepreneurs own black cab maker the London Taxi Company. Chinese companies dominate Britain’s infrastructure in the railways, oil and energy production (the largest investor in Grangemouth), and so on. They own the intellectual rights and remnants of British Leyland. They are huge investors in information technology in Britain. They have built a brick for brick replica of Nottingham University in China to make the point about their commitment to engineering, science and manufacturing development; the Chancellor of Nottingham University is a Chinese professor.

The Chinese recently bought Sunseeker, the world’s leading luxury yacht builder in Dorset, lock, stock and barrel. Originally they wanted 30 yachts but then decided they’d take the whole yard. Their intention is to expand production from 180 yachts a year to 370 yachts, all aimed at the Chinese market. Who is trading with whom? When Cameron struts, he looks more like a plantation manager showing off for his absentee landlords.

National independence, sovereignty and control means regaining the assets which constitute the British nation from whoever claims ownership. Be they United States, Arab, Chinese, European Union or the British traitor class. ■



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Contents – January 2014

News

Homes? Who needs homes? p3; Picking on the Co-op, p4; Poaching paramedics, p5; News Analysis: Autumn Statement, p6; Decision time for higher education staff, p6; Battle at GKN, p7

03

Features

‘Living wage’ – a fiasco, p8; The fight for the arts, p9; The aerospace industry: vital for Britain, p12

08

Obituary

Nelson Mandela: 1918 – 2013

14



LONDON	Flats for the rich
FOOTBALL	Investing in youth
BANKING	Picking on the Co-op
SCOTLAND	White Paper flops
PARAMEDICS	Poaching staff
HIGHER ED	Decision time
ENGINEERING	Battle at GKN
PENSIONS	Almost at the bottom
Eurobriefs	The latest from Europe
What's On	Coming soon

Homes? Who needs homes?

LONDON IS being transformed from capital city to city-state of the nomadic international rich. This development (outlined in *Workers*, October 2013) is further compounded by the proposal to erect yet another tallest building so far in London, Hertsmere Tower at Canary Wharf. It is promoted by Irish entrepreneur Tom Ryan, investing income from the failed "tiger" economy of Ireland, into what is seen as the stable economy of Osborne and Cameron: a £1 billion, 74-storey apartment block, whose 74 floors equate to 714 apartments, priced between £1 million and £10 million.



Canary Wharf, London

Somewhere in the equation certain of these properties are deemed "affordable" for local residents – the term "socially affordable", still less "council property" is no longer to be found in the planning language of Boris Johnson, Mayor of London.

Local council planning policy is supposed to require half of all new homes being built to be "socially affordable". But it has been overruled under the mayor's enhanced planning powers. Tower Hamlets Council, which initially turned down the application, will instead gain another skyline expression of the predominantly foreign-based, rich buyers and investors flaunting their

wealth. Yet it has over 23,000 people on its housing waiting list (a number set to rise with unlimited migration from the EU).

The investor, following on the £100 million purchase price, is expected to spend £800 million on development. A further £1 million is supposedly towards affordable housing, £4 million towards the Crossrail rail link and £2 million towards local community projects. More like a £7 million bribe to divert attention from the colossal returns the investor will reap.

If one more skyscraper isn't enough, then Chinese investor Wanda, allegedly worth £5.5 billion, intends building two slightly smaller towers – 660 and 530 feet – in Wandsworth, south London, close to the planned new Chinese embassy. All of this to attract the super-rich of China as they relocate abroad.

The future dwellers in the 714 apartments will probably not be concerned at the estimated 63,000 children in London deemed as homeless, living in slum, unhealthy and chronically overcrowded conditions on a par with Victorian Britain. Shelter, the housing charity, has estimated 80,000 children in the country live like this, over 75 per cent of them in London. ■

FOOTBALL

Investing in youth

AS A COUNTRY we can learn a thing or two from Southampton Football Club about a proper attitude to our young people.

It is common for a Premier League football club to field a side largely comprising foreign players. It has not been unknown for a starting lineup to include no indigenous players at all.

But, as reported by the *Daily Telegraph*, at least one club – Southampton, currently enjoying a good first half of the season – takes a different approach.

Southampton's managers travelled the globe to study best practice elsewhere. They were particularly impressed with the La Masia academy at Barcelona, probably the best club side in the world at the moment.

In setting up its own similar organisation the club chairman Nicola Cortese said, "We would want to see a starting XI in the Premier League that is fed from our youth development".

Manager Mauricio Pochettino, himself from Argentina, added that English players are technically good, brave and daring and just need to be able to show that on the field.

The club is investing £30 million in its training ground including facilities for under 8s. There is a commitment to its youth team players that if they perform well enough there is an expectation of progression to the first team, and they are encouraged to attend first team training sessions.

More mature players from other clubs and divisions have also benefited from Southampton's approach and developed sufficiently well to end up playing international football for the club. ■

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EUROBRIEFS

The latest from the EU

No to treaty

UKRAINE, BELARUS and Armenia have rejected proposals to sign an EU treaty. They would rather join the Eurasian Customs Union with Russia. Georgia and Moldova than sign EU association agreements.

The EU has warned Ukraine that it faces a financial blockade if it refuses to sign. The EU and the USA also threatened Ukraine that it is unlikely to get IMF "aid". But the IMF has already suspended a credit line worth \$15 billion because Ukraine refused to stop subsidising household gas bills. The German Council on Foreign Relations has called for "stringent and very painful social adjustment measures". EU foreign minister Catherine Ashton criticised Ukraine for not "becoming a predictable and reliable interlocutor for international markets".

Pro-EU, "pro-democracy" campaigners have called for the EU to punish Ukraine, and for the overthrow of the government of President Victor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions, which is supported by the Communist Party of Ukraine.

These campaigners include the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda (Freedom) party, led by Oleh Tiahnybok, who recently spoke against the "Jewish mafia in Moscow". The pro-German Batkivschyna (Fatherland) party of Yulia Tymoshenko, imprisoned for fraud and embezzlement, formed an electoral alliance with Svoboda before the last elections.

Hungarian Nazi friend honoured

In Budapest last month a new bust was unveiled to former Hungarian ruler Miklos Horthy. Marton Gyongyosi, a deputy of the far-right Jobbik, described Horthy as "a national saviour". This was the latest in a number of commemorations to Horthy, who took that country into alliance with Nazi Germany. He also played a leading role in the counterrevolution and foreign invasion which in 1920 overthrew the communist government led by Bela Kun.

'Nasty' Britain?

THE BRITISH government has announced proposals to tighten immigrants' access to social welfare, including a test that claimants should speak English. EU commissioners told Britain to avoid "hysteria" and called us a "nasty country". ■

Andrew Wiarcl/www.andrew-wiarcl.info



London, Tuesday 3 December. Workers in higher and further education in Britain went on strike for a day in their continuing campaign for more pay (see article, page 6). The strike, by members of the UCU, Unite, Unison and EIS trade unions, attracted a large degree of support from students. Eight days later, students at ULU (University of London Union) held a protest against police on university campuses, the privatisation of the student loan book and the planned closure of ULU as part of a national day of action. The previous day, the UCU had issued a statement supporting the right of students to protest against the privatisation of education and higher tuition fees.

Picking on the Co-op

THE ANNOUNCEMENT that JP Morgan Chase have been fined a record £8 billion for their role in the 2008 bank collapse and mortgage scam is buried in the less well read pages of the financial press. This is the civil settlement imposed by the US financial authorities, which are now looking at a follow-up first, a potential criminal prosecution.

Bank after bank has been fined for individual or collective scams, price fixing, toxic mortgage deals, market manipulation and so on. These practices have dominated banking in Britain and internationally from time immemorial. Chief executives and directors have come and gone. The occasional knighthood has been revoked and shredded. But no criminal or fraud prosecutions en masse.

But with the Co-op Bank, Osborne announced a special investigation after allegations about its failed chairman's personal behaviour. The hedge funds that now own the bank announced they will review its historic funding arrangement with the Labour Party.

Some 150 local authorities – Labour local authorities – have been advised by the bank that their banking arrangements are to be reviewed. Hundreds of schools, taken out of local authority control by the government but which still use local authority banking arrangements, have been warned that this is also to be reviewed by the new owners.

Business secretary Vince Cable announced an investigation into whether the Co-op Bank can use the that name as it is no longer a mutual bank but owned by the hedge fund investors. No high street bank supporting the Tories has experienced this level of sustained smear, investigation, review and media attack.

It has emerged that advisers to Cameron and the Tories are also advising the new owners of the Co-op Bank. The fifth column are in the boardroom. The vultures and wolves are circling the Co-op Bank to obliterate 150 years of an anathema, a bank under capitalism that the banking cartel did not fully control.

The Co-op may be a relic of an ideal that never lived up to its promise – and it is quite diminished from its glory days. But here is an opportunity for its enemies to swallow it, so that's what they are doing. Cooperation cannot survive within capitalism. ■

SCOTLAND

White Paper flops

ALEX SALMOND launched his White Paper on independence at the end of November saying it would “resonate down through the ages”. The SNP spent hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers’ money on the manifesto. But three independently commissioned opinion polls published since the launch have shown support for break-up stubbornly low. The White Paper would hand out £350 million to corporations, and promised that Scotland would be “the most business-friendly and competitive” environment in the whole EU. ■

EDUCATION

Below Estonia?

THE ORGANISATION for Economic Co-operation and Development has investigated the literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills of 16- to 65-year olds across 24 countries (see skills.oecd.org/skills.outlook.html). England and Northern Ireland, rather than Britain as a whole, was taken as a separate country, coming 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy, below Estonia, Poland and Slovakia.

Young people in these two regions got lower scores than their parents and grandparents, representing the only developed country where 55- to 65-year-olds had better results than 16- to 24s.

The study also concluded that the basic skills of those aged 16 to 24 were no better than a 10-year-old’s. It said that while young people “...are entering a much more demanding labour market, they are not much better equipped with literacy and numeracy skills than those who are retiring” and “...the pool of highly skilled adults is likely to shrink relative to that of other countries.” It also claimed that literacy and numeracy skill levels are closely correlated with employment opportunities, level of wages and health (though given the number of graduates working on minimum wage in bars, you have to wonder what that correlation is).

UCU, the university and college lecturers’ union, described the finding that young people are no better skilled than their parents’ generation as “deeply worrying” and blamed lower investment in post-16 education, along with the fact that lifelong learning is now more difficult and expensive for those who need it most.

- Office of National Statistics figures show nearly one million 16- to 24-year-olds are unemployed – and that only includes those actively seeking work in the last four weeks. There are also 1.09 million “NEETs” (Not in Education, Employment or Training). ■



Workers

Short-staffed? Try poaching

THE “FREE movement of labour” can throw up some bizarre examples of why this much-trumpeted EU policy is not only absurd, but also counterproductive. Take the NHS as an example. Because of the “austerity” measures being pursued by the government, thousands of nursing jobs have been culled.

It is no surprise, then, that winter, and the pressures upon the NHS that these cold months bring, has forced the government to accept that it has a severe shortage of staff!

Its remedy? Poach nurses from overseas. Entice staff from other countries (EU and beyond) to plug Britain’s shortages. Bring staff from countries that themselves are struggling with basic health needs. This government is turning the NHS clock back to the 1950s.

A more bizarre illustration of the free movement of labour is happening in Britain’s ambulance services. The London Ambulance Service, for example, was told to “save” £50 million over five years and shed some 900 posts. Posts that when taken out would have a crucial effect on the patient care given to Londoners.

It is now, finally, accepted that the London Ambulance Service is short of clinically trained staff. The remedy? Poach paramedics from the EU states, New Zealand and Australia. It is difficult to believe that those countries have a surplus of paramedics.

While paramedics are coming in, paramedics are also going out. There has been a major targeting of London paramedics by countries such as Abu Dhabi offering tax-free salaries in return for one- or two-year contracts. NHS-trained staff are using their clinical skills, not on British citizens, but elsewhere. Is that “free movement of labour” – or the import and export of paramedics as mere commodities? ■



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NEWS ANALYSIS

The Autumn Statement

THE MEDIA impact of George Osborne's autumn economic statement on 5 December was lost as it coincided with the death of Nelson Mandela. But workers ought to reflect: the statement is a declaration of intent by the ruling class about how it seeks to strengthen its hold over our lives.

The banking crisis that started in 2007 and 2008 launched a depression not forecast by the experts who now predict recovery. Osborne and others used the opportunity, introducing "austerity" economics – actually, impoverishment for workers everywhere.

The persistent symptoms of a falling economy are evident to all: shops vacant; jobs hard to come by especially for the young; underinvestment in major industry like energy; smaller business unable to secure bank finance; benefit cuts; a new housing bubble – and wages low and falling against inflation. Yet Osborne claims recovery is in prospect.

This year has seen a modest drop in registered unemployment from 7.9 to 7.6 per cent. GDP will rise by an estimated 2.4 per cent. But workers' wages continue to fall, as the Treasury knows. And the number of millionaires rises daily.

Unsustainable

Growth projections depend on continued consumer demand, business investment and exports. Demand may be up slightly as people use savings but that won't carry on in the face of further decline in real wages and benefits.

Announcements about business investment were window dressing: the government is selling off what's left of public assets, and cutting scientific research. Banks are unwilling to lend even when financed by the state. Exports have stayed level even though the pound has devalued – and there's little evidence they will increase.

Ministers parrot the lie that public spending "crowds out" private investment, denying the reality: the lending bubble and banking crash. The theology for the so-called recovery is that reducing employers' overheads – wages and taxes – will create jobs.

For our class to believe in those lies is to accept that there is no need to fight for wages and control of the economy. Wealth, real value, is created by workers, not by ministers or banks. ■

HIGHER EDUCATION

It's decision time

THE PAY dispute in higher education is at a critical stage and a decision needs to be made about the way ahead. The second national strike day involving staff in UCU, Unison, Unite, and the EIS in Scotland, was on 3 December. In individual institutions it was as strong, or even stronger, than the first strike day at the end of October. However, regional rallies were not as strongly supported. Arguments have been won, staff and public know that the sector as a whole now has strong surpluses and that this has been achieved through punishing fees for students and a squeeze on staff pay.

The other significant achievement of the dispute has been the close working between the NUS and the staff unions – in many institutions, where previously there was a lack of student support, this dispute has seen staff and students on the picket line together. But there is little public understanding that higher education is one of the major areas of zero hours contracts and casualisation. The number of casual staff is a significant area of weakness for workers engaged in struggle as it impacts on organisation and cohesion.

In some institutions local unity and strength has led to management making small concessions such as offering every member of staff a one-off £500 bonus. These have been paid in December salaries to coincide with the national imposition of the 1 per cent pay offer (in real terms, a pay cut). The bonus will not be consolidated into salary or pensionable, but it is a victory

nevertheless.

In imposing the 1 per cent, management has made great play of the fact that less than 10 per cent of those working in the sector voted for industrial action and the reality is that the trade unions have not been able to counter this as the initial turnout was low.

The density of union membership now varies across institutions, reflecting three factors. In university administration, union density is closely linked to the amount of work now delivered by external contractors. For academic staff, the level of casualisation and the state of branch organisation are critical.

As with other disputes in the education sector recently, one of the strange aspects is that more people have participated in the action than bothered to vote in the ballot. But the initial weakness of union members not bothering to vote in the ballot for action cannot be ignored. The appetite for struggle cannot be imposed by anyone – it has to be genuinely felt.

In March 2014 all unions will need to submit their pay claim for the academic year 2014/15. It is obvious that the employers are looking forensically at union density and turnout, and where both factors are strong there is evidence of local concessions. There will be elements in the union who will greet the New Year with wild calls for escalation and hopeful calls for the participation of members who have not even taken part in the action to date.

That will not happen. Maybe it is time for the unions to learn the lessons from those areas where local concessions have been achieved, "bank" those small victories and gather their forces for a future fight. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's new series of London public meetings continues in 2014 on Tuesday, 4 March, 5 June, 14 October and 18 November; all are held in the Bertrand Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, and start at 7.30 pm. Other meetings are held around Britain. All meetings are advertised in What's On, see page 5.

M The theme of the meeting on Tuesday 4 March, is "Class in the 21st century". Details of further meetings will be announced in **WORKERS** and at www.workers.org.uk.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2014, Thursday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn. There will also be May Day meetings elsewhere in the country.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

Pay and hours battle at GKN

GKN AEROSPACE of East Cowes Isle of Wight, the largest employer on the island, employs a thousand workers making components for the aircraft industry out of composite materials. In August of 2013, the management of GKN decided to impose a wage cut and an increase in the working week of one hour.

The reasoning behind the proposal was that the capacity for production would have to be more efficient. The market had become more competitive and less profitable. This statement was put out by the management after the company had published on its website the news that it had declared a profit of £278 million.

After lengthy discussions between the union Unite and the management ended in a failure to agree, and a ballot of the workforce was held. That ballot overwhelmingly rejected the management's proposals. Over a period of several weeks the management put two more slightly amended proposals to the workforce, each one being rejected by ballot, conducted on the company's premises.

A third proposal was put to the workforce in the form of a ballot. This time the management were determined that it should be accepted by the workforce, and it enlisted the assistance of higher management in bullying and intimidating the workforce into submission, according to local union officials.

A proper ballot

The union refused to accept the outcome of the latest ballot and called a mass meeting of the workforce at Newport Football Club. The meeting decided to have a postal ballot of its members to avoid any further corruption of the voting system. The outcome of the last ballot was an overwhelming rejection of the management's proposals for an increase in the working week and a reduction in pay.

The question now is, does the management want to force the workers into taking industrial action or is it going to see sense and continue to make its highly profitable product?

This question now becomes more relevant as it was announced in the first week of December 2013 that a multimillion-pound order has been placed by Boeing with GKN.

In a joint statement Boeing, GKN and Business Secretary Vince Cable revealed that GKN had been selected to manufacture sets of drag-reducing winglets for the 737 MAX, which has more than 1600 orders from around the world. They will be made at East Cowes, with final assembly at GKN's facility in South Carolina.

Boeing's newest family of single-aisle aircraft, the 737 MAX, is scheduled to make its first flight in 2016 with deliveries to customers beginning in 2017. GKN will deliver the first development winglet sets to Boeing in 2015.

Two suppliers are manufacturing winglets for the 737 MAX programme, GKN and Korean Air Aerospace Division (KAL-ASD) in South Korea. Boeing forecasts a market for 24,670 single-aisle aeroplanes, worth £1.4 trillion.

GKN Chief Executive Marcus Bryson said that the contract was bid on an assumed future cost base, which implies that GKN management were endeavouring to lower their costs in order to gain this lucrative contract.

In a joint statement, both the company and Unite agreed that the consultation process could have been handled more effectively.

The GKN workforce has been subject to months of intimidation, bullying and ballot rigging by the management, but the workers have remained resolute in their determination to maintain their working conditions. ■

• See also "Aerospace: vital for Britain", page 12.



The Boeing 737 MAX, for which GKN now has a contract to produce winglets – structures designed to reduce turbulence at the wing tips.

Coming soon

MARCH

Tuesday 4 March, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. "Class in the 21st century"

CPBML public meeting. Some people say class is dead. Or that there are too many to count. Really? The CPBML says there are only two classes in Britain – workers and capitalists – and that an understanding of class is central to any analysis of modern Britain. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

PENSIONS

Almost at the bottom

IN A RECENT survey of pensions in developed countries carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, only Mexico had a relatively worse state pension than Britain.

Here we get only one third of the average wage. In Mexico the figure is 28.5 per cent, in Australia and France it is more than half and in Italy, where there are moves to increase the pension age to 67, 70 per cent.

British workers can only reach the average state pension level of the nations investigated by topping up with private pensions, at a time when the number in occupational pensions has fallen to 8.5 million or 35 per cent of the workforce.

Meanwhile, government plans to increase state pensions and to "auto enrol" workers into private pensions, with a higher contribution rate and lower employer's contribution than most occupational schemes, would put workers at the mercy of annuity providers. Think tank Civitas goes further: it is recommending that the state pension be means tested! ■

SEPARATISM

Catalan bid condemned

CATALAN PRESIDENT Artur Mas has unilaterally announced that he intends to hold a referendum on Catalanian 'independence' on 9 November 2014. At a joint press conference with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said, "I guarantee that this referendum won't be held. It's unconstitutional."

Spanish opposition leader Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba also opposed the move: "President Mas is taking Catalonia into a dead end," he said. ■

A tiny increase on an already tiny amount...why are we in awe of the “living wage”?

‘Living wage’ - a fiasco

THE FIASCO over the “living wage” continues with the announcement of its upgrade in London from £8.55 to £8.80p – a massive 25p per hour! Outside of London it rises from £7.45p to £7.65p – a massive 20p! Promoted by Boris Johnson, Mayor of London and the Living Wage Foundation, the increase affects only 18,800 workers in London. Nearly 4.8 million workers outside London earn less than the £7.65p rate.

The trade unions seem to be in awe of the living wage. All unions in the public sector, especially local government – Unison, GMB and Unite – are hanging on to Johnson’s coat-tails over it. The question has to be, “Why?” Why are we in awe of the stunts from Johnson, his capitalist philanthropist chums in Canary Wharf or the anti-working class Living Wage Foundation?

The Living Wage Foundation, aka Citizens UK, aka London Citizens, are just the import from Chicago of Obama-style politics of coalitions and interest groups. All have removed the specific concept of “working class”, a class for itself.

‘Do the trade unions have a strategy for pay? The answer would appear to be no.’

Johnson has no interest in advancing wages for workers, just in stealing his predecessor’s political clothes for the sound bite value. The reality is that this is recommended not mandatory: this is a payment we hope you’ll implement within six months, become an “accredited” living wage employer, get your do-gooder certificate and feel good.

Do the trade unions have a strategy for pay? The answer would appear to be no. Do they want something for nothing, so they can hold out the begging bowl and receive charity? Yes, they do. That beats all the unpleasantness of struggle, sacri-



Workers

An employer’s culture: minimum wages and zero hours (and minimum taxes too).

ifice, loss and having to fight to assert ourselves against the employer.

Why has all this nonsense about “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” been resurrected? When has fairness had anything to do with wages? The nonsense reflects lack of clarity in the trade unions, the rolling back of class consciousness about the relationship of wages to profit and the length of the working day.

That clarity and class consciousness was hammered out in the 1880s when trade unionism was about to take the great step forward of organising general, less skilled and casual trade workers – because we recognised the need for class organisation, high levels of membership, stopping competition among ourselves.

It meant fighting the employer workplace by workplace, industry by industry, locality by locality, and understanding the national concept of our trade unions – not trade unions divided into the so-called devolved nations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England as is presented to us today.

There can be no fairness when the employer has a reserve army of the unemployed or millions of workers struggling to survive on short hours, combinations of

one, two, three jobs, zero hours contracts etc. Nor can there be fairness with employers driving wages down to the minimum and having millions of workers by the throat.

There is no fairness, no level playing field, no equity between employer and worker. Will we have to re-invent the wheel to grasp this concept or study our own history to see why we created our unions in the first instance?

We fight for wages to survive. We fight for improved terms and conditions to make survival more acceptable. We fight for a reduced working day, week, year to make living possible. We organise collectively, in the trade unions, to fight to keep the rate of wages or to lift it. We organise collectively, in the trade unions, to fight to reduce the working day.

To break our collective strength, the employers look to weaken and undermine us by fragmenting the work place and creating competition among workers. They want to lengthen the working day, to stretch the acceptable concept of working time – the 24/7 culture, endless opening hours and so on. They want to drive wages down to the national minimum wage, the living wage, depending on our level of organisation and acceptance of the attack.

Diametrically opposed

Two diametrically opposed mindsets confront us, reflecting what is in the interests of the working class and what is in the interests of the employers. There is no fairness. Employers have the whip hand unless we can disarm them through organisation, unity, discipline and sharper tactical and strategic thinking. There is no equality between employer and employed, no partnership – only the occasional marriage from hell which always ends in divorce.

Unions that either plead for more like Oliver Twist or rely on the employers’ sense of fairness and decency are delusional. We have to look to ourselves, get organised or reorganised and decide what we want. Is it to dream of “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” – or is it to take control of the means of production and fully realise the product of our labour? ■

As in health and education, the steady erosion of the culture sector damages us all...

The fight for the arts



Workers

BBC musicians and a variety of choirs prepare for a concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

LIKE HEALTH and education for all, arts for all was not won easily. It took over a century of demands and class struggle, and the impetus of hopes for a better life following the second world war to establish a national health service and a free education system throughout Britain.

What is often overlooked is the third pillar achieved in the late 1940s – the creation of a way to safeguard and fund the arts nationally, for all across the nation. It helped build morale and kept national unity in a bleak economic period. In contrast to today, demands for separatism were almost non-existent and the sense of “Britain” was enhanced by the extensive touring of theatre, music and exhibitions throughout the land.

Capitalism has never liked the way the arts are so non-commercial and contrary to “the market”, and it has sought to continually erode the system of national funding for the arts ever since. The growth of the European Union and its push to weaken

nation states by regionalisation has been another factor weakening and fracturing a flourishing cultural movement.

Behind the development of national cultural projects invariably lay some superb talents with strong vision. The National Theatre celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, but its origins can be traced back to the immediate post war years.

Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier’s rebuilding of London’s Old Vic theatre in 1945-46 with world-beating productions of Shakespeare (the legendary *Richard III* for example) inspired the revival of British theatre. Joined by Vivien Leigh and others they formed a permanent touring company – eventually reborn as The National Theatre.

Their example inspired other theatres such as the Crucible in Sheffield, the Citizens in Glasgow and the Royal Shakespeare Company, to name but a few. Youth theatre and amateur drama benefited greatly from this revival.

Similarly, the revival of symphony orchestras (and their associated choirs) had its spin-off in the formation of youth orchestras and youth choirs. The National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain was an example for the whole nation to follow.

Every city had an orchestra fed by junior orchestras and bands. For example the Youth Orchestra of Glasgow, founded in 1951, soon grew into three Glasgow Schools’ Orchestras. Alongside this, brass bands, large wind bands, pipe bands and youth choirs were founded, building on traditions of local areas. Competitive music and drama festivals such as the Brent Festival or Edinburgh Competitive Music Festival provided an incentive to keep standards high.

This system of youth music, a world-leading project at its height, has been allowed to run down for over three decades, depleted of care and funding.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

What should have been an example of excellence – an export to other countries – is now being forgotten and a project from another country imported (the Sistema or “Big Noise”, from Venezuela).

But one British institution, driven by the persistence and professionalism of its practitioners, has kept its integrity. The music examination system of Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music has steadily enhanced its worldwide reputation for high standards. Its examiners are in increasing demand in countries around the world, including China and Japan.

‘Arts funding was found – despite postwar economic devastation.’

A wartime origin can also be pinpointed for the effort to fund arts properly for the nation. Cultural organisations were struggling to continue activities as war unfolded. So in 1940 the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts was founded.

Initially, improving morale was part of the vision with theatre, concert tours, visual art and film, utilising both professional and amateur companies. Peace brought an added emphasis on excellence and enabled many ambitious music and drama projects. Arts funding was found – despite postwar economic devastation.

The new postwar funding body, the Arts Council of Great Britain, had to be prepared to account for its funding decisions to government and the public. Major festivals encompassing all the art forms were funded, including the Edinburgh International Festival, as a stage for the best of British arts to share with guests from around the world.

There was also the one-off 1951 Festival of Britain to celebrate victory over Nazism, and the peace. Iain Sinclair, the

British writer and filmmaker, visited it as an 8-year-old. Writing of its 60th anniversary, he notes that it is “remembered as an uplifting moment for a nation recovering from the trauma of war” and that it was designed to “celebrate Britain’s heritage, her industrial and scientific advances” – and its “get-it-done” attitude, a contrast with “our age of corporate sponsorship”.

Legacies from that period include the cultural hub of the Southbank Centre. It is still being developed to this day, and has just concluded its ambitious year-long music festival “The Rest is Noise”.

For the visual arts significant developments include the Hayward Gallery, Tate Modern and the renovation of galleries and museums in cities throughout Britain, and the resultant touring exhibitions.

Without proper funding major events like the Manchester International Festival and the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony – a celebration of British achievement in industry, health, education and the cultural field – could not have happened.

Decline and fracturing

Eating away at this potential was an ideological attack from capitalism. This was seen in its most overt form in the United States where the McCarthy inquisition against working class ideas drove out some of the best talent of stage and screen. Paul Robeson was exiled to Britain, with the upside that he established a lasting rapport with the Welsh miners and their male voice choirs.

In Europe including Britain a more underhand system was employed to counteract ideas that challenged capitalism. National characteristics or art that might rouse to revolt were downplayed in favour of a faceless and abrasive “modernism”. Writers and artists who followed the British and American government line were favoured.

An account of this period begins to be explored in Frances Stonor Saunders’ book *Who Paid the Piper?*, described as an investigation of the role of the CIA and other agencies in directing the ideology of culture in Europe in the “cold war” decades following World War 2. Whether by design or expediency, Europe and Britain were



Choral singing in Perth Concert Hall.

flooded with American commercial culture, much of it of a “junk” standard from the mid-1950s onwards. Despite this British voices in pop, jazz and classical music in several styles struggled to the surface.

National funding of “excellence” in art and music found itself in conflict with the pressures from this capitalist “market” ethos. Funding for the arts has been dispersed and has declined. Even in schools and art and music colleges this conflict still unfolds.

On top of this the vision for a “one nation” provision for the arts faltered. In 1967 funding was split up with the formation of Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils. In the 1980s the Thatcher government – as well as devastating industry – attacked the arts, cutting in half the number of organisations being funded and dividing up the arts into 10 regions.

1993 saw a supposed boost for culture – a reliance on gambling through National Lottery funding. But by 1997 the arts endured another major cut by amalgamation with media and sport nationally, coupled with intrusive questioning and paperwork. Accusations of dumbing down followed. By 2003 separation was well established, the national overview of culture lost and Arts Council England formed. This was one of the moves that seemed designed to make any mention of the con-

Campaigning websites include:

www.lost-arts.org

www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk

And on Twitter: @theatre_matters



cept of “Britain” taboo. Until now, that is, when the fight-back against separatism and fracturing – and reuniting our working class – has begun in earnest.

Arts unions fight back

To resist the degrading and cutting of our achievements in culture, workers have brought the unions that represent them into several well organised campaigns.

At the BBC, in its eighth year of cutbacks, several unions are arguing that cultural standards and the range of programmes have been so severely damaged that the corporation has laid itself open to privatisation by its enemies. Thousands of musicians, actors, writers, technical and production staff in the BBC are represented by BECTU (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union), Musicians’ Union, Equity, Writers’ Guild, NUJ and the IT & Communications sector of Unite. They are now campaigning jointly under the call “BBC Cuts: There is an Alternative”.

These unions – together with the Professional Footballers Association – form the Federation of Entertainment Unions. The campaign against continual cuts and closures in cultural life “Lost Arts” has brought together the Federation with members of the Prospect and PCS unions to fight this steady erosion.

The actors’ union Equity leads the “My Theatre Matters!” campaign to stop theatre decline and closures. Somerset has been the first to cut its entire arts budget. On top of Arts Council cuts, massive local authority cuts are being targeted at urban areas, where most of the funded theatres are.

Theatres and theatre companies threatened include Northern Stage and Theatre Royal in Newcastle, Sheffield’s Lyceum and Crucible theatres and the New Vic in Stoke-on-Trent. Reinforcing the Equity push are *The Stage* magazine and the Theatrical Management Association.

A special Equity technique has been to get a leading actor to make a speech to the audience at the curtain call as the show or play comes to an end – thus mobilising the public to defend their theatres. Well known names actively backing this campaign include David Tennant, Victoria Wood, Julie Walters and playwright Alan Ayckbourn.

The struggle to save libraries in Britain has been featured in *Workers* before and this campaign continues in its work under “Voices for the Library”. It is estimated that over 10 per cent of libraries (out of 4,500) are under threat of closure, yet councils have a legal obligation to provide them – without charging for book loans. So downgrading of professional standards and de-skilling has been ongoing. Many local campaigns have been organised.

The Musicians’ Union, the National Union of Teachers and the EIS in Scotland have collaborated in continual campaigns to save or upgrade music teaching in schools. Instrumental and voice training is often centred in music “hubs” sometimes outside normal school hours. Some counties have cut their provision for this, so a very uneven picture emerges, and in November Ofsted issued a damning verdict on Music Hubs in England.

Meanwhile, cuts are affecting jobs and pay for music teachers, who face redundancy, pay cuts and reduced work in over

35 music services. This is in the context of overall and ongoing arts funding cuts. For example the Arts Council of Wales’ budget was cut by over 3 per cent in November, while its Scottish equivalent was deemed in a music magazine to have become “mired in uncertainty”.

Also ongoing is the decades-long campaign to “Keep Music Live” promoted by the MU whose sticker to that effect is to be seen in most pubs, clubs and venues. A current MU effort is to survey and support those working in pubs and clubs. This comes after sorting out the problems that the restrictions by local authorities on live music venues had thrown up. The MU fought for events with audiences up to 200 to be free of the severe licensing restrictions.

We have been reminded in recent weeks of the hardships of this sector by the tragic crash of the helicopter into the Clutha pub in Glasgow where the “two-tone” nine-member ska band Esperanza were performing.

They had been inspired by an earlier generation of musicians who had broken through the commercial market jungle to establish a very British style. Their inspiration was the Coventry group The Specials, whose hit song *Ghost Town* summed up the urban and industrial devastation – and revolt against it – of the early Thatcher years. Recent years have proven that the pioneering creative spirit that led to the demands to fund arts for all nationwide has not died down. Just look out for the music, theatre and film from Britain in a host of styles that have found success on the world stage. ■

With finance capital dominating and distorting the economy British industry becomes ever more important...

Aerospace: vital for Bri

THE AEROSPACE industry is a jewel in the crown of our high-tech manufacturing and a big source of skilled jobs. As of mid-June 2013 there were around 113,000 workers employed directly in Britain's aerospace industry, up 2,000 since 2010.

But there are clouds on the horizon in terms of investment and orders. Overall, factory orders fell by 11 per cent in 2010 due entirely to a 29 per cent drop in military contracts that was not wholly offset by a 3 per cent rise in civil orders.

This trend for growth in civil aerospace and decline in military orders is set to continue. The change in market is particularly important given the earlier decision by BAE to sell its 25 per cent civil aviation share in EADS, the maker of Airbus now based in Toulouse, France. The loss of diversification has meant that BAE is now over-dependent on military orders.

The destructive move to sell the stake in Airbus was entirely orchestrated by the last Labour Government. The sale amounted to 80 years of our civil aviation expertise being given to Airbus now run by France and Germany, neither of which for obvious reasons had any significant aviation expertise following their collapse in

1945. This deliberate weakening by the Westminster quislings is central to BAE's current problems

In 2011 BAE Systems announced the loss of around 3,000 jobs. Two years on, the lack of investment in its British operations continues with a further 1,200 job losses in the shipbuilding division.

BAE Systems is involved in several major defence projects, including the F-35 Lightning II, the Eurofighter Typhoon, the Astute-class submarine and the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers. The company has been the subject of criticism, both general opposition to the arms trade and specific allegations of unethical and corrupt practices.

In the autumn of 2011, following the announcement of 900 job losses at Brough, where the Hawk jet was assembled, GMB's Dave Oglesby then claimed that the government had turned its back on the workers and the aerospace industry. A further clue to future intentions came with this year's appointment of Roger Carr as BAE Chairman.

Carr learnt his asset stripping skills with Williams Holdings during the 1980s. He came from Cadbury, and was applauded

in the City for orchestrating the chocolate maker's sale to US-owned Kraft foods in 2010 (now renamed Mondelez). The view is that Carr has been brought in to BAE to eventually conduct a similar act by selling parts of BAE to various US manufacturers.

Meanwhile Airbus, having been sold off, thrives in the new market conditions. Around 100,000 jobs in Britain feed into the Airbus wing manufacture centred around Broughton for all Airbus aircraft wings, both directly as well as indirectly through an extended supply chain of over 400 companies. This is an extremely high-tech part of civil aircraft. But of course the company could move all that to another country once they learn the expertise developed here.

Also involved in wing manufacture in Britain is the American-owned GE Hamble Plant, and GKN in the Isle of Wight (see page 7). The A350 XWB's wing fixed trailing edge package is the largest production contract in GE Aviation, and in Hamble's 75-year-plus history.

Government support

The aerospace trade organisation ADS said in 2011 that government support would be "crucial for maintaining the long term future of the sector". But governments have been unreliable on this, for example their lack of support for helicopter production and their decision to discontinue the Harrier. The aerospace companies finance 48 per cent of R&D, while government contributes 24 per cent.

The other major British aerospace firm is Rolls-Royce, which produces the most fuel-efficient aviation engines in the world and has also diversified into other markets, for example, pump manufacture.

Rolls-Royce engine expertise benefits from whichever aircraft company is doing well. The British jet engine manufacturer recently won a \$5 billion order from Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, for Trent XWB engines to power 50 Airbus A350 XWB aircraft. This takes the total number of Etihad A350 aircraft on order to 62.

It also won a \$300 million order from Qatar Airways for Trent 700 engines to

Servicing the US Air Force

ON THE military side of operations, *Flight* magazine reported on 2 October this year that Rolls-Royce had won a \$49 million contract to establish an engine maintenance facility at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma.

The new facility Global Hawk engine depot will perform maintenance on Rolls-Royce's AE 3007H, which powers the Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk unmanned air vehicles flown by the US for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. They could be produced in significant numbers not just for military but for civil use in farming, search and rescue, mapping, and delivery.

The new facility is a public-private partnership, the first for Rolls-Royce, and will be staffed by both Rolls-Royce and

US Air Force personnel.

The AE 3007H is a derivative of a model used on small airliners and corporate jets. Several hundred of the engines have been manufactured. The engine produces 8,600 lbs of thrust, and allows the RQ-4 to remain airborne for over 30 hours. The US Air Force currently operates around 30 Global Hawks, with more on the way.

A large part of the aerospace industry has always been driven by the requirements of the military and that will continue for the foreseeable future. This is important technology in which Britain plays a leading role, and a technology that could be harnessed for the benefit of Britain, especially in civil aviation, transport and delivery. ■

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power five Airbus A330 freighter aircraft. But it has given up its stake in the V2500 engine programme that powered the Airbus A319.320.321, originally a collaboration with Pratt & Whitney and MTU.

With significant orders Rolls-Royce may be doing well, but does it mean an increase in the British workforce? Where is it concentrating investment? Its website says that the new facility in Singapore includes a Trent aero engine Assembly and Test Unit (Trent 700 for Airbus A330); a Wide Chord Fan Blade manufacturing facility; an Advanced Technology Centre; and a Regional Training Centre. When fully operational the facility will create around 500 new jobs, bringing the total number of employees in Singapore to over 2,000.

Rolls-Royce has also invested another 90 million euros at its site in Dahlewitz in Germany, adding 80 new jobs to the current 2,200 workers. Since 1993 Rolls-Royce has built several competence centres in Dahlewitz, where jet engines are developed, tested, manufactured and maintained. The new development test rig for the Trent XWB engines is to go into operation in just two years' time. This model is said to be the company's largest and most environmentally friendly jet engine, and from 2016 on will equip the new Airbus A350 airliner.

Why Germany?

Rolls-Royce says it chose Dahlewitz mainly because of the many highly qualified engineers available in the region as well as the depth in other industry partners within the aerospace cluster Berlin-Brandenburg. Its collaboration with Daimler of Germany should be seen in this context. Of course, Bentley cars, now owned by Daimler, and Rolls-Royce cars, now owned by BMW, offer the Germans a useful blueprint.

But why wasn't Derby chosen? Is there investment from Rolls-Royce in Britain? It has new sites, including the new £60 million technology centre for engine controls at Birmingham Business Park. And on 2 November 2012 the company also announced the opening of the new Rolls-Royce Apprentice Academy in Derby. The new facility will enable Rolls-Royce to train additional apprentices to work in the Rolls-



Blades on the Rolls-Royce Trent 70 engine.

Royce supply chain and East Midlands manufacturing companies.

Rolls-Royce has had an apprenticeship programme for over 100 years. In 2012 the group recruited over 300 apprentices and at any one time it has over 1,000 apprentices on programmes around the world. Ofsted graded the Rolls-Royce apprenticeship programme outstanding in all areas, and the company is one of only two non-educational organisations to be awarded Beacon Status by the Learning & Skills Improvement Service.

Training

Any quality training of engineers should be welcomed – but the new engine programmes are predominantly being produced in countries other than Britain, so let us not be misled by a bit of Ofsted flannel. Still, the number of students in Britain taking specialised aerospace engineering degrees has risen on average by nearly 7 per cent a year since 2000 and reached 9,825 in 2010.

There is without doubt growing pres-

sure on British engineering companies to lower their wage bill to “compete” with labour costs in Asia, and a company such as Rolls-Royce will be no exception. But this outlook is entirely a function of currency fluctuations. Real efficiency comes from well thought-through domestic planning and investment.

The gross average weekly wage in the aerospace industry increased from £691.30 in 2009 to £712.40 in 2010, an increase of 3 per cent. This figure is 46 per cent above the mean gross weekly wage in Britain. The mean th gross annual salary for aerospace employees in 2010 averaged £37,215. This pattern of relatively higher wages is always the case where a semblance of machine tool investment takes place, and doesn't mean the workers are well paid for their skill.

Alongside demanding higher wages Rolls-Royce Derby workers should be demanding that all new engine programmes are manufactured in Britain and not eventually hijacked by Daimler aided by the same Westminster quislings. ■

Western eulogies to Nelson Mandela are trying to airbrush man who never renounced the revolutionary fight...

Nelson Mandela: 1918-

TWO FOREIGN leaders gave orations at the memorial service to the great Nelson Mandela on 14 December. One was Barack Obama of the USA, whose windy rhetoric lectured the 90 or so government heads present about following the example of “the great liberator”. The other, Raul Castro of Cuba, spoke of Mandela as the “ultimate symbol of dignity and unwavering dedication to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and justice”.

Of course it was Obama’s speech that featured in western press coverage largely promoting Mandela’s life as one of saintly fortitude in the peaceful fight for freedom.

After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 Mandela called for an end to peaceful resistance and for people’s armed struggle against the brutal apartheid government. He was a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of South Africa when he was subsequently imprisoned, and he was able to take part in leading the struggle even from a prison cell. All this was airbrushed out by capitalist leaders rushing to be part of the eulogies.

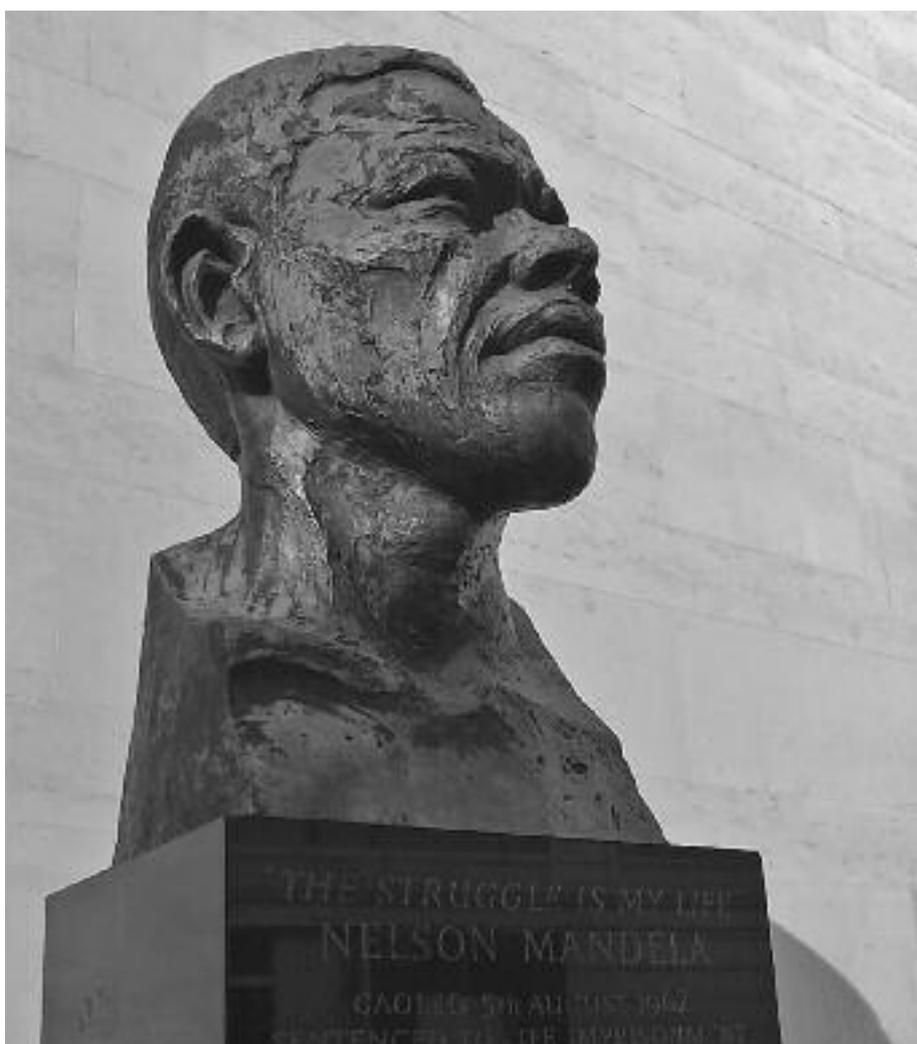
Armed struggle

Also heard was Mandela’s unswerving support for the ANC’s armed campaign of sabotage, bombings and attacks on the police and military to destroy the regime.

The crowd’s huge cheers for Castro went unreported here. As did those whenever Robert Mugabe was mentioned – he also led a bitter struggle against a western-backed racist tyranny and was a life-long friend of Mandela. There was good reason for Castro to be introduced on the memorial platform as from the “tiny island that fought for our liberation”. In 1988, Cuban forces defeated South African troops in Cuito Cuanavale, Angola (see *Workers* July 2010, available online).

Mandela said in Havana in 1991, “Without the defeat inflicted at Cuito Cuanavale our organisations never would have been legalised... The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom and justice, unparalleled for its principled and selfless character.”

Contrast this record with that of the USA and Britain, whose presidents and



The statue of Nelson Mandela erected on the South Bank, London, installed in 1986 by the Greater London Council shortly before Thatcher abolished it.

prime ministers present and past were obliged to travel in 2013 to South Africa to speak admiringly of Nelson Mandela.

The British state was apartheid’s greatest foreign supporter. In 1960 the Sharpeville massacre, when police shot dead 69 peaceful demonstrators protesting against the Pass Laws, and the Coalbrook gold mine disaster where 435 miners were buried alive (their bodies never recovered), both laid bare the brutality of a state where the black population was treated as expendable in the search for ever greater profits. Yet in 1961, the

British government opposed the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth (it was outvoted).

Then, in 1962, the UN called for sanctions against South Africa on the grounds that the regime was a threat to international peace. The British government opposed this, and also refused to observe the UN embargo on arms to South Africa.

In June 1964, the UN passed a resolution calling on the South African government to end the trial of Mandela and the other imprisoned ANC leaders. The British and US governments shamefully

out of history the -2013

abstained. For three decades, although you wouldn't know it from the present words of politicians, the ANC's main international supporters outside African armed struggle were Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Mandela stayed on the US terrorism watchlist until 2008. Reagan described the apartheid regime as "essential to the free world". The CIA helped the regime, and information from the Agency led to Mandela's arrest. Margaret Thatcher saw Mandela and the ANC as terrorists and opposed sanctions.

'Cameron joined in with pro-apartheid junkets but now fawns at Mandela's memory'

Norman Tebbit, an ageing Thatcherite ex-minister, still holds that view as correct. At least he is prepared to acknowledge it, unlike Cameron, who joined in with pro-apartheid junkets but now fawns at Mandela's memory (although, unlike many other young Tories and always the PR man, he avoided wearing a Hang Nelson Mandela T-shirt).

Mandela was released from jail in January 1990 and President de Klerk lifted the ban on the ANC. Talks on a new democracy for South Africa began. When in 1993 Mandela was elected the country's first black president, at his inauguration as President, he embraced Fidel Castro, saying, "You made this possible."

Of course, it was the South African people who made it possible, with their brave fight over many years, black and white together, to bring about the downfall of the brutal apartheid regime. But Mandela's tribute acknowledged the truth of what happened and reflects the true source of his huge moral authority – the understanding that nothing less than a lifelong revolutionary fight is needed to overthrow the people's enemies. ■

6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist has recently held its 16th Congress, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see www.workers.org.uk.

1: Out of the European Union, enemy to our survival

The European Union represents the dictatorship of finance capital, foreign domination. The British working class must declare our intention to leave the EU.

2: No to the breakup of Britain, defend our national sovereignty

Devolution, and now the threat of separation, are both products of only one thing: de-industrialisation. Any referendum on the break-up of Britain must be held throughout Britain.

3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

Unions exist as working members in real workplaces or they become something else entirely – something wholly negative. Take responsibility for your own unions.

4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

The fight for pay is central to our survival as a class, and must be central to the agenda of our trade unions.

5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

The regeneration of industry in Britain is essential to the future of our nation. Our grand-parents, and theirs, knew this. We must now reassert it at the centre of class thinking.

6: Build the Party

The task of the Party is singular: to change the ideology of the British working class in order that they make revolution here.

Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
- Get a list of our publications by sending an A5 sae to the address below, or by email.
- Subscribe to Workers, our monthly magazine, by going to www.workers.org.uk or by sending £15 for a year's issues (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

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email info@workers.org.uk
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In praise of science, and scientists

‘The lives of these two scientists show how little the government understands about creativity...’

IN NOVEMBER Fred Sanger died, aged 95. He was never a household name, but he should have been. The only Briton – and one of only three people in history – to have won two Nobel prizes in science, his contributions encompassed laying the basis for the sequencing of proteins and genes.

He was in exalted company: the other two are Marie Curie, the pioneer of research into radioactivity, and John Bardeen, who invented the transistor and later helped develop the theory of superconductivity (without which MRI scanning would not exist).

Sanger’s death made headlines around the world, and even a few in Britain. But the truth is that this government – more than any previous one – has little time for science or for scientists. For all that they bang on about scientific literacy, ministers avoid the results of science: they make policy based on prejudice, not on facts.

And Sanger never played the fame game. Unlike several recent and perhaps more politically prominent Nobel laureates, he turned down the offer of a knighthood that always comes to Nobel prizewinners. He didn’t make a fuss about this, though he did tell a journalist he didn’t want to be called “Sir”.

But Britain also gained a new laureate last year, Peter Higgs, famous for the “Higgs boson”, the fundamental particle that institutes like CERN in Switzerland have been searching for – and, it seems, might well have found. Higgs turned down a knighthood in 1999. “I’m rather cynical about the way the honours system is used, frankly,” he told a *Guardian* journalist in December. “A whole lot of the honours system is used for political purposes by the government in power.” How refreshing!

Both men shared the quality of being self-effacing, not seeking fame and certainly not claiming it where they thought it wasn’t due. Sanger famously said that he was “just a chap who messed about in a lab”. Higgs has

also gone on the record saying the media should stop using the term “God particle” to describe the Higgs boson (because as an atheist he doesn’t believe in God). And he has said the so-called Higgs mechanism should be called the “ABEGHHK’tH mechanism”, after the people who discovered it.

Higgs has never endeared himself to university officialdom. Now in his 80s, he thinks he would have been sacked from Edinburgh University in the 1960s for his trade union activity (as a member of the AUT, the forerunner of the UCU), his support for student protest, and the dearth of papers he produced – and that only rumours of a Nobel prize at the time saved him.

With the government intent on forcing children as young as 10 to take state exams, and piling the curriculum with deadly dull rote learning, the lives of these two scientists show how little the government understands about creativity.

Sanger struggled with mathematics at Cambridge, and described himself as “academically not brilliant”. Higgs has said he wasn’t very good at physics at school. He won school prizes for languages, English, chemistry and maths, but not physics. (And last year’s British winner of the Nobel prize for physiology and medicine, John Gurdon, related how his teachers at Eton told him he was too stupid for science.) Spot the pattern?

When you look at current government educational policy – or that of the previous government for that matter – its fixation with targets, its disregard for evidence and its rubbishing of original thought, you have to fear for the future of British science.

Our education system, whatever its faults, has proved brilliant at producing people who can think. That, and our technological, industrial past, is why a small island like Britain can have produced so many scientific advances. So while we should praise our scientists, we must also fight to preserve the conditions that nurtured their talents. ■

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