

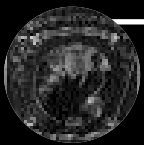
# WORKERS

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JUNE 2004 £1



## WHAT, EXACTLY, IS 'FREE' ABOUT ALL THIS MOVEMENT OF LABOUR?



Miners strike for investment

04



US plans second attack on Cuba

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# WORKERS

## “ First thoughts

THE MESSAGE from Westminster and Brussels is clear: whatever you do, just vote in the European elections this month. A propaganda barrage is being levelled at the British people, varying from European Commission adverts in cinemas with breast-feeding babies, to dire warnings about the threat posed by the BNP.

Never mind that opinion poll after opinion poll shows a stunning lack of support for the BNP, we all get these fascists shoved in our faces to dragoon us tamely into the polling booths. And those who demand our participation in the euro-parliamentary farce, and the equally farcical local elections, want us in those booths for one main reason: so that once there we might, perhaps, vote for

them. They all play the game, from Labour and the Tories through to the disintegrating Respect “coalition”.

The greatest fear that Brussels has is that a low poll will expose the European Parliament as illegitimate, unsanctified even by the bourgeois conventions of elections. The people have already made up their mind. We won't vote for you, that's our decision. But parliamentary parties don't like it when the people decide not to vote.

In Belgium itself, voting is compulsory, yet even so, around 10% decline the offer. When it was voluntary, fewer than 30% took part. So much for freedom of expression. Would they dare suggesting such a law here?

## Second opinion

MAY 3RD WAS the 25th anniversary of Thatcher coming to power. Applauded? Only slightly by a few of her old retinue. Medals issued? No. Statues raised? Only one, awaiting repair from being beheaded. Rolled out in the Tory or even Labour election campaign? No. Missed by anyone? No. Hated by millions? Yes. All that's missing from her footnote in history is the date of her death.

Blair is continuing Thatcher's work of overseeing absolute decline in Britain, with the number of manufacturing jobs lost — 3,000 weekly — double Thatcher's worst.

Thatcher pretended to oppose the EU but signed all the major treaties submerging Britain into it, enthusiastically implementing all the EU Directives which pioneered privatisation — the destruction of the utilities, the fragmentation of transport, the loss of sovereignty to name but a few. Her economic philosophy of monetarism remains that of the EU. Blair continues the headlong charge with Labour Party policies directly inspired by EU diktats — be it Foundation Hospitals, PFI or the mass movement of labour — the 21st century's slave trade.



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist),  
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB  
ISSN 0266-8580

[www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk)  
Issue 73, June 2004



Cover photo by John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk. Iraqi Kurds picking strawberries in the Vale of Evesham

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## Asset-stripping Rover

WHERE IS THE "Phoenix" of Phoenix Venture Holdings going to fly off to next? The mythical bird arising from the flames and ruin of Rover and the Longbridge plant continues to be surrounded in mystery with answers which only beg further questions.

The trade unions are still scouring the financial workings of MG Rover and of the four directors, who saved Rover by buying it for £10 in 2000, for answers. How can BMW divest themselves of Rover, for the proverbial £10, followed by the similar divesting of MG Rover engines for £20 and then MGR Capital for £50 and still apparently have written off loans to the tune of £1 billion?

How can BMW have a loan/debt on its books, reputedly repayable in 2049 for £3427 million — less than half the original loans? In 2049, will BMW itself still exist? Will Rover exist? Some doubt it will make it to 2006! MGR Capital had over 58,000 Rover car loan deals reputedly worth £340 million but went for £50! As the loans are cleared there may be a possible £20 million bonus for the four saviours. How? An estimated £31 million plus has been paid in direct salary or placed in a protected trustee scheme for these saviours during the last three years and yet MG Rover is still in the red.

There are 5,000 workers employed at MG Rover. There were 6,500 in 2000 and 40,000 in 1984. MG Rover has now announced that they are in discussions with the Polish government over the closed Daewoo car plant in Warsaw. They are also talking with the Malaysian car manufacturer Proton over possible collaboration and with the Chinese government. All these discussions are about production in those countries, with China apparently the preferred option.

Where is Longbridge in all this? Already land and asset disposal in the West Midlands has netted Phoenix an estimated £60 millions so how much is Longbridge worth? Is it more valuable closed or working? To the soaring Phoenix, losing the millstone of production, employment and underinvested assets, then it may well be the former.

**RAIL****RMT votes for action**

RMT MEMBERS at Network Rail have voted for industrial action over pensions, travel concessions and pay. The company has closed its final-salary pension scheme to new members and imposed an inferior scheme on new starters.

Only those who joined the company before April 1996 will benefit from travel concessions, including free travel up to 40 miles to work — a necessity for workers who have to travel a long way to stations. Yet bosses retain their first-class concessionary rail travel after retirement!

Members have been incensed that the five bosses at Network Rail are to receive £350,000 in bonuses (20% of their 6-figure salaries), while a standstill pay deal is being imposed on them.

**FIRE BRIGADES****United demand**

DELEGATES AT the annual conference of the Fire Brigades Union in May united behind a demand for employers to implement the June 2003 Pay Agreement or risk a total derailment of the "modernisation" process.

The employers have still not paid out the 3.5% rise due in November and are constantly changing their position over the wording of the agreement. A key issue is whether firefighters should carry out training and other duties at night rather than sleep for part of their shift. The union will hold a Recall Conference in June to decide on a ballot for action if progress is not made, or if at any time the government moves to impose a settlement.

**If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us or fax on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to [rebuilding@workers.org.uk](mailto:rebuilding@workers.org.uk)**

## MINING

### Colliery closed

WISTOW COLLIERY, which holds the UK record for coal mined in one week — 200,743 tonnes in 1995 — is now shut. Part of the Selby Complex closed on Friday 14 May 2004, the colliery's record will never be surpassed as there will be no coal industry to challenge it. There were 500 miners in 1995, and the 40 left today will work rescuing coal-cutting equipment before the pit is finally abandoned. The equipment will probably be sold to foreign competitors or for scrap and the last giant lump of coal will be for museum display as forecast by the National Union of Mineworkers less than four years ago. Yet demand for coal is at its highest for several years — 'fuelled' by foreign imports.

• UP STICKS AND A JOB FOR LIFE, produced by the Selby Coalfield Communities, is a new book that records, with insight, sadness and deep class resentment the creation and then destruction of the jewel in the crown of British coal and its strong community. One contributor says: "The Selby pits were architect-designed and distinctive [and] covered 110 square miles — an area the size of the Isle of Wight." Another reflects on the feeling of family generated when whole communities worked in the same pit (Wistow): "We once contributed £20 a head for a lad who needed help with cancer treatment. £100,000 was raised."

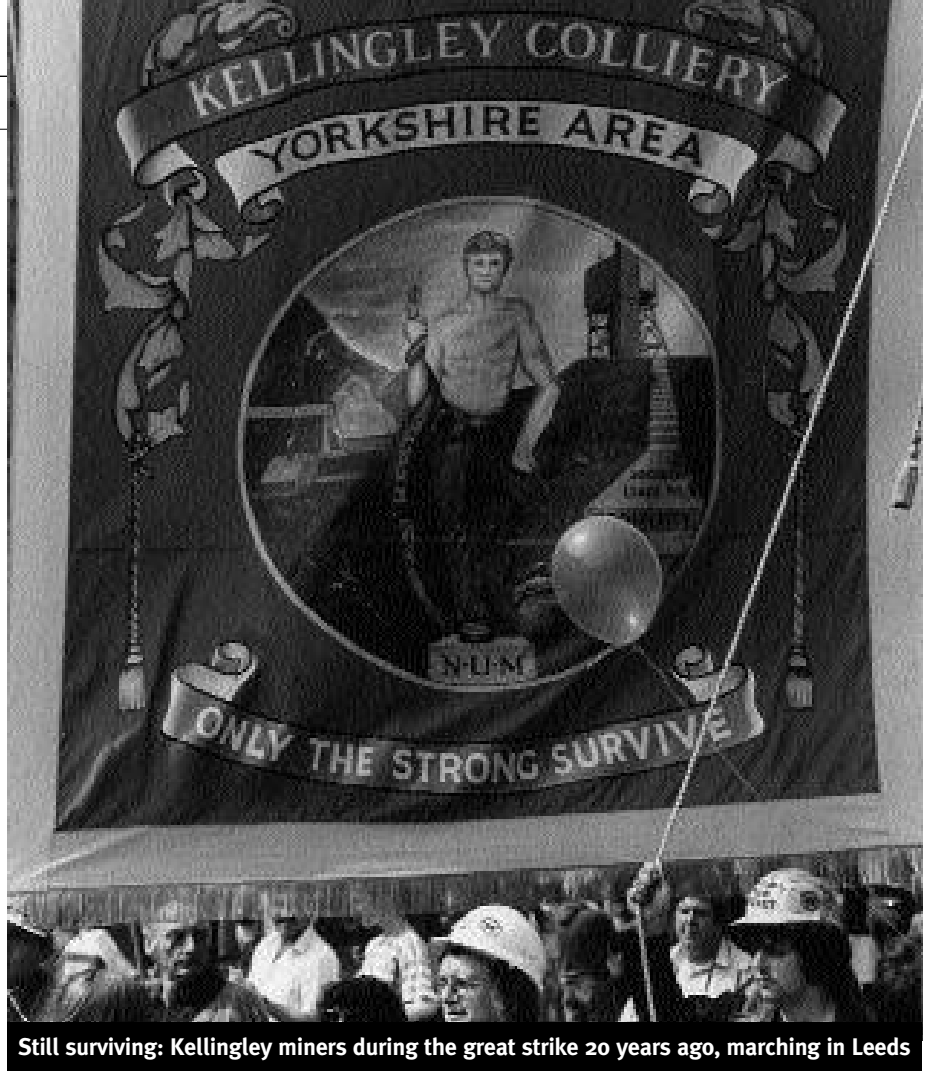
Available from the Selby Times, 01757 702802, £11.49p inc postage.

## FRANCE

### Last pit closes

LA HOUVE, the last coal mine in France has been closed. 300 years of the French coalmining industry, employing over 300,000 miners at its peak, has ended. Unlike Britain, France depends upon nuclear power for 80% of electricity generation. Unlike Britain, France does not have over 1,000 years of coal reserves. Unlike Britain, France was an initiating signatory to the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952.

This pact was the forerunner of the Treaty of Rome which established the Common Market, then the European Union. By bringing together the two core industries of manufacturing — steel and energy — the capitalists of Europe, including Britain, set in process the demise of those two industries. The closure of British coal and steel industries is a direct result of nearly 55 years of EU directives undermining, restricting, privatising, penalising and eventually removing control of industry from Britain to Brussels.



Still surviving: Kellingley miners during the great strike 20 years ago, marching in Leeds

# Miners strike for investment

KELLINGLEY COLLIERY at Pontefract now enters its third month of strike action as the miners respond to proposals to change shift patterns, lengthen the working day and introduce seven day working with weekly 24 hour stoppages. The miners were offered a bribe: accept the deal and 240 miners' jobs will be saved from the Selby complex which is to close in July. In fact the same proposal to extend hours and change shift patterns was originally made over two years ago, well before the decision to close Selby had been made public. The Kellingley NUM branch have responded not only with the weekly stoppages but with proposals to invest in and create a genuine second coal face, absorbing the threatened Selby men and raising productivity. Productivity has to be set in context: Kellingley in 1983 produced 46,000 tonnes of coal a week. Kellingley in 2003 produced 42,000 tonnes of coal a week but with a sixth of the original workforce!

UK Coal rejected this proposal saying, "It is a high risk option that would add £30 million to the cost of running Kellingley." There is no pretence that it is about saving 240 jobs — the aim is solely to bolster the balance sheet. Now UK Coal is selling its 97% share in Australian Gloucester Coal for a reputed £21.5 million, with the caveat that the proceeds will be "for the future, including investment on new coal face equipment". Kellingley is the golden opportunity for them to put their money where their mouths are.

## EUROPEAN COURT

### National interest 'illegal'

ONE YEAR AFTER the European Court of Justice ruled that the government's "golden share" scheme, whereby the government retained a controlling presence in privatised strategic industries, was illegal, the Department for Trade and Industry has quietly accepted the decision

and rolled over.

The EU legal decision was based on the principle that the golden share and therefore inherent national interest ran counter to the principles of free movement of capital.

So a sovereign interest in the British Airports Authority (BAA) and most of the privatised water, electricity and gas companies has been dumped. The utilities had all been sold abroad anyway.

# Steel shortage hits industry

THE PRICE OF STEEL has risen approximately £200 a ton since December 2003, doubling in the last year and now at a 30-year high. Steel mills and steel suppliers across Britain and Europe are facing ever increasing steel shortages.

According to the Engineering Employers Federation and its associate UK Steel this is apparently due to the demand for steel from China and the shortage of coke and recyclable metals.

Corus, the Anglo-Dutch steel company, which supports this view, has stated that it "could be in a situation where we cannot supply as much steel as we'd like". Riva, the largest Italian steel producer, and Arcelor, the world's largest steel producer — 44 million tonnes versus Corus's 220,00 tonnes, both implied coke shortages could halt production.

Within two days of this announcement Corus announced the closure of its heavy mill plant at Scunthorpe with the loss of 240 jobs. The closure sees Corus withdraw from sheet-piling in favour of Arcelor.

Investment in Scunthorpe is to continue in the production of rod and plate products but it seems ever so convenient that such a restructuring, with a rationalisation and division of the industry into spheres of influence, has taken place. Or does the demand for steel in China justify the operations of cartels in production? Arcelor signed a massive \$800 million agreement with China in December 2003.

The loss of manufacturing jobs in Britain is running at approximately 3000 a week, the highest weekly figure ever. Britain probably leads in Europe on the recycling of metal and yet the shortage of steel could lead to a worsening of the difficulties faced by manufacturing industry.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### Improved offer accepted

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS are fighting for higher education by winning better pay and conditions: on a 52% turnout, they voted by 84.5% to 15.5% to accept the employers' improved pay offer. Students and the wider public have given massive support. Public opinion is against the government's new plan to allow universities to introduce top-up fees of £3,000 — in a recent poll, 78% of us opposed them and only 16% supported them.

Governments have seriously under-funded higher education in Britain, preferring to shift the costs more and more onto individual students. Funding per

student fell by 36% between 1989 and 1997. Total spending on higher education and student support fell by 7% in real terms between 1994/5 and 2003/4, from 1.08% of GDP to 0.78%. Student support fell by 56%, due to the reduction, then the abolition, of the maintenance grant. To bring Britain up to the OECD average spend of 1.3% of GDP on higher education, we need to spend an extra £3 billion.

Meanwhile budget cuts and steep tuition fee increases are denying hundreds of thousands of American students access to college. Last year, more than 100,000 fewer students than expected enrolled in California's colleges, and because of the loss of state revenue, these colleges turned away 50,000 students, largely from working class families.

growing in their fury as pension schemes are shattered, looted and milked dry.

During the 1990s over £18.5 billion were snaffled by employers' "pensions" holidays and raids on pensions schemes. Over 60,000 workers have been left pensionless after company schemes have collapsed and the investments found to have been stolen away. Robert Maxwell and the DAILY MIRROR pension scandal was not an aberration!

Even the CBI is having to join in and criticise the "top hat" two-tier pension schemes — whereby directors and board

## PENSIONS

### Unions rally

JUNE 19TH WILL SEE a major rally and demonstration jointly sponsored by the Trades Union Congress and the Pensioners National Convention in central London. The rally and demonstration will come against a backdrop of the TUC issuing warnings that industrial action to defend pension schemes will occur.

Not that the TUC has any teeth or tanks but many constituent unions are

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### JUNE

Saturday 19 June

**Pay Up for Pensions — TUC March and Rally**

Assemble Temple Tube, Embankment, 12pm. March sets off at 1pm to Trafalgar Square for Rally at 2pm.

Trade unionists, pensioners, workers who have lost out in recent pension collapses and others concerned about their pension prospects will take to the streets to call for a new deal for pensions. Supported by the National Pensioners' Convention. For more information, see

[www.tuc.org.uk/pensionsrally](http://www.tuc.org.uk/pensionsrally)

#### JULY

Friday 16 July to Sunday 18 July

**Annual Tolpuddle March and Rally, Tolpuddle, Dorset**

Celebrate one of the seminal struggles of British trade unionism with music, speeches and a march. Highlights for this year's festival include Billy Bragg, the Oyster Band, Brendan Coker, Punjabi drummers the Dhol Blasters, and Cuban sounds from Havana group Asere.

Saturday 17 July

**Respect 2004, London**

Victoria Park, Hackney, from 12pm to 8.30pm — free, lively and loud, London's anti-racist festival returns to the East End park after last year's foray into the lifeless Dome. Sponsors include Unison and SERTUC. Full line-up yet to be announced — for more information see [www.respectfestival.org.uk](http://www.respectfestival.org.uk)

members get unbelievable pay-offs and golden goodbyes and the workers get reduced schemes and a blunt "sod off"!

The government proposal to fund a rescue package of £400 millions to help such workers is a drop in the ocean compared with what has "disappeared". Welcome though it is, it reflects government fear over the rising opposition from trade unions — those in work defending those who have retired, and pensioners' organisations — the ten-million-strong grey vote and MPs getting rather nervous about being re-elected.

Des Warren

**DES WARREN**, a stalwart fighter for British building workers, and a man who suffered for his principles, died at the end of April. He was better known as one of the Shrewsbury Two, the other one being Ricky Tomlinson, who later found fame in acting.

They were prominent organisers of the national building workers' strike in 1972 and continued the fight against the invidious 'lump' system, whereby employers forced building workers to become self-employed with the consequent de-regulation of the industry, non-recognition of building unions and worsening of pay and conditions.

Warren, then 35, was a good organiser of flying pickets, which effectively widened the dispute over the whole country, with tens of thousands joining the strike. The Tory government, having suffered defeats by the miners and being forced to release the Pentonville 5 dockers, was determined to beat the building workers in collusion with Building Trades Employers.

**Prosecuted**

To do this they prosecuted both Warren and Tomlinson on trumped-up charges under the Conspiracy Act. Warren was sentenced to 3 years, Tomlinson for 2. At the end of his trial Warren said "The conspiracy was between the government, the employers and the police." Both men endured appalling, squalid conditions in 14 different jails! They went 'on the blanket', refusing to wear prison uniform and to do prison work. Warren in particular was singled out, with many months of solitary confinement and reductions in family visits.

Des Warren never really recovered his physical health, laying the blame on the 'liquid cosh', the tranquillising drugs administered to him in prison. He wrote a book about his experiences in prison called 'The Key To My Cell'. Warren retained his wicked sense of humour to the end and it was fitting that last year the Merseyside conference of the National Construction Safety Campaign celebrated his contribution to trade unionism with the Robert Tressell Award. He is sadly missed.

# Last month, the US government announced the island into a US colony...

## US plans second war against

ON 6 MAY, the United States government announced plans to overthrow the Cuban government and effectively turn the island into a US colony. For the past 42 years, the American blockade has made it impossible for Cuba to trade with the US, imposed penalties on third countries trading or shipping with it, prohibited the country from using US dollars in foreign trade, barred it from world financial institutions, prevented it from buying medicine and food from US subsidiaries, blacklisted ships visiting Cuban ports and generally imposed a stranglehold on trade with the island. Now, the US is to impose new measures geared specifically to overthrow the revolutionary government and replace it with a US-controlled regime. The highly trained and educated Cuban population would provide cheap labour for US companies.

The new measures include:

- Cubans living in the US to be prevented from sending dollar remittances to families and friends in Cuba, and from visiting their families more frequently than every three years
- restriction on hard currency they can take with them to their families
- limitation on the definition of a Cuban family
- a scholarship funded by the US to train counter revolutionary cadres in Latin American universities
- programmes to support "democracy building" by youth, women and Afro-Cubans from the country that brought you the Ku Klux Klan
- a ban on US citizens from visiting Cuba unless they are involved in pursuing US policy on approved visits
- extraterritorial action against foreign companies investing in Cuba
- increased funding of \$59 million to counter revolutionaries on the island
- harassment of tourism
- stopping Venezuelan oil from reaching Cuba
- setting up US-controlled trade unions
- pressure on other governments and NGOs to join the US in overthrowing the Cuban government
- seizure of assets of Cuban companies working in the export sector.

The US then goes on to describe its proposed privatisation of the Cuban economy, "professionalisation" and privatisation of the police and army, moves to keep all children and teenagers off the streets by keeping schools open, changing the school syllabus, empowering Cuban churches and small businesses to control distribution of food, dismantling the existing political institutions, sacking all judges, putting the existing government on trial, and so the list goes on. They even intend to vaccinate all Cuban children despite the fact that all Cubans are currently vaccinated against all appropriate conditions, in a country that has higher health indicators than the US itself!

### Outrage

The policy is intended to turn Cuba into a US colony as it was for nearly 60 years after the US replaced Spain as the colonial power, until the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959. Cubans will respond to this policy with outrage, vigilance and a stronger determination to defend the gains of the revolution.

The Cuban Communist Party has said that Bush is driven mad by the reality of the enormous human capital created by the people, by its ability to send tens of thousands of doctors to the most remote places in the Third World (greater than the ability of all the advanced countries put together) and by its progress in education, health and culture that will soon put Cuba in the first place among all countries in the world.

Bush and those who share his ideology want to wipe out Cuba's example. They want to destroy all that a heroic people have built with incredible love. Cuba will never return to the horrible, wretched and inhuman condition of a US colony.

What will be the response of the British government to this threat against a sovereign country? Will Blair or Straw condemn the US? Of course not — but not simply because of their blind support for Bush. They will not utter a word because they no longer determine British foreign policy on this issue. Policy

# plans to overthrow the Cuban government and effectively turn t Cuba



**Cubans playing dominoes: the quiet humanity of the Cuban people continues to enrage the US**

towards Cuba is determined by the EU Common Position. This in turn is determined by the country that has the most hostile position towards Cuba.

The current hostile EU Common Position was determined by Aznar's Spain. Aznar, an admirer of Franco, steered EU policy to a position as hostile as the US policy on Cuba. He has been thrown out by Spanish workers, but the US is confident it can rely on Italy's Berlusconi, or those new Europeans from

eastern Europe. Maybe the Czech Republic or Latvia will oblige. And Jack Straw still pretends that foreign policy is one of his red lines that Britain will not give up for the EU constitution.

It is up to British workers to determine our working class foreign policy as it has done over Iraq. The British TUC took a big step in this direction at last year's congress when it passed motion 83 pledging support for Cuba. Yet the International Confederation of Free

Trade Unions, a relic from the Cold War to which the British TUC is still shamefully affiliated, carries out the will of the US government by trying to get the International Labour Organisation to condemn Cuba and by pressurising our TUC.

But more and more British trade unionists have developed links with Cuban trade unions and know the truth. Workers understand workers — it's very simple.

It all sounds seductive, yet it is not about rights, or diversity, or labour power...

## There's nothing free about the 'free movement'

BRITAIN — the welcoming new home within an enlarged European Union for all fleeing war, starvation and desperate poverty? Impossible, of course. Why, then, the confusion, deliberate and naïve, concerning the free movement of labour? The government, its EU masters and its placemen and women in the trade unions are orchestrating the most systematic and deliberate campaign to exacerbate the confusion.

To begin with, the “free movement of labour” deserves closer attention. It is not about race, culture or victims, nor is it to do with enriching societies by introducing diversity: it concerns economics and at its root, the selling of commodities — literally people in this

case. Whether workers' labour is “free”, “moving”, enslaved or otherwise, it is always a class question.

In some societies slavery was the main form of labour — ancient Greece and Rome depended on it — but with the development of productive forces it became more profitable to the ruling class to find other ways of exploiting the labour of others. It reflects on the backward, unequal societies and cultures that slavery still exists in Africa and parts of the Middle East. It is also significant that for the first time in over 100 years in Britain, the Anti-Slavery Society, that bastion of petit-bourgeois guilt-cleansing Victoriana, has started to grow.

Slaver-owning exists across the world,

including Britain — though here it is hidden. It was imported by the liberalism which believes all cultures are equal and that therefore the direct slave-owning cultures of the backward so-called Third World should have an acceptance and tolerance here. For all the breast-beating about one tragic child slain because her stepfather was a drug dealer, the Metropolitan Police's bald estimate that a minimum of 200 children a week arrive at Heathrow Airport whose destination and fate are unknown — other than being trafficked — raises not a murmur.

Meanwhile, the trafficking of estimated thousands of women and children into Britain's misnamed “sex industry” has turned London into the



Stuart Purfield/reportdigital.co.uk

October 2003: immigration officers and police raid a vegetable packhouse at Bomfords Ltd, Luddington, Warwickshire. Faces have been obscured to protect identities. After officials questioned 360 suspects and checked their identity and immigration status against Home Office records, five women and 17 men were arrested. Police later said that five Indians, two Lithuanians, seven Poles, a Slovakian, a Ukrainian and a Kosovan were failed asylum seekers, had no permission to work in this country or had exceeded their stay.



culture, or victims. It is about the buying and selling of human

## ment of labour'

**'Until recently, the term "gangmaster" survived only in the most backward areas of East Anglia. Now it has resurfaced across Britain...'**

brothel and venereal disease capital of Europe. These people are not free labourers in any sense of the word, and should be considered as slaves — illegal in Britain.

But what about those who volunteer for the worst kind of wage slavery, those who risk their lives to come here illegally to work for starvation wages?

The recent deaths of 21 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay or the 60 smuggled Chinese in the back of a lorry in Dover last year, reflects that this modern-day slave trade runs to the Far East as well as Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe. A recently jailed father and son from East Anglia are estimated to have made £10 million in the last three years from smuggling people.

The importation of labour is an abuse of the term "free movement of labour" because it is about exploitation. The Chinese cockle pickers, the farm hands, the workers stuffing goods for supermarket chains, are all about employers getting away with paying rates of £1 per hour or less.

### Gangmasters

Until recently, the term "gangmaster" survived only in the most backward areas of East Anglia. Now it has resurfaced across Britain and reflects the old agricultural work, construction sites and docks of the 19th century with their casual labour and starvation wages.

Immigration into Britain has always been about bringing in labour cheaper than that done by established workers. It

has never been about charitable employers cleansing their consciences by offering jobs to the poor downtrodden who happen to be elsewhere in the globe. It has been about bringing in labour that would accept wages established British workers would refuse — whether the historic Irish labour working on railways, canals and roads as navvies or the Caribbean immigration in the 1950s and 1960s for jobs on London Transport or in nursing. These people were quickly unionised.

Immigration from Pakistan and India during the 1960s and 1970s into the mills and textiles factories of Yorkshire and the North West was a deliberate attempt to try and depress already depressed wages. It is to the honour of a number of Pakistani and Indian Communists who ensured that the rate for the job was known, that the men joined the union and had begun to learn the language of the employer — English — before they landed.

### Underpaid

Now we see another wave of immigration to fill underpaid jobs. The 44,000 overseas doctors, nurses and health professionals working in the NHS reflect the refusal of this government to train and adequately pay the numbers required to fill those jobs from workers already resident in Britain.

The theatre staffing in one hospital has more than 50% overseas nurses. The professional registration body for nurses does require them to pass an English test before they are able to register and work. And when the shift on duty is primarily Philippino, then that becomes the preferred language with the result that British nurses are reporting they feel isolated at work.

Meanwhile, health services worldwide are sucked dry, and developing nations plundered of the skills and resources required to build and staff their own health services.

Cleaning and domestic staff, many

## How reliance on overseas teachers is dragging down London's education

LONDON SCHOOLS have long attracted teachers from overseas to come and work. In the days of the Inner London Education Authority, the opportunities for professional development in a world-class inner-city education system which stood for excellence in classroom practice and provision, was appealing, particularly to english-speaking teachers from Australia, New Zealand and Canada who would stop off in London for a year or so before travelling in Europe.

Nowadays a spell in London schools is still good for a CV back home, but conditions are not the same. Overseas teachers from places like South Africa and the Caribbean desperate to retain their skills, and increasingly from eastern Europe, are brought here by agencies to work on a termly or daily basis at far lower pay rates than permanently employed teachers. If their qualifications are not recognised by the DfES — now often the case — this is no longer a bar to work. They are simply employed short-term on the unqualified rate. Many, working in the most difficult schools which are desperate to fill empty posts, are shocked by the reality of these London classrooms. The costs of living in London eat away at wage rates which looked good at home. So some schools are effectively filling posts with a turnover of often unqualified teachers — the effect on children's education is obvious.

The response of teacher unions has been confused. The proper tactic of recruiting teachers into the union and demanding they become fully qualified by British standards (insisted on in the past by the unions themselves) is undermined by calls for the DfES to recognise all overseas qualifications and for pay parity in the name of equal opportunities — the unqualified to be paid equally with the qualified!

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 8*

illegal, have long been ruthlessly exploited on minimal wages. This situation has only begun to change in recent years with the unions vigorously enforcing the minimum wage as a starting point.

Once the employers in the public services cannot get away with poverty wages, then the value of employing unskilled, probably non-English speaking, non-numerate, non-literate, illegal labour loses its appeal. There are areas in hospitals where immigrants outnumber British staff, almost to their exclusion.

### **Poor basis**

And yet some of the the larger contracting companies are starting to realise that illiterate labour is a poor basis for securing market share and profitability. So even these vulture companies are having to embrace the trade unions, lifelong learning programmes, government training schemes etc so as to lift the skill level and quality of service.

It is estimated that in 1985 over 105 million people worldwide were economic migrants and that by 2000 this figure had risen to over 175 million. These figures will

**'It suits the employing class to have a reserve army of labour which is not steeped in the traditions and culture of the working class...'**

continue to rise with the expansion of the EU eastwards.

It is further estimated that the wages of migrant labour worldwide results in over \$150 billion dollars of income returning to those originating nations. This figure is far higher than aid programmes and handouts.

What has been known for years is that foreign aid has only aided imperialism and has been a contributing factor to ensuring poverty by subverting agricultural markets to supermarket demands or by shifting industrial production to Third World nations. Migrant wages now keep the rest of the family alive.

In Singapore, for example, slavery by

another name staffs the construction, cleaning, and caring industry. After years of limits on population growth (no more than two children), Singapore realised it had insufficient people to ensure the country could function. Workers are imported, and are employed on a variety of short-term contracts. Six-month contracts are issued to single workers, who live in camps and are paid a pittance. Families must be left at home. Any dissent and the immigrant is sent packing on the next boat home.

In British trade unions it is being argued that the migration of labour is a positive development but it is not. Instead the discussion should be about how to build the self-sufficiency and indigenous industries in those countries so as to free them from dependency and the need to ship their young men and women around the world.

The British trade unions have got to stop pandering to guilt and liberalism when they bleat about the desirability and acceptability of the "free movement of labour". They have got to stop promoting the ideologies of the EU. It is only in capitalism's favour to have free flow of goods, capital, services and labour.

Have the words of the COMMUNIST

## **The impact of migrant labour on the home country: what happens**

AT KARLOVY VARY hospital near the Czech Republic's western border with Germany, Dr Roman Brazdil, head of the intensive care unit, is facing an acute problem. In the past 18 months four doctors have quit his ward, and more are set to leave now that the door to the European Union is open, with 10 nations, mainly former Soviet bloc states like the Czech Republic, having joined the EU on May 1. "Once we are in the European Union there is nothing to stop doctors leaving, especially when they can earn up to eight times more abroad," Brazdil said in a recent interview.

Joining the EU means automatic recognition for qualifications gained

anywhere in the bloc and no formal requirement to prove language proficiency. And several Western countries are now actively recruiting doctors from the new member states, which are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Doctors' journals in several of the new member countries are full of advertisements for lucrative work packages in Western Europe. With a doctor's basic monthly salary around 800 euros in Hungary and as low as 420 euros in Poland and 312 euros in Latvia it's easy to see why many physicians are tempted to work abroad. The result of

this brain drain is that some hospitals could be left with a shortage of healthworkers.

"We fear that after 1 May we will lack medical specialists," Polish Doctors Chamber spokeswoman Iwona Raszke-Rostkowska, told the news agency AFP. "Polish doctors are already leaving for Germany, Britain and Sweden where they are regarded as good specialists and very prized," she said. But it is hard for the hospitals they leave. "You can't just replace a specialist with 10 or 12 years' experience overnight," Brazdil said. Border regions like Karlovy Vary are particularly susceptible. Doctors can commute to better-paying countries

MANIFESTO, written over 150 years ago, been lost on our modern-day social democrats: "The bourgeoisie...compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves."

The British trade unions should stop pushing the diversion of racism in discussions concerning migrant labour. If we want to tackle racism then we should address the unemployment rates among Black British youth, running at three times their white/Asian peer group, by getting that group into work. There is now a widespread culture of unemployment, benefit dependency, unemployability, with whatever explanations — drugs, criminality, destruction of industry, destruction of community, a loss of class consciousness and identity.

It suits the employing class to have a reserve army of labour which is not steeped in the traditions and culture of the working class, which does not belong to a trade union, does not understand the history or the language and whose first priority is to ensure that the family left at home eats — let alone pay off the loan-shark smugglers that thousands of such

workers are indebted to for the rest of their working lives.

The issue is one of class not race. It is a question of regenerating our class — forget the shopping malls with their low-wage jobs.

### Communist Manifesto

The COMMUNIST MANIFESTO charged workers with many tasks. One of these was that: "The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie." That means that the working class, wherever they are in the world and faced with whatever difficulties there may be, need to be clear that they must sort out their own problems at home and take control and not look elsewhere for wages or a better life. If life is dire at home, then they must become the catalyst to change it. No revolutionary from Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba or wherever else thought the problems at home could be resolved by becoming a migrant worker.

As long as workers fool themselves that globalisation of labour is unchallengeable or that mass migration is acceptable, then capitalism will always triumph. For this line to be espoused in the trade unions is criminal. The mass transfer of British manufacturing jobs over

the last 30 years to the European Union or China or India, poses the same challenge to British workers: stand and fight or become stateless, identity-less, another band of travelling, cheap labourers.

"Workers of all Countries, unite!", not "Workers of all Countries, migrate!" How patronising for our own trade unions to try and foist a programme that creates division. Workers can have organisation, unity and discipline in any workplace. Any worker who comes to Britain should join their union, learn English and understand the history and culture of these islands. That culture is very simple: there are those who exploit and there are those who labour: we unite to defeat the former.

We are not for the free flow of capital, goods, services or labour, for this is mere code for capitalism's continued looting of the world. We are for self-sufficiency, self-reliance, mutual exchange and co-operation, sovereignty and non-interference, development and equality and an end to exploitation — especially of labour.

**Next month in WORKERS: focus on nursing, migration and the state of Britain's National Health Service**

## Opens when doctors migrate to Old Europe from New Europe

while continuing to live at home without having to relocate their families. Milan Kubek, chairman of the Czech doctors' trade union, said that while the average Czech doctor's monthly salary, including overtime, was 35,000 koruna (1,070 euros), Czech doctors could earn up to seven times a month more in Britain. "If we want doctors to stay in the Czech Republic, their salaries must be raised significantly," he said.

Kubek emphasised that another reason doctors were tempted to go abroad was greater professional and further study opportunities. Officials admit they are concerned. "I personally have deep concerns that doctors and

nurses from Latvia could move to other EU states after enlargement," Rinalds Mucins, Latvian health minister, told AFP. Mucins expects that mostly young people with language skills will be tempted abroad. "We have to solve several tough tasks. The most urgent are wages, workloads and the education system," the minister said, adding, "It is not easy."

A Hungarian health ministry spokeswoman said the issue was "worrying" and was currently being researched by the ministry. She said the Hungarian health system already lacks five percent of the medical personnel it needs. Petr Ottinger, Slovakia's deputy

minister of health, said the greatest risk is faced by smaller hospitals in the regions. Czech Health Minister Marie Souckova said however that limited and temporary migration was not necessarily negative. "It is not a bad thing if doctors go abroad to get some valuable experience. Most of them will come back," she told AFP. But will they? Many young newly-qualified doctors such as Hungarian Peter Salstig, aged 30, are impatient to leave as soon as they finish their studies. "As soon as I qualified two years ago I started looking for a job abroad and am now earning 10 times as much in Switzerland as I would in Hungary."

Those who think that they have to tell the British working class what to do patronise the class...

## A politic made in Britain

**This article is based on a speech given at the May Day rally organised by the CPBML on 1 May at Conway Hall, London — an evening of celebration which also saw the launch of Bellman Books' REG BIRCH: ENGINEER, TRADE UNIONIST, COMMUNIST.**

REG BIRCH'S POLITICS were made in Britain, and always focused on what the British working class — all those who have to go out to work to earn a living — needed to win a decent life, to win our class rights — the right to work and create in Britain, the rights to health, education, skill and housing, the right to sovereignty, the right to run our own affairs. Similarly, all workers across the world have class rights. We can only achieve these with peace and independence, when we no longer allow capitalism to rule.

All his life, Reg was proud to be a member of the engineers' union; he was a skilled worker, good at his trade. Our trade defines our trade union. If all IT workers were in one union, instead of scattered across fifty, they could hold all the employers to ransom. Some wrongly say,

'pay all equally', qualified and unqualified, skilled and unskilled alike. Some oppose unions and skill, and use the old discredited notion of "labour aristocracy", not a phrase Karl Marx ever used, and if he had, he'd have been wrong.

Picture a Muslim woman from Bangladesh who works in a Spitalfields sweatshop. Should she see herself as a member of a doubly oppressed minority, or as part of the vast majority, the British working class? Progress for her means she joins her union, she opposes her employer, even if he too is a Muslim from Bangladesh. Religion divides, an exclusive stress on gender divides; our unions unite the vast majority.

In Britain today, the capitalist class, that tiny minority of exploiters, is the root of all our problems. They gain when we do not produce what we want, when we buy it, on tick. They gain from record pay rises, bonuses, dividends, £15 million payoffs, tax havens and tax avoidance scams for top directors. They have built more prisons than schools, and sold off school playing fields and council houses. They are responsible for the premature deaths of Steve Thoburn, the metric martyr, and Des

Warren, the Shrewsbury building worker. They are to blame for our long hours, low wages, the most restrictive trade union laws in the developed world and low investment. They gain from the free movement of capital and from the free movement of labour, both enshrined in the EU Constitution and which lead to a modern slavery.

This May Day is also the day when ten countries join the EU. The Polish doctors' union and the Czech doctors already protest against the start of emigration of their doctors to Western Europe. The USA has "guest worker" programmes, so that big firms can recruit foreign, non-unionised workers, to compete with other countries' low wages. Some workers suffered 50% wage cuts. The greater the supply of workers, the lower the wage.

### Capitalism means war

What could be more fascist than to attack another country then occupy it by force? Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld's deputy, said, "Economically we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil." Bush tries to hold Iraq, against a national resistance. Britain's senior diplomats call it an "illegal and brutal occupation... doomed to failure". Why reinforce failure? Capitalism has not brought independence and peace to Iraq, Haiti or anywhere else.

Capitalism means terrorism. The US built up the mujahadin, to attack workers and peasants in Afghanistan. Now the US state holds captive in Guantanamo Bay those it captured in Afghanistan, so it is nearly impossible to charge and try any of them fairly in a court of law. Workers oppose terrorism, because workers are those who suffer its effects. But the government uses the terrorists to take away all our freedoms, it rams through ID cards, ends the right to trial by jury, ends habeas corpus. People are being held in British jails, without charge or trial.

Those who think that they have to tell the British working class what to do, or how to think, or how to vote, patronise the class. The "left", the Labour Party, and the



**Reg Birch (back row, second from left) with fellow members of the AEU's 1948 London North District Committee, which he had joined six years earlier while still in his 20s.**

*Continued on page 14*

# Reg Birch:

**engineer, trade unionist, communist**

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**Will Podmore**

*Continued from page 12*

Conservative Party, all tell the class not to vote for the BNP. But they attack the wrong target, just as Bush and Blair attacked Iraq not al-Qa'eda. The BNP, whatever else it does, does not blow up large numbers of workers.

There are Christian fascists, Jewish fascists, Muslim fascists, Hindu fascists — every religion has the germs of fascism in it, a reactionary hatred and contempt for life. Class unites: religion divides and demeans. Belief in gods and spirits, pie in the sky when we die, and reaction, all go together. Italy's government, under Signor Berlusconi, has just banned the teaching of Darwin in schools. Materialism banishes gods and spirits; science and progress go together. Fascism is anti-worker, anti-union, anti-women, anti-progress, anti-communist, anti-Britain.

The European Union imposes the notions of devolved regional government and regional elections, to break down local government democracy, the unity of our unions, our labour movement and of Britain. Low turnouts for EU elections prove how all the peoples of the EU oppose the EU, especially the British working class.

### EU vs US?

Some, for instance the French government, say build the EU to oppose the USA. Yet President Chirac joined with Bush to oust Haiti's elected government and impose their choice. The EU is not a lesser evil than the USA; it is the same thing — capitalist through and through.

Our Party has always opposed the social democratic trap of backing the lesser evil. The Viennese writer Karl Kraus said the "supreme principle of creative integrity" was "If I must choose the lesser

of two evils, I will choose neither." The French novelist Henri Barbusse said, "minimalism (which is also called the "least evil") is really conservatism." Why choose this evil or that evil, when we could choose the good?

Forty years ago we got a new Labour government, surfing a wave of new technology, promising it would be progressive and modern. But it brought incomes policies, spending cuts and tied us to a US war of aggression. We have moved on — we had the giant demonstrations against war, swift exposure of all the government's lies, but we haven't moved far enough to link workplace struggles to the fight against war and capitalism.

Conventional wisdom says that foreign affairs don't win elections. But they can lose them! The Liberal Party took us into the First World War, and never won another election on its own. A Conservative



**Reg Birch (bottom, second from left) with AUEW colleagues on the steps of the engineering union's Peckham headquarters during the fight against the National Industrial Relations Act, ready to repel sequestrators.**

# WHAT'S THE PARTY?

government took us into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, and hasn't won an election since. Blair took us into Iraq, which has at least wrecked his career. Each party betrayed British sovereignty by tying us to a doomed venture imposed by others. Each broke on the rocks of the British working class's independence of mind, our refusal to be dragged into something that was not in our interests.

Over the last year, we have had struggles by airport staff, car workers, transport workers, journalists, postal workers, youth workers, university lecturers, students, tenants in Camden, BBC workers, nursery nurses and civil servants, but it's not just those who have had to go on strike who have made progress. Teachers, firefighters, health workers, musicians and ambulance workers for example organise against government schemes to divide and destroy.

## A world of workers

Most of the world's people now are workers. In February, 50 million workers struck in India. Workers in Spain, Cyprus, Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq and North Korea all refuse to kowtow to capitalism.

Reg always said that his greatest achievement was founding this Party, a democratic centralist party. This simply means that after free and open discussion, the party takes a decision, and its members carry out that decision.

The strength of our Party is that we are rooted in the material needs and real interests of the British working class; we oppose what the class opposes — the EU and its constitution, capital, foreign wars. We want what the class wants — the NHS, education, jobs, industry, to rebuild Britain.

We cannot rely on anybody else to do the job for us; we cannot devolve our responsibilities to MPs; we are not looking for pie in the sky. There is always a way forward — not in parliament, but in workplace and trade union: assert our class demands, peace and independence, no war, no capitalism!

**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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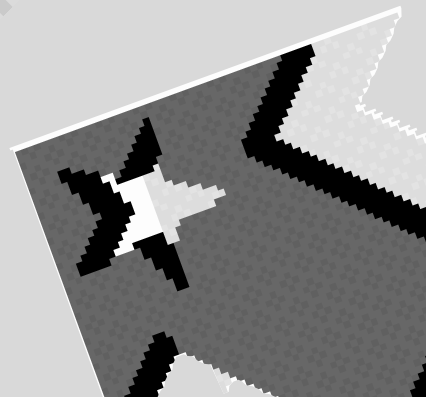
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# Back to Front – Power play

**‘During the war and the occupation, the US and British forces have killed at least 9,148 Iraqi people, and possibly as many as 11,005...’**

WHATEVER THEIR INITIAL views on the US invasion, most Iraqis now see it as a traditional colonial war, where the occupier fights to get control of a country’s resources, then remains in order to keep it. They want the occupying troops withdrawn immediately, and increasing numbers of Iraqis are prepared to fight them. And the predictions that the ethnic and religious divisions in the country would prevent Iraqi unity have been confounded.

Probably some in the USA and Britain believe the lie that power is being handed over to the Iraqi people on 30 June. A survey in Britain has shown that most British people want the troops withdrawn by the end of June (55% to 28%, Independent poll, 10 May).

But just consider what is actually being planned for 30 June: the US will run the US-appointed Iraqi Council, the US Army will run Iraq’s armed forces, and US oilmen will control Iraq’s oil. 30 June is “so that it no longer looks like an occupation”, in Colin Powell’s words. The US promises elections next January, but the director of the UN’s electoral assistance division warns, “elections could be postponed unless security improves”. This is not a war to introduce democracy.

Nor is it a war to fight terrorism. Richard Clarke, US National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism from 1998 until he resigned in March 2003, recently wrote, “Many thought that the Bush administration was doing a good job of fighting terrorism when, actually, the administration had squandered the opportunity to eliminate al-Qa’eda and instead strengthened our enemies by going off on a completely unnecessary tangent, the invasion of Iraq...Nothing America could have done would have provided al-Qa’eda and its new generation

of cloned groups a better recruitment device than our unprovoked invasion of an oil-rich Arab country.” The US Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute agreed that the attack on Iraq was a strategic error of the first magnitude.

What are the costs? Between 1 May 2003 and 1 April 2004, 461 US soldiers were killed (nearly four times as many as in the April 2003 campaign) and 3000 wounded. The war has cost the USA £86 billion and Britain £10 billion. During the war and the occupation, the US and British forces have killed at least 9,148 Iraqi people, and possibly as many as 11,005 (20 May figures, from [www.iraqbodycount.org](http://www.iraqbodycount.org)).

This includes 1,361 in April alone, for example, 40 worshippers in a mosque on 7 April, and 600 in Fallujah where the vast majority of the dead were women, children and the elderly, according to the director of Fallujah’s hospital. British forces have killed 37 people in circumstances where the troops were not under threat, as when they killed 12 people in Amara and wounded 27 others on 5/6 April.

Arbitrary arrests, indefinite detentions of about 10,000 people without charge or trial, appalling abuse and torture of prisoners (personally authorised by Rumsfeld, according to veteran US journalist Seymour Hersh), deaths in custody, house demolitions, collective punishments and casual killings of Iraqi people by the occupying forces, are all typical of colonial wars. As Kofi Annan observed, “As long as there’s an occupation, the resistance will grow.”

What is Blair’s response to these horrors? He is said to have “ordered a stop to any criticism, implied or overt, of Washington”. (SUNDAY TIMES, 18 April). And he is sending 3,000 more British troops to Iraq.

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