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MIGRANT LABOUR ON THE TYNE



Ellesmerre

04



Away with all our superstitions!

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Why capital can't keep its hands clean

14

WORKERS

“Out of control

IN THE PAST seven years, the government has deliberately let 1,023 foreign prisoners return to society without deportation hearings. The government's policy was to release them without any check of their status, in order to meet its own target of cutting the number of asylum claims. Public safety didn't come into it.

BBC's Panorama programme on 14 May nailed the lie that there had been 'systemic failure' to consider released foreign prisoners for deportation. They showed that Blair, in an attempt to stave off criticism over asylum seekers and immigration, had insisted that the number of failed asylum seekers being deported would soon outnumber those coming into the country. This was to be called 'Tipping the Balance'. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate dutifully responded by instructing its staff to only chase for deportation those who could help fulfil Blair's 'Tipping the Balance' target.

So when police or prison officers contacted the IND with foreign prisoners to be considered for deportation, they were told the priority was failed asylum seekers. So released offenders who may be a danger to the public or even illegal immigrants were not for deporting.

In this way, the executive was doing what

it wants, overriding the courts' direct, explicit recommendations that the prisoners must be deported after they had been released. This was not a cock-up, rather a deliberate policy to endanger the public. Tough on crime, soft on the foreign criminal.

Now the government is claiming that all foreign criminals who have served prison sentences will be deported on release – a policy which Charles Clarke undermined almost as soon as the Prime Minister had made the promise. EU nationals will certainly be allowed to stay. An EU Directive which came into force on Sunday 30 April purports to make it illegal to deport 'EU nationals' solely on the basis of criminal convictions. And of course anyone claiming they might be tortured. And anyone whose nationality cannot be discovered.

So there we have it. The hundreds or thousands of foreign prisoners "roaming our streets" were put there as a result of a deliberate government policy, and now they are lying about a new policy. Why would they do this? Do they have some reason to try to scare us?

Every sovereign state has the right to identify everyone who enters and who leaves the country. We have the right, and the duty, to control our borders.



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Ellesmere Port faces axe

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Ellesmere Port faces GM axe

NINE HUNDRED JOBS are set to go at Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant – a third of the workforce. The sight of Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling going cap in hand to General Motors pleading for the future was pathetic. If they had not entrenched themselves in the European Union, had not reinforced and kept in place the Thatcher anti-union legislation and had not overseen the destruction of British manufacturing at an accelerated rate during the past nine years, then they may have had harsher words for General Motors. Instead they whinge and grovel.

Amicus and the TGWU are forthright in calling for resistance to the job losses and redundancy offers. The walkout by Vauxhall workers was a good start, not rolling over and dying like at Rover, but it has to go further – such as boycotting General Motors, campaigning in new ways against the greatest attack on civil liberties – the enshrined anti-trade union legislation.

There are currently five Vauxhall plants producing Astras. The older ones are in Ellesmere Port, Antwerp in Holland and Bochum in Germany. The new ones are in eastern Germany and Poland where labour costs can be about a third of Dutch, British and west German rates.

Citroen–Peugeot recently decided to transfer its Coventry production to Slovakia, tipped to become the motor manufacturing centre of Europe. As for Rover, the Chinese ran off with the intellectual rights to the brand, and we can expect to see identical vehicles imported from China in years to come. Workers at the Astra plant know that they cannot compete with labour this cheap. They know that the reduction from three shifts to two is the run-up for the five plants to compete against one another for the right to build the Astra's replacement at two or three plants at most.

Another battle faces Liverpool. The Ellesmere Port workers are being urged by their unions to reject the voluntary redundancy invitations that will shortly be issued, and if the long term future of the plant cannot be guaranteed, based on production of the new model, then a boycott of General Motors vehicles should be organised to deny them its British market.

The root of this destruction of British manufacturing lies in the European Union, and only by taking it on can we defend manufacturing. All the traditional methods that a government could take to protect its national industry – import controls, ban on export of capital, government assistance to industry, etc – are now illegal under the EU rules.

We have to learn how to take control of our industry, and we could start by reasserting control of our unions to make them stand up to the EU.

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

PENSIONS**Back to the table...**

AFTER THE hugely successful one-day national stoppage on 28 March by members of the Local Government Pension Scheme, involving over a million workers, all has fallen quiet after the promise of further negotiations.

What the industrial action brought the employers and government back to a negotiating position proffered to health, civil servants and teaching workers in October 2005, nothing more. The broad span for negotiation – “nothing ruled in, nothing ruled out” – has still left all public sector workers wondering what on earth is happening. Protections for existing pension scheme members will emerge, but so will changes to the criteria of the scheme, such as two tier or differing scheme options.

These arguments for equalities, whether against ageism, sexism, averaged earnings or whatever, threaten to move the agenda on to one set by the government and its acceptance of the EU Directive on Occupational Pension Schemes.

MOTOR INDUSTRY**£10 gap enough to close Ryton**

IT HAS emerged that of the three Peugeot factories making the 207 model, the threatened Ryton plant is the second most productive turning out 67 vehicles a day compared with 69 at the Vigo, Spanish plant and 54 at Poissy in France. Peugeot claim that costs are higher at Coventry than at Poissy – £290 per vehicle as opposed to £280 at Poissy. The £10 differential is costing 2,300 workers at Coventry their jobs.

EUOTRASH**The latest from Brussels**

to come
TO COME



Vauxhall dealership: the axe hangs over British workers, see p3

Crisis stalks mining industry

WHILE BLAIR makes friendly noises towards nuclear generation, the coal industry staggers from crisis to crisis. On the one hand mothballed Hatfield Main is set to be re-opened by Powerfuel, headed up by Richard Budge (formerly of UK Coal) and attracting over £800 millions of Russian investment, employing 350 miners, is set to happen. The target here is 100 million tonnes of coal reserves. In addition to re-opening the pit Budge is planning a clean coal-fired power station, meeting targets for CO₂ global emissions.

On the other hand UK Coal, under financial pressure as a result of its pricing and the contracts it has signed with the electricity generators, is threatening to close five of its seven remaining pits – putting at risk 1,500 miners' jobs.

UK Coal's argument is based solely on greed and profit returns. The world price of coal has doubled over the past two years. But locked in by the contracts it accepted, UK Coal has not been able to capitalise on the rising prices. Electricity generation has begun to switch back to coal from gas as gas prices have rocketed and supplies have become scarce. UK generators are paying nearly £10 more per tonne of imported coal than they are for British coal.

The choice is stark: over 230 million tonnes of coal reserves in the Yorkshire coalfield could be lost to production within the next 18 months if UK Coal closes or reserves that are expected to last for the next 200 years are not available for Britain's power stations.

The recent government White Paper on Energy supports the prospect of 90% of Britain's energy needs being met by imports by 2020, an unbelievable situation considering Britain's huge coal reserves. As Russian investment moves into Hatfield, a collapse or takeover of UK Coal – with Russian, US, German and French mining companies hovering in the wings – seems imminent.

POWER**Power station up for auction**

A SMALL coal-fired power station, refurbished with gas desulphurisation plant, meeting international emissions standards and with a productive life expectancy of 25 years is expected to sell for over £120 million at auction.

The Uskmouth power station has passed from British public ownership (the

Central Electricity Generating Board) to US utility ownership under AES, to bankruptcy following the collapse of the US utility company TXU, and most lately to a bidding consortium of German banks.

The demand for energy, adequate coal reserves, dwindling gas supplies with soaring prices and uncertainty of security of supply have all made Uskmouth a sought-after purchase. As Bolivia and Venezuela secure their energy reserves, why doesn't Britain?

PFI**The robbery continues**

PRIVATE FINANCE Initiative schemes continue to demonstrate greed and outright daylight robbery by the Companies involved. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, reviewing the operation of the PFI consortium managing the Norfolk and Norwich NHS Hospital, Trust choicely referred to how "investors" increased their rate of return from 16% to 60%!

That windfall generated over £115

million for the consortium with only £34 million going back to the hospital. It has since been revealed that the Department of Health told the trust to agree to the deal. To escape from the contract would cost the trust over £257 million – almost a third of the entire NHS deficit.

The PFI scheme will cost the hospital between £5 and £7 million a year, offset by government funding of £3.8 million a year, for the next 30 years. That means over £210 million going to the "investors". To break even from this year's estimated £14.8 million deficit, the trust is looking to shed over 450 jobs.

People's trade deal signed

BOLIVIA, VENEZUELA and Cuba signed a Peoples Trade Agreement in Havana on April 29th. This followed Bolivia's formal accession to ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative Trade Area (alternative to the US sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas). The agreement covers cooperation and trade in a number of areas and recognises Bolivia's need for economic support due, in part, to the effects of US free trade agreements with Peru and Colombia that have taken markets away from Bolivia. The agreement is based on the principles of mutual cooperation and solidarity rather than free markets.

Cuba and Venezuela will guarantee 10,000 free scholarships to Bolivian students and provide state-of-the-art health care, education, and eradication of illiteracy in indigenous languages as well as Spanish, road building resources, hydrocarbon technology, energy saving advice, technology in the mining and energy sectors and resources for infrastructure and social programmes. They will also import Bolivian goods. In addition they will assist landlocked Bolivia to build a genuinely national airline

Bolivia will export to Cuba and Venezuela mining, agricultural livestock and industrial products, contribute to energy security, contribute its expertise in the study of native peoples and cooperate in the study and recovery of ancestral knowledge in the field of natural medicines and provide its research on natural resources and genetic agricultural and livestock patterns. The agreement ends with a joint commitment to Latin American unity and integration, international cooperation and peace. What! No free movement of labour and capital? No having to join NATO? No destruction of one another's industry? No laws imposed on one another?

- At an EU/Latin American summit on Friday 12 May, heads of EU member countries like Austria and Britain berated both Bolivia and Venezuela for attacking free market economics. The Austrian Chancellor, Wolfgang Schuessel, said there was only one real choice of economic policy and that the "reality is ... open market societies are better in their performance than closed, restricted structures". Tell that to the UK's fishermen.

Tony Blair also delivered a lecture on the moral use of power (!) to the leaders of Bolivia and Venezuela: "The most important thing is that everyone uses the power they have responsibly, that is what we want to have happen." Perhaps he was getting close to his concern about countries deciding for themselves when he went on to say, "People are worried about energy supply in the future. What countries do in their energy policy... matters enormously to all of us."

HEALTH**Primary Care Trusts hit**

THE NHS FACES its 21st reorganisation in as many years. From 1 October 2006 the number of Primary Care Trusts will be reduced from 303 to 152. At the same time, 900 seats on the boards of PCTs are being created (and with them, interesting prospects for patronage).

Though London retains its 32 PCTs –

in order to mirror the London local government boroughs – pilot schemes to strip out all non-clinical services and replace them with shared services crossing boundaries are being prepared.

- The Ambulance Service is likewise to be re-shaped, with the existing 29 services reduced to 11 from 1 July 2006. The figure is not dissimilar to the proposed re-shaping of police forces in England, or the European Union's planned regions for England.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****JULY**

Saturday 8 July, Durham, all day

Durham Miners' Gala

The mines and the miners have gone from the North East, but the pride lives on. Last year up to 70,000 people came to the Durham Miners' Gala, and more are expected this year, the 122nd Gala. Music all day. The highlight is the traditional march with banners through the city.

Monday 10 July, for four weeks

"A better world is possible", Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH

A photographic exhibition illustrating the work of the Cuban Medical Brigades in Honduras, Haiti and Venezuela by Gateshead photographer Ailie Hodgson. A Salud International production. For more information about the exhibition, email info@salud.org.uk.



Weekend of 14/16 July, Tolpuddle

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival, Tolpuddle, Dorset. The annual celebration of the farm labourers' fight for union rights.

Martyrs' Festival goes from strength to strength. The event kicks off on Friday night, with plenty of music. Sessions on Saturday on "Unions and Climate Change" and "Latin America turns left". The grand procession sets off at 2pm on Sunday, followed by speeches, including from Brendan Barber, Shami Shakrabarti and Tony Benn. For more information, email southwest@tuc.org.uk or visit www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle

Saturday 15 July, London, 1pm

International Brigade Memorial Trust

The annual commemoration takes place at Jubilee Gardens, South Bank, SE1.

Adding Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union

AS THE SCALE of the influx of cheap labour following the gobbling up of eight eastern European countries plus Cyprus and Malta becomes clear, the EU Commission is to admit at least another two countries from 1 January 2007. Bulgaria, a byword for corruption and organised crime, will join Romania, slightly less of a basket case, in gaining admittance to the European Union.

The European Commission expressed concern that the nearly 200 contract killings that have occurred in Bulgaria, apparently with no successful investigations or prosecutions, were a threat to the rule of law! They have been told to show tangible results in prosecuting organised crime gangs and to be seen to do something about corruption, fraud and money laundering. So although the Bulgarian Chief Prosecutor has said it would be impossible to produce prosecutions in a few months, Bulgaria may have to try to get just one prosecution before their case is reheard in October, but nobody believes they will be refused admission to the EU. Romania on the other hand is deemed to be 'ready' to join. However, it has to show that it can properly distribute handouts from the EU to its farmers. Apparently it has no compatible IT systems that will enable it to control distribution of these payments. Not much different to Britain then.

The British government has announced that it predicts that 56,000 migrant workers from these two countries will come to Britain for work. However, as their previous estimates for immigration from central and eastern Europe were incorrect to a factor of around one hundred, we could expect up to half a million. This would be at a time of increasing unemployment in Britain following the last wave of

immigration by new EU states. Ruth Lea of the Centre for Policy Studies said in April "This month's unemployment figures show a rise of 30,000 over three months and 120,000 over the past year. Those are people who are really looking for jobs". "It's very clear that migrant labour has kept down wages and it is highly questionable that immigration has had no effect on unemployment."

Although the implications for Britain are potentially huge based on our current experience, it would appear that neither the British Parliament nor the British people are being asked for their view on this decision. Tony Blair's newly appointed Minister for Europe, Geoff Hoon, told the nation in a television interview that this decision was best left to the unelected European Commission. This may seem incredible but it conforms to Blair's practice that the British people will not be consulted about these momentous changes that will affect our class and our lives for a very long time. No votes on the Euro, the EU Constitution, enlargement, control of borders or immigration.

Bulgaria and Romania are members of NATO, one of the unwritten conditions for membership of the EU. However, they are strategically located in the Balkans and on the Black Sea coast. This makes them strategically important as the EU wants to annex the remaining countries of the Balkans and eventually Turkey, Ukraine and Georgia. Already, most of the former Yugoslavia is under some kind EU/NATO occupation or administration, some already using the Euro as their currency. If only that stubborn Serbia would stop refusing to join NATO or the EU, the fall, or accession, of the Balkans into the EU would be so much easier.

The deliberate destruction of manufacturing employers are shouting about the decline and jeopardy of the

Industry on the

WE ARE CONSTANTLY told that immigration from Eastern Europe contributes to our economy and provides much needed labour for our hospitality and catering industries. But the direct experience of the European Union's free movement of labour on manufacturing jobs in the northeast of England shows a very different story. It is a story of the deliberate destruction of manufacturing jobs in Britain dating back to the time of Thatcher and continued by Blair.

There has been a shortage of skills in manufacturing industry since the Thatcher government abolished apprenticeships. Today, there is a massive shortage of all engineering and construction skills, leaving an ageing workforce in sole possession of those skills.

Employers have obviously seen this, and some have taken last-minute steps to reinstate apprenticeship schemes and training, but there is a four-year gap before these youngsters become trained and there is no guarantee that they will work for the employers who have trained them.

Most employers have been waiting for the accession of eastern European countries to the European Union and the consequent free movement of labour.

There is an abundance of highly skilled cheap labour in those countries, particularly Poland. These workers benefited from the training and education provided by their socialist governments before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Existing EU countries could impose time restrictions on the movement of this labour and most did. But the British government, through Jack Straw, invited them to work in this country from day one.

Direct recruitment

It is now commonplace for industrial employers to recruit cheap Polish or Lithuanian labour through agencies in those countries in which many of those companies have a controlling interest. On Tyneside, for example, there are increasing numbers of cheap Polish and Lithuanian skilled labour.

The unions, through the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU), have had to develop a strategic response as it became clear that not only

Bring out your badges

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

Badges
78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

ction of British manufacturing has gone so far that even the
g about a skills shortage. But their response is to accelerate
rdise the position of the reaming skilled British workers...

e Tyne – employers turn to eastern Europe



Photo: Workers

Shipyards: it is now common for companies to recruit cheap Polish labour through agencies in which they have a controlling interest.

were companies recruiting from Poland and Lithuania, but they were planning to set up training programmes in those countries to ensure a permanent supply of cheap skilled labour.

Knowing the companies' intentions to pay the immigrants only the national minimum wage, less than half the skilled rate, the unions' first job was to get

agreements with employers to get them on the skilled rate. Unions have been able to do this where they are well organised and the employers are prepared to bide their time until the ageing skilled workforce retires or dies.

So agreements have been reached with Hertel International Marine, for example, to pay them £12.10 per hour and

for the Poles to live in humane conditions in local bed and breakfast houses. British Engines Ltd and Parsons (now Siemens) have similar agreements.

Where the unions are not so well organised it is a different story and these

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workers are at the mercy of capitalism. A&P, formerly Appledore, have ship repair yards on the Tyne and the South Coast. At their Hebburn on Tyne yard they have subcontracted to an agency that employs about 60 Poles out of a workforce of 170.

The Poles are paid the national minimum wage, have deductions from their wage to pay the agency as well as deductions for their accommodation and are housed in cabins within the yard. They have no safety training and, unlike previous immigrants from Ireland, Jamaica and Pakistan, they do not speak English.

A&P has a history of subcontracting and has replaced nine existing subcontractors with foreign skilled labour, denying work to local skilled workers who may have worked casually or are on the dole.

It gets worse. A&P holds 51% of the

shares in a Polish employment agency. The immigrant workers are brought over for ten weeks, then returned to Poland for a break before returning to Hebburn. But after attempts by the CSEU unions to contact the Poles and pressurise the company, A&P now sends them back to Poland every 10 weeks and brings fresh workers back, making it impossible to organise them.

Casual

Clearly, as the ageing workforce at A&P retire or more likely are made redundant, the entire workforce will be made up of casual Polish labour. Those employers who have reached agreement with the unions are simply delaying this process.

British Engines, for example, is providing free English-language training for its Poles in working time – so the company is obviously in it for the long term.

The consequence of this strategy will be the total elimination of British skilled industrial workers. Take the Cape Group as an example – its business is scaffolding and insulation. Many trade unionists will remember the difficult litigation against Cape claiming compensation for asbestos-related diseases. Cape has set up a training centre in Poland to train 1,000 thermal insulation engineers to work in Britain – paid for by EU grants.

Remember how Blair gave away most of the UK rebate at last year's EU budget negotiation? That money is going to Eastern Europe and funding projects such as Cape's, which is paving the way for all other UK employers. As that rebate was our money, we are effectively paying to be destroyed.

You can move an entire motor production line to Poland or Slovakia, but some industries cannot be moved east. For example, a new generation of British power stations needs to be in Britain. So, if you can't move the industry east, move the labour here. Polish workers will build Tony Blair's new generation of nuclear power stations! Or maybe they will be from Bulgaria or Romania.

As the Tyne and Blyth District Secretary of the CSEU told WORKERS, "We are looking at the total collapse of the infrastructure of an industrial society and at a serious reduction in wages, with the British motor

'Employment agencies boast that they can supply staff from all eastern European countries... selling the skills legacy of the former Soviet bloc...'

industry at the top of the list. Our younger people, Thatcher's generation, have been denied skills and work. This means about twenty per cent of the population have been abandoned by our government."

That Eastern European labour contributes to the economy is a myth. Most of their wages go home. Few will want to abandon their homeland, so their use of the NHS and other public services represents a transfer of value from Britain to their home country. It really is AUF WIEDERSEHEN, PET on a gigantic scale.

It will not stop at manufacturing and construction. When two rival bus companies fought each other in the North East, one of them, Stagecoach, recruited all the available bus drivers, including their rivals'. and just sat in the staff canteen to deprive their rival of drivers. The rival simply recruited from Poland. That's a dispute between capitalists. Imagine what would happen if there was a strike.

Boasting

Employment agencies boast that they can supply staff from all eastern European countries in the fields of finance, hospitality, construction, engineering, care, technology and many others, from unskilled labour to management – selling the legacy of the high level of skills from the former Soviet bloc.

How are the CSEU unions going to tackle this? Not easy! First, it is necessary to understand the nature of this process. It is a continuation of the deskilling of the British working class and the destruction of British manufacturing industry. It is about capitalism abandoning Britain. It is deliberate and it is thought out.

Migrant notes

- An estimated 300,000 migrant workers have entered the UK since 2004 when the government implemented open access to Eastern European states that joined the EU.
- Based upon Treasury data, the banking and finance consultants, Ernst & Young Item Club report indicates that the economic migration has placed an estimated 80% of these workers in jobs paying less than £6 an hour, brought swathes of non-unionised 'flexible' workers onto the market undermining wage rates and pensions, introducing "a very positive cost-benefit" to companies – cheap labour in English.
- An organisation called MultiHands offers employers over 500,000 registered workers from Eastern Europe, covering all skilled, unskilled, manual, non-manual, professional, clerical jobs etc to fill jobs in the UK.
- Unemployment in the UK has now reached an official figure of 1.7 million, leaving aside the 'economically inactive' estimated at 8 million people.

The employers are still trying to sow division among university staff...

Academics' fight continues

Remember, Labour decided that Britain would let them work here from day one while most other EU countries chose to deny them entry for some years. How can this be anything other than deliberate targeting of British manufacturing jobs? There's no point asking the government to do something – they are the problem. This process is being driven from Downing Street.

Rate for the job

The unions recognise that in some cases, if they don't agree to foreign labour in the short term, the employer will move abroad. So they will be stressing equality of treatment, saying that in addition to paying the rate for the job and providing decent accommodation, the employer must agree to quotas of British apprentices.

So, for example, for every ten Poles or Lithuanians, they must take on one or two local apprentices, including adults such as redundant miners or steel workers as late start apprentices. The employer knows they will be unproductive for two years, so this is where the battle is.

Who will pay for this? The unions have to try and organise the foreign workers. This is very difficult as they don't speak English and tend not to live with or near other workers. There is currently resistance among some British workers to have them in the union as they are seen as transient.

Recruitment

In the North West, Amicus had to bite the bullet and bring over from Poland a representative of the Solidarity trade union to speak to Polish workers and urge them to join the union. Maybe they will have to do that in the North East. The unions are trying to work through the old Polish societies and clubs that exist around Polish communities that have lived here since WW2. Perhaps they will at least find someone to translate for them.

But some of the Polish workers at A&P in Hebburn are beginning to complain about their conditions. They are beginning to realise that they are part of the new slave trade. Perhaps this is where the breakthrough will come, but we can hardly sit back and just wait for it.

THE DISPUTE in Britain's universities is entering an intense stage, with the employers seeking to sow division at every opportunity focusing on whipping up student and parent opposition to the dispute rather than negotiating with the unions. The employers are also seeking to sow division between academic and administrative unions by falsely claiming that Unison is satisfied with the pay offer to administrators.

On Monday 8 May Natfhe and the AUT rejected the long-awaited "final" pay offer from the university employers. The offer – only 3.5% for three years – fell far short of the claim (23% over three years) and was even less per year than the guaranteed funding increase of 5.8% that institutions in England will receive in the 2006/7 teaching and research grant.

Unions also pointed out that the offer utilised almost none of the new income from tuition fees for basic pay increases. An additional caveat included in the offer was that "institutions in severe financial difficulties to be able to defer full payment by up to 11 months".

Since the rejection of the offer some individual employers have issued threats to stop 100% of the pay of staff at Northumbria and Bournemouth University who are taking part in the action short of a strike by boycotting assessment.

A mass meeting at Northumbria has already voted to strike. Meanwhile in Scotland the Educational Institute of Scotland, which has not been involved in the action to date, has voted to ballot immediately on action short of strike.

The current struggle marks the mature emergence of the academics as a trade union. For too long they have almost apologised for being "privileged" to be academics; embarrassed to seek higher pay. Now, in keeping with their true position as the leading force in universities, they have taken the lead.

Paradoxically, the support staff, mainly in Unison and Amicus, who have spent years berating academics for not supporting pay struggles, are standing on the sidelines. Whatever the excuses, the fact is that the other staff groups are



quite happy to allow the academics to fight and then claim any increase won because of the single pay spine.

Ethics aside, this is extremely foolish. A concerted effort is much more likely to prise some of the "new money" from fees out of the hands of the employer. Hopefully, a decision to join in will come before the new term starts in September.

- Unions at London Metropolitan University are balloting members on a vote of no confidence in the Vice Chancellor and the Director of Human Resources.

London Met was created in 2002, from the merger of the University of North London and Guildhall University, amid claims of future expansion, financial security and academic development. Now, less than four years later, the university is facing a projected deficit of at least £10.5 million and is going through a second round of voluntary redundancies with the imminent threat of compulsory redundancies to follow.

Natfhe and Unison have suggested that bonus payments and new appointments be suspended to head off the need for compulsory redundancies but this has been rejected. This from a Vice Chancellor on an annual salary of £214,000, one of the biggest in higher education, following an increase of 35% in the past three years!

Britain's centuries-old tradition of rational thinking is under attack by the Labour government...

Away with all our superstitions!

THE BRITISH version of the Communist anthem the INTERNATIONALE is unique. The original French simply says 'Make a clean sweep of the past', and so, more or less, do other versions. The fight against superstition, against unreason, is more deeply rooted in Britain and its history than in any other country.

We see examples of superstitions all around us, most of it harmless. But a lot is far from harmless, linked to an attack on industry and science.

Many of the world's finest scientists were people with religious belief – Galileo, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, for example. But like all proper scientists they didn't let their beliefs get in the way of their science, and they didn't let religion stop them.

Religion is an organised, structured hierarchy that seeks control. Given free rein, religions want to control everything: what you read, what you say, when and what you eat and drink; and they want even more to control your children.

Look what happened to John Wycliffe, who committed the unpardonable sin of translating the Bible into English, the language of the people, so that they could read it and have it read to them. He said that the Bible, rather than the Church, was the sole authority on what was right and what was wrong. Worse, he did it during the period of intense class antagonism that followed on from the Black Death and culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

A year after the suppression of the revolt, the Church declared his theories heretical, leading to a ban on his translated Bible – which had been hand copied by an army of Oxford scholars, 16 copies, an extraordinary venture of organised resistance to orthodoxy.

Wycliffe died in 1384, but the Church gnawed and fretted over his influence. In 1428, with the Archbishop of Canterbury looking on, his bones were exhumed, then burnt, then thrown into a river.

The next translator of the Bible into

English, William Tyndale, wisely did it from the Continent, but paid with his life anyway in Belgium, after he had translated the New Testament into glorious English, the St James version. But change was in the air.

When Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, the Catholic church held a central place in the governance of England, with bishops chosen by the Pope, its own courts, control of the entire education system, such as it was, and the centre of much legal and social life, especially in the countryside.

By the end of the 1500s, a lot had changed. The monasteries were swept away, and along with them swathes of corruption and vice. The church was no longer ruled from a foreign country. Public schools were set up to be outside the control of the monasteries, hence public. And a Bible in English meant that now you didn't have to know Latin in order to read it and criticise it.

Five hundred years ago, we dealt with our own home grown mullahs. By the way, what's so wrong with Islamophobia? Hating people for their religion is wrong, but what's wrong about hating a religion, or all religions? What's wrong with hating an idea? It's not atheists who go round stoning people or burning them at the stake.

Church attendance

Where are we 500 years after Henry VIII? We started the 21st century with a census which, for the first time, required people to state what their religion was. 71.6% of the population describe themselves as Christian. The next largest section is 'no religion' 15.5%, 7.3% refused to answer, 2.7% said they were Muslim, 1% Hindu, 0.6% Sikh, 0.5% Jewish.

A major opinion poll in 2000, however, found two-thirds of 18-24 year olds said they had no religious affiliation – and all them would, by law, have been subjected to a "daily act of worship" at school – introduced by the Thatcher government and maintained by this one. A 2004 poll found that 44 percent of UK citizens believe in God, while 35 percent don't – presumably the rest are not sure.

The disparity between the census and

'The superstition that religion is somehow nice needs to be laid to rest. Just a glance at the Bible or the Koran reveals grisly calls for slaughter and oppression of women....'

the poll data has been put down to what's called "cultural Christianity", whereby many who don't believe in God still identify with the religion they were brought up in. Britain is one of the least religious countries in the world. An avowed atheist can be elected to union posts, a council, or parliament. Nobody cares.

We also started the century with an attempt to outlaw criticism of religion. So why, given our past and our present, are religions and superstition making a comeback? Why do we have an education secretary who belongs to Opus Dei and a prime minister who prays with George Bush?

The superstition that religion is somehow nice needs to be laid to rest. Just a glance at the Bible or the Koran reveals grisly calls for slaughter and oppression of women.

Consider the opposite of religion – science. The development of trade and industry that led to the industrial revolution changed thought to a staggering degree, and in turn was changed by thought. It couldn't be anything other. In feudal agriculture, success or failure was often in the hands of inanimate forces – climate, pests, disease. But when you are making a wheel, or a barrel, or a sword, rational thought is in control. That combination of industry and rational thought equalled a unique contribution to science in the 17th century.

Britain's first great scientist was Francis Bacon, born in 1561, ten years after the law about compulsory church attendance. Bacon invented scientific

This article is an edited version of a talk given at a CPBML public meeting held in London in February.

Back from a new breed of bigots and fundamentalists – headed



Image of witchcraft – swap a few things around and it's not too far from the green fundamentalist view of science!

observation. It had two parts: First, the mind must be freed of superstition and prejudice, the idols, he called them. Then the constructive side: record what's there, to what degree, and what isn't. Bacon became Lord Chancellor. Compare this with Italy, where around the same time Galileo was forced to recant his scientific observation and spend the last ten years of his life under house arrest.

Back to Britain. In the 17th century British science really took off: Newton, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle – all of them described scientific laws that are still used today. And the British scientists started to get organised. At first informally, and then, in 1660, a dozen of them got together after a lecture by Christopher Wren and formed the Royal Society. Five years later they started the *Philosophical Transactions*, now the world's oldest scientific journal in continuous publication. The Royal Society is still a

powerful voice against superstition.

The materialist tradition in Britain was strong by then, and grew stronger with the Industrial Revolution.

The best example of the link between science and industry is the think tank of the industrial revolution, the Birmingham Lunar society. In the 1770s, Erasmus Darwin helped set up this social club for the great scientists and industrialists of the day. The society met at full moon, supposedly so that they could find their way home afterwards. They called themselves lunatics, but they were far from mad.

Members of the society included Joseph Priestley (the discoverer of oxygen and inventor of the indiarubber eraser and carbonated water), Matthew Boulton ("the creator of Birmingham") and a number of other eminent inventors and engineers.

In Britain today, our scientific heritage, our way of looking at the world, is under

threat from four distinct but often allied fronts. The religious bigots, who seek to run our education system and mould the minds of our children; the straight anti-science bigots, green fundamentalists and the animal rights extremists, who think that science is evil and progress is bad; the anti-medicine freaks, who are so anti-vaccine that they have caused a measles epidemic in Britain and finally, from deindustrialisation.

Education is a vital area for the churches. They believe that they can control how people think, which is an illusion. They know that they can force people into church by tying admissions criteria to church attendance. And there are so many different churches, sects, mosques, synagogues, all trying to use the education system to get their claws

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into the country's children. Blair and Kelly are encouraging this, through the new sponsored academies.

The great split between Catholic and Protestant was of enormous significance in the liberation of thought that took place from the 16th century on. However, the Bible itself became a new form of dogmatism – for those who held that it represented the only truth. That negative aspect has never gone away and it is there in the Bible belt of the US, where Protestant fundamentalists are waging their war against science.

That same fundamentalism has found an echo in the fringe remnants of Protestantism in Britain, and in the cults imported from Africa - like the one that nearly killed the 8-year-old girl from Angola who was thought to be a witch. It has found an echo also in Islam, where in February some Muslim medical students at Guy's Hospital circulated leaflets dismissing Darwin's theories as false. You have to hope they don't end up as your doctor.

Anti-science

One of the saddest aspects of this anti-science drive is that Britain has fewer aspiring scientists. In six years leading up to December 2004, 79 science and engineering departments were closed. Just a day after Newcastle was named "city of science" by Gordon Brown, its university said it was closing its pure physics course. Sussex University is trying to close its famous chemistry department in a move being opposed by its students and academics internal and external.

But the universities are under pressure. Science is expensive, and the pool of potential scientists is drying up alarmingly. Last year the Royal Society gave evidence to the government that A-level entries in 2004 were, relative to 1991, 16% lower in Chemistry, and 22% lower in Mathematics and 34% down for Physics. In January the Royal Society of Chemistry warned of the threat to Scottish science due to a lack of chemistry teachers.

'The problem with the green fundamentalists is that to them all progress is bad. Most of them don't listen, and don't debate...'

Part of the anti-science movement is not related to religion, at least, not formally: the green fundamentalists who think progress is a bad thing. They have fanned out into quasi-sect-like bodies that attack any kind of vaccine. Vaccines have eliminated smallpox from the world, and are about to eliminate polio. How can that be a bad thing?

They also attack GM crops with a quasi religious mania, matched only by the Animal Liberation Front. In their attack they feed off ignorance. Eating GM crops means eating DNA! Well, it does, of course. You eat genes every time you eat a carrot, organic or GM. Or anything that once had life.

There are huge commercial interests behind GM, but given that rural women in sub-Saharan Africa spend 80 per cent of their waking lives weeding, perhaps crops manipulated to be resistant to pesticides might not, in principle, be a bad idea. The problem with the green fundamentalists is that to them all progress is bad. Most of them don't listen, and don't debate. Yet they have tremendous power. Look at what happened to Shell when it tried to dispose of a disused oil platform, Brent Spar, in the north east Atlantic in 1995. It got crucified.

And then it turned out that Greenpeace had got its figures wrong, claiming there were 5,500 tonnes of oil still in the platform. Shell said there were 50 tonnes, and no one believed them. An independent survey proved the real figure was 75-100 tonnes, or less than 2% of the Greenpeace estimate.

But Shell was forced by worldwide boycotts into an alternative disposal that was far more environmentally hazardous than its original plan.

Many of the green fundamentalists persist in their opposition to nuclear power, saying instead that "alternative energy sources" will do the trick, which is patently nonsense. Even the green guru and founder of the Gaia movement, James Lovelock, recognises this. Patrick Moore, the American, not the astronomer but one of the founders of Greenpeace, told a US congressional subcommittee in April last year: "Some of the features of this environmental extremism are: environmental extremists tend to be anti-human. Humans are characterised as a cancer on the earth."

Chemicals

Anything chemical is bad, we are told, although we ourselves are built on chemicals. When Rachel Carson wrote her classic book *SILENT SPRING* in 1962, it led to a worldwide ban on DDT, despite the lack of evidence then or since that DDT properly applied was damaging human or bird health. Yet the worldwide ban on it has led to the unnecessary death, from malaria, of at least a million children in India alone.

The fourth and final attack – perhaps the most significant – on our scientific heritage and our tradition of rational thought is from the deindustrialisation of Britain.

One of the great capitalist superstitions is the idea that the City "creates wealth"†. It doesn't create anything. It lives off wealth created elsewhere.

Are we changing from a nation that made its living through making things, through interaction with material reality, to a nation that makes its living through financial wheeler-dealing, where fortunes are made from speculation and futures, money out of crops that have never been sown, ores that have never been mined? From a nation that needed science and rationalism to survive and grow to one whose economy is sinking, and which will drag us back to superstition?

As communists, we call on people to see life as it really is, not clouded by superstition. Reclaim our heritage. Away with all your superstitions!

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Will Podmore

Liberal structures – the free movements of capital, goods and labour – are the best. By the same process, they aid crime and corruption...

Dirty money: capital just can't keep its hands clean

Capitalism's Achilles Heel: Dirty Money and How to Renew the Free-Market System, by Raymond W. Baker, hardback, 438 pages, ISBN 047164488-9, John Wiley & Sons, 2005, £16.99.

THIS IS a fascinating and deeply researched book by a businessman with experience across the world. Baker sums up, "Dirty money causes disaster for millions and deprivation for billions. No other economic condition generates so much harm for so many people. A system that continues to support such massive illegal flows, sustaining poverty, and contributing to historically high levels of global inequality, requires fundamental rethinking."

Multinational firms steal an estimated \$500 billion a year from the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This can only happen with the connivance of the West's banks, which process the illicit gains.

Fictitious pricing

Baker writes, "Intracompany trade across borders represents about 50 to 60 percent of all cross-border trade. I have never known a multinational, multibillion-dollar, multiproduct corporation that did not use fictitious transfer pricing in some part of its business to shift money between some of its entities."

Half of all international trade and investment passes through the world's 63 tax havens, including the Isle of Man,



the Channel Isles, the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Cyprus, Malta, Gibraltar, Singapore and Hong Kong. Nearly half are members of the Commonwealth. They host about three million dummy corporations (500,000 in the Caribbean alone), holding possibly \$11 trillion.

Foreign aid to Asia, Africa and Latin America is \$50 billion a year, just a tenth of the amount plundered. These countries owe \$1.5 trillion: the World Bank/IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' Initiative forgives only \$50 billion of this, 3%.

How does the system "support such massive illegal flows"? For centuries the British ruling class, then the US ruling class too, have used the law to maximise

capital's freedom. Lord Chief Justice Mansfield said in 1775, "No country ever takes notice of the revenue laws of another." So no capitalist state enforces the tax rules of another, opening the way to tax evasion.

Tax avoidance

Later, in 1929, the ruling in the case Egyptian Delta Land and Investment Co., Ltd. v Todd established the principle – for the entire British Empire – that companies could incorporate in Britain but avoid paying British tax. This allowed tax havens to sprout across the Commonwealth. Britain itself became a tax haven. As a French parliamentary committee reported in 2001, "Great Britain does not cooperate with European

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countries and offers a totally unacceptable haven for criminal funds.”

Baker shows how the US state used English law as precedent: “Holes [were] intentionally left in anti-money laundering laws.” These laws allow US banks to trade in the money generated by most kinds of crimes committed in other countries – prostitution, people smuggling and slave trading, for example.

Failure

Even after 9/11, the American Bankers’ Association lobbied against tighter controls on bank accounts to curb terrorists’ funds. So it is no surprise that 99.9% of anti-laundering efforts fail.

Liberal structures – the free movements of capital, goods and labour – suit capital best. By the same process, they aid crime and corruption. The freer capital is, the more lawless the host society will be. Free movement of capital also destroys national sovereignty and democratic accountability.

Baker shows how all capitalism’s leading institutions are complicit in crime, but what does he say we should do about it? He urges us to press capitalism to put justice before profit. He writes, “There is no suggestion here that businesses should not be maximizing profits, operating efficiently, and competing. The point is much simpler: Capitalism should not place these aims ahead of justice in its institutions and transactions. Justice must be a prior condition.”

Wishful thinking

Where is the evidence that capitalism could do this? It is idealist nonsense, sheer wishful thinking. As Lenin pointed out long ago, if capitalism could put justice before profit, it would not be capitalism.

Illegal money flows are not an unfortunate off-shoot of capitalism: they are integral to capitalism. Baker gives us enough evidence to convict capitalism as an unreformable, exploitative system, inevitably breeding crime and corruption.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It’s our turn now.

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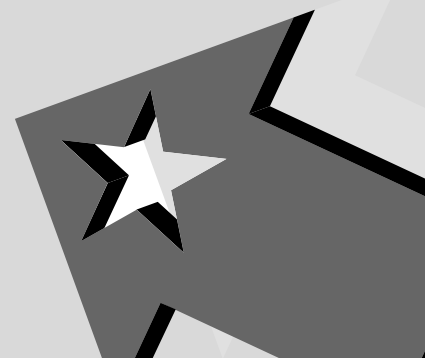
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Back to Front – Pension possibilities

‘The implication that two people elected by a tiny proportion of the population feel that they can decide when we retire is fanciful...’

EARLY MAY’S news headlines reporting that an agreement on pensions retirement age had been reached must have at first taken workers by surprise. Certainly there had been no prior mention of negotiations taking place, let alone indications of a possible settlement with those unions involved in the successful day of action on 28 March.

Upon closer inspection it became apparent that the headlines only referred to an agreement reached between Brown and Blair, that age 68 should be the future retirement age and the state pension is to be linked to the National Average Earnings Index, rather than the lower Retail Price Index.

Leaving aside the minutiae of their sweatshop pension design, as embodied in the newly announced National Pension Savings Scheme (NPSS), the implication that two people elected by a tiny proportion of the population feel that they can decide when we retire is fanciful. Both Brown and Blair are out of touch with what is taking place in working class minds.

The way they have pushed through the EU protocol on raising retirement age through the NPSS, is not only a sign of this detachment but also an indication of their desperation in having to reduce our pension standard, in order to find money to service their horrendous Government debt, now that interest rates are on the rise.

In short, there is nothing to be gained in negotiations with these two loyal compradors to the EU. The real challenge is for us to make a decision about the type of pension structure we need for the future.

A number of opportunities exist, not

only because of the size of the pension funds at our disposal and but also because of the technological advance that has occurred in the way manufacture can produce. This leap in production has taken place despite of and not because of capitalism and quite rightly workers aspirations match that reality.

This is why so many workers wish to retire between 55 and 60 and to then engage in other work and activities. The fact is we are fully capable of reducing our working hours and retiring earlier, rather than the opposite as implied by the EU apologists. It is this reality that workers have grasped and why Blair and Brown are now out of touch.

Naturally pensions are part of a much wider perspective concerning this country’s industrial future and while many of us have a clear perspective of the pension design we need, its shape can only be finalised as the struggle unfolds.

Of course, the choreography of Brown and Blair is all part of the announcement of the National Pension Savings Scheme (NPSS) in this month’s Government Green Paper. But a sign of the advance recently made in the understanding of pensions is that the NPSS has already been nicknamed Nats’ Piss by workers in recognition of its befuddled 8% of salary contribution, compared with an employers 20% of salary or more, required to fund a decent occupational final salary pension.

20% plus is our benchmark, Blair, and the next move is that we want control of our accumulated pension funds, so that we can invest here in order to develop manufacture and support our future pensions.

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