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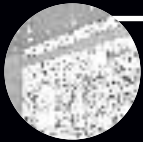
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ON THE MARCH AGAINST WAR

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

Elective dictatorship

ONE LOOK at the huge march on 15 February and you can see why our “democratic” rulers don’t like the idea of referendums. Like company bosses who insist on “the right to manage”, they believe that they and they alone have the right to rule. Let the people have a say? You must be kidding.

What we have instead of democracy is a parliamentary dictatorship, in which the ruling party is always elected on the votes of a minority of the electorate. (And if things carry on from the last election, soon only a minority of the electorate will actually vote at all.)

On the back of this unrepresentative parliament, we have a government maintaining itself through bribery, to give the ministerial

payroll its proper name. And at its head, a prime minister who thinks he is free to get away with going to war, with at his call what is in effect a private, mercenary army ready to do his bidding.

Even while acknowledging the strength of opposition, Blair is still effortlessly usurping the authority of the ballot box to march to war in our name. If that is not dictatorship, then perhaps someone will say what is.

Once British workers fought, and fought hard, for the vote. But surely we have learnt by now that there is a lot more to power than a vote once every four or five years. In the past we have found other ways of exerting our will, and we shall have to do so now.

In the red

BRITAIN’S TRADE deficit last year was yet again a new record, at £34.3 billion, the worst total since records began in 1697, beating last year’s £33.6 billion. Our deficit with the eurozone doubled to £9 billion, and with Germany alone doubled to £8 billion. November’s deficit of £4.1 billion was the record for just one month.

This shows the reality of our country’s economic performance, increasingly unable to

produce the goods we need, increasingly dependent on others to produce for us.

Germany, once Europe’s powerhouse, has joined the euro, and it is now dragging the whole eurozone down with it, with 4.6 million German workers now unemployed, even on official figures. Would joining the euro help to solve our problem? The question only has to be posed for the answer to be obvious.



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WHAT'S ON

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Workers on the march

ON 15 FEBRUARY the working class came from all over Britain to take over the capital, saying no to war against Iraq. The vast numbers filled the streets, flowing as one along the roads and pavements and side streets. Where the colossal crush made forward movement impossible, in Haymarket and Piccadilly, people stood and waited patiently, chatting to those around. Over a million workers acted with tremendous dignity, orderliness and extraordinary discipline to ensure there was no trouble and no physical harm. The police stood aside and left the march to police itself.

It was a true cross section of the British working class - all ages, political backgrounds, all religions and none, all colours and types, town and country - coming together in unity of purpose. Family groups, community groups, students from their schools and colleges, and workers from their workplaces, came together. Every now and then a great shout travelled along the length of the demonstration, a Mexican wave of sound, a mighty roar of rejection of war. When the working class stands up it is a magnificent and awesome sight.

A sister march of 90,000 marched on Blair at the Labour conference in Glasgow. He had arrived early, given his speech ahead of schedule, and run away.

All over the world, from New York to Greece, Antarctica to Thailand, people marched against war. In a show of true European internationalism, workers demonstrated in huge numbers in Italy and Spain — a million in Rome, over 3 million in Madrid and Barcelona — to demand that their US-supporting governments reject aggression. New York and San Francisco, among other US cities, also saw huge demonstrations.

In Hyde Park people stood in their hundreds of thousands and cheered speeches calling for Blair to go. Union leaders pledged determination to extend the action of the Motherwell ASLEF members who refused to transport weapons destined for war on Iraq. The people have spoken. For Blair, to go to war in such circumstances would be the act of a dictator, alone with his army.

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

MANUFACTURE**More meltdown**

JOB LOSSES in manufacturing industry are hemorrhaging at a rate of some 10,000 a month. This is almost double the worst period under Thatcher. Bankruptcies are at a 20-year high. Industrial production is at a 20-year low. The country is being deluged with imports.

Labour's hostility to industry is a continuation of Thatcher's scorched earth policy against all manufacturing industry and all workers in industry. Britain will soon become an industrial nation without industry. Debate should not be about the potential collapse of the housing market or stock exchange lottery but the collapse of Britain's ability to produce, the key threat to our future survival.

EUROPEAN UNION**An island no longer**

THE EUROPEAN Commission has declared that Britain is no longer an island. EU statisticians have dismissed its physical geography as being unworthy of statistical or economic analysis. Britain cannot be an island because it is "home to the capital of an EU state".

The minimum 20 miles of sea between Dover and Calais presumably likewise no longer exist. The Channel Tunnel which attaches the two mainlands by a "rigid structure" further removes the claim to being an island, according to the EU.

This is no joke. Last year the 2002 RAC's Road Atlas of Britain and Ireland changed British and Ireland road numbers to show them as extensions of European motorways.

FURTHER EDUCATION

The fight for pay

LAST NOVEMBER lecturers and support staff at colleges all over the country joined forces and took industrial action in the form of a strike. The strike affected over 250 further education colleges, catering between them for nearly 4 million students.

The action was to protest against a 2.3% pay offer nationally which was among the lowest in the public sector and does nothing to bridge the pay gap between colleges and schools staff.

The pay claim for 2002/03 has still not been agreed. But negotiations are continuing and progress has been made.

Further industrial action has been suspended pending the outcome of these discussions.

Bolton Community College staff took part in the action. The employers at the college offered 2% stating that they could not afford to meet the national offer. The action was well supported locally by UNISON and NATFHE members.

Behind the national picture lies years of struggle to preserve terms and conditions in colleges. For example, Bolton Community College staff took strike action on 5 November 1999.

Three years ago to the day UNISON members took action to get rid of the senior management team. This followed years of members being lied to about the financial state of the college as well as an erosion of terms, conditions and staff morale.

UNISON stewards, who were requesting information from the management team, were continually put under pressure from management and threatened with redundancy on more than one occasion.

The action in 1999 saw UNISON members picketing outside the college from 8 am until 8 pm. Posters with the faces of the senior management team were on show outside the college as well as a Guy Fawkes effigy of the principal.

The action was successful in that UNISON stewards were informed on the 8 November 1999 that the principal of the college had resigned (on grounds of ill-health) and a temporary principal was to take over.

The major task of the temporary principal was to draw up a three-year plan for financial recovery in order to keep the college open.

The financial state of the college is still precarious and those working at the college are still struggling to maintain decent conditions of service.

And then there was one...

THE MOVE TOWARDS one single water company in Britain, irrespective of the protests from the regulator and government, looks set to continue with another round of de-mergers, take-overs and consolidation of business interests.

Northumberland Water is about to be sold off by Suez, its French owner, with a £2.2 billion price tag for 2,200 staff, 4.4 million customers and profits of £92.4 million last year. Southern Water, which was recently acquired by another French-owned company, Vivendi, is likely to be cleared for merger or re-offered for sale by mid-February. Wessex Water has now been bought by the Malaysian company YTL, while a frustrated Royal Bank of Scotland, which lost out in the bidding war, is sniffing round for other possible acquisitions. Meanwhile the bankers West LB have bid £900 million for the Anglian Water Group.

The water industry has gone through the same process that the electricity industry is still undergoing. Price regulation has stopped the owners effectively printing money and they have slashed staffing costs to the bone. Now the companies no longer generate attractive profits they are being returned to the market to be snapped up by the banks or bigger multi-national utilities companies. A few more mergers and take-overs and the dangers of one company holding a virtual monopoly over water in the UK or even the EU could move from a possibility to a probability.

- In another utility — electricity — concentration continues. In 2000, Eastern Electricity bought NorWeb electricity. In 2001 TXU Energi bought Eastern Electricity. As the number of companies reduces, so regional identities are lost, headquarters are closed, shop chains are shunted off and billing arrangements can be anywhere in Britain. Multi-national companies have swallowed the small fry.

Now Powergen, owned by Eon, the German utilities giant, has bought TXU Energi from its near bankrupt Texan parent company amid the continuing fallout from the Enron scandal. This means the company has established a market share in the UK of around 40%. Powergen immediately announced a cut of 1,000 jobs in TXU Energi, effectively closing down the old Eastern Electricity Company base in Ipswich and East Anglia. They also intend to close two coal-fired power stations and ship all their call centre work to India. 4,000 jobs may be cut in Britain, with 400 lower-paid jobs to be created in India.

PROBATION SERVICE

New workload agreements

INDUSTRIAL ACTION by NAPO, the union for probation officers, has resulted in new workload agreements in 34 out of 42 probation areas nationally. Negotiations have been going on for three years, but the 'short sharp shock' of industrial action has forced the employers into meaningful discussions and agreements over soaring workloads and reduced budgets and staffing levels.

The probation service faces future chaos as the record prison population of over 72,600 rises to an estimated 110,000 during the next seven years. Almost half the present prison population has a drug-related problem.

Meanwhile, the private prisons and the recently privatised hostel system have been turned into lucrative businesses by government on the back of a criminal justice system near to collapse.

Meanwhile, the private security company Group Four has been hauled in front of Northampton magistrates for

failing to deliver prisoners to court. Nine court cases had to be halted as a result and a whole morning of court business was wasted.

Magistrates found the company in contempt of court and forced it to issue an apology. The company blamed temporary staff shortages for the problems, but staff at the magistrates court said the service was chronically understaffed and the company consistently failed to provide prisoners when required.

ENERGY

Yorkshire dumped

RWE, the German energy company, owners of nPower and Innogy, which in turn own Yorkshire Electricity, has decided to dump the name "Yorkshire". The name is too regional for a multinational with global ambitions and too parochial to rebrand throughout the rest of the European Union. As the EU drives towards regionalisation, England's largest county obviously doesn't register on the energy giant's map.

EDUCATION**Damning verdict on PFI**

RESEARCH PUBLISHED by the Audit Commission on the role of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in the provision of schools is damning in its critique of government policy. PFI primary and secondary schools are "significantly worse" in terms of space, heating, lighting and acoustics when compared with traditionally funded and designed schools.

PFI schools failed in design and value for money against the government's criteria.

In other words PFI schools are small, shoddy and hugely expensive to the public and very profitable to the construction companies. The research advised the government against forcing local authorities to use PFI schemes. However, although the Audit Commission is the government's watchdog, its report will be ignored, to protect various political and economic vested interests.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MARCH**

Saturday 8 March, 10.30am to 1pm
Campaign against Euro-Federalism,
Annual General Meeting

Optima Centre, Gaywood Croft, Cregoe Street, Birmingham B15. Followed by a public meeting: "Threat of the proposed and so called EU Constitution", 2pm.



Marching in London against war on Iraq, 15 February 2003: see story, p3

AIRLINES**Cut-throat competition**

RYANAIR has bought Buzz Air (formerly the low-cost arm of KLM). Ryanair's chief executive immediately told Buzz staff and trade unions that any opposition would be met with total closure — 100 job losses out of 500 staff are represented as a necessary "hard" management stance.

Objections from BALPA, the pilots' union and the TGWU, which represents cabin staff, have been ignored. Ryanair's "low cost no frills" airway is based on low wages, poor conditions and marginalised trade unions.

The airline industry started restructuring and realigning itself ten years ago, long before 11 September. Low cost airlines such as Buzz, Ryanair, EasyJet and Go have been battling for survival.

Ryanair sees only one survivor — itself.

Given the likelihood of further realignments among national carriers such as British Airways, or United Airlines in the US, together with the EU vision of one national carrier, the whole airline business is set for more mergers, takeovers and divisions.

In this cut-throat world the losers will be the staff, as wages are forced down and conditions of service worsen.

Decent recognition

UNIONS ARE coming back into the workplace across Britain, according to the TUC's annual survey of recognition, covering deals up to October 2002. But the going is getting tougher now that deals with more receptive employers have been done, leaving the more resistant ones still to crack.

There were more than 300 new recognition agreements last year, with the vast majority achieved through without disputes. Some well-known employers having to concede recognition include American Airlines, Boots, Meridian TV, the Church of Scotland, Kwik-Fit, Greenpeace and Air New Zealand.

At Kwik-Fit 574 workers in London won recognition in a ballot in which 92.2% voted in favour. This led to a voluntary agreement covering 3,200 workers in over 600 auto centres across Britain.

Another excellent example of how recognition in one area can lead to a breakthrough in a whole organisation, came with NUJ recognition at the Bristol Evening Post, part of the Northcliffe Newspapers chain, a regional subsidiary of the Daily Mail Group. The agreement covers 90 journalists.

Other important examples are recognition secured by Amicus for 6,000 staff employed by financial company AMP UK, by UNISON for 200 domestics employed by ISS Mediclean in South Durham last July and by GPMU for 160 workers at Norcor, after a 12-year campaign.

Although there was a big increase in deals after the introduction of statutory recognition, anti-union employers are getting better at exploiting the loopholes. The TUC wants the government to address this problem when it reviews the Employment Relations Act this summer.

The TUC is calling for an end to the exclusion of employees of firms employing fewer than 21. Also at present a union needs a 40% vote from the entire bargaining unit — a failure to vote counts as a "No" vote — but the TUC believes a simple majority of those voting should be sufficient. That said, in practice most votes are overwhelming.

While it is tough going in many workplaces (when has it ever been easy?) many agreements are far-reaching, covering more than pay, hours and holidays. According to TUC figures, 91% cover representation at grievance and disciplinary hearings and a significant number cover issues such as training and equal rights.

70,000 more workers are covered by a recognised trade union, almost three times the total covered by the survey carried out in 2000. This brings the total number of workers covered since the Employment Relations Act 1999 to around 200,000.

Pollution, delays, dangerous road — e to levy a toll on people driving into ce

Capitalising on chaos

CONGESTION CHARGING seeks to capitalise on London's transport chaos. It is the latest traffic flow initiative and will accompany the other charges that have been introduced over the past ten years (for example, clamping, speed and lane cameras, red route fines, etc). During this time, revenues coming in to local boroughs from these sources have soared and traffic flow has deteriorated. At the same time, to offset the gain in revenue from traffic, the central government grant to local boroughs has been slashed, along with a lowering of the local rates paid by employers.

Central to this approach is the idea that a transport policy should consist of making car use extremely difficult and costly, while leaving workers with no alternative means of transport. The underground is the most obvious method of mass transport for London but instead it is cash starved. £200 million has been spent on introducing the congestion charge over the past 12 months, whilst the tube has become even more shambolic.

The cost of labour

Transport as an activity does not in itself create value and therefore transport policies seeking to raise revenue are contradictory. During the 1950s and 1960s trade unions, through collective bargaining, negotiated payments to cover travel time, thus recognising that transport to the workplace was part of the cost in hiring labour. Now in 2003, we queue for hours on end to get to and from work and pay the cost ourselves in both monetary and social terms. In effect we cross-subsidise the employers' production costs in the guise of making traffic profitable.

Another example of hiding costs is the way large central shops and retail centres benefit from workers being transported to these locations. Curiously, nothing from the resulting profits has ever gone towards the transport system that gets us to their shops in the first place.

This longstanding transport premium to the store owners has recently been brought to light as a result of the Central Line tube closure. Oxford Street stores are claiming that they have lost tens of millions: "We attribute the 5% drop last week totally to the closure of the Central Line." By applying this same logic, does anyone previously recall a large retailer saying that they attribute a part of their profits to the transport system? Of course not.

In fact, those apologists who conceal transport's role in the macro economic process by asserting in micro detail that everything, including transport, must stand alone and be profitable, encourage this backwardness.

Carriage cuts

On top of all this came the announcement at the beginning of this year that the number of trains and carriages coming into London are to be reduced, along with the scrapping of large-scale rail projects including the much chattered about Crossrail, linking London's east and west perimeters. The raising and dropping of the Crossrail plan has been a regular ritual since the mid 1980s. Its intended introduction usually coincides with an announcement stating the project is to be shelved and that further rail reductions are to be made. The Strategic Rail Authority now says that cross rail "is part of a longer term vision for the railways".

It is clear that congestion charging will not address any of transport's shortcomings because the whole analysis is flawed. To use car drivers as a cash cow reflects a failure to address core principles and is part of the reluctance to tackle the key features in rebuilding Britain.

But what is encouraging are reports that a number of trade unions are beginning once more to place the cost of travel into the employers' court, as part of the collective bargaining process. Transport investment should come

Everyone agreed something had to be done. But is the answer central London?



Congestion charging cannot be the ultimate solution: the challenge remains to reconstruct a good and safe transport system

‘The capital was an astonishingly tranquil place to walk about during the first week — an achievement, or an example of giving in to capitalism...?’

from the value employers currently appropriate from our labour power. London needs a massive development of the tube network and no apologetic congestion charge or pretend policy involving a few more cheap one-man operated buses clogging up roads can conceal that fact.

Everyone talks about “the mayor’s

congestion charge scheme”. This does not take into account the fact that Londoners — all the unions, pensioners’ groups, trades councils, motoring organisations, small businesses — in short the working class, made a conscious decision to back this scheme, even if only passively (and many backed it actively). They didn’t have to, they could have told the mayor to stuff it. They always said improving public transport was the priority but they could not shift the government’s intransigence over the tube.

Meanwhile, London was becoming gridlocked from dawn to dusk. What else was to be done in the short term? They studied the plans, the projections for changed traffic flows. It might just work. They didn’t like the idea of yet another tax on workers. Those who were sufficiently organised to demand exemption made their case; some won, some lost.

All were agreed emergency services

must be exempt. Those forced to pay resolved to claw back what they could from the employer. Londoners were also clear that acceptance was conditional — charging was not the ultimate solution, but complementary to a comprehensive transport strategy, for which they also took responsibility. Money from the congestion charge (whatever is left after Capita have taken their cut) should be ploughed back into transport.

In many areas the capital has been an astonishingly beautiful and tranquil place to walk around this past week. Is this an achievement for the working class or an example of giving in to capitalism? We failed to wrest the tube from the privateers, but have not given in. The struggle continues, with safety the focus — something capitalism cannot deliver.

It is only the working class — not Blair nor Mayor — which will rise to the challenge of reconstructing the tube and building Crossrail. This we still have to tackle.

The government has set out its own plans for higher education. It's time for us to be clear on our own agenda...

The future of higher education

AFTER MANY DELAYS and umpteen leaks, the Higher Education White Paper entitled "The Future of Higher Education" was finally launched on 23 January. But before you rush to read it, WORKERS suggests you take a preliminary "module".

Most university education is now modular with learning supposedly divided into easily marketable chunks called "modules" which can be shared by students doing different courses. The onus is on the students to tailor the learning to their particular programme, a system that is more economical of teacher time.

If you were to tackle a module on the White Paper it should really be a pre-requisite to study another less advertised module called the transparency review, an audit of higher education commissioned by the government and which reported in May 2002.

Every higher education institution in Britain took part in the review, which was

designed to establish the real cost of providing teaching and research at an adequate standard. The audit used accounting methods approved by the Treasury and concluded that British universities are at least £1 billion a year short of the money needed to keep buildings and equipment in working order.

The conclusion of the review was stark: Professor David Westbury (the chairman of the committee that designed the review) said: "...ultimately the system will collapse because that shortfall in funding will bring about either huge deficits in universities or a complete collapse of the infrastructure".

The review demonstrated that the costs of teaching British and EU undergraduates are covered by the "profit" made from postgraduate and overseas students (in financial terms EU students count as home students) — both unpredictable markets.

And the reviewers admitted that their

conclusions were "very conservative", with no account being taken of staff overwork.

A funding increase?

So when the White Paper finally came out in January it initially seemed heartening. It talked about an increase in general funding per student of about 5 per cent per year for the next three years (that is, 3 per cent in real terms assuming inflation stays at around 2 per cent).

But if you had studied the transparency review mentioned above or had any awareness of the Bett Committee on higher education which reported in the 1990s and which had recommended pay rises of 30 per cent for British academics, you would know that the much-vaunted real increases for higher education were not going to address the decline.

Even in the USA with its emphasis on students paying for their own education, public funding of higher education is 1% of GDP compared to Britain's 0.8%.

Strings attached

The real impact of the White Paper will be in the strings attached — especially the introduction of top-up fees which will saddle individual students and their families with debt. The National Union of Students (NUS) has said that it will effectively mean that families will need to take out a second mortgage.

Charles Clarke, the education secretary, has said he believes that students will graduate with about £21,000 debt — but that figure only covers student loans and the higher tuition fees. The NUS points out that the real cost of getting a degree is much higher when you add living costs of over £6,000 a year outside of London and more than £7,300 inside London.

More profoundly, in terms of the shape of the whole system, the introduction of top-up fees will allow the development of a multi-tiered education system where a course will be chosen on the basis of budget rather than aptitude.

Key points from the White Paper

- **Top-up fees from 2006, up to £3,000. The upper limit will be for the period of that parliament. Fees can vary by course as well as institution. The state will continue to pay up to the first £1,100 of fees for students from low income families**
- **Up-front fees to go. Students will start paying back loans at 9 per cent when their income reaches £15,000 (currently £10,000)**
- **Grants to be reintroduced — but will be just £1,000 and available only to those households with a very low income of £10,000 per annum**
- **More money for research — but allocated on the basis of narrow selection to those institutions already receiving moneys**
- **The title of "university" will be awarded on the basis of undergraduate degree-awarding powers, student numbers and the provision of a range of subjects. Universities will no longer need research degree-awarding powers to be called a university**
- **Most of the expected increase in student numbers over the next few years will come from an increase in two-year foundation degrees. Foundation degree holders will use the letters FDA or FDS after their name depending on whether their degree is arts or science based.**

The multi-tiered approach to education will be exacerbated by the extra earmarked funding for research. It is quite clear that this will be available only to the top 10, or at most 20, universities.

One sop offered in the White Paper is that grants will return. The downside is that they will be just £1,000, and the full grant will be available only to students whose family income is below £10,000 per annum. How many families will fall within this very low figure? The NUS criticises the level of the grant, but claims a victory in principle in that the government had always said it would never reintroduce grants.

Fighting for quality

Rather like the NHS, the higher education system, especially in the past twenty years, is a story of a service sustained by goodwill.

It is true that Britain has produced 44 Nobel prize winners in the past 50 years and that we produce 8% of the world's scientific publications with only 1% of the world's population.

But a more sober assessment in 2003 would note that Britain has a declining share of Nobel prizes for scientists, and 26% of Royal Society fellows (leading researchers) work outside Britain.

Trading off goodwill

As Sally Hunt of the Association of University Teachers said when the transparency review was published: "For years now, ministers and vice-chancellors have been trading off the goodwill of staff members to teach larger classes, to reduce the numbers of tutorials, to reduce the contact time and to cut back on their own research time. They can't do it any more."

So students have to ask questions about quality of education as well as about debt. The NUS describes the White Paper as charter for lifelong debt rather than lifelong learning.

But the student body is probably far too accepting of poor standards. How else could the massive rise in student

**MISSING
OUT ON
OUR
FUTURE**

Your future education is under threat. Government proposals to charge top-up fees will increase the cost of a degree to over £21,000

Can you or your family afford this?

This will exclude people you know and could affect your future

**Make your voice heard
National Mass Lobby of Parliament
March 5 2003**

Contact your students' union

UNISON
Association of University Teachers

NUS
National Union of Students

nusenline.co.uk/campaigns

numbers over the last two decades without the commensurate rise in university staff numbers have been tolerated?

The NUS and the university teaching unions (AUT and NATFHE) have

committed themselves to challenging the White Paper. The first event in the campaign is a lobby of Parliament on the issue of student debt on 5 March

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organised by the NUS. Then in mid-March the NUS, NATFHE and the AUT will be holding a major conference against top up fees. All the unions will be producing a joint response to the White Paper by 30 April.

A new kind of degree

As mentioned in the key points (see Box, p8) most of the expansion in graduate numbers in the next couple of years will come from the expansion of two year foundation degrees.

Currently the higher and further education sectors provide a number of HND courses or diplomas which will re-emerge chrysalis-like under the name of foundation degrees. Take for example the fact that the majority of British nurses currently qualify by means of a three-year diploma, minimum entry criteria 5 GCSEs at A-C or equivalent.

In the future such provision will be by means of a foundation degree and —hey presto! — the programme will be shortened and the government will be able to claim a massive expansion in

‘Most of the expansion in graduate numbers in the next couple of years will come from the expansion of two-year foundation degrees...’

graduate numbers.

Foundation degrees, effectively two-year vocational qualifications leading directly to particular jobs are not, of themselves, a bad thing. In fact, foundation degrees are being utilised as a route to revitalise engineering education in Britain in a campaign supported by NATFHE and industrial unions.

For example the foundation degree in aircraft maintenance engineering at Kingston University has seen a rise in student numbers from 37 to 250. However it will be a mammoth statistical

‘Any honest assessment of the current system would readily admit that we already have “teaching-led” and “research-led” universities...’

task, akin to solving the riddle of actual unemployment numbers, to decipher whether it was a real expansion in university provision as opposed to a renaming or redesignation of existing provision.

Redefining a university

Further magical expansion of the higher education sector may be achieved by a rule change which will allow institutions to call themselves “universities” on the basis of having the power to award undergraduate degrees. This will spell an end to the current position, where to call yourself a university you need to have the power to award research degrees.

This move is part of a wider agenda to designate some universities as teaching-only universities. Any honest assessment of the current system would readily admit that we already have a system of “teaching-led” and “research-led” universities. It is these “research-led” universities that will get the bulk of the earmarked funding for research and most academic staff would accept that we need to maintain these centres.

And yet formally dividing research from teaching does not make sense for students who prefer to study in an active research environment. Interestingly, Britain has a lot of academic staff in the teaching-led universities who, despite other pressures, have a prolific research output. Some of these academics work directly with researchers in particular industries and so extend the seat of learning outwards.

The types of research may vary by institution but to gag research developments by limiting institutions to being teaching-only will be a retrograde step. Not surprisingly, employers are

talking about issuing academic staff with “teaching-only” contracts — at lower rates of pay of course.

But how will altering the designation of what counts as a university lead to expansion? Quite simply, it turns out. The government will redesignate as higher education areas that are currently in further education.

Artificial expansion does not stop there, however. Schemes are being hatched at a department not far from Charles Clarke which will aid his plans to expand higher education. The leading contender in the field is the NHSU, which stands for the NHS University. Currently the NHSU exists as a rather shadowy organisation with highly paid directors but no curriculum. The White Paper opens the door for it to become a university.

The Development Plan of the NHSU, entitled “Learning for Everyone”, was produced to coincide with the White Paper and sets out the “aspirations of the NHSU to become a fully recognised UK university”. Apparently the NHSU will be available to “everyone who works in or for the NHS”, and the development plan states “we will also introduce arrangements whereby anyone working for the NHS who does not already possess a higher education qualification will have the opportunity to follow an NHSU learning pathway towards the attainment of a foundation degree”.

A corporate university

Without a doubt the NHSU will be a corporate university — but was the development of a corporate university in Britain ever mentioned in any policy document or election promise? There is very little debate of the NHSU outside the NHS (the acronym NHSU disguises the matter pretty well from the general public).

WORKERS readers who need to know more about this corporate development can send for a free copy of the plan to NHSU consultation, Room 301 A, Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH or log on at www.nhsu.nhs.uk.

Links: The Future of Higher Education White Paper is at:

Last year Britain needed half a million new homes. And councils built just 150...

It's still on: the fight for council housing



IT MAY NOT be fashionable, it may not yet be making the news headlines, but the fight for council housing is far from over. On 29 January, 1,800 people attended a rally at Westminster Hall (see picture, above) and lobbied MPs to demand fair treatment for council housing — a telling indication of the rising concern throughout the country.

A mixture of tenants and trade unionists heard a variety of speakers

while taking turns to cross the road and meet their MPs at Westminster. The large number of speakers included union general secretaries and MPs including Austin Mitchell, Gerald Kaufman and Lynn Jones.

The lobby and rally — organised by Defend Council Housing, tenants' organisations and the trade unions UNISON, UCATT and GMB — marked an advance in the campaign to defend

council housing. Up to now there have been local campaigns throughout the country around ballots on stock transfer some of which were lost as in Glasgow and many won as in Birmingham, Dudley and Sandwell.

The ballots were held under government conditions that use finance as a weapon against tenants' choice. If

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you vote for stock transfer there will be government finance to repair and modernise the houses you occupy, but if you vote against there won't.

That the government should attack council housing, at a time when the lack of affordable housing for key workers in many parts of the country is a major problem, baffles many and infuriates generations of tenants. They remember the battles that led to large council housing programmes after the Second World War through to the 1970s and which were stopped by Thatcher.

For the Thatcherite Tories the objective was clear, council tenants tend to vote Labour, Tory rule would turn tenants into house owners who may change their voting habits influenced by house ownership. If not they would be replaced by Tory voters (or, at least, people who it was assumed would vote Tory) as happened in Westminster council. Best of all a lot of property developers and financiers would make a lot of money from council assets.

'Right' to buy

Their masterstroke in the attack was the 'right to buy'. Tenants acquired the right to buy the dwelling they occupied at a discounted price, and councils could not even use all the receipts to build or invest in the housing stock. Three quarters of the money had to be used to reduce general council debt.

In effect this measure has ended the building of new council houses. Last year the estimated need for new houses in the country was half a million. Only 150 were built by councils.

With council house sales at around 10% a year and some, like the unpopular tower blocks, being demolished, the stock of council houses is reducing year by year.

But the gradual reduction did not provide sufficient returns for financiers investing in social housing. So a number of stock transfer schemes were started, resulting in 695,988 council homes being

transferred to housing associations by December 2002. To the dismay of Labour voters most of the transfer (450,283 homes) has occurred since 1997, when Labour entered government.

Why should Labour embrace a Tory initiative designed to take votes from them? The answer is that a more important strategy was calling the shots: the planned end of local government as a part of British democracy.

The European connection

The development of regional assemblies with a strong tie to the European Union does not fit with local councils and MPs accountable in a British parliament and much less with active citizens shaping their housing.

In addition, investment through housing associations has two financial advantages to Labour. Firstly, this investment is "off balance sheet", that is, it does not count against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, which makes it easier to meet one of the rules of entry into the euro. Secondly, it allows the banks to charge more in interest than

they would to councils.

As predicted, it has become a large and secure revenue stream for the banks. Since the introduction of private finance in 1989, the lenders have invested £20 billion in housing associations. The total public investment in housing associations since 1964 is £25 billion. Of course, it is tenants who foot the bill.

Capitalism has never been able to provide decent housing for all its workers, employed or unemployed. Recently the structural distortions of the economy mean that in areas like London, the south east of England and many other places even employed workers such as teachers, nurses, firefighters and many others cannot afford to buy or rent decent housing in the market as speculation has driven the cost of property in many areas out of reach of average earnings.

Out of all this comes the need for what is coyly called 'social housing' (what other kind is there?), but now housing associations are to provide housing when it becomes critical, and in the process provide banks with secure





‘Capitalism has never been able to provide decent housing for all its workers, employed or unemployed...’

profits.

Of 22.3 million dwellings in England and Wales, 2.7 million are now owned by councils and 1.45 million by housing associations. Some 85,000 houses are planned to be built in the next three years, all of them by housing associations.

The 2,000 housing associations possess the newer stock and have in many cases led the way in the development of housing architecture but have not won the loyalty of council tenants as tenures are less secure, rents higher and control unaccountable.

The sector is run by the Housing

Corporation, a quango sponsored by the office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is run by a board of 15 members appointed by him, and it only operates in England. Although most registered social landlords (again, our language is strangely mauled here; “social landlords” are landlords owning “social housing”) are housing associations, there are some trusts, cooperatives and companies, all registered and regulated by the Housing Corporation.

Most people recognise that there is a need to invest in public services and that these cannot improve significantly if their workers cannot afford housing in the areas they serve. The same problem exists with many manufacturing and service sector businesses.

The 2.7 million dwellings in council ownership could make a large contribution to solving the problem, if repaired and modernised. But it would take about £19 billion to bring this council stock up to standard by 2010, and there is a £14 billion shortage in council finance.

UNISON research has identified that

this programme could be financed largely by redirecting into council stock investment finance that would otherwise subsidise privatisation. This, though, is heresy to the government.

Meanwhile, the planned transfer of 200,000 council houses a year has been voted down by many tenants. Council tenants have also become aware that their rents subsidise housing benefit.

Out of £2,500 rent a year per dwelling, £1,000 is paid by councils to central government as the ‘clawback’ which is then redistributed as housing benefit to the unemployed and low-income tenants. That money should go to repair and modernise the dwellings they occupy.

By 2002 tenants provided £1 billion from their rents towards housing benefit. Of course, full employment and decent pay would eliminate the need for housing benefit.

As we make progress in the campaign we need to review our thinking. Reversing the decline is the first step but council housing that gradually shrinks through the ‘right to buy’ has no long-term future.

Tenant support

Currently those campaigning to keep council housing have not questioned this policy as many feel it could lose tenant support. At the lobby a council employee was quite surprised when tenants in his group called on their MP to stop the abuse by people who bought their council house, sold it and were back as council tenants with cash from the sale in the bank.

Others questioned the amount of discount and the fact that developers were applying for the right to buy on tenants’ behalf to take over land for speculation.

A society builds wealth through production, and the use of land to meet all needs has to be controlled by society. When we fail to do so and speculators take over, the price is paid by all of us.

Links: for more campaign information, see www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk.

Sixty years ago the world watched as the Soviet army destroyed invincibility at Stalingrad. A new book reminds us of the battle's

The battle that changed history

THIS YEAR saw the 60th anniversary of the battle of Stalingrad, a battle that truly changed history. The anniversary passed virtually unremarked in Britain and the USA, but in Russia tens of thousands commemorated the great victory, and there is a widely popular movement to give back to the city of Volgograd its historic name of Stalingrad.

We were not always so ignorant. In 1943 King George VI had the Sword of Stalingrad forged by Wilkinson's as a gift to the people of the Soviet Union. It was exhibited in Westminster Abbey as well as Birmingham, Coventry, Belfast, Winchester Cathedral, Glasgow and Edinburgh. People queued for hours to see it.

In this short book, Geoffrey Roberts aims to provide an overview of the battle and its historical significance, and also to summarise, synthesise and criticise the vast literature on Stalingrad. To a remarkable extent he succeeds, although his review section is all too brief, a mere twenty pages. As he notes, Alexander Werth's superb *RUSSIA AT WAR* is still the

unsurpassed account of the battle.

Stalingrad was indeed the turning point of the entire war: as the American historian Stephen Ambrose wrote, "The Russians, alone, stemmed the Nazi tide, then began to roll it back." The strategic initiative passed from Hitler to the Soviet Union.

The battle ended the string of Allied defeats, and opened the way for all our subsequent victories.

As Roberts writes, "No battle changed history more than Stalingrad." He also shows how Stalingrad resulted from the Soviet Union's economic, political and moral superiority: "The successful mobilisation and deployment of Soviet material superiority — that was a matter of effective politics and economics."

Soviet forces inflicted more than 90% of the Nazis' losses, 600 divisions, ten million casualties. President Roosevelt said, "The Russian armies are killing more Axis personnel and destroying more Axis material than all the other twenty-five United Nations [countries] put together."

The Soviet Union assisted the D-Day landings by stepping up its attacks in eastern Europe, stopping Hitler from reinforcing Normandy. As the BBC said, "But for the Russians, D-Day would have been impossible." Even after D-Day, Soviet forces were still fighting twice as many German soldiers on the eastern front as the British and US forces were fighting on the western front.

Without Stalin, the Bolshevik Party



Churchill presents the Sword of Stalingrad to Stalin at the Teheran Conference, 1943



German barricade at Stalingrad, 1942

the myth of Nazi significance...

and the Red Army, Hitler would have won the war, Britain would be enslaved, and we would be living, if at all, in concentration camps. We must never forget the huge debt that we all owe to the Soviet Union.

VICTORY AT STALINGRAD – THE BATTLE THAT CHANGED HISTORY, by Geoffrey Roberts, Longman, 2002, ISBN 0582771854, 247 pages, paperback, £9.99.



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.

How to get in touch

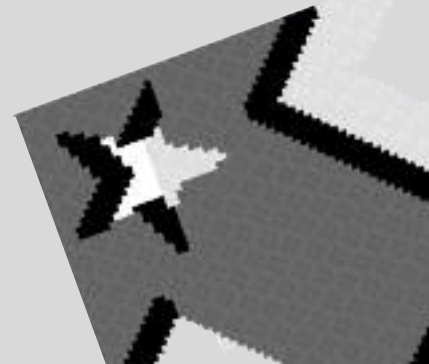
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Back to Front – Help yourself

‘The same people who call Marxists “utopian” seem quite happy attempting to convince pharmaceutical companies to start behaving as charities...’

IN THE 20 years since the identification of the HIV virus, the AIDS epidemic has ravaged sub-Saharan Africa, where in many countries it is the major cause of adult death. AIDS is a massive problem almost everywhere in the world (including now in China), a challenge to public health and to science.

The pharmaceutical companies love a major disease. Let’s face it, without disease they would be out of business. So the onslaught of AIDS brought with it R&D programmes as the companies raced to find first diagnostic tests, then drugs to treat AIDS.

It is a tribute to human ingenuity that a range of drugs have been produced that, between them, have the ability to markedly extend the life expectancy of people with HIV. There is no cure, but people are living far longer — that is, if they have access to the drugs.

But the cost of drugs is only one aspect of human health. And last month, the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Denver, Colorado, heard about the other aspects.

In front of an audience composed mainly of scientists, Dr Byron Barksdale from the American Cuban Aids Project explained how Cuba, alone among the so-called “developing countries”, had contained and reduced the spread of HIV through concerted public health measures allied to modern drugs.

It came as a surprise, apparently, that little Cuba had itself developed three antiviral drugs which it used in the fight

against AIDS. In fact, Cuba decided many years ago that it had to develop its own pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries — either that, or be at the mercy of foreign multinationals.

Instead of complaining that capitalists were acting in their class interest, Cuba’s workers decided to act in their own class interest. As a result, Cuba has one of the lowest levels of AIDS in the world.

Mortality is 7% instead of the “expected” 25%; and transmission from infected needles, from blood transfusions or from mother to child is virtually unknown.

Oddly enough, this, the exercise of workers’ power through socialism, is seen as “utopian” by many.

Yet the same people who call Marxists “utopian” seem quite happy to embark on a propaganda war in an attempt to convince pharmaceutical companies to start behaving as charities. It is as though the inhabitants of Hell passed a resolution calling on the Devil to turn down the flames — poignant, but hardly powerful. When workers fail to take responsibility for their own futures, why should they be surprised that capitalists refuse to take responsibility for what happens to workers?

There is a solution to bad health, greedy drugs companies and venal governments, and it has been available to workers throughout the world ever since the Russian Revolution of 1917, no less so to the working people of Africa or Britain than those in Cuba. Take charge, take control. Don’t call for aid, help yourself.

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