

WORKERS

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14



The euro-charge falters

06



Railtrack RIP?

09



Quality in public services

11

SMASH TERRORISM, STOP THE WAR



WORKERS

“ Editorial

FROM THE COLLAPSE of the Soviet Union to the mayhem of the modern world has turned out to be a very short step. Workers in the United States find themselves targets for terrorist assault, unprotected by outdated and idle intelligence forces. In Britain, too, there are justified fears for our safety.

The world of workers is now reaping what it has sown. We were content to leave the Soviet Union to stand, and then fall, almost alone. We have allowed our governments to play power politics in the Middle East, akin to letting children play with fireworks in an ammunition dump.

We allowed them to fund, train and equip the very terrorists who now attack them, and do so through attacking us, the workers. And worse, we have allowed these terrorists to masquerade under the banner of freedom fighters — an insult to those around the world, in Vietnam, South Africa, Cuba and many other countries, who have truly earned that accolade.

As a result, we now face the twin evils of terrorism and war. And we must fight both.

Terrorism never has been progressive. It

has always involved making war on workers, either at work, or in their homes, or in their social lives. There is never an excuse for it. As Gerry Adams said, addressing the Sinn Fein conference shortly after the plane attacks on US workers, “There is no ethical justification for terrorism.” And yet some within our class still flirt with it.

The US, meanwhile, bombs Afghani children, Red Cross depots and refugees, and occasionally the Taliban, in a war that will not destroy terrorism but will exacerbate and perpetuate that country’s agony. The war must be stopped, not because it is a war against terrorism, but because it is the opposite.

The Middle East will not be at peace until Palestinians have a secure home and foreign powers have departed. But terrorism will never be defeated until workers collectively oppose and expose it. In Britain, all workers must put the interests of the working class above any sectional loyalties. We must assert control over our future. That goes for workers in Afghanistan as much as it does for workers in Britain. We know who our enemies are.

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Contents – November 2001

News

Civil servants in pay fights, p3; Byers forced back on privatisation, p4;
University support staff gear up for action, p5; News Analysis: the euro, p6

03

Features

Smash terrorism, stop the war, p6; Railtrack’s timely demise, p9; Putting the quality
into public service, p11

06

Life & Soul

An electrifying experience, p14

14

**CIVIL SERVICE**

Anger over pay

EURO

No loss

PENSIONS

Civil servants beware

PFI

Byers backs down

MANUFACTURING

Bye, bye buggy

RAIL

Glasgow privatisation row

MANUFACTURING

Rolls Royce axes jobs

UNISON

Universities pay action

COMING SOON

What's on

NEWS ANALYSIS

The faltering euro-rush

Civil servants in pay anger

THE GOVERNMENT is under siege from its own workforce as the civil service is hit by a raft of disputes over pay. The last Tory government began the process of devolving pay bargaining to individual departments. The present government continued with the policy, despite emerging pressures. It also continued to hold down civil service pay at a time of rising wages in the private sector. It is now feeling the effects.

In the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) ex-MAFF staff earned much less than DETR staff who joined them. This was the product of years of separate negotiations.

The Public Commercial & Services Union (PCS), representing the 3,500 workers concerned, held a successful one-day strike on 20 August. This was followed up with two-day strikes in selected areas and another one-day strike on 28 September backed up with non-cooperation. More strikes are planned.

Despite backlogs in subsidy and other payments to farmers, the Government does not yet seem to be prepared to settle this issue. Without its agreement, the departmental management cannot settle with the union. Civil service unions have always said that so-called devolved pay bargaining was a convenient sham for the Government to distance itself from its workers.

In a separate development, Inland Revenue workers have heavily rejected the pay deal on offer and voted in favour of industrial action in support of their claim. The action will begin with an overtime ban and other limited non-cooperation, and may be escalated to strikes. It may affect the Government's tax collection at a time when it is expected to want to increase taxes.

Like their colleagues in DEFRA, the problems for Revenue employees are long term. Ministers are using the deteriorating economic climate to justify not meeting demands. Revenue workers felt aggrieved that the Treasury-capped additional paybill costs that the department could incur. So there was not enough available to meet the jointly agreed objectives of a new pay structure agreed only this year. That agreement was intended to put right problems accumulated over several years. At the time the unions believed there was a commitment to deliver a better long term structure.

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

EURO**No loss (1)**

BLAIR STARTED the latest euro campaign by his foreshortened speech to the TUC Congress where he said that "3 million jobs depend on and 60% of our trade is with the EU". A report from the National Institute of Economic Research shows that the idea that we would lose 3 million jobs is pure invention.

The report —written at the request and expense of the Britain in Europe campaign — assesses the consequences not just of failing to join the euro, but of Britain leaving the EU altogether.

The report confirms that 3.5m jobs are related to our exports to the EU, but there is no reason to believe that more than 50,000 would be lost if we left, and those only for a short time.

EURO**No loss (2)**

FOURTEEN MONTHS on from the Danish "No" vote to the Euro, the country's economy has strengthened, despite predictions from politicians, banks, business and union leaders that 20,000 would lose their jobs and the economy would take a downward turn.

The Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration has produced evidence that the no vote has had no adverse effects and that the Danish economy enjoys great confidence abroad. The difference in interest rates between Denmark and other countries has diminished, more foreign capital has been invested in Denmark and less Danish capital abroad.

CIVIL SERVICE

Pensioners beware

WE SHOULD BE suspicious about the motives of the Blair Government and its apparent generosity to pensioners, said General Secretary Brian Sturtevant, addressing the Annual Meeting of the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance (CSPA) in October.

National Insurance pensions have risen in 2001, for the first time in many years. They are due to do so next year, at a rate greater than inflation. But there is still no guarantee this will happen in future.

These one-off payments might appear to be acts of generosity, said Sturtevant, but the Government has a deeper purpose. It has designed its move to avoid any possibility of a legal challenge by bodies such as CSPA, who would argue that occupational pensions should increase at the higher rate as well.

The Government Actuary had confirmed that the country could afford pension increases linked to the Wages Index, rather than the less favourable Retail Prices Index. The Government had ignored this advice.

Sturtevant alluded to Blair's Labour Party Conference speech, where he talked about tackling poverty worldwide. He reminded delegates that there was plenty of poverty here in Britain, particularly among pensioners.

This is something Blair could deal with directly and did not require international action, he said. Blair should begin the fight at home. There should be a large pension increase now, followed by a link to the Wages Index.

There was also criticism of the Government's attitude to Health and Social Welfare. Money was the issue, not variations on the theme of privatisation. If the Government wants comparisons with Western Europe, how about increasing spending on the National Health Service from 6.8% of the National Income to the French level of 9.4%?

The CSPA holds its 50th Anniversary celebrations next year. Its meeting reflected a lively dynamic organisation. Five new local groups were opened during the year and, uniquely during recent years, not one group closed for lack of support.

Agreement has been reached for merger with the much smaller, 2,500-member First Division Pensioners' Group, making the enlarged CSPA the sole representative body of Civil Service



Calling for an end to council house sales, West Midlands

Byers forced back

STEPHEN BYERS, the DTLR Minister, made a clear commitment in the crucial Monday afternoon session at the Labour Party conference to back council housing. He promised to introduce legislation to allow councils to borrow to fund repairs and improvements as "an alternative to going into the private sector".

This concedes one of the major demands of the Defend Council Housing campaign, and makes any moves by councils to force through transfer, PFI or Arms Length Companies completely unnecessary — with implications beyond council housing right through the range of local authority services. The campaign has produced a leaflet responding to the commitment (see www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk).

The crucial question is, when will the Government actually introduce legislation? The campaign is demanding it be in place by April 2002 and calls on councils to drop any current plans/expenditure on consultants or setup costs associated with transfers, PFI or ALCs.

The context of the commitment is important, according to the campaign, which says this was not an off the cuff comment in a smoke-filled room — Byers made a careful response to a pre-arranged question, the outcome of the deal struck between union leaders and ministers to avoid a confrontation over privatisation at Labour's conference.

Lord Falconer, the Housing Minister, is apparently denying any change of policy. It is our job to make sure that Byers keeps to the commitment and agrees an early date for implementation.

WHISKY

A levy on rainwater?

THE TROUBLED whisky industry, worth over £2 billion a year, is fighting a new European directive which would impose a levy on using fresh rainwater — a move which would cost millions of pounds a year.

The centuries-old practice of taking water from local rivers and lochs — one which gives malt whisky its distinctive flavours — is being lumped together with drought problems in Greece where annual rainfall is just 400 millimetres, compared with highland Scotland's 2 metres.

Karen Prentice of the Scotch Whisky Association pointed to the "new rules and regulations niggling away at the Scotch whisky industry, causing its death by a thousand cuts".

Inevitably, the danger to jobs spreads throughout the industry. Tensions have

been simmering for several months, with the GMB union handling a bitter dispute at the third largest producer, Chivas Brothers, which employs over 1,000 working on such brands and Chivas Regal and Morgan's Spice rum. Solid votes for a series of one-day stoppages and overtime bans came at a time when production is traditionally stepped up to meet seasonal demand.

In another development, a sector representing over 9% of worldwide Scotch whisky sales has been brought back into British ownership after a decade in US hands.

Kyndal, with its grain distillery at Invergordon, five malt distilleries and two bottling plants, now controls the brands Whyte & Mackay, Vladivar Vodka, Glayva Liqueur and single malts such as Isle of Jura and Tamnavulin.

MANUFACTURING**Rolls Royce meltdown**

THE MELTDOWN of British manufacturing industry taking place under this Labour Government continues apace. On 19 October, Rolls Royce announced 5,000 job cuts worldwide, of which 3,800 are to be in Britain.

Attempts to blame the events of 11 September for the cuts were greeted with scepticism by City analysts. Rolls Royce's American rivals GE and Pratt and Whitney, which have suffered much greater exposure to the decline in air travel, are axing far fewer jobs.

The cuts are devastating to an industry which has already suffered 1,000 redundancies this year. Bill Morris of the TGWU said: "There is little point in winning the military and political battle if we go on to lose the war in manufacturing."

The current troubles for the industry

will pass, yet Britain is unlikely to regain the loss of jobs without a fight when the situation settles down.

Around half the job losses will be in Derby, which is dependent on manufacture, with the rest spread between Bristol, East Kilbride and Glasgow. A further 1,000 jobs are expected to go in associated contract work.

Danny Carrigan, the AEEU Scottish Regional Secretary, said: "Our members are very angry that the manufacturing and engineering industry seems to be disappearing out of sight."

Ken Jackson of the AEEU called on the Government to fight on two fronts, against terrorism and for jobs. There is no sign, though, that Blair accepts any responsibility for the fate of British manufacturing.

Rolls Royce announced first half profits of £190 million before 11 September, after a 40% rise in deliveries of civil aero-engines. After the cuts announcement, Rolls shares rose 2%.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****NOVEMBER****Sunday 18 November**

March against the war on Afghanistan, organised by the Stop the War Coalition. Assemble 12 noon, Hyde Park, London. For more information phone 07951 235 915, or see www.stopwar.org.uk

Monday 19 November

Conference organised by South East Region of the TUC to discuss the state of manufacturing in London and the South East. 10.00 – 3.30pm, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL**New centre delayed**

ON 15 OCTOBER the Government announced an indefinite delay for the new air traffic control centre in Scotland. Workers who fought over the past 2 years to keep National Air Traffic Services (NATS) in public hands were disappointed. They warned of a repeat of the Railtrack fiasco.

The cuts in NATS development work come only 3 months after the beginning of control by Airline Group, a public private partnership (PPP). The unions argued for a not-for-profit organisation, but accepted what they thought was the least bad option in the form of a PPP, backed by airlines and the Government.

At the time of privatisation, assurances were given to staff, unions and Scottish MPs that the new Scottish centre would be built and opened within an agreed time. The existing centre will near the end of its useful life in five years. With long lead times in replacing systems and the need to have another centre to back up recently opened Swanswick, the decision to delay work will compromise capacity and safety.

The main union involved, IPMS, says the Government must take responsibility as part of the partnership behind NATS and cannot escape its responsibilities for air traffic safety. The industry partners, in particular British Airways, anticipate falling revenue after 11 September and are cutting back everywhere. The union argues that if necessary the Government should fund the planned expenditure on infrastructure. Not to carry out that work at this stage would be a big mistake, making flights over Britain less safe than they ought to be.

Support staff gear up for action

UNISON, Britain's largest union, is gearing up for industrial action among its 25,000 support staff members in further education across England and Wales, in a dispute over pay.

The union accepted a 3.7% or £400 pay offer this year with the proviso that if additional money became available, it would re-open negotiations. Additional money did become available, but only to lecturers' union NATFHE whose members received 4% after a bitter struggle lasting several months.

UNISON has asked for negotiations to be re-opened but has had no response to date and has begun preparing for ground for industrial action. National trade union side secretary Christina McAnea said: "I am pleased that the Government has recognised the need to improve pay in this sector by giving NATFHE members this additional money. We believe that this extra money should be available to all staff otherwise it will widen differentials and create disharmony among different groups of workers in colleges."

Support staff workers include technicians, administrators, finance, student support services and IT workers, caretakers, cooks, cleaners, receptionists. Average pay for support staff, says UNISON, is about £13,000 — though 60% earn less than this and 20% earn less than £10,000 a year.

RAILWAYS**Glasgow fights privatisation**

DESPITE THE SAGA of Railtrack, EU legislation could still force the underground railway system in Glasgow to be privatised. Recognition of this has sparked a vigorous campaign, backed by all unions concerned and by Strathclyde Passenger Transport.

Campaigners are fighting alongside operators of the Paris Metro and systems in Rome and Berlin, who are also opposed

to the proposed directives, aimed at imposing a "free market" separation of the functions of operator and infrastructure maintenance.

Dr Malcolm Reed of Strathclyde Passenger Transport decried the proposals, taking pride in the current system where "we are multi-skilled in running the trains and maintaining the infrastructure".

Andy Baird, Scottish Regional Secretary of the TGWU, supported an integrated system, pointing out that "in Glasgow, the underground is an essential part of the public transport network".

The faltering euro-rush

IN 2000, the Government spent £20 million on preparing for converting government and public bodies' accounts and payment systems to the euro. Paddy Ashdown described this as "a crossing of the Rubicon": it made clear to everyone the Government's intention to hold and win a referendum as early as possible. Jeremy Heywood, Blair's Principal Private Secretary, told EU leaders that Blair "intends to call a referendum within two years of the election and he is very confident of winning it".

But the British people's persistent resistance forced changes in the Government's desired timetable. As David Clark, Robin Cook's former adviser, pointed out, "Labour's timidity has been rewarded with opinion polls which show majorities against entry so large and persistent that many now doubt whether a referendum is winnable."

The European Commission's recent Eurobarometer report on British attitudes to the EU showed that almost two-thirds of us believed that joining the euro would end our national independence, and 60% did not trust the EU to protect Britain's interests.

Most significantly, Bill Morris, General Secretary of the TGWU, warned that the labour movement faced the danger of "a headlong rush into the single currency, bringing huge cuts in public spending and public service at a time of slowing economic growth".

To win the June 2001 general election, Blair was forced to dissociate himself from his most unpopular policy, support for the euro. Promising a referendum on the euro separated the desired second term from the euro's prospects, so the election was not — and could not be claimed to be — a referendum on the euro.

Warning

There was an unusually small swing since the 1997 election; four weeks (or was it four years?) of intense campaigning had changed hardly anybody's mind, which should be a warning to the euro-enthusiasts. Some said that the low turnout was an argument for making voting compulsory, but it was not that the parties must compel us to vote, but we must compel the parties to do what we wanted.

Blair told the recent Labour Party conference in Brighton that the economic tests were fundamental. He said: "But if they are met, we should join; and if met in this Parliament, we should have the courage of our argument, to ask the people for their consent in this Parliament."

For the first time, Blair committed himself to calling a referendum before the next election if conditions were right. The Government said that sometime before June 2003 they would assess whether Britain had met the conditions.

But the real test is what we want, and we don't want the euro.

The events of 11 September have set Here we discuss what has happened,

Smash terrorism, stop th

THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION for the terrorist atrocities of 11 September. They were carried out by those with a fascistic ideology combined with a medieval religious fanaticism. They killed and injured thousands of workers, and their effect, apart from the tragedies for those people and their families, as with all acts of terrorism, is to have strengthened those it purported to be aimed against.

There has been a tendency by some on the self styled "left" of politics to justify the attack on American workers by reference to the crimes committed in the past — and currently — by the American ruling class and its government. The history of US military, political and economic coercion of peoples around the world has been long and bloody, and continues today. In terms of war crimes, history will find them guilty.

Slaughter cannot go unchallenged

But, let's be clear: terrorist forces need to be dealt with, by their own people, and by the world's workers. Their slaughter of people in their own lands, and abroad, cannot go unchallenged. It is right to tackle terrorism. It is right to go to the aid of states with these terrorists operating within their borders. It is right to attack terrorist groups where they are protected by similarly minded states. We must recognise that governments — whatever their politics and class base — will act against them. A "knee jerk" reaction which lumps together action against the perpetrators of terrorism with unjustified and aggressive military coercion of workers is plain stupid and dangerous. Workers will not take any anti-war movement seriously that does so.

Workers all round the world know that the proponents of the New World Order (a strangely old-fashioned term now, but still absolutely pertinent) will use "opposition to terrorism" to go far beyond this remit, and launch a war to protect and extend their domination. They will define any state that does not comply with their demands as "terrorist". This is the meaning of Bush's apparently naïve statement that "if they are not with us, they're against us."

Bush's assertion that such a war will be long term, and will take many forms — military, economic, political and clandestine — is a clear statement that they are not undertaking short term, effective strikes against specific terrorist bases, but rather a permanent policy of domination. They were "pulled back" from an immediate air and ground war on a number of fronts, almost certainly by some of their own strategists and allies and by the fear of losing their oil supplies, but equally certainly by the real reaction of workers around the world who have shown opposition to such actions.

Workers are not stupid. We know that the terrorists identified by the US were financed and put in place by the US in the fight to destroy the previous socialist government of Afghanistan. We know that the US Government itself harbours and supports terrorist groups in many countries, not least those operating out of Miami against Cuba. They have arrested and imprisoned five Cuban intelligence officers who were investigating these terrorist groups.

Workers are not pacifists in the main, neither are we supportive of capitalist war. We can clearly distinguish between a concern that terrorists cannot go unchallenged and the ambitions of capitalist powers to coerce

Continued on page 8

in train a series of events, mostly reactionary.
and how workers must respond.

e war



Thousands march in London

ON SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER London saw its biggest march for a long time, as people from all over Britain came together to protest against the war on Afghanistan. Both the organisers (CND) and the police were taken by surprise by the numbers who turned out - even the police estimated 50,000!

The march attracted support from a wide range of organisations and individuals. Especially heartening was the large number of young people, including many students. Many unions were represented, with UNISON and those from education playing a strong part. Large numbers of Muslims, both men and women, were there alongside Christian church organisations (despite the reluctance of Church leaders to speak out against the war).

Everywhere it was possible to hear animated political discussion, and it was obvious that anti-war groups have sprung up all over the country, arranging leafleting and holding meetings or vigils. The war has also sparked much interest in the politics of the Middle East and anger at American involvement in rightwing dictatorships and military actions.

In Trafalgar Square there were speakers from a wide range of interest groups and there was much applause for MPs who had spoken out against the war and demanded the right of MPs to vote on it.

There will be another march on Sunday 18 November and it is anticipated that more will come, now that this march has shown that opposition to the war is more widespread than the media would have us believe.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Be nice to religion

AS BRITAIN FACES the most serious terrorist threat ever, what does the Government do? Do they clamp down on potential terrorists entering the country courtesy of the laughably inefficient security arrangements on Eurostar? Do they detain those who have been recruiting for and supporting Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda?

No...they announce a law to ban incitement to religious hatred. The comedian Rowan Atkinson has protested that this law, if passed, could be used against those who, like his own *NOT THE NINE O'CLOCK NEWS* in sketches about fundamentalists in Iran, or *MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN*, satirise religion.

The Government's response was to say that they could tell the difference between jokes and incitement to hatred. This shed a new light on Blair's Labour, whose sense of humour has hitherto been well hidden, unless the whole project is a very subtle joke whose punch line is yet to come.

Anyone involved in defending workers who has run foul of the politically correct will know that pleading that an allegedly offensive remark was made as a joke is rarely an effective defence.

What would be the fate of Salman Rushdie's *SATANIC VERSES* if such a law were passed? Would V S Naipaul, the first British winner of the Nobel prize for literature since William Golding, become a victim for his trenchant writings about the reactionary nature of religions?

The Government has brought in this law to appease the religious fundamentalist lobby. There is a robust and ribald anti-clerical tradition in British culture going back to Chaucer. We have never paid much attention to those who claimed to be sent by any God...when Charles I claimed divine right, we cut off his head.

The same fate will await those who want to stir up peasant religious sentiment in the island that is home to the oldest working-class in the world.

NEW YORK WORKERS

Labour movement statement

IN ALL THE REPORTING, the voice of New York workers has hardly been heard. We reproduce here a statement signed by more than a hundred New York labour movement representatives.

“September 11 has brought indescribable suffering to New York City’s working people. We have lost friends, family members and coworkers of all colors, nationalities and religions — a thousand of them union members. An estimated one hundred thousand New Yorkers will lose their jobs.

We condemn this crime against humanity and mourn those who perished.

We are proud of the rescuers and the outpouring of labor support for victims’ families.

We want justice for the dead and safety for the living. And we believe that George Bush’s war is not the answer. No one

should suffer what we experienced on September 11. Yet war will inevitably harm countless innocent civilians, strengthen American alliances with brutal dictatorships and deepen global poverty—just as the United States and its allies have already inflicted widespread suffering on innocent people in such places as Iraq, Sudan, Israel and the Occupied Territories, the former Yugoslavia and Latin America.

War will also take a heavy toll on us. For Americans in uniform—the overwhelming number of whom are workers and people of color— it will be another Vietnam. It will generate further terror in this country against Arabs, Muslims, South Asians, people of color and immigrants, and erode our civil liberties. It will redirect billions to the military and corporate executives, while draining such essential domestic programs as education, health care and the social security trust. War will play into the hands of religious fanatics — from Osama bin Laden to Jerry Falwell — and provoke further terrorism in major urban centers

like New York.

Therefore, the undersigned New York City metro-area trade unionists believe a just and effective response to September 11 demands:

NO WAR. It is wrong to punish any nation or people for the crimes of individuals—peace requires global social and economic justice.

JUSTICE, NOT VENGEANCE. An independent international tribunal to impartially investigate, apprehend and try those responsible for the September 11 attack.

OPPOSITION TO RACISM - DEFENSE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES. Stop terror, racial profiling and legal restrictions against people of color and immigrants, and defend democratic rights.

AID FOR THE NEEDY, NOT THE GREEDY. Government aid for the victims’ families and displaced workers — not the wealthy. Rebuild New York City with union labor, union pay, and with special concern for new threats to worker health and safety.”

Smash terrorism, stop the war

Continued from page 8

workers everywhere. If the anti-war movement does not make that distinction it will not have the support of workers, and will simply represent noisy and dangerous politics.

As the US military in Afghanistan scratch their heads to find remaining military and terrorist targets, and as Bush dismisses the Taliban offer to turn bin Laden over in accordance with normal extradition rules — the original demand of the “world coalition” — it is clear that the US has determined that the aim of its campaign is not to “bring the perpetrators to justice” but to bring down the Taliban regime it itself helped to create.

If the Taliban were destroyed it would be a great day for Afghani workers and peasants who want to live in the 21st century. But the Taliban is only one of a number of governments and regimes the US want to target.

Workers and peasants must determine their own affairs — that self-determination being unhindered by terrorism external or internal, by the threat of military attack from abroad, by economic war, or by poverty and debt.

AFGHANISTAN

Britain’s bloody history

SINCE THE 1830s, Afghanistan had been under British influence. British forces had attacked Afghanistan in 1838-42 and 1878-80. They had used the country as a base for attacks on the Soviet Union in 1918-22, and had organised coups in 1924 and 1928-29. But in April 1978, the Afghan people overthrew the country’s feudal regime and set up a progressive government.

The US Government, the IMF, the World Bank and the Pakistan Aid Consortium (led by the US and British Governments) gave Pakistan’s Government over \$5 billion to build and supply bases for attacking Afghanistan.

The CIA spent \$1.5 billion arming and training Contra-style opponents of the new Government, the mujahadin, in their biggest operation since Angola. It used British mercenaries, and raised money for its operations by selling drugs to the USA and elsewhere. The SAS also operated alongside the mujahadin.

MI6 also aided the mujahadin, supplying them with Blowpipe surface-to-air missiles and training them at secret bases in Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Governments of Britain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, West Germany and Israel all

backed the US aggression. The EEC banned food sales to Afghanistan. The IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development cut off aid. The mujahadin raided civilian targets, destroying over 1800 schools, 40 hospitals and 110 first aid centres.

The US state, assisted by Thatcher, trained and armed almost a quarter of a million Islamic mercenaries drawn from around the world to fight against Afghani national liberation. It was not supporting a “jihad” but manipulating dupes, just as it has used other groups to fight proxy wars in Africa and Asia, colonial wars it labelled wars against communism.

The CIA promoted drug traffic in the Golden Crescent to raise funds for them. The Egyptian, Saudi, British, French and Israeli Governments all sold them arms. The CIA supported their sabotage and guerrilla operations inside the Soviet Union. Only in December 1979, five months after the US intervention, did Soviet troops enter Afghanistan.

In the 1980s Reagan gave the mujahadin logistical support, training and weapons. And the British and US Governments allowed them to open recruiting offices, under the name Al Kifah, in London and New York. It was Thatcher who ordered the SAS to train them to use various weapons at secret camps in the Scottish Highlands, and to sell them Stinger missiles.

As Railtrack reaches the end of the line, transport workers have the opportunity to ensure that the same mistakes are not made with the Tube...

Goodbye Railtrack...now save the Tube



Waterloo Station, London: rail terminus, Tube interchange, and scene of misery for thousands every day

Photo: Workers

THE COMBINED STRUGGLE of the rail unions, safety campaigners, and the bereaved to persuade the Government to 'take back the track' has finally been vindicated. Railtrack Ltd is to go into receivership. The Cullen report into Ladbroke Grove confirmed just what a disaster privatisation has been. The squeals of the shareholders will be heard for some time, but have so far met with short shrift. The Labour Government should for once be congratulated for protecting public money and, to the gratification of ordinary people, delivering a lecture on the risk inherent in capitalist ventures!

A fresh start can now be made on the railways. But the future of the London Underground remains a problem of the Government's own making. Labour has said that private contracts will have to show clear value for money measured

against the public sector.

The question must be — will Labour now find the courage to abandon its unsafe and uneconomic privatisation plans for the Tube? Can it possibly be safe for track and signalling to be in the hands of a private consortium, separated from operations, when this has proved so disastrous on the railways? No one in their right mind thinks so, even under the supervision of safety committees. It is particularly hard to see how integration, both within the core Tube system and with the national network, can possibly be achieved by competing interests.

Legal victory

Although London's mayor lost his legal bid to pre-empt privatisation by taking control of the Tube before PPP plans were drawn up, he did win one significant victory in the High Court in August.

Permission was granted to see a confidential report on the PPP by accountants Deloitte and Touche. The judge said of this, "it is an expert and adverse evaluation of it [PPP], the very fact of which is of public importance." The report explodes the Government's argument that private funding is more efficient. It reveals that the Government, in their desperation, used unscrupulous accounting methods, rigging the figures by £2.5 billion, to try to prove by hook or by crook that London Underground's bid would not be value for money. No wonder they wanted the report kept under wraps! They brought out all the tired old arguments about over-runs on the Jubilee Line, and assumed that private contractors would, simply by

Continued on page 10



Photo Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

One year ago: demonstration outside Railtrack HQ, organised by RMT against the privatisation of the London Underground and Railtrack's maintenance of the railway network. It was held four days after the Hatfield train disaster.

'Can it possibly be safe for track and signalling to be in the hands of a private consortium, separated from operations, when this has proved so disastrous on the railways?'

Transport Commissioner Bob Kiley said the public's bargaining power was thrown away in the rush to appoint the Government's chosen bidders. Kiley also says the New York subway was in a far worse state when he took it over, but now the Tube has deteriorated even more. It is currently in rapid decline. In the past year track, signals, and points failures have increased by 35%; there have been at least 7 fatalities (51 in the last decade), and the major injury rate to passengers has again increased.

Livestock

In July, 4,000 passengers on the Victoria Line endured temperatures which would have been illegal for livestock. After being trapped for 90 minutes, more than 600 passengers had to be treated for the effects of the heat. This can be 10 degrees Celsius higher than above ground as energy driving the trains ratchets up the temperature. According to one engineer, only the Jubilee Line has an effective cooling system.

Is privatisation a foregone conclusion? The answer is no. The Government promised that it would not go ahead without the approval of the Health and Safety Executive, after meeting with the unions, the passengers, the Mayor, and other stakeholders.

This urgent meeting is long overdue, but if and when it takes place, Londoners will have been encouraged to 'take back the Tube track'.

virtue of being private, deliver on time and to budget. Upward renegotiation of contracts was conveniently left out of the private side of the equation.

Meanwhile, LUL managers are obliged to concentrate on plans for implementing the PPP. 'Infracos' (Infrastructure companies) currently 'shadow' the PPP, in competition with each other. Stations are given face-lifts, and passengers can be forgiven for thinking all is well, until they reach the crowded platforms and trains.

Safety versus profit

Last year some escalators were taken out of service on safety grounds, and stations were closed. The Infracos, which lose money from LUL when escalators are withdrawn, fought to get their particular stations re-opened, regardless of safety.

Such competition shows the potential for danger: stations with the worst congestion were not prioritised for re-opening.

Passengers rightly appreciate modernised stations, but train drivers know only too well the danger in the tunnels. They report seeing loose bolts on the plates holding the rails together. Flooding is common and sleepers are rotting. Brickwork falls into the tunnels. They report it all, but become despondent on being told repeatedly that immediate investment is out of the question.

The Government's claim to have raised core investment to over £500 million a year is contradicted by London Transport reports, which reveal an average of £360 million.

Everyone wants quality in public services. The question in front of public service workers is, How to achieve it?

Mind the quality



EVERYONE IS SICK of empty calls for better public services, accompanied by their actual worsening. Those of us working in public services see something of what is needed every day at work, wring our hands, but feel powerless to effect change.

One problem is that we are stuck in defensive mode. The Thatcher creed, that privatisation was the only way to get quality and value for money in public services, has been refined, made more subtle, by Labour.

The present government potentially can be moved when a concerted effort is made — witness promises made at the recent Labour Party Conference — but its current doctrine is that private sources of finance are bigger and better, and that

private management can sort out failing services.

Systems for measuring quality and value for money have been put in place to identify failures. These systems seem bureaucratic and often arbitrary in their choice of victims, naming and shaming, using stick without carrot, pushing down pay and morale, creating an unstoppable downward spiral wherever there is a serious problem.

Victim mentality

A victim mentality, which developed during the 80s and 90s when workers were under constant attack, is still there. In education, for example, it seems to have caused many of our teachers to leave their profession, creating a major

crisis. London alone lacks 800 of the teachers it needs.

What is the alternative? We must look for new possibilities, think how to move forward instead of continuing to fall back. Despite its majority, the Government and its enforcers are weak and poor in ideas. They can be moved wherever we are clear and strong enough.

The workforce in each public service must themselves take hold of quality control and the systems brought in to measure and enforce it. After all, we as both users and providers of public services are the people who really care about quality and value for money. Only

Continued on page 12

we as providers can create services which are good quality and good value for money. Unless we work out what needs to be done, what systems should operate, unite around the programme, and require management and government to let us implement it, there will be no significant improvement.

Take Best Value, the Government's latest attempt at controlling the quality of local authorities' services. It is a cumbersome system which will be there throughout this Parliament whether we like it or not. Depending on what we do, it could go either way, for or against the interests of workers.

Best Value Reviews and Inspections are proceeding, and summaries of the inspectors' findings are available on the Internet. It is interesting that the inspectors' findings are not couched in Woodhead terms. Indeed they seem to be aiming mainly at getting management to do its job better. The inspections ask, "Exactly what is the service trying to do and how does it plan to improve?" There is no apparent attempt to rubbish good efforts by the workforce.

Some privatised services have been rated as only fair. Some in-house services have been rated as excellent. Even so, some services that received good ratings have still had to face restructuring afterwards by their management.

It is a testing time, but there is no reason why workers should not take hold of Best Value and use it to put forward what we want the service to aim for, and what we need by way of investment, for example. Why not take up and define in our own way the concepts of Best Value instead of letting more ignorant people use them to damage the reputation and quality of our service?

The "four Cs" of Best Value may sound embarrassingly silly: challenge, compare, consult and compete. But some canner public service workers have been able to get inside the simplistic formula and turn it around.

• **Challenge why and how and by whom the service is provided.** This means

'These are the "four Cs" of Best Value — we can and should take them on, not run away from or merely object to them...'

considering whether maybe the local authority should merely commission the service or maybe it shouldn't be providing the service at all. But of course we don't want to be paying for and running a service that isn't wanted in that form by those who use it.

What exactly is the service which local people require? We have a keen interest in, and special knowledge of that, and we must assert it. As for who is the employer, organised we can take on any employer. A well organised workforce would probably avoid privatisation, but if not, make a private company better as employer and service provider.

• **Compare performance with others.** Here our input is essential — comparisons are useful only if you are comparing like with like. Simple league tables are usually too simple, but they are useful to start an analysis of what a fair comparison is. Employers and government have far less understanding of factors affecting performance than we do. Again, we must assert what we know, and the fact that resources needed here may be quite different from resources needed there to get the same performance.

• **Compete.** Fair competition in deciding who should deliver the service means that the specification must be right, including the specification of the workforce and everything they need to do the job. We have often let this slide in services provided by local authorities, allowing, for example, lack of investment and de-professionalisation to harm the quality of services. If the specification is right, there should be no scope for that, and also no scope for the private sector

to submit low bids, never mind room for the extra burden of profits.

• **Consult local service users and residents on their expectations of the service.** It must be our job to make consultation genuine, to expose phoney consultation. We are the people best placed to engage local service users and residents, and know how to get their views, make sure the right questions are asked on surveys, etc.

These are the "four Cs" of Best Value — we can and should take them on, not run away from or merely object to them.

Taking control is easier said than done in a time when workers have walked away from their trade union organisation, or even allowed it to be used by a few unrepresentative "activists". The unions are the only independent organisations we have at present which could be used for exerting influence, let alone control — otherwise it may be impossible to speak to the press and other media, for example.

It is dangerous just to leave Best Value to management. They may have scores to settle, they will always be covering their backs, and they (or the councillors concerned) may even be feathering their own nests. With so much contracting out of services there is again scope for the kind of corruption which led to services being brought into public ownership in the first place. Remember THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPIST?

UNISON's Public Services Charter 2001 has some positive points to make in response to Best Value. It sets out the case that people expect and deserve the very best public services, accessible and responsive to those who need them, and that such services require a well paid, well trained, highly motivated workforce.

There is actually no contradiction between on the one hand good quality and value for the taxpayers, and on the other, good pay for the workforce. That should be possible to achieve whoever the employer, but only by a workforce which is well organised and clear about its strategy. It won't come as a handout from government, employer or Europe.

West Midlands: a case study

WITH THE HUGE variety of public services provided by local government around the country, it is difficult to generalise about current changes or reforms. But a few examples taken from the West Midlands show how the contrasting approaches taken by different authorities are linked to how much the local workforce is involved.

Council house maintenance

Birmingham City Council has gone for privatisation to meet the needs of maintenance for council houses. When faced with difficulties, it scrapped a productivity agreement it had only just made with its workforce and opted for what it saw as the easy answer. Only one of its sections which had made progress was allowed to tender. A similar approach to grounds maintenance has resulted in lower standards but cheaper costs.

By contrast in Sandwell the approach for council house maintenance has been to increase cooperation between client officers, designers and site operatives working as teams in an effort to improve quality and costs. This approach, by bringing long-term stability in managing the workload, enables the council to address long-term problems such as the skill shortage in construction and to encourage regeneration of the local economy by the use of local firms and labour. It takes into account the broader picture, within which the cost of a service may be a factor in other council costs and incomes.

Cooperation between designers and craftsmen has also brought productivity and quality improvements, and long term planning on programmes and budgets by the team has resulted in projects being delivered on time, on budget and with fewer defects.

But the new approach is not easy, for it requires changes in attitudes and forms of work by all from operatives to managers, with everyone being responsible for the outcomes of the whole team. Effort goes into finding solutions instead of someone to blame. Progress is hard but real, and the



problems solved are fundamental ones of production not apparent ones shown by short term prices. Importantly, those who receive the service are consulted on their view of the service.

Youth Service

In Wolverhampton the youth service consulted young people extensively on their views of the service. Many were taken to a variety of facilities, including private sector provision such as 'Wacky Warehouse' adventure play centres. The young people made clear they appreciate the skilled local authority youth workers and the variety of provision tailored to many needs. They also expressed concern at the cost of private facilities which was often beyond the amount they have in pocket money.

At the same time, much was learnt about possible improvements and changes to the service with greater involvement by the youth —who now influence council policy through their participation in youth councils.

The question of what is a quality service has become a matter of conflict between Wolverhampton Council and the

Audit Inspectors, who want the council to close many local libraries, youth and community centres and concentrate resources on a few centres. The council sees access to facilities by all communities as vital to quality provision.

In all the debate and effort to shape the future of services the role of the trade unions involving their members is vital. The short-term, get-the-cheapest, superficial approach in Birmingham arrived after a long period of ineffective union influence brought about by division and ultraleft adventurism with the membership largely uninvolved. Unions in Sandwell and Wolverhampton, on the other hand, are more united and active at the workplace. The councils there have recognised the importance of union consultation.

But the threat to services cannot be entirely solved locally. By restricting local council's ability to raise finance for investment, the government is forcing privatisation (see news item, page 3). The clearest example of this is in council housing. It is this that has led to UNISON to campaign against the private finance initiative and the Euro.

Once the site of plant producing steel in record quantities, a steelworks near Rotherham has found a second career as a science centre...

An electrifying experience

ONE OF BRITAIN'S latest interactive science centres opened in Rotherham earlier this year and it should be a big hit. It is only a short hop from junctions

way along is attached information about the steelworks, and you can hear accounts by workers of their times there.

From the raised walkways visitors can

insight into engineering and scientific principles. It also makes for a great time for children, who can pull, push, turn, squeeze, lift, bang and splash all day.

They can also easily vanish inside some of the bigger attractions.

The four sections are each dramatic in their own way. The Air Pavilion is suspended high above the ground in a translucent airship and tackles the central question, 'How do things fly?' The Water Pavilion has many traditional hands-on exhibits, but for many the best thing



An aerial view of the Magna science centre, near Rotherham

33 and 34 of the M1 and well signposted, so it makes a convenient stop on journeys north or south, as well as a destination in its own right.

The centre is housed in the former Templeborough Steelworks, which was shut down in 1993. The works had the distinction of exceeding the average hourly output of any plant in the world for one week in 1977, thus earning a congratulatory Christmas card from the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan.

For many adults it is likely that the building itself will be a big draw. It is huge inside and immensely atmospheric. To reach the interactive sections visitors have to walk along a high walkway through the darkened building. All the

look down on the old arc furnace and see a spectacular and very loud light and sound show, using pyrotechnics to recreate the process of turning scrap metal into steel. Magna should be commended for incorporating this into the experience. The importance of steel is highlighted in various places, and we found it quite moving, although ironic considering the ongoing struggle over the failure of Corus.

The interactive exhibits are divided into four sections — Earth, Fire, Air and Water. Magna likes to call these sections Pavilions — presumably the word 'Zone' is banned. They have gone to great lengths to make sure almost everything is hands-on, giving visitors a lot of



will be the transparent, overhead river delivering the water to the other exhibits. Prepare to get wet (there are overalls for the very young). In Fire, you cannot fail to be impressed by the amazing fire tornado. This is a vertical, rotating, jet of flame, some 6 or 7 metres high, with clever safety controls which let us get very close.

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

The Earth Pavilion is underground and explores all aspects of mining and excavation. Here the main attraction is the opportunity to work a real JCB — but the queues are long and unless you have the time, you might have to give this one a miss. As a tip for visitors who want a go on a JCB, get there early and go straight to this exhibit. For most people it will be at the end of their tour.

Outside is a specially designed adventure playground which our 10 year old daughter loved the best and which gives a chance to let off steam. A big schools programme is planned, with training courses for teachers. The site is going to continually develop, both outside and inside, with evolving robot colonies planned.

Impressions

All in all, the centre leaves some odd impressions. On the one hand this is a great (and tiring) day out for the family, at about £18 for a family ticket. On the other hand the site gives mixed and unsettling messages. Visitors conscious of the central role of industry in Britain's past and its future will be impressed with themes of 'isn't engineering great' and 'science can be fun', and there is no doubt that the site has been put to good use. Yet many will be uneasy about celebrating engineering in a site which, at its heyday, bristled with engineering excellence, but has since been killed off by European directives and international capital.

At the end of it all we have a central question to ask ourselves as a nation. 'How can our children grow up believing in an industrial future, when their parents are showing them industrial archaeology and not industry?'

For details ring 01709 720002. Website www.magnatrust.org.uk

If you want to be a player in the political game, not a spectator, the politics of cynicism is not enough. But thinking about the mountain of work and the changes in attitude that will be needed to transform Britain is overwhelming if you are on your own. That's why British workers need their own political party, this party, to generate the ideas and effort to bring the changes we need.

Who are we?

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist was founded in 1968 by Reg Birch and other leading engineers. They identified that there were only two classes in Britain and that only workers could make the change that was needed. Birch pulled together a diverse crew, of workers, and turned them into a party with a difference.

In 1971, the Party's second Congress produced a piece of completely new communist thinking for Britain called THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND ITS PARTY. We call this our Party programme and it remains as fresh and important for today as it was then. You can find it on our website, www.workers.org.uk.

Dozens of political parties formed in the 1960s and 70s have come and gone, while the CPBML is alive, well, and welcoming new recruits. One reason for its success has been that every CPBML member must be a thinker and a do-er. There are no paid officials.

The party is made up of working people like you, who are helped by their participation in it to develop as leaders and earn the respect of fellow workers. The party vows never to put itself above the class which created it, but to serve the interests of the class.

Those who join us know we are in for a long haul, and most of our members stay for good. We leave it to the political Moonies to grab anyone, exploit them and spit them out. We don't tolerate zealots on the one hand or armchair generals on the other. What about you? If you are interested, get in touch. In the long run, the only thing harder than being a communist is not being one.

How to get in touch

* The above description of the party is taken from our pamphlet WHERE'S THE PARTY. You can order one, and a list of other publications, by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

- Subscribe to WORKERS, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below.

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. You can ask to be put in touch by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

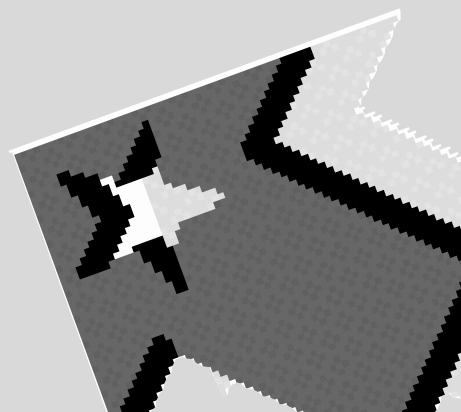
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Back to Front – On the right track

‘Railwaymen and -women will be operating the railway system of the future. They might as well take responsibility now for shaping that system in the course of struggle.’

THE RAIL unions RMT and ASLEF have from the start been at the forefront of the nationwide struggle against Railtrack, and for Londoners to own and control their own underground system. The white collar union the TSSA has also provided support and serious analysis.

If rail workers have to transfer to private companies, their pay and conditions will suffer. That is the context in which the train drivers threatened to strike. The same context, too, in which London Underground staff balloted for action last month.

They have to win what they can, while they can. Pay parity, station facilities, toilets for women workers, time off for union reps to carry out their duties — this is the day-to-day stuff of trade union bargaining, no more, no less. It could always have been settled overnight, and eventually more or less was.

It is heartening that workers in Britain are still organised enough to fight, in spite of the most restrictive anti-union laws in Europe. However, the tasks ahead — to rebuild the

railways, to rebuild a manufacturing Britain — demand a leap of imagination and confidence that has never before been seen in this country.

Working class struggle, starting modestly at the workplace, must be turned into a strategy for running whole industries, for running our country.

Railwaymen and -women will be operating the railway system of the future. They might as well take responsibility now for shaping that system in the course of struggle.

Do trade union leaders articulate the real challenge, so that all can come on board? Or do they still see the struggle in misleading terms of ‘left’ or ‘right’ or ‘moderate’, or new versus old Labour?

If they truly believe in workers’ control, do they yet appreciate the enormity of the threat posed by loss of national sovereignty?

When the call goes out to run the railways in the interest of Britain and with rolling stock and equipment made by British workers, then we will have made real progress towards socialism.

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