

WORKERS

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THE WAR AGAINST YOUTH

Testing, education, housing, health, work and wages, pensions – a generation under attack

TUC A vicious new bill *plus* News,

ELDERLY No care, no shame **Book Reviews**

NIGHT TUBE Not over yet **and more**

WORKERS



False hopes

IT'S TIME to stop magical thinking, time to allow experience to conquer false hope. Our ailing class doesn't need a witch doctor. It needs the evidence-based medicine of materialist thought.

The prospect of Jeremy Corbyn being elected Leader of the Labour Party is frightening the dullards of social democracy. In bored desperation, many workers attached to the compromising philosophy have turned to the "radical" candidate.

Why do we refuse to acknowledge that the "left" end of the idealist spectrum always fails to deliver? Look at Greece. The people elect a "radical left" government and vote in a referendum to reject the EU elimination of sovereignty. Within a

very short space of time their chosen saviour had bowed his head before the capitalist order.

He could do no other without rejecting capitalism. He was not elected to do that as the Greek people wanted to remain part of the euro. He had to fail.

We will never make any progress while we hold on to the pipe dream of social progress via compromise with capitalism. Can the pain of taking responsibility be worse than consequences like this? Clearly not.

We have no saviours but ourselves. It's time to accept the responsibility for eliminating capitalism by ourselves, for ourselves. ■

Fighting back in the war on youth

IN THIS ISSUE we carry a number of articles about the dire position faced by young people in Britain today. They are scarcely out of the womb when the government's testing regimes are applied to them. Then comes a narrowing education, and welcome to university along with a lifetime of debt.

Weighed down with insecurity, unable to foresee a home of their own or an end to debt, no wonder many young people are suffering from mental health problems.

Ahead they face the prospect of working well

into their old age – and still having to face retirement in poverty.

All the while they are being told that their problems are individual, and require individual solutions. That's the biggest lie of all.

They young are not to blame for the failure of capitalism, nor for the failure of older workers to confront it. But if they want a world fit for them and their children to live in, they will have to adopt collective solutions to what are collective problems. A young person's place is in their union. ■



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Doctors' fury over 7-day jibe



Doctors are fighting back against government interference.

Doctors have never disputed the need to enhance NHS services at the weekend. The issue is how to fund this and how to do this in a way which enhances the service without provoking a deterioration.

Most hospital consultants already work at weekends. A recent BMA survey of nearly 900 consultants shows that 88 per cent are on a "non-resident on-call rota" – regularly required to attend hospital at evenings or weekends if required, often in emergencies. More than two-thirds of those surveyed had been on call on Saturday or Sunday in the past week, working on average six hours or longer.

Health researchers at Manchester and York universities have recently analysed the case for more seven-day services. They found that providing such comprehensive coverage would cost between £1 billion and £1.4 billion – and that the health benefits could be achieved at half the cost if the money were spent on other health priorities.

Doctors know that there is a government "agenda" for blaming NHS staff for any shortcomings in the NHS and then using this to undermine the service as a whole.

So there is now a fierce war of words between doctors and the government. And there is a war of images, too, with doctors all over the country posting pictures of themselves in the workplace at the weekend.

The relationship between Hunt and the medical profession has suddenly become as toxic as the relationship between former education secretary Michael Gove and teachers. An online petition for a vote of no confidence in Hunt set up by Dan Furmedge, a young doctor at the Princess Royal Hospital in Bromley, Kent, reached the requisite figures in a matter of days. It now stands at over 100,000 signatories.

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk.

THIS SUMMER health secretary Jeremy Hunt told doctors to "get real" over the need for "proper seven-day service" in the NHS. Doctors are furious, and understandably. It is Hunt who needs to "get real" as the state of NHS finance means that 9 out of 10 acute hospitals are predicting a deficit this year.

The influential health policy charity the King's Fund, which monitors NHS finance, warned on 3 July ahead of chancellor Osborne's budget that financial problems are now endemic among NHS providers, "with even the most prestigious and well-run hospitals forecasting deficits".

DEATH RATES

Highest for a decade

BRITAIN'S DEATH rates for January to July 2015 were 30,000 up on similar figures for 2014 – the highest for a decade. Health analysts are trying to work out why: flu and the cold winter, heat related deaths in June-July? Or the 60 per cent cut in the public health budget since the abolition of the Primary Care Units and the absorption of public health into local authorities with subsequent decimation of health staff?

But you can never keep a good entrepreneur down. Dignity Pallbearers, which claims to be Britain's largest undertaker, sees the silver lining: pre-tax profits for this period up by 44 per cent to £46.5 million. Capitalism in life and death can be relied upon to turn a profit. ■

PARLIAMENT

The glorious rebuild

IF IT CAME from local authority leaders or senior NHS managers, the proposal to spend between £5.7 and £7.1 billion restoring the Houses of Parliament over a 40-year period would lead for calls for them to be sectioned. But it's apparently acceptable if you are the MPs and Lords.

A recent BBC documentary on the Palace of Westminster referred to its infestation with vermin (whether animal or human wasn't clear), and implied the building is sinking into the Thames and that Big Ben is the new leaning tower of Pisa. Parliament and its politics have been museum like since the demise of Oliver Cromwell. So let's campaign for Parliament to be put out to pasture and this symbol of oppression against workers be closed! ■

Workers

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email workers@cpbml.org.uk



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional news at cpbml.org.uk...

Britain's role in Saudi attack on Yemen

Since late March, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia, including Qatar, the UAE and Egypt, and backed by the Obama and Cameron governments, has been attacking Yemen...

RAF pilots join US-inspired bombing in Syria

British pilots have taken part in NATO bombing missions in Syria – in breach of the August 2013 Parliamentary vote against military involvement there...

No good comes from the rich

All parliamentary parties hold the view that very rich people are good for the economy, and workers can only hope to have crumbs from the table. That's never been a convincing argument – and a book from Andrew Sayer shows how the opposite is true...

Tube workers speak out

Members of Aslef and RMT picketing in July told cpbml.org.uk why they were on strike...

FT sold to Japanese company

Publishing group Pearson is selling the Financial Times Group to Japanese firm Nikkei for £844 million – sending another famous firm into foreign ownership...

Plans to tighten the euro noose

Even as negotiations with Greece were continuing, the European Commission released a report calling for closer monetary and political union...

Plus: the e-newsletter

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Andrew Wiard/www.andrew-wiard.info



18 August, Waterloo Station: rail unions and the TUC's Action for Rail Campaign demonstrated against the double attack of fare increases and staff cuts.

Still fighting over Co-op Bank

THE "SAVE OUR BANK" campaign, the cooperative and mutualists who have seen the demise of the Co-op Bank and control pass to private equity and hedge funds, is still trying to fight back against the new owners.

Proposals are being drafted to establish a Co-operative Bank customer union to work within the bank as a pressure group campaigning for the full re-establishment of cooperative principles and mutualism within the bank – in other words to drive out the private equity ownership.

If that is not a realistic aim – which it isn't – then the pressure group will try to ensure that the Co-op upholds its public commitments to ethical banking. Meanwhile, the Co-operative Group shareholding in the bank has been reduced to 20 per cent, and the private equity shareholders are inviting further hedge fund investors to buy in. Capitalism sees that there is a market for investors with ethics and a do-gooder portfolio as much as there is a market for other cut-your-throat privateers and financial bandits.

The ethical banking code the Co-op was forced to uphold is still in place – widespread surveying of existing customers indicated that dumping the code would lead to a massive haemorrhaging of the customer base. But it is slowly being reduced. Forty-two dodgy applications for new accounts were rejected in 2012, 12 in 2013 and only 4 in 2014. An ethical code maintained on paper? The Co-op movement fights on – but is the corpse picked clean? ■

COURTS

Direct action escalates

THE DIRECT ACTION reported in *Workers* in July by criminal lawyers (outside of all the anti-trade union legislation in Britain), which is intended to clog up the criminal legal system in Britain, has now been escalated.

Barristers have joined the boycott of the application for legal aid. More and more cases are being adjourned until they can be processed by duty legal staff.

The Ministry of Justice has put out tentative feelers to try and resolve the dispute, but this is just shadow boxing. No proposals have been put forward either to reverse the cut of 17.5 percent (over a year) in legal aid payments or to put forward alternatives to make the provision

of justice transparent and open to all, not just the rich.

Solicitors and barristers are now looking at further escalation of the action. They are clear the ministry's approach is a body swerve by the government to try to avoid their action bringing down the criminal justice system.

The government is also proposing further reductions in court room facilities, court rooms working round the clock and yet more privatisation of legal services. The reduction in court rooms and premises will take judges and magistrates back to the old concept of travelling judges and assizes – closer to the 18th century than Britain in the 21st century.

Legal professionals and civil service trade unions are combining to resist this return to justice only if you can afford to pay for it. ■

NHS contract challenged

THE NHS is facing a legal challenge from private provider Care UK, after four GP-led clinical commissioning groups awarded an elective care contract instead to a local NHS Trust in East London.

The four commissioning groups – from Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Havering, and Waltham Forest – judged that the NHS bid would do a better job for a lower cost. Care UK, Britain’s largest private health and social care company, had previously supplied elective care services (pre-arranged, non-emergency care) in the area, but the commissioning groups opted for the bid from the Barking, Havering and Redbridge university hospitals NHS trust. The contract covers services such as general surgery, orthopaedics and ophthalmology for nearly a million local people.

Now Care UK has lodged a complaint, on the grounds of “discrimination”, with NHS economic regulator Monitor, claiming that the contract was improperly awarded. Monitor has launched an investigation, which puts the process on hold, potentially delaying the opening of new services.

The complaint is likely to lead to significant costs in legal fees for the NHS, as the commissioning groups must now prove that their assessment of the bids was “consistent with their obligations to act in a transparent and proportionate way and to treat providers equally”.

This is exactly what was predicted when the NHS was opened up to competition in 2012 by the last government’s Health and Social Care Act. Money which should be spent on patient care will now instead go towards defending the NHS in the courts. This case could be the first of many to drain the NHS of precious funds.

Care UK is owned by private equity firm Bridgepoint Capital. It made profits of about £53 million in 2014 from its national portfolio of hospitals, GP surgeries and mental health centres.

- In July 2014 the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee noted that only 21 of Monitor’s 337 staff had an NHS background – and just seven had a clinical background. This “damages Monitor’s credibility in dealing with trusts and its effectiveness in diagnosing problems and developing solutions,” said the MPs. ■

TUC

Lobby call

THE TRADES Union Congress has announced a national union mobilisation against the government’s Trade Union

Bill – starting with a lobby of parliament on Monday 2 November.

Few details were available as *Workers* went to press, but the TUC did say that there would be a rally from 1 pm at Westminster Hall, followed by delegations to see MPs from 2.30 pm. ■

WHAT’S ON

Coming soon

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 6 September, 11 am to 5 pm

Burston School Strike Festival, Burston, Near Diss, Norfolk

Annual rally to celebrate the longest strike in history. Speeches, march, exhibition. For details, see www.burston-strikeschool.wordpress.com

Tuesday 22 September, 7.30 pm

“When Britain leaves the EU”

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

CPBML Public Meeting



With the EU and the euro in meltdown, come and hear why, and what Britain needs to do to retain its integrity, sovereignty and unity as an island of labour.

OCTOBER

Sunday 4 October 12 pm

Manchester

TUC demonstration outside the Conservative Party conference. For details, see tuc.org.uk/

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s next series of London public meetings in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL, begins on 22 September – with the title “When Britain leaves the EU” – and 25 November. The meetings will take place in the Brockway Room, which can accommodate more people than the room previously used. Other meetings are held around Britain. Meeting details will be published on What’s On, page 5, and on www.cpbml.org.uk/events.

M The Party’s annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays. There are also CPBML May Day meetings in Edinburgh and Leeds.

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



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NEWS ANALYSIS

The Luxembourg follies



Workers

THE EU ELITE have now taken to styling Luxembourg City the “Capital of Europe”. They have built themselves the modern district of Kirchberg to help them feel comfortable in their capital. No one lives there, no one needs it, but the EU has never let that get in the way of spending in the “age of austerity” and the Greek crisis.

High on a plateau of the same name, Kirchberg is a modern folly. It has schools, an Olympic-grade pool, theatres, flats, 5-star hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants. To get around there’s a four-lane highway and bike lanes. A tramway link is planned. All that’s missing is a resident population – and businesses to fill the empty shops.

This grand development is isolated from the rest of the world. Visit Kirchberg at the weekend and you’d soon discover that people are at a premium. You might see armed guards outside a beano for young Eurocrats, a score or so of visitors to the glistening new museums, a few people on bikes and maybe a wedding party at a hotel. That’s it!

Our money

EU money (ours) has paid for this phenomenal infrastructure, but it is hard to find the complete cost. The European Courts of Justice cost €500 million; the concert hall €113.5 million; the European Investment Bank building €118 million; the Museum of Modern Art €100 million; the Museum of the Fortress a meagre €30 million.

The greatest folly is the European Parliament complex. The parliament sits in both Strasbourg and Brussels, yet its secretariat is housed in Luxembourg, including space for plenary sessions last held there over 40 years ago. There’s a massive rebuilding programme expanding the Luxembourg facility to 3 million sq ft at an estimated cost of €850 million. The EU claims that this will produce efficiency savings of €363 million over 20 years. The basis for that calculation is unclear.

On the other hand, the EP ignores a report it received from the EU Court of Auditors last year. That showed it could make savings of €114 million a year by moving the parliamentary seat from Strasbourg to Brussels. And it could save another €1.4 million by relocating all employees from Luxembourg to Brussels.

The real savings for the people of Europe would be to do away with the whole corrupt edifice of the EU and its institutions. ■

Anyone under any illusion about look at its Trade Union Bill...

They want us

THE TRADE UNION Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech has resurrected every wish-list governments ever had of smashing the working class. It embodies every anti-worker measure they’ve previously tried to implement and every shred of vindictive class hatred they have had in their ranks reaching back to day one of modern capitalism.

The government invites workers to disarm, put away those relics from the 19th century, trust in the kindness and caring nature of the employer and voluntarily offer our throats to the butcher’s knife.

The detail of the Trade Union Bill is captured in the TUC and other trade union critiques. But how many really understand that the greatest challenge to the working class has been thrown down, requiring the greatest response in return? We must see it as an opportunity to galvanise, reassert and organise our class.

The announcement on 6 August, the day of the Tube strike in London, of plans to ban the deduction of subscriptions from source for public sector workers, and those providing public services, was a further provocation from these bully boys. No employer in the public or private sector is openly calling for such a measure.

It is simple arrogance on the part of this government to think they can air-brush us out of history by legislative measures, both civil and criminal, to reduce every aspect of trade union organisation – finance, influence, thought, industrial action – or even its very presence. The language used, the images thrown up, are the same they used in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries when they attacked working class organisation.

The Labour Party will of course happily oppose, since they are not in power. When in power they also legislate against us.

Trade unions have always been defensive organisations of workers. They have never been revolutionary organisations threatening the existence of capitalism. Why then this latest assault on the trade unions, when successive governments have already imposed the most reactionary and draconian legislation anywhere in the developed world bar the USA? Because capitalism in Britain – despite all its anti-worker policies, its deindustrialisation, its importing of cheap labour to undermine wage rates – has signally failed to improve productivity in Britain, hence significantly failed to increase its profit returns.

Absolute decline

Since 1976 the CPBML has described British capitalism as being in absolute decline, downward and irreversible. British capitalism believes it can only resurrect itself by further destroying all working class opposition, thought and organisation. Hence this latest assaults. The attack has the hallmarks of the Battle of the Somme or Verdun, do or die, bleed your opponent to death, an attack from desperation not strength.

In addition to the legislative attacks on the trade unions we should look at the ideological attacks and employer offensives in the workplace. While describing itself, ludicrously, as “the party of the working class”, the government is encouraging employers and would-be “independent workers” to fragment, disrupt, break down, and casualise work relationships. Under the pretence of new technology and instant “app” servicing, capitalism is trying to pretend that a great personalised, consumer-driven product revolution is

‘It is arrogance for them to think they can airbrush us out of history.’

government intentions towards working people should to disarm and surrender



Workers

Last autumn's TUC march for pay. This year the fight is about the survival of unions.

taking place.

Capitalism has always sought to revolutionise how products are produced. Latterly the drive for change has taken the form of short-term employment, personalised casualisation, the “gig” economy, the “Uber” system and so on create greater so-called flexibility – where workers are chained in desperation to the next email, text, app.

Fragmentation

With the fragmentation of work comes the ideological attempt to break up every aspect of collectivity involving more than one worker in any workplace. Some trade unionists from the 1990s through to today

thought legislative measures would resolve issues such as inequality. But reality is breaking through. The employer is striking back.

Using zero hour contracts, flexibility over hours, home working, freedom when and how to work, “smart working”, the employers aim to get greater productivity for less wages, for less stability of employment, for less or no pension provision. Millions of workers in Britain have had full-time reduced to part-time or even “spare-time” employment and under-employment.

An analysis by Unison of a leading multi-national in the world of outsourcing identified systematic and deliberate undermining

of collective bargaining and agreements. There was a consistent “churn” of managers and workers to prevent stability in the workplace. All accompanied by unceasing change to hours worked, shift patterns and holiday entitlement, changing established routines, introducing casuals on the minimum wage and zero-hours contracts.

Tin-pot line managers generate a culture of hiring, firing, bullying, and harassing the workforce. Computerised pay slips can cheat workers of hours worked, penalties and fines are imposed, sickness benefits reduced, and two-, three-, or four-tiered workforces created.

The “Living Wage”? Of course not (see editorial, page 24) – instead a myriad of

Continued on page 8

What's in the bill?

Industrial action. New restrictions on the right to strike, including a 50 per cent voting threshold for union ballot turnouts, plus in some “essential public services” 40 per cent of those entitled to vote must vote for industrial action. Doubling of the 7-day notice of action to employers; limit of 4 months in which action must be taken following a ballot.

Further restriction on the number of pickets and their location. Agency workers allowed to be brought in as scabs.

Political funds. Individual members to have to opt in. Regulation of political spending to be much broader than funding for political parties.

Facility time for union reps. Government regulation of its extent and its proportion of any local authority's pay bill. Employers required to publish details on any time they pay for.

New certification officer. In charge of policing the requirements of the act, the certification officer will have powers to appoint inspectors to investigate unions and to impose financial penalties. ■

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ways to cut the wage bill. Welcome to Britain moving backwards.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, based in Dublin, has published the first EU-wide survey of wage distribution across the EU. Its first conclusion is that until 2008 wages across the EU were equalising upwards. Second conclusion: EU wage rates after what it refers to as “The Great Depression of 2008” have led to more unequal distribution than ever. Third conclusion: the three EU countries with the greatest wage inequality are Latvia, Portugal and...Britain.

Britain leads the EU in wage inequality. Or to put it a better way, the class divide over wages in Britain is the most pronounced in Europe. We have 50 per cent of all the top earners in Europe, and they account for 1 per cent of earners in Britain. An important reason why we should leave the EU is the 23 failed capitalist nations which constitute it are united against our interests as the British working class.

The class divide in Britain is fundamental to why the government attacks workers' wages and why it therefore attacks the trade unions – whose purpose in life is or should

‘There have never been any halcyon days in British labour history.’

be to fight for wages rather than for the national minimum wage or Osborne's new national living wage or any other variants.

Fight on our terms

Trade unions have to get off their knees, blow the dust out of their heads over wages and remember we dumped the slogan of “a fair day's wage for a fair day's work” in the 1880s. It's not about fairness. We fight for wages so that we can live, not on their terms but ours. We organise through our unions to make inroads into the capitalists' profits, hence why we are attacked.

True, some of the practices attacked in the Bill are themselves destructive of our labour movement. But they are our unions and we have to deal with any problems within them ourselves. We will clean out our own stables and must defend the right to do that. But we must do it.

The TUC in September has a hugely difficult challenge. All the old battlefields are calling: the fight for wages, the fight for the right to work, dignity at work, hours of work, the right to be a trade unionist, unifying those who work, re-establishing collectivity and class identity.

None of these issues is new. All have been there before Thatcher came to power in 1979 and continued with Major, Blair, Brown and Cameron. They are still here and as demanding as ever.

The TUC has called for a lobby of Parliament on 2 November. This will be more useful than the ultra-left annual parade to the Tory Conference in October which will be the usual ragtag march. But by itself such a lobby will pass unnoticed – when you go cap in hand to capital's political representatives you always get short shrift.

There have never been any halcyon days in British industrial and labour history. We should have no illusion of workers and employers skipping hand in hand through the gates of the workplace as happy newly-weds with a mutual vision of the future.

It has always been today the war, tomorrow perhaps the armistice but always the war again the next day. That sums up the relationship between worker and employer in Britain for hundreds of years. ■



CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London

Tuesday 22 September, 7.30 pm

“When Britain leaves the EU”

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

Over the past 50 years and more, Britain's ruling class has battled to ensure Britain is enmeshed in the European Union. With the EU and the euro in meltdown, come and hear why, and what Britain needs to do to retain its integrity, sovereignty and unity as an island of labour. All welcome.

Tube unions called off strikes in August over the night tube. But the battle is not over yet...

Progress in tube fight

THE LONG-RUNNING dispute over the introduction of a 24-hour rail service on London's underground took a positive turn when RMT, TSSA and Unite called off two further 24-hour strikes scheduled for the last week of August. But the unions also set dates for more strikes in September to put more pressure on London Underground to negotiate an acceptable settlement.

The unions have made it clear that any attempt to start running the night tube on the target date of 12 September or even running test services in preparation for it, would result in immediate action.

The dispute has been simmering for a long time, and has its roots in the decision last year by London mayor Boris Johnson to abolish ticket offices and cut nearly a thousand jobs, leading to one-day strikes by station staff in both RMT and TSSA. While this was going on, Johnson announced that London Underground would in September 2015 be starting the night tube 24-hour service at weekends.

War

Johnson, along with Cameron and his Bullingdon Club cronies, hates trade unions – and above all they hate the rail unions. As soon as he became mayor, Johnson started an ideologically driven war with the rail unions and the London Underground staff they represent.

Johnson has been making the strategic decisions. But notably he has refused to be directly involved in the disputes that he deliberately engineered, instead leaving his London Underground management team to do his dirty work for him.

Strikes by RMT and TSSA station staff in 2014 had only a limited impact on services. So the unions executed a tactical retreat, no doubt aware that the night tube issue was going to be a major battle for all London Underground's staff, not just the station staff, and the real fight was coming soon.

Recent changes in the senior management team have failed to change the dictatorial approach to industrial relations at London Underground. Instead of negotiating and consulting with the unions over the introduction of the night tube, as has been the norm in the past, management tried to impose new working arrangements which if



Julius Kiehlitz/shutterstock.com

The Central Line at the busy Holborn tube station. London Underground says it wants to run a 10-minute service throughout the night.

accepted would have a severe impact on the work-life balance of many staff.

This was coupled with a point blank refusal to negotiate over suitable compensatory payments for what is a fundamental change to hours of work and rosters. The annual pay negotiations were then deliberately thrown into the mix so that London Underground, Boris Johnson and the likes of the anti-union rags the Daily Mail and the Evening Standard could then accuse the workers of being greedy, and ungrateful for having such wonderful well-paid jobs!

After months of attempting to get London Underground to engage in meaningful discussions, patience ran out when last ditch talks at ACAS never got beyond London Underground sitting in one room

and getting ACAS officials to scurry to and fro to another room where the union negotiating teams were located.

The first one-day strike was staged after ballots held by all four unions (RMT, TSSA, Aslef and Unite) delivered overwhelming votes in favour of industrial action. The ballot results were a particular slap in the face to Johnson, who has been very vocal in his support for the inclusion of much tougher thresholds for strikes in the anti-trade union bill now going through Parliament. All of the ballot results would have exceeded the threshold currently being proposed.

First strike

The first strike was held for 24 hours from 18.30 on 8 July, a tactic designed to have a one-day strike cause disruption over two days. Unlike the 2014 strikes, this time all of the tube staff took strike action. No tube trains ran, and there was also a knock-on effect on Chiltern Trains services. London's

'A point-blank refusal to negotiate.'

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roads were gridlocked for much of the day. An overtime ban and work to rule were also put in place, resulting in further disruption.

Despite a continuing massive media campaign against the tube workers that regurgitated a tissue of lies put out by London Underground, there has been enormous support from the public for the staff.

The strike moved London Underground but only slightly. They continued their provocative approach to what passed for negotiations with the unions, and so a further strike was held for 24 hours on 5/6 August. It was as solid as the first one, and achieved the same effects on London's transport.

With 12 September set as London Underground's target date for starting the night tube, and no sign of the unions' resolve cracking, management employed new tactics.

London Underground had begun to talk meaningfully on some issues, but had engaged in what is effectively psychological warfare by finding reasons to go back on areas where progress had been made. Discussions between London Underground and the unions during August have been characterised by TSSA as like a game of snakes and ladders.

Division

It is worrying that London Underground had at least some success with their tactics of divide and conquer, convincing drivers' union Aslef to suspend industrial action long before the other three unions felt able to do so. Yet since many drivers are in RMT and Aslef drivers are clearly reluctant to cross picket lines, London Underground advised passengers that there was unlikely to be any service on the strike days anyway!

Division among the unions is bad in any dispute, but even more so in one as politically crucial as this one. Aslef needs to reflect on the need for unity in opposing someone like Johnson and his backers.

Aslef has a habit of splitting off from the negotiating alongside other unions right across the rail industry, and while its tactics have often yielded short-term gains, its sectionalism often seriously damages

prospects for unity and solidarity which will be crucial if the rail unions are going to be able to withstand the onslaught from this government in the future.

The RMT and TSSA have been particularly critical of the safety issues relating to the introduction of the night tube. Johnson wants a night tube on the cheap, and seems hell bent on putting the lives of both staff and passengers at risk by trying to run the system with minimal staff numbers. Not only will there be few station staff, but there will also be fewer staff in the control centres that monitor the many CCTV cameras essential for a safe and secure rail system.



Unity (before the division): Aslef members picket the Northumberland Park depot on 9 July.

London Underground has decided that much of the staffing of stations at night will be by new recruits on part-time contracts, and is particularly keen on attracting students looking for paid work to do alongside their studies. This means that young and inexperienced staff will be expected to deal with some of the most difficult situations any station staff could expect to encounter.

Everyone knows that these staff will be regularly faced with large numbers of intoxicated passengers, some certainly violent. With services in some parts of the network down to a 30-minute frequency, passengers looking to get up to high jinks or worse will have plenty of time to do so.

'The unions will need to avoid being suckered into sectionalism.'

Only ten years ago, tube staff were being publicly congratulated for their bravery in dealing with terrorist bombings. Yet London Underground intends to have some of its station staff unqualified to do anything other than answer queries and help travellers use self-service ticket machines.

London Underground has apparently stated to unions that in the event of a major emergency in the future, the unqualified staff would be instructed to abandon their (very small number of) qualified colleagues to get on with it and to leave the station completely for their own safety.

Safety fears

Not all of the tube lines will be running a night service. This means that some stations will only be partially open, some platforms being open for trains and others being closed. London Underground have been unable to satisfy the safety authorities that they have adequate measures to keep the public out of the closed areas – not surprising given that at some stations it is proposed to use elasticated barriers of the sort usually used to manage queues.

Faced with an intransigent management backed by an ideologically driven mayor and government, the rail unions and their members have shown that by being resolute and united, they can force significant concessions from those that would attack their public service and their pay, terms and conditions. It looks as though they will win this particular battle.

But tube workers will need to strengthen their organisation still further, including making sure the new tube staff are recruited into the unions. The unions will also need to understand the forces that confront them, avoid divisions that will give comfort to the class enemy, and avoid being suckered into sectionalism. ■

The government said it would cap charges on residential care. Now it's gone back on the promise...

No care, no shame

IN THEIR ELECTION manifesto, the Conservatives said that by April 2016 they would cap charges on residential social care and limit the liability of any individual needing long-term care, along with a rise in the level of personal assets above which people would be ineligible for state help.

Now ministers have shelved all that for England. Why? Apparently because council leaders, alarmed at the crisis in day-to-day services for elderly and disabled people, asked for the funding set aside for the cap to be used instead to ease the current crisis.

In a letter to health secretary Jeremy Hunt and chancellor George Osborne sent on 1 July, the Local Government Association (LGA) wrote: "It would be deeply damaging to press ahead with a costly and ambitious reform programme if the very foundations of the system we are reforming cannot be sustained."

A "pause" for the cost cap, due to be introduced next April, was widely expected. The decision was quietly announced in writing at the end of July, just before parliament closed for the summer.

Delaying the cap was tempting for ministers, enabling them to inject up to £2 billion extra into social care in England over the life of this parliament. But it would involve breaking a clear manifesto commitment at the recent general election.

The cap on liability for care costs, set at £72,000 for people above state pension age, was due to be introduced next year under the Care Act 2015, following the recommendations of the Dilnot Commission in 2010.

The intervention by council leaders came in response to what they say is a social care funding gap in England worsening by £700 million a year and forecast to be at least £4.3 billion by 2020. The LGA cited the prospect of paying the "National Living Wage" as one of the reasons for wanting a

delay. So young workers are paid a pittance for looking after the old, and "we" can't afford either decent care or decent wages.

As many as 500,000 people who would have been eligible for state help with washing, dressing and meals in 2009 do not receive any support today. According to the charity Age UK, lack of such support in the community means that numbers of elderly – and the number of disabled people stuck in hospital is rising by 19 per cent a year.

In the letter to ministers the LGA stressed that it still backs the idea of a cap on care costs and is not calling for its indefinite suspension, but said that "frank assessments of prioritisation" are needed. The letter continued, "This means considering postponing new costly initiatives – even those we fully support – if that is the only way we can secure sufficient funding for mainstream social care services."

The letter was signed by Izzi Seccombe, chair of the LGA's community wellbeing board and Conservative leader of Warwickshire county council, approved by the LGA's new majority Conservative leader, Gary Porter. So much for election promises!

Savings

On the basis of the government's cost estimates, postponing the reforms that were due to come in next year will save £590 million in 2016-17. The government will save at least £2 billion in total as implementation will be deferred until 2020, a year after its "austerity" programme is due to end. Annual costs of the care cap changes are set to rise to £2.3 billion by 2025-26.

The Welsh government has already postponed its version of the changes, which were also due to take effect in 2016, because of "uncertainty as to what reform may be introduced in England".

A one-year postponement in England would have reinstated the original timetable for introduction of the care costs cap. But a delay to 2020 with a hint of rethinking social care provision is likely open the whole debate again, to the detriment of all those needing care now or in the future.

Opinion in the social care sector soon swung behind postponement once the possibility was raised. Ray James, president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social

Services, said: "Whilst the Care Act is rightly welcomed across the sector, if asked to choose between implementing the funding reforms right now or having the money to directly fund growing demand for social care, every right-minded person would prioritise a fair and sustainable funding settlement to meet the true cost of providing safe, good quality care."

Sue Brown, deputy chair of the Care and Support Alliance, representing 80 leading care charities, has blogged that the crisis in social care is so acute that the added demands on councils of introducing the cap "would be dangerous". ■

'So "we" can't afford either decent care or decent wages.'



You can judge a society by how it treats its young people. On that measure, Britain stands condemned...

The war against youth

A FORWARD-LOOKING, optimistic, collectively minded society will nurture and encourage its youth, ensuring they know how important they are now and for the future.

Research into the education, training, employment, housing, health and well being of young people under capitalism presents a very different picture. Henry Giroux, a well-known US youth researcher, has written angrily of a “War on Youth”, a sentiment that certainly resonates with the experience of young people in Britain.

There are plenty of examples of young people refusing to accept the situation. And despite the destruction of the 2011 riots in British, research into them showed that young people understand the causes of their problems. The reasons for their actions should never be underestimated.

Workers know that the only effective way to stand against capitalism is through demonstrating economic and class power. For that our young people need at least to be in trade unions. In this article we present some of the most recent research about the impact of capitalism on young people and the vital role trade union members play in taking them under their wing, helping to direct their anger against the employer and capitalism constructively and effectively.

Negative for Youth

The government’s youth policies all come under the strapline “Positive for Youth”. The fiction is that young people are solely responsible for themselves, as individuals. The first “role” for young people is what they can do about their future: “taking responsibility, making the most of every opportunity available, and speaking up on issues they care about”. This overlooks one fact: the government will never listen!

Government policy accepts that capital-

ism is destructive of young people’s self-esteem and claims to set out to make them more resilient and self-reliant. The new National Citizen Service (NCS) is supposed to encourage them to build character through voluntary work, sport, entrepreneurship and civic engagement. It says without apparent shame or irony, “Your time at NCS will give you the tools to change the world around you through fundraising and volunteering”.

Anything to divert

NCS and similar initiatives are about anything to turn the attention of youth away from the fundamentals of their plight. The reality is that the economic and social prospects for young people are dire, and getting worse. According to *The Economist* (7 April 2015), labour market participation among 16- to 24-year-olds is 6.5 percentage points lower than in 2005. The young were the hardest hit by the great financial crisis of 2007-2008, still referred to euphemistically as “the recession”.

The research and policy focus in recent years has been those dubbed “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (NEET). Reports show that these young people continue to be deeply affected by the lack of real training and employment opportunities. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that 963,000 of all young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are still classified as NEET – that’s over 13 per cent of the whole age group.

The discrepancy between the number of NEETs and those “unemployed” is the result of the relatively large number classed as “economically inactive” – over half a million – but as the ONS statistics do not include further data on them we don’t know what “inactive” means.

Youth employment data is hard to interpret given the range of government policies. One policy forces young people to stay in school by raising the school leaving age; another reduces vocational options in schools. Training and work-related policies range from draconian – the Work Programme and Mandatory Work Activity aimed at those with no qualifications – to ineffective “traineeships” for those who have not benefitted from, or have missed out on,

‘The fiction is that young people are solely responsible for themselves, as individuals.’

both schooling and family support.

Other policies, such as the Youth Contract and Apprenticeships, have to pay employers to take on young people since they have no sense of responsibility towards youth. The idea of “apprenticeship” has become particularly debased.

Academic research published last year shows that apprenticeships do not serve as an alternative to university. It found that most of them are low-skilled, dead-end placements and do not guarantee employment after completion. There are some very good schemes that lead to decently paid skilled jobs, but these are massively oversubscribed, with BT and Rolls-Royce apprenticeships (see *Workers*, January 2014) attracting more applicants per place than Oxford engineering degrees.

The employment areas where apprenticeships are more likely to be available are in routine office work, health and social care, or retail. Engineering apprenticeships are still in short supply and in 2013-14 there were under 15,000 starts in the construction industry. As a result, overall apprenticeship vacancies are still well short of the number of applicants.

Those who are not NEETs or Rolls-Royce apprentices are faring no better. Nearly half of all school-leavers have been lured into higher education. Successive governments trying to disguise youth unemployment made promises, now broken, of a bright future. While the youth of this generation have more qualifications than any of their predecessors, they have been disproportionately affected by the 2008 slump, with high levels of unemployment, underemployment and insecurity.

For many of these young people the best hope is one of the enslaving, unregu-

‘The prospects for young people are dire, and getting worse.’



Students marching in London in 2012 against the outrageous fees charged for university education.

Workers

lated internships. And even then they need a degree and parents who are able to support them. Internships are unpaid or at best poorly paid, giving new meaning to wage slavery. It's unclear how many of those tied to internships are included in the unemployment figures.

These positions are advertised by employers for highly qualified but as yet inexperienced young graduates desperate to get their foot on a career ladder. In the

absence of real jobs, the competition for these internships is fierce, with no promise of a job at the end but offering yet one more thing to add to the CV in the hope this may lead to a job eventually.

'Youth on the Move'

The prize for destroying meaningful employment opportunities for young people in Britain goes to the EU. That's true too in other member states, except Germany,

Austria and Luxembourg. Using data from 1975 to 2010, researchers from the London School of Economics found that Britain had had a record increase in immigration. The proportion of population foreign-born was below 6 per cent in the early 1990s, rising by 2011 to about 10 per cent. In London this proportion rose from 28 per cent to the current level of around 40 per cent.

Continued on page 14

Locked out of housing

YOUNG PEOPLE struggle to find decent housing. Few are able to build up the cash for a deposit, so they are locked out of the housing market. Many more young people now live for long periods in the expanding private rented sector. That accommodation is insecure, of variable quality and often very expensive.

The government's English Housing Survey paints a bleak picture for young people. In London 16- to 24-year-olds spend an astonishing 88 per cent of their income on rent. Taking housing benefit into account, the figure is 81 per cent, but that will soon be scrapped for under-21s. Being unable to save for a house forces many young people to remain for longer periods in their parents' homes well into their 20s, or to return home after leaving for university or beginning work.

The Citizens Advice Bureau warns that young people aged 17-24 are up against it. Its data show that young people are particularly seeking help with housing and employment – and that they are much more likely than clients in other age groups to need help with them. And of course adverse labour market circumstances combined with high housing costs make it harder to move around for jobs.

The combination of low wages, unemployment and tighter housing markets mean that young people cannot establish independent households. Many young adults now go through a protracted period without traditional family responsibilities, replaced by non-family living. Such difficulties affect their health and well-being and make it increasingly difficult to maintain protective social relationships. ■

Continued from page 13

Immigrants who are less skilled than British workers are substitutes for inexperienced young people and so may hurt young people's employment chances more than adults'. Evidence shows that a 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of foreign-born workers in the working age population is associated with an increase in youth unemployment of 0.43 percentage points.

The EU has spent millions – we could not find out just how much – on its programme "Youth on the Move", which has now come to an end. The programme's name and aims are regarded by europhiles (including thousands of university researchers, sad to say) as positive! The opposite is true, the programme is bad for young people and their own countries everywhere in Europe, though we are all subjected to constant propaganda to the contrary.

Keep moving

"Youth on the Move" was based on the dangerous myth that mobility is good. It consisted of so-called research or development projects designed to keep young people moving round and round Europe looking for work. In doing so it ensured poor wage levels and working conditions in those countries where they eventually do find employment, in Britain for example. At the same time this strips their own countries of young people.

These projects were even extended to NEETs, meaning that the most vulnerable could also wander about looking for work, unsupported by any of their home social networks or services. The latest EU plan is the Youth Guarantee scheme. This will supposedly ensure "that all young people under



Young and old marched in last year's successful fight to stop the (relatively affordable) New Era housing estate being sold to Westbrooks.

'There is a dangerous EU myth that mobility is good.'

Capitalism will damage your mental health

IN A 2013 review by the World Health Organisation, Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of the Institute of Health Equity, concluded that “Persistent high levels of the number of young people over 18 not in employment, education or training is storing up a public health time bomb waiting to explode.”

Unemployment is clearly related to poor mental health in young adults. Students worried about studying and money – and these concerns are increasing – also have relatively poor mental health.

Studies outside Britain have found that casual employment is linked with poor physical health and precarious employment with poor mental health. Temporary workers show more depressive symptoms, and often do not make a successful transition into permanent work.

A 2013 survey by UCU, the lecturers’ union, found that a third of young unemployed people had experienced depression “and rarely leave the house”. Many feel isolated and are lacking in confidence – 40 per cent feel they are not part of society and 36 per cent believe they will never have a chance of getting a job. This kind of response in the survey was typical: “I rarely go out and I feel so down about myself. I’ve tried so hard to find work but I feel no one wants me.”



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Research in Japan has shown clearly that young people who are supported in the transition from education to training and work felt able to take responsibility for themselves. Those who wanted to help themselves but had no supporting com-

munity experienced serious depression.

That so many of our young people feel this way, simply because they can’t get a job, is one of the best reasons to be a communist and take up the fight to destroy capitalism and build a better society. ■

25 – whether registered with employment services or not – get a good-quality, concrete offer within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed”.

In reality this will be another means of allowing employers to do what they like with young people’s working lives. And it will be subsidised by the working class in each country to the tune of €21 billion a year or 0.22 per cent of GDP according to a report on the eurozone job crisis from the International Labour Organization. The cost

is justified by the cost of NEETs, estimated in 2012 by the EU agency Eurofound to be €153 billion a year in benefits and foregone earnings and taxes .

Low wages and high debt

The rate of youth unemployment for Britain was 16 per cent for April to June this year. That’s slightly down on the same period last year. But rising debt levels clearly show that those who are in work are still poorly paid. The Institute of Fiscal Studies reported in March this year that the median income of

22-30 year olds will be 7.9 per cent lower this year than in 2007-08.

In 2014 employment rose fastest among 20-29 year olds, the lowest paid adults. The fastest-growing sectors include those with low pay, such as care and cleaning. Also the fastest-growing group of workers in the labour market this year are those who have been employed for less than a year in their current role. All these factors will drag down wages generally – facts to be remembered when the government touts the success of rising levels of employment. ■

Young people in general may not be interested in party or

A young person's place i

YOUNG PEOPLE are not enthused by traditional politics – but that doesn't mean they are apathetic. Bobby Duffy, managing editor of Ipsos Mori's social research unit, says, "The younger generation is not uninterested in current affairs.... It is remarkably focused on particular problems that it wants to resolve."

Harnessing and directing that interest where young workers have economic power is not easy. The lack of full-time, permanent work, the growing number of short- and zero-hours contracts, the use of agencies and other similar factors all diminish union membership levels among young workers.

Lefteris Kretsos, a researcher in trade unionism, found in 2014 that there is no serious evidence that young workers have negative attitudes towards trade unionism. Union membership levels for younger workers are declining faster than for older groups, but there is good reason to believe there is an unsatisfied demand for unionism among the young.

He concluded that "In essence, the low levels of trade union membership should be seen as the outcome of employers' resistance and hostility to unionisation, as well as the concentration of employment of young people in non-unionised private-sector services and small workplaces."

Unions and young people

The jobs that young people hold, the industries they work in, whether there is a union in the workplace, as well as the decline in the number of large workplaces and in public sector employment, are all key factors.

Kretsos found that young people are less likely than older workers to have opportunities to join a union, by virtue of their limited experience in the workforce. They may not encounter a union or a unionised workplace. Research examining whether young people would join, if they had the opportunity, found higher levels of unmet demand for union membership among young people than older people. This is true in Britain and also the US, Canada and New Zealand.

With these issues in mind, unions have attempted to create a "portable" or "open source" form of union membership for workers, cheaper than full membership, and moving with the worker between transitory



Getty images

All too rare a sight: part of a group of 20 apprentices taken on for proper training by Cammell Laird s

jobs. Organising in this way has become the dominant approach to renewal taken by

'Young people show a worrying lack of awareness about trade unions.'

British unions "because of the lack of other credible strategies for renewal and revitalisation" according to one academic in 2009.

Many trade unions in Britain have established youth committees and youth forums. Unison for example has dedicated structures for young members as well as a young members' forum and weekends away. This is a means to get young people interested in unions and their issues, although the attendance is generally low.

parliamentary politics but that's not the whole picture...

is in their union



Shipyard on Merseyside in December 2008.

Young members are involved at all levels of Unison, including the National Delegate Conference, the supreme policy making forum of the union. Unison, along with Unite and the GMB, is active in “community level” unionism, trying to encourage young unemployed people to join a union. But this is a shabby substitute for workplace organising and getting into workplaces where trade unions have been derecognised. The idea is a direct import from the

USA where “community” is used to displace recognition of class. That makes it dangerous, as it is sectarian, divisive and divorced from traditional working class organisation.

To try and ensure that young people learn about trade unions, the TUC coordinates “Unions into Schools”, as a way to improve education about trade unionism among young people since it became TUC policy in 2006. The programme was developed with the support of Unionlearn and

‘We know that many young people want to join trade unions.’

education unions. Its website is “designed to help schools incorporate education about trade unions into a range of curriculum-linked work at a secondary level”. Nonetheless, a study in 2011 by the TUC and Unions 21 found that young people showed a worrying lack of awareness and understanding about trade unions. They were not visible to young people.

We know that our young people are in desperate straits. They have few good work opportunities, they can't afford anywhere to live to start their own families or even move to a job. We know this is all seriously affecting their health and wellbeing. But we also know that many want to join trade unions, which have to accommodate the precarious conditions under which young people work.

And those in work?

People in the media and fashion, for example, allow so-called interns to work for nothing. They actively recruit them to work long hours for no pay at all, knowing they are desperate to add work experience to their CVs.

In strongly unionised workplaces there are few core branch positions held by young members. Trade unions are aware that branches are too often run by older members, many of them retired and out of touch with the workplace.

Young people are suffering the biggest pay squeeze of any age group, currently earning 13 per cent less in real terms than in 2007. Their entry into the workforce at this lower level of pay has pulled wages down overall.

There is evidence that young people are looking for a way to defend themselves, to fight the War on Youth, alongside other, older workers doing the same. But they are also looking for opportunities to argue, discuss and understand better the world they live in to help them take control of their lives. For this, they need look no further than the CPBML (see information panel, page 23). ■

Why have governments of all political hues been so obsessed with testing the youngest children within a few weeks of starting full-time

Tested to destruction?

WHY ARE governments (Tory, Labour) so obsessed with school testing? The latest wheeze is to test the youngest children within a few weeks of starting full-time school, when most are still just four years old.

This is a new form of “baseline” testing in reading, writing and maths. The results of these tests will then be used to compare test results at the end of primary school, to judge how well each child has progressed.

Baseline testing has been tried before in Britain. In 1997 the Labour government introduced a system which lasted just five years because it proved damaging, time-wasting and ineffective, with such a low statistical reliability that the outcomes were seen as meaningless.

As any experienced early-years teacher knows, sitting down with a new four-year-old pupil and asking a series of progressively harder questions (one recommended format), or even getting a computer to do it for you (another), will be unlikely to tell you anything useful about what the child knows and can do.

Too young

For a start, a young child experiencing full-time school for the first time is just as likely to refuse to talk to you at all if they don't know you. Such very young children need at least half a term to settle in to the new world of school, and until they do they will be unlikely to show adults what they know.

Early years teachers know how to assess young children's learning because they do it all the time, and it is a complex and painstaking business. The purpose of assessment as far as teachers are concerned is so that they know what to teach and how best to teach it. The new tests will not help in this, and will take up a great deal of time in a period when teachers need to be concentrating on making sure that the children settle comfortably into school life.

So such formal, standardised tests will significantly underestimate children's learning. Of course, a cynic might see this as useful, falsely boosting the apparent progress the child has made by age 11. But a process which sorts children into successes and failures at age 4 is a cruel and damaging one as well as being stupid.



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Each of the testing criteria must be marked as pass/fail to achieve a final score for each child. For parents to be told that their 4-year old is failing is unhelpful to say the least, and research has consistently shown that even very young children can be quick to think of themselves as failures, a self image which is then hard to change.

The futility of narrow testing of literacy, reading and maths at this age is further underlined by considerable research which shows that such aptitude at 4 doesn't necessarily correlate with later achievement. Much better indicators of later success are self-confidence, curiosity, enthusiasm for learning, and independence.

The new tests are available to be trialed by schools this September, with a view to adoption in September 2016. The Department for Education (DfE) says they will not be compulsory, but Ofsted inspectors will be asking schools how they know about progress between 4 and 11. Inspectors are notorious for their lack of

understanding of early years assessment, so the assumption is that they will want to see simple test results. Schools will be under pressure.

The DfE invited private companies to compete to come up with a testing system, with the aim of identifying six to be permitted to offer their wares to schools. The testing methods of the initial six chosen range from observing children – probably the most acceptable – to interrogating children about their reading and maths, stopping if a child gets three successive questions wrong.

How the outcomes of such different methods of testing could possibly be comparable is a question ministers have been anxious to avoid.

What for?

So why add yet another layer of testing on what is already one of the most heavily tested school systems in Europe? Successive governments have steadily applied tighter and tighter central control

sed with school testing? The latest wheeze is to test the school, when most are still just four years old...



over what goes on in schools in the name of “accountability”.

Of course schools should be accountable – for the public money they spend (although this does not apply to academies and free schools now) and, more importantly, as being responsible for the education of the young on behalf of society. At one time, this accountability was assessed through visits from Her Majesty’s

‘At one time Finland was flavour of the month – until it was realised that they have no tests at all until 18.’

Inspectors, who made judgements and helped schools which needed to make improvements. Not any more.

Modern state schools find themselves in a stranglehold: the National Curriculum; Ofsted inspectors who fly in, make snap and often ill-founded judgements based on ever-shifting criteria, and fly out again; a huge raft of policies to adhere to and be assessed on which also change constantly; league tables; national targets which change arbitrarily but bring down draconian punishments for failure; and tests, tests, tests. The DfE monitors how every school in England is performing on a wide series of measures, every term.

Education ministers who know about education are rare, and mistrust of professionals is rife. A favourite activity is visits abroad to look at school systems there, returning to declare that teachers must now adopt methods used in New York/Sweden/Shanghai. At one time Finland was flavour of the month because its pupils

did so well in international assessments – until it was realised that they have no tests or exams at all until 18.

And teachers are now subject to performance-related pay – another system tried before (in the 19th century) and abandoned because it didn’t work. Its purpose now is to intimidate and denigrate the profession.

Opposition

The new baseline testing has met with universal condemnation from experts, professionals and organisations in the early-years education field. They have launched a campaign, www.betterwithoutbaseline.org.uk. A petition against the tests at change.org has already attracted more than 6,500 signatories.

Teacher unions are part of this campaign. At its Easter conference the NUT termed the tests “absolutely disgraceful” and “death by testing”, and voted to encourage schools, teachers and parents to opt out of the tests, with a possible ballot for a boycott on the cards. The union’s position was backed by the Pre-School Learning Alliance, the highly respected organisation for day nurseries and playgroups.

In the teeth of such concerted opposition, the DfE is showing signs of incoherence and wobble. Schools appear to be voting with their feet. At the beginning of July it was reported that only three of the desired six test providers had managed to sign up the requisite 10 per cent of schools, with the more formal systems failing to garner enough schools to continue.

It seems the few schools which did sign up for the failed providers will not have their costs reimbursed. And the education media now reports that the DfE is considering dropping baseline testing for 4 year-olds altogether and putting back the SATs tests for 6- and 7-year-olds!

Successive governments have shown extreme dislike and mistrust of professionals – workers who know about their area of work and don’t like being told what to do by politicians who don’t. When Michael Gove was education minister he called professionals The Blob, and saw it as his job to fight and defeat them. It will be up to teachers to carry through the struggle against this oppressive policy. ■

Young workers today face unemployment and working longer than ever – and still being poor in retirement...

No work, no rest



Workers

Young NUT members marching for pensions, 28 March 2012.

'If older workers stay longer in the labour force it must reduce the chances of younger workers in the labour market.'

chances and opportunities of younger prospective workers.

Quite simply, the continuous increase in retirement age has deliberately intensified youth unemployment. More and more young workers are affected by those who should have retired but financially are not in a position to do so (and those who can afford to retire but want to carry on working).

Successive pensions policies have amounted to an open attack on older workers while at the same time being part of a covert war on the younger age bracket. This malice is cheered on by advocates of working beyond a civilised retirement age as a victory over "ageism". And governments are happy to see groups of workers blaming each other for their problems.

Current longevity figures are projections, estimates. The fact is that living standards and mortality rates are closely linked. Low wages plus low pensions will simply equate to impaired lives while at work, followed by early death during retirement. Capitalists despise workers, especially when non-productive. Their policy for pensions can be summed up as "just push off and die".

Intergenerational pension funding based on a mutual respect between young and old, much higher state pensions payable at an earlier retirement age and the assimilation of young workers into production are all integral features of the type of national planning that workers need. Trade unions ran pension schemes before 1946 because the state would not. That may not be the way now, but unions need to take up the issue again, more widely than the few excellent but isolated disputes at employer level. ■

WORKERS LEAVING school or university now have to pay individually to fund a non-guaranteed pension due in forty years' time. That would seem an odd idea to previous generations of British workers.

A universal state pension was introduced in 1946, paid for out of National Insurance contributions. And from that time an increasing number of employers operated company pension schemes to which they contributed. The result was that workers no longer expected poverty when they retired and many could retire before they were too old to work.

Yet young workers today have lost that expectation through a combination of personal pension contributions, limited workplace pension provision and a constant attack on state pension benefits. In effect pension funding has become a part of a young worker's discretionary spending.

Should they regularly go out for an evening with friends or commit to a private pension contribution? If young workers fail to come to grips with this question they are accused of a lack of engagement with their own pension planning. What an oppressive choice.

It doesn't end there. The mantra of "we are all living longer" recited by successive governments and most economists has been used to justify much later retirement ages and the closure of many quality workplace pension schemes.

Too poor to retire

As a result there are now over one million people working beyond age 65 who cannot afford to retire. And at the same time over one million of our youth are at a loss to find meaningful full-time employment. It is self-evident that if older workers stay longer in the labour force this must reduce the

There's no shortage of alternatives to untrammelled markets – but most critics are still wedded to them...

Not a real change

***Change Everything: Creating an Economy for the Common Good*, by Christian Felber, paperback, 272 pages, ISBN 978-1-78-360472-2, Zed Books, 2015, £12.99, e-book edition available**

EXPERIENCE OF untrammelled markets in recent decades has put capitalism in such bad odour that many people are desperately searching for other ways of organising life. Christian Felber, an economist and university lecturer in Austria, has outlined an “alternative” to the economic chaos and enormous social suffering caused by the oligarchs of financial capital. He advocates a partnership of companies, consumers and communities based on ethical goals.

Felber begins his analysis by looking at what values should underpin an economy. He notes, “The ‘free’ market economy is based on the rules of the systematic pursuit of profit and competition. These pursuits promote egoism, greed, avarice, envy, ruthlessness and irresponsibility.” He suggests that “we thrive when we live in accordance with human values: the building of trust, honesty, esteem, respect, empathy, cooperation, mutual help and sharing.”

Under capitalism he observes that the pursuit of the largest possible amount of personal financial gain “stems from the paradoxical hope that the good of all will result from the egoistic behaviour of the individual.” Markets do not automatically transform their participants’ pursuit of self-interest into the common good.

Felber takes issue with the monetarist economist Friedrich Hayek’s claim that “Competition is in most cases the most efficient method we know.” He has found no empirical studies to back up Hayek’s claim, which has become a cornerstone of bourgeois economics.

‘Felber never refers to the power of states or the clout of entrenched market forces.’



Nicolai Georgiev (CC BY 2.0)

Christian Felber talking about his “Economy for the Common Good” in May 2012.

Felber refers to academic studies across numerous disciplines that found cooperation and not competition is the most efficient method. Competition in market capitalism primarily “motivates” people through fear – of losing their job, income, status, social recognition and place in the community. Cooperation motivates people through successful relationships, recognition, esteem, mutual goals and mutual achievements.

Redefining success

The major section of the book advocates an “Economy for the Common Good” (or “ECG”), redefining economic success. Capitalism measures economic success in terms of gross domestic product, financial profit and return on investment, all “monetary” indicators. Felber argues that’s a false view “...money is not the goal of economic activity; it merely constitutes its means”.

In the ECG, improving the common good would be the highest goal. Adam Smith’s theory of an invisible hand where social benefits occur unplanned from individual economic action would be set aside. Instead society would have a method to measure and reward the success of economic activity in terms of its contribution to society.

Felder admits that an ECG requires an

entirely different financial system. Capitalist banks have departed from their supposed core task of converting savings into loans and making these available to local enterprises, households and communities. “Money as credit would become a public good and the financial markets would be closed.” People would live on earned income, not on capital income.

Felber, an innocent abroad, never refers to the power of states and existing capital or the clout of entrenched market forces. All would prevent a measure of ECG challenging or displacing the current capitalist set-up. His vision is still of a market economy, not a centrally planned one. He seems to ascribe mythical power to ethical arguments holding sway.

Only a working class has the potential to effect positive changes to the economy. However, among the dubious propositions, there are lots of other stimulating ideas about how people can operate under capitalism to mitigate some of the system’s callousness. And these could have relevance to how we will function under socialism, where we will have to fashion a common economic good. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk.

Seventy years ago this August, America exploded atomic bombs on two Japanese cities. Controversy still rages as to why they were

1945: Atom bombs fall on

SEVEN DECADES after the dropping of atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, American governments are still justifying the bombings by claiming they helped bring the war with Japan to a speedy conclusion. Not everyone agrees.

Many historians argue that dropping the atomic bombs was unnecessary and that an allied invasion planned for October 1945 could have gone ahead. Others believe that the USA's purpose was to demonstrate the awesome power of their new exclusive weapon of mass destruction and to intimidate the Soviet Union.

The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945 with the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. The Japanese refused to accept the Allies' demand for unconditional surrender. So preparations began for an invasion of the Japanese mainland. But soon official statements started to appear claiming an invasion of Japan would cause horrendous casualties, weakening the case for that option.

The USA carried out an immensely destructive firebombing campaign from February 1945 onwards. More than 100 Japanese towns and cities were hit. Many were obliterated, including Tokyo on 9 March. That was the deadliest air raid of World War Two, killing an estimated 100,000 people in one night.

Manhattan Project

At the start of 1942 the United States launched the Manhattan Project to research the potential for atomic weapons. Germany was doing the same. By mid 1942 construction had started on the immense industrial and scientific facilities needed to produce the bombs. Later both Britain and Canada joined the project. Eventually on 16 July 1945, America conducted its first successful test of an atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert.

From 17 July until 2 August 1945 the final summit of the leaders of the wartime allies took place at Potsdam. Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee represented Britain, Joseph Stalin the USSR and Harry Truman the USA. Truman was virulently anti-Soviet, unlike his predecessor the recently deceased President Roosevelt. Potsdam witnessed a change in relations

and was full of tension and recriminations.

Truman, who delayed the start of Potsdam to ensure the atomic test had gone ahead in New Mexico, informed Stalin that he had a new weapon of great destructive force, without telling him what it was.

On 28 July, the Japanese government rejected the terms for surrender set out by the USA and Britain, which had threatened "the inevitable and complete destruction" without mentioning the atomic bomb. Emperor Hirohito was waiting for a Soviet reply to Japanese peace feelers.

On 6 August President Truman authorised an American bomber, Enola Gay, to drop the "Little Boy" atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The blast and fire immediately killed 80,000 people, around 30 percent of the city's population. Five square miles of the city were destroyed. Tens of thousands more died later from burns, radiation sickness and other injuries.

After the Hiroshima bombing, President Truman issued a statement announcing the use of the new weapon. He said, "We may be grateful to Providence" that the German atomic bomb project had failed, and that the United States and its allies had "spent two billion dollars on the greatest scientific gamble in history – and won."

The Yalta agreement in February 1945 required the Soviet Union to join the war against Japan within three months of the end of war in Europe.

On 9 August Soviet armed forces launched a strategic offensive with 1.6 million troops against the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria, quickly routing them.

"The Soviet entry into the war," argues the US-based Japanese historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, "played a much greater role than the atomic bombs in inducing Japan to surrender because it dashed any hope that Japan could terminate the war through

'The bomb was directed as much at the USSR as at Japan..'



The "mushroom" cloud from the explosion over Hiroshima, Japan, from an American plane that dropped the bomb.

Moscow's mediation."

With no Japanese surrender, the American government decided to drop another bomb. On 9 August, the US plane Bockscar dropped the "Fat Man" bomb over the industrial valley at Nagasaki. Around 263,000 people were in the city at the time. Between 22,000 and 75,000 died immediately (estimates vary widely). As in Hiroshima, many more died afterwards.

The same day – 9 August – Emperor Hirohito ordered the Japanese government to "quickly control the situation...because the Soviet Union has declared war against us." He then held an Imperial conference to discuss surrender. The timing here is important. News of the Soviet attack reached Tokyo at 4.00 am on 9 August. Hirohito's conference – the first to discuss surrender – was already under way by the time the Nagasaki bomb was dropped (11.02 am local time).

On 15 August, Hirohito broadcast his capitulation announcement. In a message to the Japanese armed forces two days later, he stressed the impact of the Soviet invasion on his decision to surrender, omitting any mention of the bombs.

bombs over two
re used...

on Japan



Hiroshima, photographed from the Enola Gay, the

Militarily Japan was finished. Many believe the second bomb, a different design to the first, was dropped primarily to allow the US military and scientists to see how effective it was. Marshal Zhukov of the Soviet Union said the bombs were dropped "without any military need whatsoever" – a strong statement from the victor of Stalingrad and the most successful general of the war.

As important to the USA – perhaps – as wanting to demonstrate atomic power was the political imperative of excluding the Soviet Union from the peace agreement with Japan or to participate in the occupation of Japan.

The Soviet government read the clear signs that the atom bomb was directed as much at the USSR as at Japan. As soon as Truman mentioned a new weapon at Potsdam, Stalin took immediate steps to accelerate the Soviet's own nascent atomic bomb project. The Soviet Union tested an atomic bomb in August 1949. America's nuclear monopoly was broken. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk.

6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist held its 16th Congress in November 2012, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see www.cpbml.org.uk.

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

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

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

Devolution, and now the threats of separation and regionalism, are all products of only one thing: de-industrialisation.

3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation

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

4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground

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

5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future

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

6: Build the Party

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

Interested in these ideas?

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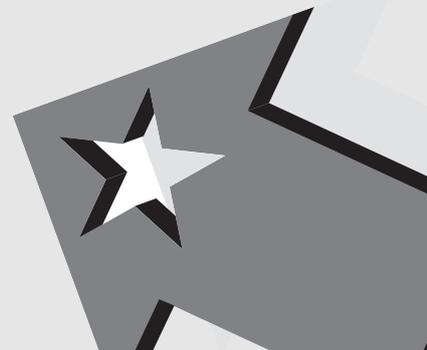
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For employers, subsidies are forever

'The promotion of the new national living wage is just a sleight of hand.'

THE ASSUMPTION that the national minimum wage was good for workers was always wrong. The labour movement's acceptance of it – embrace would be a more correct word – amounted to an admission that, yes, it is right that capitalism should pay us just enough to maintain ourselves and propagate the next generation of workers. The "living wage" is no different.

We said at the time that the minimum wage would inevitably become, for millions, a maximum wage, and that is what has happened. So much so that even the Conservatives, who opposed it at first, are its new best friends.

In fact, it's even worse than that, because it turns out that workers have been paying for the minimum wage all along.

When the national minimum wage was introduced in 2004 it was based upon the premise that state benefits would contribute roughly 40 per cent extra to its value. The London Living Wage and other Living Wage Foundation calculations always took into consideration that benefits would be part of any living wage level.

And the subsidies are huge. The organisation Citizens UK calculated in April that the state (that is, us) is subsidising minimum-wage employers to the tune of £11 billion a year, the amount paid in tax credits and other benefits to make up for the poverty wages. Where Citizens UK got it wrong was its calculation that the benefits bill would reduce by £6 billion if employers had to pay the living wage instead of the minimum wage.

It will still be legal to pay workers less than they can live on. And the living wage will still require subsidies to the incomes of many workers, even if the bill will have been cut by just over half.

But this time the hidden subsidy to the

employers comes in the form of tax cuts. Look closely and you can see that the government's cuts in benefits and its promotion of the new national living wage are just a sleight of hand.

The proposed increase of the national living wage to £9.00 in 2020, coupled with the reduction in benefits, would appear to swop the equation round from poverty wages + benefits to improved wages paid for by the employer with the reduction of the state benefit.

The impression given is that the onus is shifting from the taxpayer to the employer. Not so. Employers paying the national living wage will see their corporation tax reduced by 1 per cent. This will largely compensate them for the rise in their wages bill.

What's more, employers who break jobs down into blocks not exceeding 17.5 hours a week will not have to pay national insurance, further reducing their costs. So the reality is that the taxpayer, those workers paying taxes, will subsidise the new national living wage. But not through so-called "benefits".

The employers can put up the "Living Wage Foundation" plaques and the government has got away with another wheeze. Given that only 30,000 of the 30+ million workforce of Britain in 2014 were in receipt of "living wage" settlements, while over 4.5 million were on national minimum wage (plus benefits in most cases), Osborne's living wage plan is a nice little earner for employers and the Treasury.

When will we realise that the concept of a national minimum or living wage implies an acceptance of perpetual poverty wages in work, subsidised by ourselves, all with a dollop of austerity economic mumbo-jumbo thrown into the mix? We must say "No, it is not right."

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