

WORKERS

www.workers.org.uk

SEPTEMBER 2002 £1



LIFE AND SOUL

SUMMERTIME,
AND THE SPIRIT
IS CHANGING...

14



Scotland organises against the euro

04



Education, industry and society

06



TUC: the place for real politics

09

THE STATE OF THE UNIONS



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“First thoughts

IT MAY JUST be the summer holidays, but it's hard to escape the impression that Tony Blair is becoming less visible. Not quite the Invisible Man, but quite definitely a prime minister suddenly become silent.

It is not that his self-promoting character has changed. More, probably, that the people of this country are starting to speak their own mind — and Blair has lost his tongue.

On two of the key issues of the day, the euro and Iraq, he has become strangely reticent. The euro is rapidly turning into a disaster area for him. The summer holidays began for him with the defeat of Ken Jackson, his most staunch ally in the trade union movement, the man he had undoubtedly thought would head up the Yes campaign in a referendum and garner votes from the industrial working class.

Then the hopes expressed by the Minister for Europe, Peter Hain, that the experience of the euro on holiday would convert us all turned out to be wishful thinking. A poll by Barclays revealed that holding euros in the hand was turning people off the idea even more. And finally

the Chambers of Commerce had to abandon a planned poll of British business — designed to push Blair into action — because no one would fund it.

On Iraq, Blair would love to support Bush (he does lapdog very well) but realises just how strong opposition is, not just throughout the Arab world but in Britain as well — and among core Labour voters, too.

So instead of Blair himself, we get leaks here and there from so-called “insiders” and “sources”.

All the more reason, then, for the TUC when it meets this month to assert a working-class voice on these two issues. On the euro, it would do very well to follow the lead of the new AEEU general secretary, encourage debate and information, and let the members make policy. And it must call loudly for Bush to refrain from attacking Iraq.

Silence is not a natural state among politicians. He'll be back. We need to ensure that we have the clarity and organisation at all levels in the trade union movement to ensure that he has to listen to us, rather than we to him.



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

www.workers.org.uk
Issue 53, September 2002

WORKERS is published monthly.

”

Contents – September 2002

News

Rail workers fight for pay, p3; What next for rail?, p4; Danes march against euro, p5; News Analysis: The destruction of Selby, p6

03

Features

Education, industry and society, p6; The TUC: the place for real politics, p9; The state of the unions, p11

06

Life and Soul

Summertime...and the spirit is changing, p14

14



Rebuilding Britain

RAIL

MINING

SOUTH AMERICA

TREASURY

CIVIL SERVICE

MANUFACTURE

ENGINEERING

EU

WHAT'S ON

NEWS ANALYSIS

Pay fights spread

The dash for land

Enter the IMF

Selling the actual silver

Back to Beirut?

Ambulance emergency

Closing the Forge

Danes on the march

Coming soon

The destruction of Selby

Rail workers fight for pay

ALL THREE RAIL UNIONS, ASLEF, RMT and TSSA, are currently involved in pay battles with passenger train companies across the north of England.

The long-running disputes raging since the beginning of the year in Arriva Trains Northern involving conductors and station staff have resulted in a series of strikes in the week leading up to the August Bank Holiday. Members of RMT and TSSA show no sign of being prepared to back down.

ASLEF members have begun a series of 48 hour strikes in First North Western over the Bank Holiday in support of their claim for pay parity with train drivers in other companies.

Both disputes are about achieving parity with colleagues doing the same jobs with other train companies, and are symptomatic of the fragmentation of bargaining that has occurred since 1996 when all staff were employed by British Rail. The three unions continue to call for a return to national bargaining.

Attempts at reaching settlements in these companies are now being undermined by interference from the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), a body which will not negotiate with the unions, and which essentially acts on behalf of the government.

ASLEF General Secretary Mick Rix said: "If the SRA wants to set a ceiling on train drivers' pay, let it do so directly with ASLEF... The SRA cannot have it both ways — it is either free collective bargaining, with no interference, or it is a return to proper national bargaining. The 'third way' is anarchy, with the travelling public the ultimate losers."

Arriva's other train company, which runs the Merseyside underground network, is also facing trouble over pay. ASLEF balloted for industrial action, and called it off only when the company capitulated to their demands for pay parity, and agreed a deal worth 16% over 3 years, a deal approved by the SRA. Action by both RMT and TSSA now looks likely as their members in the company seek similar treatment.

They have received the message loud and clear — stand up for yourselves and the companies and the SRA will back down.

MINING

The dash for land

EVEN BEFORE the Selby mining complex has been closed, UK Coal intends to have its cake and eat it (see also News Analysis, p 6). On one hand it advises its 2100 Selby miners to keep producing up to 5.2 million tonnes of coal during 2002 and 2003, then be sacked. In the same breath the company talks about diversifying into real estate.

UK Coal has an estimated 50,000 acres of land — the topside of the coal industry — which is estimated to be worth billions.

Safe, clean, no responsibilities, no risks, no workers.

SOUTH AMERICA

Enter the IMF

AFTER ARGENTINA'S treatment by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) it came as a surprise that Brazil recently received quick help when requesting a rescheduling of their loan. This had nothing to do with concern for the people of Brazil. The worry was that US banks, already tottering from fraud in the US, and might go under if Brazil stopped loan repayments.

The crisis in Argentina was largely caused by the widespread privatisation ordered by the IMF. Income from the old national companies dried up, and the new multinationals paid little in tax and caused huge demands on the state welfare system by sacking thousands of workers.

The IMF said welfare benefits and public services had to be cut. The Argentinians rebelled, forcing several changes of government, but so far privatisation remains.

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

LONDON

The mayor and the capital

THE MAYOR OF LONDON reinforces his disaffection with London being the capital of Britain by opening his mayor's office in Brussels.

Ken Livingstone's unreserved abject worshipping of the EU is demonstrated in his LONDONLINE EUROPE publication. There are now only cities of Europe, no longer capital cities of sovereign states. London is down rated and just becomes one of several cities which could be part of any travel agent's manifest. The lobbying office in Brussels is reminiscent of some camp follower, begging bowl in hand, scraps always welcome.

All strategic concerns of London are not to be geared to the interests of Londoners and Britain but simply to the directives of the European Union. Be it transport, work, health, safety, every initiative spewing from the mayor's office seems to be driven from Brussels.

Livingstone's obsession with the EU is reminiscent of trade unionists in the 1980s and 1990s who, believing that the Tories could never be beaten, worshipped the sparse and meaningless EU Social Chapter as their saviour. Is the mayor doing the same with what he sees as an intransigent British government or is his pioneering done on their behalf? The latter would seem to be more accurate.

Whatever the division between mayor and prime minister, unity to deliver Britain to the European Union by stealth seems absolute. Livingstone wants a "city for people", an "accessible city", a "fair city", a "green city", a city of "equalities". All laudable cosmetics, but nowhere in the plan is there a city of work, of employment, of manufacturing. A city for whom?

TREASURY

Selling the actual silver

HAROLD MACMILLAN criticised Thatcher's privatisation of the nation's assets as "selling the family's silver". She, of course, ignored him. Gordon Brown's attempt to literally sell the family silver, has, however, been abandoned. This collection, owned by the Treasury, consists of over £100,000 worth of historic silver pieces including 17th century candle snuffers, trays and skewers.

First mooted in October 2001, the proposed sale was widely opposed by museums, charities and heritage and constitutional bodies, all fearful that



Opposition to the euro in Scotland has been boosted by the formation of a broad campaign, Scottish Democracy Against The Euro, launched at a public meeting on 28 August following a press conference (see photo). One of the first organisations to affiliate was Trade Unions Against the Single Currency, and a wide range of trade unions, trades councils, parties and individuals are considering joining.

Shown above, left to right, are Arthur West (Kilmarnock and Loudon Trades Council), Chas Booth (Scottish Green Party), John McAllion (MSP, Dundee East), Alex Smith (ex MEP, South of Scotland), Jane Carolan (UNISON NEC) and Ian Davidson (MP, Glasgow Pollock). They pointed to the new campaign as showing that "Scottish public opinion is opposed to the euro across the spectrum". Looking to the trade union lead — being given increasingly vigorously by unions such as CYWU, FBU, RMT and UNISON — the chair said: "Fundamental issues are at stake. The most important is our democracy. Monetary Union would end it. Economic and social power would be transferred from parliament to the hands of unelected bankers."

What next for rail?

WITH NETWORK RAIL now set to take over the nation's railway infrastructure before the end of the year, there is widespread speculation as to what the new regime will bring with it. Transport Minister Darling hinted early on that in the aftermath of Potters Bar, he will change dramatically the way in which contractors are used for maintenance and renewal of the network.

All three rail unions have called for renationalisation of the infrastructure as the first step to returning the whole industry to public control. Arguably, Network Rail is the nearest the government could get to renationalisation without breaching EU law and its free market principles. The real test will be safety.

"The Health and Safety Executive should face up to the inevitable and recommend that rail maintenance be brought back in-house," said RMT General Secretary Bob Crow, responding to the HSE's interim recommendations, made recently, nearly two years after the Hatfield derailment. "The recommendations highlight failings in training, communications and management systems which are the direct result of privatisation. The maintenance of our railways must be taken out of the hands of those who can only put profits and shareholders first."

Crow points out that the Great Western maintenance contracts are up for renewal next year: "Bringing them back in-house where they belong would be a good start," he says. Meanwhile, the TSSA has tabled a motion for the forthcoming TUC which calls upon Network Rail to directly employ maintenance and renewal workers.

Britain's national treasures would seep abroad, gracing foreign museums whilst leaving the display cabinets empty at home. Now the pieces are to be lent on a permanent basis to the Victoria and Albert Museum with a planned regional exhibition.

In 1997 the government established a National Asset Register — a latter-day

Domesday Book of property owned by the government. This Register revealed that the government did not know what it owned despite the scale of privatisation under the Tories.

The Register was intended to identify and then dispose of 'unwanted' assets — not just the silver but the kitchen cupboard as well!

MANUFACTURE**Ambulance emergency**

UVG (Universal Vehicle Group) Ambulances, Britain's biggest ambulance manufacturer, has gone into receivership. Plants in Cardiff and Brighouse have been closed with over 300 job losses.

The critical factor which has brought about the collapse is EU regulation on tendering which has opened the British

ambulance market to French and German competition. NHS Trusts no longer have control over their buying policy and are now forced to tender EU wide for replacement ambulances, which has destroyed the home manufacturers' market. This is not due to the pound being uncompetitive but multinational competitors squeezing out smaller companies. What are perceived as 'cheap imports' have a high cost — the loss of a high-skill industry.

Danes march against euro

DANISH INDUSTRIAL WORKERS are on the march over the European Union, demonstrating in Kolding to 'greet' the European Ministers of Labour meeting there this summer. Under the banner "Hands off free collective bargaining" they alerted workers throughout Europe to the dangers facing established collective bargaining procedures from European Ministers, whose programme rests on the deregulation of capital and the increased regulation of labour.

Red banners from all over Denmark flew proudly on the march and young people, very much in the vanguard of the anti-European Movement, made colourful and humorous contributions to the rally. A speaker from the British organisation Trade Unions Against the Single Currency (TASC) addressed the march with a clear description of how membership of the EU had disadvantaged British workers.

This successful demonstration has strengthened the resolve of industrial workers in Denmark to intensify their campaign against the euro and the EU. Further discussions and demonstrations will be held before the end of the year. This is seen as important because the EU is now carefully weighing up the order in which it will seek referenda. The plan is to create a domino effect by taking the weakest of Sweden, Denmark and Britain into the euro next and hoping that the others will follow. Increased solidarity between workers in these countries will be needed over the coming two years to fight this threat.

ENGINEERING**Closing the forge**

THERE HAS BEEN metal-working and engineering on the Kirkstall Valley site in Leeds dating back to the time of the monks at Kirkstall Abbey in 1132. The site has long associations with heavy engineering and is renowned particularly for the production of axles and other vehicle engineering.

The site was owned by Guest, Keen and Nettlefold (GKN and then GKN Sankey during the merger phase of the 1970s), before being taken over by the US Dana-Spicer conglomerate in recent years. Now the substantial order book has been sold for millions to engineering interests in Pamplona in Spain.

The 28-acre site, valued at over £38 million, is now earmarked for substantial housing development, and 300 workers are facing redundancy. Obviously housing is seen as more profitable than manufacturing. Kirkstall Valley has faced many changes during recent years — the

closure of the clothing factories and the power station for example — but the ending of engineering at the Forge is as significant as the closure of the Abbey by Henry VIII over 460 years ago.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT**Pay offer**

UNISON is still consulting on the employers' offer, made at the beginning of August in talks at ACAS.

The offer, which UNISON is recommending along with other unions in local government, provides for a minimum increase of 7.7% over two years, with rises of up to 10.95% (52 pence an hour) for the lowest paid.

The offer came after nationwide industrial action involving a one-day strike, and prompted UNISON to suspend an all-out day of strikes on 14 August, which was to have been followed by a campaign of selective action.

Consultation is expected to end some time in the middle of September.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****SEPTEMBER**

Monday 9 September

Public meeting at the TUC, Blackpool "Dangers of the euro"

Organised by TASC, Trade Unions against the Single Currency
Speakers include Dr Phil Wyman (Bradford University), plus speaker from Labour MPs Against the Euro.
1pm, St John's Church, Cedar Square, opposite Winter Gardens entrance.
All welcome.

PORTUGAL**Doctors and nurses strike**

PORTUGUESE DOCTORS and nurses have recently taken their first major strike action against government health reforms. About 100,000 workers took part in a 24-hour stoppage, which saw 94% of nurses staying away from work on the midnight to 8am shift. Hospitals and clinics maintained basic services and emergency services.

The action is the latest in a long-running wave that has lasted most of the year. Doctors have long been angry at the amount of overtime they have to work and have been refusing to work more than 12 hours overtime a week. Because of the shortage of doctors the law forces doctors in casualty departments to work up to 12 hours overtime. While the demands have been the same, doctors have taken different types of action depending on circumstances in hospitals around the country. In Leira hospital doctors have reported working 36 hours without a break, because there is no one to replace them.

The situation escalated after the general election in March when the Socialist Party was defeated and replaced by a coalition of the centre-right Social Democratic Party and the right-wing People's Party. The national healthcare system was one of the major issues in the election, especially the lack of an overall strategic policy, which has meant changes occur according to the whim of each new minister.

The new prime minister, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, has made overhauling the health system a priority. A new law will set performance targets for hospitals and mandate individual contracts for workers. Hospitals will also be able to hire private companies to provide healthcare and other services.

Health workers are rejecting these policies as damaging to both patients and staff.

The destruction of Selby

DEREK EZRA, Chairman of the National Coal Board, speaking in the mid-1970s over the exciting prospect of building the Selby mining complex said, "The superb reserves of coal are going to play a vital part in Britain's industrial regeneration and Selby's reserves will last well into the next century."

Selby, with anything up to 500 million plus tonnes reserves still unmined, has made it to the next century — by two years. Selby will now be closed by UK Coal and government decision in 2004. The Selby mining complex, the most modern in Britain and Europe in terms of investment and technology, is to be laid bare. What had been forecast as a pit life expectancy of over 100 years has barely made 20 years. Ezra's forecast for the industry and emphasis on "industrial regeneration" contrast sharply with this government's words and ideas, where the only "regeneration" is in drug dealing.

Two scapegoats for closure are proffered, financial losses and geological difficulties. The Selby complex is said to have "lost" £107 million in profitability during the last three years — not actual loss but loss of expected profit return. British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, on the other hand, has 'lost' £2 billion this year but expects to declare a £20 million profit as it has a 'write-down' of £40.5 billion for decommissioning.

The meaning of "loss"

So the language and meaning of financial losses are cartoon language gobbledygook. To mine coal in Germany costs £80 per tonne; in Britain £40. If the government supported British coal like the German government does, there would be no closures. But Britain has sold off its pits to comply with the European Union's coal strategy, which allows for no deep coal mining in Britain.

Instead we imported 35.5 million tonnes of coal last year. In rough terms, one million tonnes = one pit = 1000 miners' jobs. (The membership of the NUM stood at 200,000 in 1982; now it is down to 6000). North Sea gas used for energy generation looks like being exhausted in 2005 — hence the huge import deals being signed now. The economics, the logic, the strategy do not add up in working class minds, only in capitalist terms.

Geology is a convenient excuse — coal mining has always been difficult and dangerous. The originality, inventiveness and mining genius to open the Selby coalfield up in the first instance overcame innumerable geological difficulties. As the 1984-85 strike poster proclaimed, "Closed minds close mines".

Some 2,100 miners face redundancy. 200 jobs are being offered at Kellingley nearby. But UK Coal cynically offers these on different terms and conditions to the existing miners at Kellingley — effectively 6-day, 24-hour working — to undermine the NUM Branch at Kellingley and ensure the exhaustion of Kellingley as quickly as possible. Only pit managers are being offered a full pension at 50, miners face the sack. For every job directly lost multiply the figure by nine — Selby's income will drop by £1 million a year.

Yorkshire has seen its four staple industries destroyed during the last 20 years — coal, steel, fishing and textiles — costing hundreds of thousands of jobs. The common destructive theme crashing through them all has been EU economic strategy, EU driven imports and governments which have not governed Britain but administered it on behalf of capitalism in Europe.

Without economic achievement how far does education depend

Education and the in



WHY WOULD A LEADING teachers' union reject a proposal by a leading manufacturing union to put £1 million into Britain's schools? The AEEU proposed to support the government's "Specialist School" initiative by ploughing funds into schools seeking "specialist status" in engineering and science, but the Executive of the National Union of Teachers decided to tell them that this would be an "inappropriate" venture.

The NUT will now seek discussions with the AEEU and other manufacturing unions about how they might work together to bring together TUC affiliates to develop a policy for an integrated programme of education, vocational training and full employment for young people.

Regeneration

This issue, seen to be of small importance by some who are interested only in the 'grand sweep' of the education debate, and by others who are preoccupied with the immediate struggle to improve teachers' pay and conditions, in fact is central to both. It goes to the heart of the struggle for regeneration of the education and economic systems, a struggle which provides the context and conditions which will decide whether or not many of the immediate demands of teachers will be met, and the "big picture" future direction of the education service.

The government's "modernisation agenda" for education is made up of a number of policy strands in the Education Bill currently nearing completion. They seek, in

t the wish lists for education are not going to be fulfilled. But
d on the economy — and is it the other way around?

Industry connection



their words, to eliminate “bog standard” comprehensive schools.

They are to be replaced with a two or three tier education service made up of competing schools with different types of control — including private control funded directly out of public money and control by religious organisations — as well as by governing bodies with varying degrees of relationship with local education authorities.

Funding

These “diverse and autonomous” schools, as the government calls them, will have different levels of funding, with different cohorts of pupils, with selection for such schools based on pupil aptitude, and with different curricular ‘pathways’ within schools for different children. From the age of 14, children are to be selected for “fast track” academic routes, or for vocational training routes — and stops in between.

There are already schools with Specialist Status in such areas as engineering and science, computing and information technology, art and design,

sports education, performing arts etc. Such schools need to find private sponsors to offer substantial funding, which is then matched by additional funding from government.

It is to such schools — specialising in engineering — that the AEEU sought to offer funding.

All this leads teacher unions to be concerned that what is in fact being proposed is a return to the grammar/secondary modern divide, with a good measure of privatisation and “marketisation” in addition.

Abandoned

This selective grammar/secondary modern system was abandoned progressively from the 1960s as a result of research which confirmed what teachers had always known — that such selection and division resulted in a lack of opportunity for the majority of children to develop to their full potential, created a self-fulfilling prophecy as children perceived themselves as failures, lost confidence and became disenchanted with school.

This was not only destructive to the children involved, but hugely wasteful of talents and abilities that could have been developed for the good of the nation as a whole. The current governmental agenda, far from being one of “modernisation”, is one of regression to a destructive and discredited system.

Failure

The other underlying concept of the government is that any failure on its part to deal with questions of unemployment, poverty, inner city decay, crime and so on is to be laid at the door of schools and teachers. This began with a regular theme of the then Secretary of State for Education — and significantly now Home Secretary — David Blunkett.

Rightly, Blunkett asserted that teachers should not use “social disadvantage” as an excuse for low expectations of pupils. But he went on to ignore the research which demonstrates clearly the negative effects of low income, unemployment, poor housing etc on educational attainment, and even further when he maintained that such disadvantage should be overcome by the education system.

Global market?

He was also the Secretary of State for Employment who denied the ability of any modern government to develop an industrial and employment policy because of the rapid development of the “global market”. He, and everybody else, knew that what he meant was that he viewed the multinationals as now too powerful to be controlled by political policy, even if governments had the will to do so.

In fact, Blunkett and his party had long since rolled over to this capitalist power. He felt able to limit government intervention to defend and extend employment and industry to the simple insistence that schools and vocational trainers needed to develop a ‘high skills’ labour force in order to ‘compete’ on a

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

global basis.

Nation

No assessment was to be made of Britain as a nation and people. No educational, economic, social and employment initiatives were to be developed to meet those needs. The rules of the free market were to be untouchable imperatives.

So the educational policies of government become clear: "Fast tracking" of the academically committed and most immediately able; narrow vocational "pathways" for the rest; the differential funding and control of schools in order to allow it to happen, and to justify the results politically; the "marketisation" and privatisation of education both as vehicles for the policy, and to meet the demands of the World Trade Organisation and others for the right to make profit from the huge education "marketplace" domestically and internationally.

In this context, it becomes equally clear that if teachers are to defend and develop comprehensive education which

'Any government failure is to be laid at the door of schools and teachers...'

will educate all children properly, and if they are to succeed in maintaining and improving national pay and working conditions of teachers, they need to be instrumental in bringing about a fundamental challenge to the negative politics and economics of international capital.

Perhaps the imminent meeting of the TUC will give education unions the opportunity to meet with their manufacturing counterparts and set the ball rolling.

How innovative and exciting would it be to see the trade union movement coming together for a policy for the future of Britain in terms of education, training and full employment for young

people? An integrated policy that puts the needs of people first, demands a real future for its young people and stands up to the dictates of the multinationals.

There is a new mood about in the trade union movement, a new confidence – and the beginnings of a new leadership. We need it to result in new forms of policy and new expressions of power to achieve it.

Regeneration

All our individual aspirations and hopes have a place in such a policy – a policy for Regeneration for Youth. It would be a monumental task to develop, and even more monumental to make it happen. There is an old slogan, "If you think education is expensive, try the alternative!" Now we need to apply that sentiment to the future of education, training and employment. It would be very demanding to set out on that road. The opposition would be enormous. But the alternative doesn't really bear thinking about, does it?

Teacher unions gear up for next phase of pay battle

TEACHERS' LEADERS in England and Wales are currently working together to try to develop a common pay policy that they will be able to put to the government's School Teachers' Review Body in October. Teachers face the government's continuing attempts to undermine national pay and conditions, and to impose Performance Related Pay. In terms of the latter, the government has been forced to adopt a slower process of imposition than they would have liked – but the long-term intention becomes increasingly clear. They want to see individual bargaining for pay and conditions packages, region by region, school by school, and finally teacher by teacher.

In the face of this the unions need to maximise their strengths, and minimise their divisions. Last year the unions adopted a common position to try to secure the same sort of national package achieved by Scottish teachers. This was a professionally based package which secured in part the right to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) throughout teachers' careers, and to

base pay progression both on developing experience through years of service, and on the achievement of further qualification through such guaranteed CPD. Such a pay structure would mean increased finance for CPD, a professional pay progression, and the employment of tens of thousands more teachers in order to allow the training to take place.

Despite all these positives, and the unity developed between all the unions in its favour, the last conference of the NUT, the largest teacher union, in a vote orchestrated by the ultra-left, threw out the proposals – insisting that there should be no link between pay and professional development! At the same time, the Conference called for joint policy, campaigning, rallies etc with the other teacher unions.

The unions' policy developers and negotiators now have to make sense of this, and not to let the government exploit disunity – as it undoubtedly looks forward to doing.

As the unions gather for their annual congress, they need to confront the idea that politics belongs to parliament...

TUC: the place for real politics



Photo: Andrew Ward/www.reportphotos.com

THIS YEAR'S TUC needs to assess where the organised labour movement stands in relation to its huge potential power. There is still the corrosive view — among trade unionists at all levels — that the trade unions 'do' industrial issues and the Labour Party and Parliament 'does' politics. Trade unions lobby for legal changes, Labour governments grant them.

In truth, the gatherings of trade unions, particularly their coming together at the TUC Congress each year, are also political events. If organised workers move, the world moves. And the trade unions provide potentially the most democratic and powerful base for political action that there is.

Britain is a nation of associations and organisations on every single issue and for a multitude of reasons. Everyone is part of a collective grouping whether it is a community or tenants' association, a youth group, a charity or campaign, a social, welfare or a sporting group. What

has inspired and influenced this collective endeavour at root has been the trade union movement with its lively sense of collectivism and democracy. Campaign tactics, leisure time, styles of organisation were all rooted in the workplace democracy that the best trade unions developed. This way of thinking has survived the Thatcher years, though not unscathed — and the full extent of the damage remains to be assessed.

Accountability

Collective accountability and responsibility coupled with a practical sense of getting things done for the common good have been distinctive and dominant features of our culture for two hundred years.

Despite all the attempts to subvert this culture with everything new, new quangos, new boards, new policies, a confusion of new appointees, new advisers, new structures, new unelected bodies and new private companies, and

new ways of subverting union consultation and involvement, our trade unions gather at this year's Congress with feelings of renewed strength and optimism — though one swallow does not make a summer — and, among some, new commitments to workplace organisation and involving the next generation in our affairs.

Many unions will arrive at Congress, notably AMICUS and PCS, having survived the painful internal democracy of cleansing from their ranks non trade unionists and Europhile usurpers. Some come to Congress in the throes of essential struggles to maintain the fabric of British industry and public services. Many of the specialist trade unions, whose role and voice is still much underestimated, contribute to Congress on the big issues while giving essential guidance to the rest of the movement on

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

the best ways of securing and advancing certain key skills and services whether in science, medicine, technology, or education, sport or art.

Many more come to Congress, frankly having not fought, or fought and lost. Regrettably these are in areas of the economy most ruined by Britain's membership of the European Union – textiles and clothing, steel, coal, merchant shipbuilding, agriculture and fisheries, shipping and ceramics. With the exception of the miners, those hardest hit by the European Union are among the most vocal supporters of the euro as the solution to all of our problems. It's like asking your assassin to be your undertaker.

Reflecting always the diffidence that trade unions don't do politics, Congress often projects its appeals outwards to lobby the government and the Labour Party as if the trade unions themselves have no power and rely on others. There are positive signs of shifts in this thinking this year.

The euro

Notably this comes in the composite motion on the European Single Currency. Effectively this motion does not leave the assessment of the single currency up to the government. It recognises that the trade union movement must make its own mind up and must on no account permit a referendum until certain fundamental and profound conditions are met.

When the motion is passed delegates must be prepared to reconvene Congress once any referendum is called. The General Council will be expected also to provide more objective and comprehensive information about the state of unemployment, industrial relations and prices, manufacturing, growth and public spending in all the eurozone countries at each Congress and prior to any referendum.

In other words, the gung-ho rush over the cliff into oblivion that the TUC General Secretary and many General Council

'Congress often projects its appeals outwards as if the trade unions themselves have no power and rely on others...'

members have sought to lead in relation to the euro will come officially to an end this Congress. A more sober and sceptical and conditional and critical approach will be adopted to the biggest issue of the day in the best tradition of trade union negotiations.

Outright opposition to the euro would be better, but this is a significant if small start. What the movement lacks is the confidence to take matters into its own hands on a range of other issues, and to take responsibility independently for a manufacturing strategy and independent, unshackled collective bargaining and trade union organisation.

It is dawning on more unions that the whole privatisation of industry and services is required by the Amsterdam Treaty. Post Offices, Railways, Transport, utilities, education — nothing is safe so long as our economy is controlled as it is now by the Treaties of the European Union. The next phase through the single currency does not represent a bright new future, but the slow switching off of the life support machine.

The trade unions are tolerating the free movement of labour, capital and goods demanded by Britain's membership of the European Union and World Trade Organisation. This means they can see no reason when they come together to project a future for the country.

Market forces and the made-up demon of globalisation are seen as being too big to control, let alone destroy. Hence bad employment practice, bad laws and factories will come and go. Some good ones will slip through and the movement will claim a victory. While

bobbing about in the tide the movement will assert all sorts of rights and equality issues which capitalism has since the French Revolution always been keen to listen to. Moves to combat discrimination will take steps forward, while the European Union and the US prepare to plunder other countries and markets.

Trade unionists who forget responsibility for our own nation means can sometimes forget those who are taking responsibility for theirs. Two big tests at Congress will be whether the movement opposes the planned war on Iraq and whether it will see through the rhetoric condemning the attempts by the people and government of Zimbabwe to reclaim their land. British trade unionists with a long history of internationalism cannot oppose the idea of national independence all over the globe.

Union rights

Our trade union power has in reality been limited by members' acceptance of Thatcher's regulation of the unions and deregulation of capital — which continue with Blair. Until the trade unions get to grips with the latter they will not win the battle for trade union rights.

This year, instead of a struggle to assert the independence of trade unions from the draconian laws that govern our every step and limit our effectiveness we have calls for Charters of Rights and the usual list of positive alternatives to the current position. At the heart of the current position remains the illegality of secondary or solidarity action between one group of workers and those at another workplace. When workers are prepared to defy this the law will change and we will resume our struggle for control of Britain.

For trade unionists the stakes remain high and the old questions return: who controls the workplace, who controls the ports, airspace, fishing agriculture, investment plans, public services and utilities and governing bodies? Is it those whose skills make up the economy, or those who simply capitalise upon our skills for their own private profit.

It will take more than a few general secretary elections — to repair the damage done to our unions...

What state are we in?

THERE IS GREAT TURMOIL in the trade unions, but you may be hard pressed to discover what it is. This year has witnessed the emergence of struggle on a scale not seen for years (though still far from sufficient), but the general picture is still one of much froth but too little substance. There are pygmies in vast empty halls filled with rhetoric and fire. There is posturing and re-fighting of battles long gone.

A random sample of unions shows confusion of thought associated with their relationship with the Labour government, over the European Union and their purpose in existing.

Be it court or Certification Officer, the internal affairs of union after union are removed from the membership and paraded before the “impartial and independent” machinery of the state. Who is kidding whom?

Amicus (beautifully named, something on a par with Consignia), once the AEEU and MSF, attempted to prolong its General Secretary in office past his state retirement age to avoid raging opposition to his pro-EU policy. His stunning shock was then to lose an election despite manipulating every aspect of office and power possible. Derek Simpson won the election on a platform of returning the union to its roots, representing the members not telling them how to think. Note, though, that three-quarters of the membership took no part in the voting.

Gutter stories

Meanwhile, the other wing of Amicus, ex MSF, parades dire gutter story after gutter story of high living and alleged abuse of members' subscriptions from among its senior echelons.

Similarly PCS (Public and Commercial Services union) is riven with sectarianism, factionalism and yet another high profile court case took place. This time the judgement went against the “moderates”. The whole affair cost the union £250,000, but the cost of allowing the High Court to rule on the powers of a national executive

may well be paid many times over in years to come.

Coups d'etat and allegations of election fraud create dismay among the membership and bemusement among the employers.

The members cannot expect these Augean stables to be cleaned out simply by the election of new general secretaries. They themselves will have to take on the problems and sort them out. If the AEEU membership had been attending its branch meetings in anything other than tiny numbers, it would have taken a lot more than a few fiddled memberships to have rigged the branch nominations.

Elements within the leaderships of the GMB and TGWU marshal and position for power bids as General Secretaries and Deputies retire. Too often the only interests consulted are those of factions, with no question of where is the membership, or what are their interests?

Fake organisations proliferate in every trade union — ‘The Real Broad Left’, ‘UNISON United Left’, ‘Member First’ et al. The main achievement of these organisations has been to switch the membership off in their thousands.

Union general secretaries and their acolytes vie with one another for the dubious title of who can be the media darling for out-lefting one another — RMT, ASLEF, FBU, PCS, UNISON — for most of the membership a yawning bore.

Within UNISON, ultra-leftists engineered nearly every case handled by the Certification Officer during the last



Local government workers on strike earlier this year: despite the successes, members need to take control.

ten years. They have no respect for the union — because it is ‘ours’ and belongs to the class — but they seek instead the opportunity to seize assets, position and power in the struggle to advance factional not class interests, and if it means using the state, so be it.

The FBU, RMT, UNISON, to name but some, have seen an orchestrated assault on their Labour Party political funds. This attack is double-edged. On one hand it suits those who would asset strip members money which they normally could not get at. On the other it fuels

Continued on page 12



Teachers marching for the London allowance on 14 March. Only a handful had been to a branch meeting before — or gone to one since

Continued from page 11

Blair's wish to sever union support and move to political parties being funded by the state — a most dangerous harnessing of 'democracy'. Be it chicken or egg — ultra-leftist or rightist social democrat is debatable. They both end up with the same result: separation of the working class from its use, if there is a use or for how long there will be a use, of a 'voice' in parliament. The idea that unions should use their political funds to pursue independently their own political campaigns is hardly discussed.

Nearly every trade union is recruiting, but participation and involvement continue to decline. The age profile of activists in unions still borders on 47+ years. Young workers look, join, even take part in strikes, but they shun the structures and find a life elsewhere.

Identity

So why the identity crisis? The continuity and values of the trade union movement

were seriously damaged if not severed by Thatcher. What has followed is a deeply scarred psyche trying to remember its roots and look forward. Many young workers do not know their history and see the unions as being irrelevant. Many take for granted the supposed 'quality of life' in Britain, the struggles for that quality being forgotten. The subtlety of the union badge, "From the people who brought you the weekend — the Trade Unions" is lost on many.

In the 1980s the trade unions tried to match Thatcherism by the credit card and services culture. They failed. By the mid-1990s most trade unions had adopted the organising culture. Getting new recruits in and motivating the membership to activate issues and campaigns to survive. An excellent strategy, but if every worker who could be a trade unionist was recruited what thought is given to what the exercising of that power could or should be?

So are the unions who have survived

Thatcherism concentrating on the cosmetics? Every union is "modernising". Every union is concentrating on "systems". This is the 21st century, and performance, customer service and delivery are the buzzwords.

But systems and process are not identity. The number of disaffected members suing their unions for breach of contract and inadequate service while having remained soundly sat on their backsides and hands is reaching epidemic proportions. It is not just a litigious society but a divorce from the concept of union, of collective.

Modernisation for what? To deliver position, power and control to moribund branches dominated by those who are driven by narrow factional ideology? You only attend one such sterile meeting.

What is the quality of those who have survived and risen to prominence in the unions during and post Thatcher? The standard characteristic of many levels of the unions is manoeuvring and machination of self-promotion. Every full

time officer, NEC member and politico wannabe has his or her General Secretary baton in their union shoulder bag.

Corruption is not about a tiny number with their fingers in the till. Actual corruption is not money stolen; it is of the mind, eased by the gravy train, which undermines the ability of the union to deliver in the workplace. And it is given permission by members who could put a stop to it tomorrow, but who look the other way, or comment but do nothing.

Progression through a trade union is often no longer on ability or contribution or even struggles won, but carefully plotted-out career moves. 'Office' politics elevated to an art form coupled with a studied political correctness. This is not just a caricature of a full time official but also those lay members who find that endless committees removed from the workplace beat working. No wonder there is a deep cynicism among members about cronyism.

Real opposition

What strategic thinking dominates the trade union movement? The strategy of "do nothing", until a spark has become a forest fire, has become the norm. The chanting of mantras as an answer to all ills is endemic: "public not private" or "Euro not Pound to save industry".

Lip service is paid to 'public not private'. If UNISON, for example, really wants public services then every EU privatising directive, PFI or PPP initiative, which is destroying Britain's public services, should be hit primarily by whatever UNISON can muster. In the public services you cannot tackle privatisation unless you take the EU head on. This government is a mere cipher for EU diktat. Resistance to the EU cannot be the politics of the split personality — say one thing but do another, look one way but travel in the opposite direction. Resistance has to be real.

Likewise in manufacturing. The EU blueprint for regionalised industrial centres obliterates Britain. Rather than clamouring for the euro, Amicus in particular now needs to outline the plans for industry retention, re-equipping and re-skilling.

'We either fight for industry here or we die...'

How does the trade union movement deal with this mixture of Blairite social democracy or latter-day Thatcherism with an alleged social conscience? Many trade unionists are achieving small, safe and acceptable reformist steps that the government sponsors. The minimum wage, automatic TU recognition in the NHS, lifelong learning, equalities legislation, removal of the Tory political placements, establishing public partnerships whereby we can all hold hands etc.

But those who have signed up for the European Union, especially in the manufacturing unions, see the heartlands of industry bleed to death because they have no strategy. We either fight for industry here or die.

Is there an ideological root within the trade unions? Or did Thatcher sever it? There is empiricism, pragmatism and that the lowest common denominator approach is acceptable. There is a seeming rejection, by those who claim leadership, of traditional roots and the ideas that stood us in good stead for over 150 years. So if it isn't old Labour and it's not Marxist and it is not Tory, what is it? Fad of the week, flavour of the month, trendy idea of the year — an utter superficiality of approach.

Accommodation of ideas is not about being fair and proper. It is about stopping genuine struggle of ideas and cultivates torpor and corruption. The Blairite concept of a 'big tent' is accommodation after a fashion if you want to live in a refugee camp.

New thinking

Is there new thinking in the trade unions? Is it possible to have progress without struggle? Is a new gradualism emerging? Do gimmicks and the photo opportunity replace the clash of interests within the workplace? Has the originating

purpose of the trade unions — to ensure we physically survived capitalism become business trade unionism? Are the trade unions so institutionalised with the state and employers to have lost their way?

So what are the trade unions going to achieve in the next five years? Superficiality and gesture politics have to go, along with the 1960s student unionism. Serious engagement with government means tackling all policies emanating from the EU. Serious engagement means the most systematic campaign to lift the most restrictive anti-union legislation in Europe. Serious engagement means defining workplace-related matters — wages, employment, equality, health and safety etc, as central to lifting the quality of life in Britain.

A re-assertion of strength, workplace organisation, responsibility and gravitas of purpose and vision has to be our new agenda. This means being rooted in our originating strengths as well as presenting a radical and forward looking analysis of the dynamics of the workplace.

Activists?

When NUT members came out on strike earlier this year for increased London allowance, thousands of young teachers marched who had never taken industrial action before. They did this not because they saw themselves as "activists" — they didn't — but because they cannot afford both to teach and to live in the capital. Real life as a worker was the driving force. The vast majority had never been near their local association meetings, and haven't been since. Yet if they decide to do so, they could transform the trade unions.

These young members, in all unions, should now go to their local meetings, or hold their own — not to participate in the tired old "politics" of empty posturing, but to reject it. Kick out the has-beens and take over. The genuine activists will welcome them with open arms. Reinvigorate the trade unions to be what they were created for - workers' own organisations, which serve no interests except those of their members, decided on and controlled by their members.

The Commonwealth Games in Manchester contained a real buzz — indicative, perhaps, of a new mood in Britain...

Summertime...and the spirit is changing...

SOMETHING IS STIRRING within the British working class and this summer has seen workers enjoying themselves come rain or shine, as if getting ready for a new phase of struggle. This refreshing buoyancy has been played out in sport, music and political events across the country.

At the Commonwealth Games in Manchester the atmosphere, art and organisation were something special. The opening and closing ceremonies were working class culture through and through. Bashing a beat on instruments made of rubbish in the opening ceremony and expressing non sectarian solidarity in the closing ceremony

represented the humour and ideas important in our British culture.

Sporting challenge and excitement aside, there was a real buzz — a life and soul that created its own camaraderie, a glimpse of the future. Children were asked by happy bus drivers as they left events if they had enjoyed themselves. First aid and lost property were efficiently dealt with. Free transport was abundant. McDonalds was replaced by good old roast pork rolls from local producers. The big corporate bodies looked way out of step with everyone else wherever they tried to capitalise on proceedings. Physical prowess and having a good time was what counted, not clever advertising.

There was not a hint of terrorism or despair or hate in Manchester, nor indeed was there in any of the working class events over this summer. Athletes were respected because of their skill and talent regardless of whether they were in a wheelchair, or had missing limbs — this was the first Games to integrate all sportsmen and women.

Youth and community groups throughout the region ensured that those with mental disabilities participated fully and enjoyably in the opening ceremony and many other events. Twenty-one thousand cheerful voluntary support staff worked solidly to ensure everything ran like clockwork.

Collective planning

It is difficult to describe the quality of care and attention that the organisers managed to achieve in such a large event, which involved representatives from 72 areas of the globe congregating in one rejuvenated City. Even Salford Quays, a concrete-and-steel paradise for architects and property sharks, blossomed as cyclists and triathletes were welcomed by crowds in numbers not seen since Lowry painted thousands pouring from factories.

But the clue to the success of the Games resides in the immense voluntary effort that went into the whole proceedings, coupled with a collective, disciplined, socialist-style approach to fun, safety and technical excellence. For Manchester to pull this off and Manchester City to gain a well deserved new ground out of it, has been an achievement greater than anything that surrounded the Millennium Dome.

Our country, not theirs

When the dignitaries appeared, especially the stiff and starchy Prime Minister and Queen, all people could talk about was David Beckham hugging a terminally ill child. He carried out his duties with



Photo copyright Manchester 2002 Ltd

Mancunians (and others) throng Albert Square to greet the arrival of the Games baton

genuine affection (and beautiful sequins).

But the huge success of the Commonwealth Games, was just one of many events that British workers have organised this year in defiance of the dullness of life with Mrs Windsor and the war-making government we have saddled ourselves with. Blair comes across as best friend of Bush and the EU but reluctant to engage with us at home. A bit more tax distributed funding is inadequate in this new world order.

We had Glastonbury, the Respect Festival, Notting Hill and the glorious Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, where Estelle Morris was rightly booed. We saw the toppling of Ken Jackson in the union AMICUS and Barry Reamsbottom in PCS, strikes by rail and local government workers and new investment in public services forced on the government by the unions.

Culturally there was the internationalist WOMAD Festival, the Reading Festival and literary, jazz and folk festivals galore. British youth took the lead in a range of international events about the environment and democracy.

We even saw the TUC preparing to meet in September and get ready for the difficult debates ahead.

Signs of new life

Britain showed something of what it could be in the summer of 2002, in contrast to the last 23 years of confusion and reaction and depression. This should make Blair think twice about both a referendum on the euro and taking us into a war with Iraq. Now is the time for British workers to make links, to build on the solidarity that has been developing in the past few months. And to let that solidarity and energy translate to the struggles ahead, to the forum of the TUC, to the key tasks — keeping Britain out of the imperialist war and the euro out of Britain.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

* You can get list of our publications by sending an A5 s.a.e. to the address below.

• Subscribe to **WORKERS**, our monthly magazine, by sending £12 for a year's issues (cheques payable to **WORKERS**) to the address below.

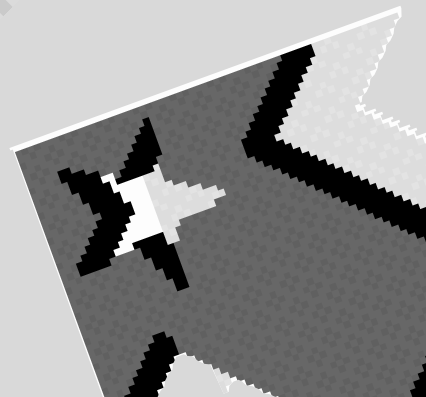
• Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class.

• You can ask to be put in touch by writing or sending a fax to the address below.

WORKERS

78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

www.workers.org.uk
phone/fax 020 8801 9543
e-mail info@workers.org.uk



Back to Front – The powder keg

‘The logic of the EU intervention into Portugal would have been to create Europe’s version of the financial crisis shattering Argentina...’

AFTER THE SECOND World War the US Marshall Plan aimed to place a barrier in the path of the Soviet Union, to ensure that the march of socialism was contained and halted. The development of the European Union and its economic predecessors, were just steps on that road, forced through by the USA, in particular the CIA.

Fascists in the past such as Hitler, Mussolini and Mosley have also advocated a greater Europe, for the same reason. But the Soviet Union is no more.

Already the attempt to extend the EU, especially eastwards, is bringing to the fore contradictions not seen for 60 years. German politicians talk of returning up to 12 million Germans displaced by the war to Poland, the Czech Republic, and other ‘eastern territories’ — echoes of resurgent Hitlerism.

Polish and Czech desires to be part of the EU are now raising the possibility of the destruction of the post-1945 settlement of Europe. If Central Europe is shuddering from this prospect, bear in mind that the shattering of nations such as Yugoslavia and Albania in the Balkans has already been achieved, largely initiated by German and US interests.

Milton Friedman, Thatcher’s economics mentor and the guru behind all the EU’s economic mumbo jumbo, predicts the collapse of the euro and the single currency within 5 years. He comments on its unworkability and contradictions that will split Europe

apart.

An example of these problems is the threat to Portugal of direct governmental interference from Brussels for failing to abide by the arbitrary Growth and Stability Pact — the EU’s budgetary convergence criteria. These are draconian measures aimed to remove any vestige of sovereignty over tax, public spending and financial matters. The crisis facing Portugal has been mirrored in Germany, France and Italy to a lesser degree.

The logic of the EU intervention into Portugal would have been to create Europe’s version of the financial crisis shattering Argentina. More time has now been agreed to allow the “one size fits all” economic straitjacket of the EU to be brought in.

If Portugal was to be sacrificed Argentina-fashion for the interests of the European Commissioners, the cry from Portugal would be to leave the EU. Friedman’s prediction is nearer than many believe.

The European Union is a false entity. Its past expansion and proposed eastern enlargement is riven with contradictions and issues that have deep and potentially violent undertones. The Blair government’s attempts to draw the British working class into the EU by stealth — they fear a referendum because they know they would lose it — must be resisted. Britain must not become drawn into the Europe powder keg.

Subscriptions

Take a regular copy of WORKERS. The cost for a year’s issues (no issue in August) delivered direct to you every month, including postage, is £12.

Name

Address

Postcode

Cheques payable to “WORKERS”. Send along with completed subscriptions form (or photocopy) to WORKERS 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

Publications

WHERE’S THE PARTY?

“If you have preconceived ideas of what a communist is, forget them and read this booklet. You may find yourself agreeing with our views.” Free of jargon and instructions on how to think, this entertaining and thought-provoking pamphlet is an ideal introduction to communist politics. (send an A5 sae)

BRITAIN AND THE EU

Refutes some of the main arguments in favour of Britain’s membership of the EU and proposes an independent future for our country. (50p plus an A5 sae)

To order...

Copies of these pamphlets and a fuller list of material can be obtained from CPBML PUBLICATIONS 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. Prices include postage. Please make all cheques payable to “WORKERS”.

Workers on the Web

• Highlights from this and other issues of Workers can be found on our website, www.workers.org.uk, as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.