

WORKERS

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TUC 2004 — NEVER MIND LABOUR, HOW ABOUT INDEPENDENT UNIONS FOR AN INDEPENDENT BRITAIN?



UN court condemns Israel's wall

03



A constitution for capitalism

12



A design classic — and made in Britain

14

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

BLAIR SAYS that Britain has a “moral responsibility” for the decisions taken by the Sudanese government. Why? Because Britain misruled the Sudan until 1956? Does he think we have a right to interfere wherever the flag of empire flew, or could it be that southern Sudan has become a significant oil exporter?

Hilary Benn, Minister for Aid, threatens that if Sudan’s government does not disarm the Janjawid, “further action will follow”. Perhaps he is going to follow General Gordon into Sudan on a quest for imperial glory, forgetting how that story ended in disaster? Or maybe he wants to impose even harsher sanctions on one of the poorest countries in the world, a move

guaranteed to worsen their suffering.

Yet the USA, backed as usual by the EU, has proposed a draft resolution for stronger sanctions, on top of the sanctions imposed since 1996 and extended in 2001. The USA has already been responsible for the destruction of Sudan’s only pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum in 1998, causing thousands of casualties by depriving the Sudanese people of life-saving drugs.

Intervention by Western troops would also worsen the suffering and prolong the hostilities. The Sudanese people must be allowed to settle their own affairs, without outside interference.

Second opinion

WHINGEING LIKE a market stall holder who has to pay his Saturday labour too much, Mayor Livingstone decided to blast the RMT and cross its picket lines if the gutter press needed him to. It would have been a classic photo opportunity.

Scared that the union’s tough stance for a reduced working week for working in his dangerous tunnels will break the cosy “progressive coalition” of highly paid, self seeking individuals he has cultivated around himself for decades, the London mayor joined

the long list of Labour politicians who condemn the workers when the chips are down – that is down in their opinion.

Organised workers, not “progressive coalitions”, make history. We would all benefit from the job-creating proposals that the RMT offers in all humility.

Those Londoners hurrying to work their 70-hour weeks on the tube should reflect on how tube workers are trying to regain control of their working and waking lives – and start to do likewise.



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Main pic: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com. West Bank Wall, Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign



Contents – September 2004

News

Wall illegal, Israel told, p3; Regionalisation ballots scrapped as Labour fear defeat, p4; Pension rights at risk, p5; News Analysis: Sewage and the River Thames, p6

03

Features

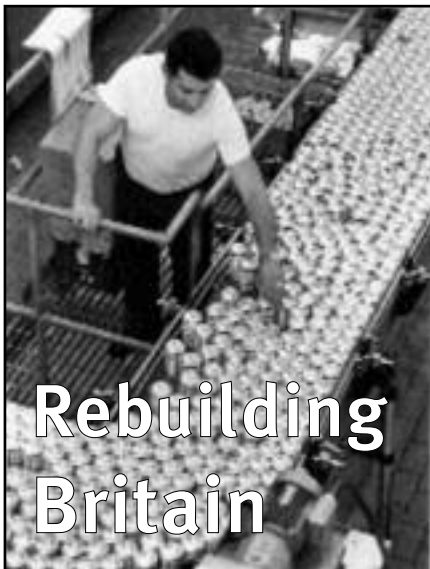
Trade unions and the Labour Party, p6; TUC – independent unions for an independent Britain, p8; A constitution for international capitalism, p12

06

Life and Soul

A design classic – and made in Britain, p14

14



ISRAEL	The wall is illegal
GOING BROKE	Bankruptcy record
AIRLINES	BA staff win rise
REGIONS	Two referendums scrapped
DIEGO GARCIA	High Court overruled
BRAZIL	Grim disappointments
NHS	Paying for PFI...for ever?
PENSIONS	Rights at risk
NEWS ANALYSIS	Sewage in the Thames
WHAT'S ON	Coming soon

Wall illegal, Israel told

THE INTERNATIONAL COURT of Justice ruled on 9 July that Israel's 450-mile-long wall around Palestine was illegal and should come down, and that Israel should compensate the Palestinians for the hardship caused. The Court called on all countries to act against the project, and called on the UN Security Council to consider "further action" to halt construction.

The court ruled that "the construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, are contrary to international law." It said, "Israel is under an obligation to terminate its breaches of international law; it is under an obligation to cease forthwith the works of construction of the wall being built in the Occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, to dismantle forthwith the structure therein situated."

The court rejected the Sharon government's claim that the wall was essential for security, saying that the wall "cannot be justified by military exigencies or by the requirements of national security or public order".

About 975 square kilometres (or 16.6% of the West Bank) would, according to the report of the UN Secretary General, lie between the 1967 Green Line (between Israel and the occupied territories) and the wall. This area is home to 237,000 Palestinians. If the full wall were completed as planned, another 160,000 Palestinians would live in almost completely encircled communities. As a result of the planned route, nearly 320,000 Israeli settlers (of whom 178,000 are in East Jerusalem) would be living in the area between the Green Line and the wall. The court reiterated that "Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (including East Jerusalem) have been established in breach of international law."

In 1971, the court ruled that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was illegal, which led to sanctions against South Africa. In 1984, the court ruled that the US government had broken international law by mining Nicaragua's harbours, and ordered it to stop attacking Nicaragua.

Like the Israeli and US governments, the Labour government had not wanted the issue of the wall referred to the court. Now, along with the other EU governments, it will do all it can to protect the illegal wall. Workers should ask whether the \$9 billion annual US subsidy to Israel and the EU's favourable trade arrangements with Israel should continue.

GOING BROKE

Bankruptcies at record rate

BANKRUPTCIES HAVE reached an all-time high, according to the Department of Trade and Industry. Nearly 1,000 people a week are declared bankrupt. The personal debt mountain has reached £1 trillion for the first time, having doubled in only seven years. Although small business failure continues to account for some of the bankruptcy figures, the rising trend is entirely due to consumer insolvency. There were 11,214 individual insolvencies in England and Wales in the second quarter of this year, a 29% increase on the same quarter in 2003.

The Citizens Advice Bureau reports that its workload has risen by nearly 50% since 1997, and that 4 out of every 5 cases it deals with relate to bad debt. It is concerned that even small rises in interest rates would result in a very steep rise in the bankruptcy rate.

AIRLINES

BA staff win rise

BA BAGGAGE handlers and check-in staff have won an 8.5% pay increase over three years, plus £1,000 in three staged payments. The agreement includes a new sickness absence policy designed to cut the absence rate without penalising those who are sick.

The workers had voted for a 24-hour strike during the August Bank Holiday weekend in two ballots, one held by the GMB and one by the TGWU. The strength and determination showed in the votes effectively forced BA to suspend bookings during the four days of negotiations.

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

DIEGO GARCIA**High Court overruled**

THE GOVERNMENT has overruled a High Court judgement by using an Order in Council to legalise the continuing scandalous expulsion of the Diego Garcia islanders from their homes.

These orders are a relic of the royal prerogative whereby the Privy Council can act with no reference to parliament or the public. The Privy Council's business can be conducted by any group of ministers who are members of it — and apparently just four of them took this decision.

This Labour government has used these Orders before to give Blair's aides Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell their unprecedented powers to give orders to civil servants.

Labour also used an order to give Campbell the power to chair the meetings which drew up the dossier that alleged that Iraq had WMD threatening us all. In short, they are a handy means of getting your own way without that bothersome democracy getting in the way.

BRAZIL**Grim disappointments**

THE BRAZILIAN Workers Party has now been in office in Latin America's largest country for nearly two years. Early high hopes of social democracy have foundered on the usual grim disappointments.

The new government's first act was to appoint the former head of BankBoston as head of Brazil's Central Bank. It then gave the Bank independence, just like Labour did here. The government is paying all Brazil's debts, to the despair of Brazilians but to the delight of international bankers — mainly from the US.

It has cut public spending even more than the IMF demanded, and now promises another nine years of cuts. It has also kept interest rates high, currently at 26.5%.

As a result another 500,000 workers have been sacked and the national unemployment rate is now 13%, a fifth of whom are in Sao Paulo, Brazil's industrial heartland. The government has also sent troops to Haiti, to assist the occupying US and French forces.

Promised land reform has been drastically curtailed, and the age of retirement raised. Anti-trade union legislation and university fees are to be introduced.

If this sounds a bit familiar in Blair's Britain, guess what — a new leftist party is being set up with "rights for all tendencies and factions."



Photo: Workers

On the march at the annual Tolpuddle rally in July. The festival, which lasted from Friday 16 July through to Sunday 18 July, attracted a larger and younger crowd than for many years.

Two referendums scrapped

THE GOVERNMENT has decided to abandon regional referendums in Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West — two out of the three planned. This is a major defeat for the government and its postal voting policy. But the defeat is not about postal voting versus traditional polling booths. Nor is it about the substantial postal fraud and deception which occurred in the June elections.

The core issue is government's fear of defeat over regionalisation and the fragmentation of the North of England. All the opinion polls from Yorkshire and the North West repeatedly stress mass opposition to the proposed break-up of traditional regional identities. The prospect of a defeat for the European Union's agenda for regionalisation and a subsequent backlash in Labour constituencies has the government running scared.

MINING**Kellingley dispute ends**

THE FOUR-MONTH DISPUTE at Kellingley Colliery has come to an end. Kellingley miners have managed to maintain their working conditions which exclude nights and weekends, but the 180 miners transferring from the Selby complex will start working permanent nights.

Their jobs have been saved but their terms and conditions will differ from the

established Kellingley miners.

UK Coal argues that the reason for the trade dispute has disappeared and that all strike action should cease. However, the current truce will almost certainly break down when the first vacancy occurs and management seeks to impose less favourable working conditions.

The demands for the opening of an additional coal face and enhanced investment have also not been met. The issue of a survival plan for the pit must be resolved, or Kellingley could become another Selby in a couple of years' time.

PORTS**Share price dips**

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS' share price dipped when congestion charges and compensation to customers were identified in the annual accounts. The costs and charges of over £1 million, arose from congestion at the Immingham coal terminal, where coal imports are being delivered so fast that lorry owners and freight trains cannot move the stuff quickly enough.

The ABP Humber International Terminal opened its new multi-purpose facility in June 2000. In June 2004 they "celebrated" the handling of their 20 millionth tonne of cargo. This just happened to be 70,000 tonnes of coal from Indonesia destined for the Aire and Trent Valley power stations.

The Selby mining complex is only 51 miles from Immingham, but it is obviously more profitable and politically desirable to bring coal from Indonesia than to dig it out of the ground here.

Pension rights at risk

UP TO 40,000 pensioners at Turner and Newall, the asbestos giant, may lose some or all of their pension rights if the company winds up their scheme. The company, now owned by the US company Federal-Mogul, was a car parts firm that used to make asbestos. Workers from the firm, including British and South African claimants who now suffer from mesothelioma, had to fight to win compensation, although records from company archives showed management was aware of the deadly nature of asbestos from as early as 1942.

The firm then went into voluntary bankruptcy in an attempt to protect its assets, with a winding-up deficit of £875 million. Creditors who hold the purse strings now say there is no more money. Up to 17,500 current and former employees could lose up to 70% of their pensions and 22,000 others could lose inflation-linked rises.

Next year the government is intending to introduce its Pension Protection Fund to protect pensioners from collapsed, defrauded or mismanaged pension schemes, a move which may come too late for those who worked for this company.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE**Paying for PFI — for ever?**

STEWARDS FROM UNISON at Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust recently asked for clarification of the private finance initiative costs for the forthcoming new PFI hospital. The private consortium will be paid £2.7 million every month for the first 30 years from public funds, which equates to £32.4 million per annum or £972 million over 30 years.

But the contract is for 60 years and the trust could not or would not provide figures for the second 30-year contract term. No modern-built hospital is going to last 30, let alone 60 years, yet our grandchildren will be paying the debts.

CONTRACTING OUT**Doctors' letters from India**

UNISON, which represents over 10,000 medical secretaries, has called for a full review of the use of an Indian-based typing service, Omnimedical, which is being used by eight hospitals to type letters for consultants and medical staff.

The union claims there has been no consultation on performance and standards and is demanding information on the pay and conditions of Indian staff. It also calls for the immediate withdrawal of the working arrangement.

As Jillian Green, UNISON rep and medical secretary at Mayday Hospital in Croydon says, "There is a very close professional bond between medical secretaries and medical staff. We would be very concerned at any outsourcing that undermined that special relationship. It is also vital that the relationship between the patient and the medical secretary acting for the hospital consultant is maintained to ensure continuity."

TRADE DEFICIT**Britain posts new record**

YET AGAIN, Britain has posted a new record monthly trade deficit. June's figure was £5 billion, up from May's record £4.8 billion. The second quarter also saw a new record quarterly deficit, at £10.8 billion, up from £9.2 billion in the previous quarter. Yet government sycophants praise this constant running up of ever-larger debts as "prudent housekeeping".

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

Sunday 5 September, 11am to 4.30pm

Burston School Strike Rally, Burston, Norfolk

Annual rally celebrating the battle between agricultural workers and the squirarchy over the education of their children. Stalls, food, march, kids' play.

Tuesday 14 September, 1pm

Meeting at TUC, Brighton: "For Manufacturing and Public Services — No to the EU"

Organised by WORKERS, this meeting takes place at the Quality Inn Hotel, West Street Brighton. Plenty of opportunity for discussion and contribution. All welcome — and lunch is provided.

BARRISTERS AT WAR**Boycott ends with more cash**

THE UNOFFICIAL boycott of serious and complex criminal cases by barristers who refused to sign the new government contract has come to an end. An additional £15 million remuneration package has been agreed.

The end of the boycott means that defendants facing charges ranging from terrorism to murder and drugs offences will no longer be at risk of release on bail due to the failure of the courts to be able to meet strict procedural timetables.

No industrial action ballot was needed, no implementation of the anti-trade union legislation, and no referral to the courts for injunctions for illegal secondary action. If barristers can ignore the law when taking action, then why not everyone?

HUTTON INQUIRY**No more about leaks**

THE INQUIRY set up by the government into the leaking of the Hutton Inquiry's findings to THE SUN ended inconclusively. This is not altogether a surprise, as it was revealed that the inquiry never managed to get around to interviewing the leak's recipient, Trevor Kavanagh, THE SUN's political editor. He might well have told the inquiry just who in Number 10 had leaked the findings, and that would never do, would it?

SEWAGE IN THE THAMES

WALKING ACROSS London's Millennium Bridge in early August was a particularly unpleasant experience, as the River Thames was bright brown, with stinking sewage and dead fish floating right to the riverbanks. A million tons of sewage had been pumped into the river by Thames Water after a torrential downpour over London on 3 August, but even the use of the river as "safety valve" for the sewers did not prevent the flooding and pollution of low-lying areas near the Thames.

Rainwater had filled sewerage pipes and blocked the system so that the raw sewage could not reach treatment plants at Beckton in east London and Crossness in Thamesmead. A mix of solid faecal matter, paper, condoms, and even hypodermic syringes flowed for hours into the river after the storm. Currents and tides trap this disgusting and dangerous material, forming a "sewage slick" which may take three months to reach the sea at Southend.

The event was shocking enough, but afterwards the Environment Agency revealed that smaller-scale discharge of raw sewage happens routinely whenever the sewers cannot cope, 60 times a year on average. A total of 20 million tons of it is pumped into the river each year.

Ageing system

London's sewerage system is old, a brilliant pioneering piece of engineering for the 19th century, but wholly inadequate for the demands of the 21st. Designed by Joseph Bazalgette, Chief Engineer to the Metropolitan Commission for Sewers, and funded by taxation, it ended cholera and typhoid fever epidemics and the infamous "Big Stink" of the city's summers, by taking the sewage out of the Thames to treatment works. It established London as a safe, modern city. But now there is a very real danger that diseases such as these could return, unless action is taken urgently. The Marine Conservation Society has already warned that raw sewage poses a health problem on many of Britain's beaches.

The Environment Agency's technical manager John Goddard asked, "How can you have a major capital city with 20 million tons of sewage running through its main river every year when we are supposed to be setting an example to the cities in the developing world?"

RWE Thames Water, subsidiary of a private German company, wants to raise water bills to fund a giant 20-mile drainage channel under the Thames, which would cost an estimated £1 billion and merely dump the sewage further downstream, by-passing the London section of the Thames. The Environment Agency backs this ridiculous beggar-my-neighbour proposal, and reckons consumers would be quite happy to pay for it. Their spokesman said the alternative is to "dig up every street in London" to install separate rainwater and sewerage pipes.

Indeed. Right now the streets are being dug up to install new gas mains. Why not put in separate rainwater pipes at the same time? A long-term plan for modernising London's infrastructure, that is what we need — impossible while separate private companies are running the various public utilities.

Peter Bowler, a campaigner with the consumer group WaterWatch, denounced decades of inaction by government and the water industry. He said: "This was a disaster waiting to happen. Thames Water has known for ages that the sewer overflow system was not up to the job.

"This is a problem of a company run for profit rather than for the sake of customers or the environment. It all goes back to privatisation. If Thames Water can't run the system properly without fleecing the customers then the government should do what it did to Railtrack and take it back."

**Biting the hand that feeds you
occupation — it started when
created Labour a century ago..**

Trade unions and the

IN JULY THIS YEAR, just in time for the TUC conference and the impending general election, the government and larger trade unions closed a deal which the government hopes will buy them industrial peace and vital funding — party membership is in steep decline — to secure a third term.

Blair had adopted his usual "Mr Sincerity—trust me—I'm an honest politician" act, pleading with union leaders to continue bankrolling Labour and to present a united front going into the election. It will not be lost on workers that this money is ours, and why should we go on subsidising a government that continues to kick us in the teeth? The de-industrialisation of Britain proceeds unchecked — workers in unions have not fought for jobs — and we have a series of open-ended wars abroad we don't want.

Tony Woodley, TGWU general secretary, is apparently delighted with the deal: "This is a fantastic achievement," he said. "Finally the Labour manifesto is treating the unions seriously...Labour have listened to the grassroots and conceded sizeable ground. This is an agenda we can campaign on...We will be helpful to Labour for the election."

TGWU decision

The TGWU decides in September whether to give Labour cash for its election campaign — and so, too, does the GMB, whose deputy general secretary, Jack Dromey, is Labour's next treasurer at its September conference. Some leaders of larger unions, and indeed too many workers, have exceedingly short and selective memories. Recent labour movement history, as well as the struggle over the past hundred years or so, has provided us with numerous examples of why we should not trust any species of social democratic government.

Trade unions brought the Labour Party into being, sponsoring working men to become MPs. It seemed a logical development for some unions to establish a political fund, paying for MPs to bring about legislation for the needs of the working class, but the Labour Party has never done anything politically but betray its class origins.

Tail wagging dog

Apart from a few positive outcomes, such as enabling trade unions legally to carry on representing workers the relationship between Labour and trade unions has always been a very unequal one — the Labour tail wagging the working class dog. From an early stage, party functionaries sought to create a division between the "political" Labour Party and the unions, with the unions seen merely as an economic adjunct. Workers in unions were expected to concentrate on pay and conditions and leave the "politics" to the Labour Party. But while we do not seem to be doing the former very well, we are only too keen to get involved with the Labour party, though it is not our politics.

It was mainly craft and general unions that created

is not a Labour Party the trade unions

political fund

political funds, subsidising elections and lobbying MPs. But what actually happened was that the Labour Party began telling unions what to do, which often meant “do nothing ...we know best....leave it to us....don't rock the boat” — hence so many attempts at incomes policies by successive governments.

The more recent white-collar unions have, in many cases, never considered a political fund, because they are not affiliated to the Labour Party — some not even to the TUC. It is already apparent to many both inside and outside the unions that the Labour Party does not represent their interests.

The Tories realised that trade unions acting independently, defending their members' interests, were a powerful force. So they constructed employment legislation to curb that power in the 1980s. The only loophole was for unions to create their own political funds, which had to be a set amount for each member, and from which any worker could opt out. NALGO, one of the founding unions of Unison, set up a political fund but a resolution to commit it to the Labour Party was defeated.

Loyalty

There has always been a struggle about Labour Party loyalty versus political independence. In the years leading up to the 1980s some unions had achieved a closed shop in their industries, which should have been a position of strength. Instead, they laid themselves open to attacks of corruption. If workers had used the closed shop wisely then this would have been an important development in the taking of political control of their working lives.

Under Thatcher, unions campaigned to get Labour elected when they should have been using their industrial strength to fight the government. If the miners and the rest of our class had won that struggle then Thatcherism would have come to an abrupt end and workers would have been in a better position to take advantage of enemy disarray and go on the attack. In the event, Thatcherism is both embedded and being further



Give us your money, then go away: the message from Labour

Photo © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

developed in Blair's Labour, so what is the point of a political fund to get Labour re-elected?

The supporters of the political fund display one of two characteristics: either they belong to one of a variety of ultra-leftist groups and wish to use the union's political fund for their own purposes, or they have adopted the “lesser of two evils” notion because of some perceived benefits.

Lack of vision

What we have is a lack of vision —worse, manifest cowardice —in unions beset with destructive factions. Clarity and unity of purpose are missing from our union work. It cannot be right to let others (politicians) campaign and work for us.

There is a massive growth in PR organisations and consultants who will take over campaigns on our behalf — for

a fee. We must do the job ourselves. Unison has 1.3 million members; if they were united how powerful would that be? Professional politicians survive on our laziness and reluctance to take responsibility. Specialist advisers should be there to assist us to make a case, not take charge of the project themselves.

Politicians can come to us, not us to them. Those who would have us choose between evils are deceiving themselves as well as us. If we confine ourselves to constantly backing one parliamentary party against others then we condemn ourselves to perpetual servitude.

Why limit oneself to choosing one evil or another, when one could choose the good? We do not have the choice of living with capitalism because it is destroying us. We cannot afford to shirk the responsibility of running things for ourselves — our unions and ultimately our nation.

The real work of the trade union movement takes place in the work created by an annual vote: it has to come from below, every day

TUC — what we need are independent unions

WHEN THE TUC meets it deserves great attention as the closest we have to a parliament of workers. We should meet thus every day. A once-a-year event becomes a rigmarole like the band playing in the park one Sunday in summer. But we are too exhausted just surviving to pool our resources daily. Once a year for the time being will have to do. Or will it? Isn't the situation quite urgent?

Dormant power

For years the TUC Congress's docility and 'respectability' have left it sidelined and irrelevant as an event both to trade union members and the two-thirds of workers who are not in unions. There is minimal competition to go to Congress these days, most who go are unelected, a real sign of weakness. This is so because actually at work there is greater prospect for change that attracts the genuinely committed. Local results are better than national posturing. In this respect the TUC can appear very remote to trade union members keen to make a difference where they live and work.

Legions of informed industrial correspondents in the 1970s and early 1980s have been replaced by temporary headline hacks who do little more than focus on superficial splits and personalities. There's more interest in Big Brother than the brothers and sisters.

So the TUC press corps finds little to report on that workers find real at work every day, and TUC delegates have little of substance to report back except of course a few wild nights. But even the social events these days are more like post-colonial cocktail parties than socialist gatherings with stimulating culture and cooperative camaraderie. Hotels (largely un-unionised) do a roaring trade. There's the bitchiness of the fashion parade, rather than the passion of rich socialist tirade.

Fairy tale

Intended to act on genuine workers' aspirations passed through the Congress, the General Council is like something that sleeps for ages in a fairy tale. In the

meantime step-children can find a new life in a hundred and one other organisations. The ability of workers to use their democratic machinery to wake the sleeping giant is just as much a problem, though not yet in folklore.

You get what you pay for. In the name of unanimity, Congress has been staged to encourage a crass uniformity of view that has little to do with active discipline and everything to do with distancing itself from workers who, in reality, love nothing more than an honest debate followed by decisive action taken by a majority in the interests of a majority. Lose this concept of democracy and you lose the unions' political purpose.

TUC struggle

The extent to which the TUC has always, since its inception, struggled to find a role reflects the artificiality of many national structures in the trade union movement. National officials easily get carried away with themselves when the real work of the trade union movement is in fact at the workplace.

National unions are no more or less than the strength of their branches. There is no getting round this. A trade union is only as good as its members. And members are only as good as they behave when disciplining management and reducing the employer to tears at the workplace. Members by and large train themselves in the struggle too and don't need to be told how to do it.

What's up at work?

An organised workplace cannot be created from the top, let alone by the TUC. An organised workplace is one where workers exercise control and power more than the employer. There are very few workplaces left like this and few unions with such clout. But it would be a great boost to every workplace if the TUC were really seen to stand up and risk a



Unison delegates at last year's TUC: there's only one side, t

bit in the name of the majority of people in the country. Saying that unions should be able to support each other with strike action would be a start.

Small specialist trade unions organised around skills or industries have tended to be best at workplace organisation and skill enhancement. They have also recruited and held onto members better. But some in industries being run down by the EU have been genuinely pathetic in their complicity with the decline.

Trade union merger mania and conglomerate unions, some now looking to merge with European counterparts, have not necessarily benefited the politics of workplace control. Outsiders never get a look in at a genuinely well organised workplace even if they are the employer. Employ as many organisers as you want — you can only lead a horse to water. And big is not necessarily beautiful. Yet still there are essential mergers long overdue, notably the teachers.

Our class solidarity arose from the common identity of issues in each

workplace. Strength — especially that of the TUC, cannot be

ons for an independent Britain



hat of the working class

Photo © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

at least be a start.

Our primary responsibility as workers to each other is forbidden under legislation against secondary action and until we defy and replace this our workplace and national union strength will be minimal. As the Tolpuddle Festival becomes increasingly professionalised so our need to return to the enforced amateur illegality of our founders becomes more pressing. Hardly a suit in the hallowed Hall of Congress would risk a day's wages let alone a movement these days. Or would we?

It is much more difficult to betray workers in the workplace, because at work you can smell out the traitor or self seeking.

Workplace politics

But workplace politics is universally derided, and has been so since 1906, when the Labour Party as we know it was created. Yet politics only really exists at the workplace, in the essentially political relation between worker and employer, and in the skill concentrated in various occupations. It also exists in the wider community and family struggles to survive and adopt a collective approach. Since 1906 the view has been put forward that politics is for the politicians and the Labour Party in particular.

This defines politics as a thing that only exists in Parliament and once or twice a year in elections over this or that or for him or her to save us. This is a puzzling, reduced view of politics. It is in fact very alien to trade unions although trade unions give succour to it. Those who promoted it in order to promote themselves within the establishment had to confine trade union and workplace politics to "industrial" or "economic" matters, as if being able to eat were not political. A strike is more political than anything that has occurred in the Palace of Westminster. Ultimately Parliament only manages a fraction of the nation's wealth expressed as taxation. It has a

predominantly economic function, with law-making powers based on capital and the armed forces.

The consequence of relegating responsibility for the political to those who have minimal experience of work and skill is that government is idle and unskilled. Few now in Parliament have ever had a real job. Their politics is purely a matter of finding ways to approve of the latest capitalist development. The Labour Party in power has always supported imperialism. Another tax against the rich never alleviates exploitation of the most skilled workers. It is easier, you don't have to think. It would, we are told, simply be worse if the nasty Tories were doing it. And when the Tories are down and out, the BNP is boosted as the real danger.

In praise of the Third Way

Yet it is the notion of accepting the lesser of two evils that always strikes such a lethal chord with trade unionists. And it is this intellectual conundrum that lies at the heart of social democracy and the tolerance of capitalism. Trade unionists every day settle for second best — we are always negotiating between a rock and a hard place. If you get the hard place it is better than the rock.

This encourages a habit of thought which can be called in philosophical language "empiricism" — this means finding immediate solutions to immediate problems without looking at causes and the future. Or it can be put in more everyday language as a "pragmatic" approach.

What pragmatism forgets is that there is always a third way. Neither rock, nor hard place, but our way instead.

Ironically, without generations of people taking a third way there would be no trade unions. We were formed against the lesser of two evils and prospered always when we defeated the lesser of two evils. Waiting for wind and tide to rise in our favour, as Bunyan said when he helped inspire the birth of our

workplace. Some, often rightly, thought all other workers inferior for their lack of organisation. They paved the way for the movement as a whole by the strength and detail of their organisation.

Dignity and skill

We all strive for dignity and the independent exercise of skill. Where dignity or skill is threatened in any workplace, other workplaces should be able to respond in solidarity. We cannot, under the existing legislation, which is among the worst in the world, exercise real solidarity. And years of not having done so has made us neglectful and parochial.

Some now see other workers as inferior because they are beyond care. The worst of this mentality is paraded at the TUC and preyed upon by the MI5 operatives who circuit the hall looking for new friends.

This year there will even be opposition again from the hallowed ranks to a suggestion that we demonstrate against the anti union laws, let alone opposing them in practice. A demo would

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

movement, was never an option. You'll wait for ever for them to do it.

Delegating power to represent trade union interests in Parliament is very different from delegating power to others to do all of the thinking and all of the law making and war making. History does not repeat itself. So trying to re-create the Labour Party's origins nearly a hundred years after it was born is just daft.

Labour doesn't need representation. This concept was the origin of our folly. We need power. We could run the country easily. To think that we can achieve this using the machinery the capitalists have created for themselves is as misleading now as it was a hundred years ago. History repeated becomes both farce and tragedy.

New Labour. old millionaires

Don't we want to try something new? If we do this begins with recognition of our strengths, not our weaknesses. Those who wish to represent us thrive on and wish to perpetuate our weaknesses and subjected position. Our strengths are not just in our numbers, though these are still quite significant. There are nearly 60 million people in Britain, almost all depending on workers' wages. There are only around 208,000 members of the Labour Party and 7 million trade unionists. Who should really call the shots? Many Labour Party members are millionaires. In fact the number of millionaires and billionaires has doubled since 1997.

US and EU

This small group sides with Washington and Brussels. They have managed to forget Britain. They pursue war behind Bush and support the multinationals' EU Constitution behind Berlusconi (who provides a very nice holiday retreat, thank you very much). There will be unchallenged quips about this at the General Council dinner at Congress, very droll. And then there is Mandelson,

'Those who wish to represent us thrive on and wish to perpetuate our weaknesses and subjected position....'

making a Millennium Dome of the World Trade Organisation next after he does his thing in his beloved EU.

Magnificent stuff to behold isn't it? Surprisingly some of us still let our unions pay a political levy to the Labour Party. The only supporters of this appear to be the self-appointed Left. Hardly anyone else does, least of all genuine Communists, and most of our best trade unions do not. Workplace organisation needs all the resources it can get. Why waste it on millionaires in government? No wonder they want state funding.

The Labour Party has tried to take the trade unions with it since 1906. Now the unions, big, stronger than they think, confused, and in danger of wilting on the vine at the crucial moment, have to decide if they want to continue in this way. Play with big business for another year, and support globalisation through the EU Constitution, or get serious about doing things for all workers in Britain? This question will underpin all Congress debates.

Taking ourselves seriously

Ironically, getting serious might mean taking our own policies seriously for a change.

But this would be the biggest challenge not just to the TUC but to each union. Why not implement our policies? What gets in the way? If our policy is to see vibrant manufacturing production across a balanced range of commodities, supplying first a domestic market that is sustained by productive agriculture and fishing in order to pay for high quality

public services and free health care, then we will have to break the EU's blockade against us.

Us or them?

If our policy is for deepened skills training in each sector and full employment, then all of our revenue created by our work must be spent here and reinvested in science and research, and we must reverse the imbalance of huge imports at the expense of exports. We will need to control the flow of capital and pension funds too.

If our policy is for utilities that are affordable and in our democratic control with transport networks that service our integrated needs, then why not remove from office all those who oppose us?

If we want a future and a decent pension why not withdraw from the EU which demanded the end to final salary schemes and disguised this move very cleverly?

If we don't want our children to fight other children in the future why not withdraw from the special relationship with the United States, NATO and the new EU military forces that the constitution will create? In short why not run Britain as independently, in cooperation with other nations, as you want to run your workplace?

Secondary action to help other nations will involve determined defence of our nation. In the same way you cannot call for secondary action to support your workplace unless your workplace is very well organised in the first place. The TUC will not be able to stop strong workplace organisation and opposition to the further takeover of Britain by foreign powers, despite the best efforts of dozens of government agents in its highest ranks.

Our country and our unions need to be rebuilt from the bottom up. Free, independent trade unions for a free, independent Britain. Mix it with the EU, the US, the Labour Party, new variants of the Labour Party or worse still the self-appointed Left and you will miss the point of trade unionism and class power.

Reg Birch:

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Will Podmore

The EU Constitution is the biggest threat to our nation since the cowardly refusal to struggle and betrayal of its working-class roots.

A constitution for international capitalism



Looking for the trough: the new European Commission — Peter Mandelson receives a salary of £150,000 a year, £1,900 a month housing allowance, a chauffeur-driven car 24 hours a day, and a severance payment after five years of £5,000 a month for three years, plus pension

WILL THE BRITISH working class survive as an independent, sovereign and democratic nation? We are the nation. We have no other nation, and though we may often choose not to exercise our powers, the proposed EU constitution is the biggest threat to them since the Second World War. Yet the TUC, out of cowardly refusal to struggle and betrayal of its working class roots, embraces it.

The constitution would remove the power of independent nation states and make the European Union the overriding legal and political power. It is not just another step on the road towards a centralised EU state: it would completely change the EU. Talk of a “two-tier” union is misleading — the pre-Civil War USA was a two-tier state, and look what happened there next.

The constitution would end our

economic independence. The European Union would decide which countries would have which industries, and would stop us working as an independent economy. For example, under the constitution it could impose its rules on energy to create an EU oil reserve, allowing it to ration our oil throughout Europe.

End of democracy

The constitution would end our democracy, because the EU is intrinsically undemocratic, since it opposes all national, popular and democratic interests. Too many of its members are still damaged by their embrace of fascism in the 1930s — Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Greece and France. Its ruling body, the Commission, is inherently undemocratic — how many of

us chose Peter Mandelson to be a commissioner? Talk of the EU’s “democratic deficit” misleadingly implies that it could make good the deficit.

The constitution is no ordinary treaty, an agreement between sovereign governments. It is a set of rules for a new “Single Legal Personality”, with unprecedented powers. In every area, we would only be allowed to make decisions where the EU chose not to. The EU is constantly “tidying up” the constitution: in the most recent versions, our “opt-outs” from the euro and on border controls have mysteriously vanished. We have already lost habeas corpus, due to the common EU “anti-terrorist” laws.

Labour’s “red lines” on criminal and civil law harmonisation, and on social security, have gone. Under the constitution, the EU takes the power of

Second World War. Yet the TUC, out of veto, embraces it...

extradition over British citizens.

The constitution would give the European Council new powers to change the Treaty without recourse to national governments — the so-called passerelle or escalator clause in Article I-24.4 — so the EU could end remaining national vetoes and override Labour's other red lines. National parliaments, far from having a "greater role", could only register concerns about EU proposals: the "emergency brake" merely imposes a brief delay before enforcing laws that we could not veto.

The unelected commission would be the only source of law. The commissioners, dominated by the chief executive officers of multinational corporations through the European Round Table of Industrialists, would run the EU in the EU's interests, refusing to accept any national interests.

The EU would be even more difficult to influence than Westminster. Indeed, no national political party is allowed any meaningful influence. So we can expect no employment or trade union laws meeting our aspirations. Indeed, EU employment laws have not prevented the unemployment of 20 million European workers.

The constitution does not include key trade union demands for the right to work, the right to take secondary industrial action, the application of employment rights from day one in all workplaces, or the rights to employment, housing, free education and free health care. Britain's National Health Service free at the point of need is not compatible with the EU model, as Brussels has repeatedly said.

Foreign policy

The EU has already started creating a new European External Action Service (diplomatic corps), even before anyone has ratified the constitution, and Article I-27 creates a new Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Article I-15 creates a single EU foreign, security and military policy, overriding the policies of individual countries: "1. The Union's competence in

'The Constitution is no ordinary Treaty, an agreement between sovereign governments. In every area, we would only be allowed to make decisions where the EU chose not to...'

matters of common foreign and security policy shall cover all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union's security, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy, which might lead to a common defence. 2. Member States shall actively and unreservedly support the Union's common foreign and security policy in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity and shall comply with the acts adopted by the Union in this area. They shall refrain from action contrary to the Union's interests or likely to impair its effectiveness."

The EU is creating a single European army "to deal with trouble spots in and around Europe and in the rest of the world", as the constitution says, an open avowal that EU foreign policy would be aggressive. Yet Blair wrote in *THE TIMES*, "There is no such concept called a European army." (13 October 2003). All member states will have to provide military resources to the EU and increase their military spending. This single EU army would raise the tensions between the three large trading blocs over access to dwindling mineral resources and oil and gas pipelines, and between the EU and the countries of Asia and Africa.

Workers, on the other hand, want peaceful and cooperative relations with all our neighbours and with all the countries of the world, based on mutual

respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

The EU's regional policies would also have a huge impact, by breaking Britain down into weak, mutually hostile regions that would be unable to stand up to the EU. If the EU and its Labour and Liberal-Democrat allies forced regional assemblies on us, they could force the Constitution and the euro on us too. They know that they cannot convince us to vote for either, so they are trying to get them through by the back door by imposing an unnecessary and unwanted tier of regional government.

We have already forced Labour to back down on two of these three regional elections, in Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West (see News, p4). The Chair of Yes4Yorkshire, Lord Haskins, told the *YORKSHIRE POST* in July that the referendum was "unwinnable". Yet Nick Raynsford, the Minister for Local and Regional Government, sees "overwhelming support for a referendum".

Similarly, last year Labour got just 3,947 out of seven million people to back the proposed referendum for a regional assembly in the North West. John Prescott described this as "significant and widespread interest"! Now only the North East is to be the unwilling guinea pig for this monstrous experiment, on 4 November.

Referendum

The vast majority of us want a referendum on the EU Constitution so that we can vote against it, and we won a great victory by forcing Labour to concede a referendum. But nevertheless, Labour is planning a bill to ratify it.

In Holland, a referendum on the Constitution is to be held at the end of this year. In France too, the people have forced the government to call a referendum, for late 2005. Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Poland and Luxembourg are also committed to holding referenda.

Whenever the referendum comes, to keep our national sovereignty, independence and democracy, we must vote down the EU Constitution.

It's light, it's quick, and two of them can fit into the boot of a car — so why label it a bicycle shows what British industry can deliver — so why label it

A design classic — and made in Britain

THE BROMPTON BIKE, attracting admiration and applause as it unfolds from its extremely compact package, is a good example of British inventiveness and capacity for production. But in future the European Union wants to stop people knowing where this remarkable bike is made — by banning labels such as Made in Britain.

This classic design by Andrew Ritchie (who incidentally does approximately five thousand miles per year on his own Brompton) is produced in a small factory in West London which currently employs 45 people. The whole engineering process from bending tube through frame-building to final assembly takes place in house.

Although some components are imported the company has complete control of materials and for every bike they ship they can identify whose work went into all stages of its manufacture.

Given the number of small components factories which do still exist in London why don't they go the extra step and make the components here?

Quick folder

Although it is a folding bike it nevertheless has a full size frame made of steel for strength but with careful choice of alloys and tube sections it is light enough to carry easily. Remarkably it takes just fifteen to twenty seconds to fold.

When folded, a Brompton stays locked together automatically, forming a package little larger than its wheels. Often when riders unfold it on a platform after a train journey, onlookers give a clap as the folded specimen turns into a full size bike as if by magic!

The attention to detail in the design is all important as many Bromptons are used by commuters who need to arrive at their destination looking smart. When the bike is folded the chain and gears are on the inside and therefore there is no risk of getting grease on your own or other commuters' clothing. Likewise vulnerable parts like lights and cable-runs are tucked away and cannot get caught in luggage racks.

One or more Bromptons could easily fit into a car boot and crucially for flat dwellers a Brompton means that the rest of your flat mates are not constantly falling over your bike in the hall.

The bike has a unique front carrier system which allows the rider to carry a heavy briefcase or a significant amount of shopping. As the load is attached directly to the main bike frame it has remarkably little effect on the steering despite the carrier having a capacity of 22 litres.

Efficiency

Just in case you are thinking such a small wheeled bicycle must be uncomfortable and slow, other design features such as the hub gears and good alignment means

that there is very efficient transmission of energy. It is true that smaller wheels will not cover the same ground as large ones, however small wheels do have some intrinsic advantages in that they are easy to accelerate and highly manoeuvrable.

In a recent commuting challenge organised by Islington council a London red bus, a car and a Brompton were raced against each other in the morning rush hour from Finsbury Park in North London to Finsbury Square (on the edge of the City of London).

The London Bus took 49 minutes which was nearly three times as long as the Brompton on which grandfather Tom Bogdanowicz rode the journey in 15 minutes wearing a suit. The car was



From hallway to street: and quicker in London than bus or car

r. The Brompton t Made in the EU”?

second taking 25 minutes. Incidentally, the slow speed of the bus demonstrates why London’s public transport problems will not be solved without more attention to tube and rail travel.

Bromptons are cheap compared with other modes of travel but not as cheap as some imported bikes. The cheapest model costs £375 and the most expensive which includes an integral dynamo, lights and carrier costs £626.

Enamoured

However if you are considering a cheap import consider the words of American bike designer Leonard Rubin. “After buying a Brompton (initially as a new curiosity for addition to my collection) I became so enamoured of the design I stopped making mine....I believe the stock bike is the most compact, civilised, well designed and produced folding bike ever sold commercially...”

Rubin and other bike designers would like to see a museum of Bromptons opened to honour this design classic. There would only be limited items to go into such a museum because all the original production prototypes were sold as the West London factory was operating in such a hand to mouth fashion when it first opened.

As Britain continues to become increasingly a heritage trail country there is something rather heartening about a company selling even its prototypes in order to keep producing for a future. Consider a ride on the living heritage of the Brompton bicycle rather than the visit to a museum of industrial heritage (or you could do both).

Why should we allow our country’s industrial merit to be hidden behind the vague label Made in the EU? When objection is raised it is sometimes pointed out that so little is now Made in Britain why bother to object?

With the destruction of manufacturing jobs continuing apace under this Blair government at approximately twice the rate of the Thatcher era, it must be more important than ever to celebrate and take pride in industrial success.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It’s our turn now.

How to get in touch

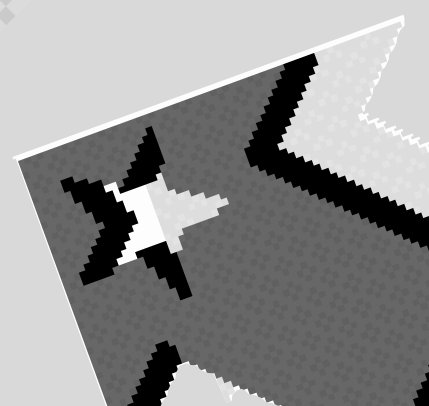
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Back to Front – Politics of closure

‘Why has the Labour Party lost control of such bastion heartlands as Leeds, Hull, Huddersfield and Newcastle...?’

WHILE THE government tinkers with all-inclusive postal ballots, as trialled in the North of England during the June local elections, and pontificates about regional government and the fragmentation of the UK, attention should be given to the state of local government.

The question is, why has the Labour Party lost control of such bastion heartlands as Leeds, Sheffield, Doncaster, Hull, Bradford, Barnsley, Huddersfield and Newcastle in the North East, areas dominated by them for decades?

What factors have brought this about? Is this about the struggles between New Labour and Old Labour? Is it a result of the move to postal balloting and away from the traditional ballot booths? Could it be disgust at Blairite local council cabinets undermining traditional democratic participation?

Or could it be because local government is being (and in some cases

already has been) stripped of all its traditional functions such as housing, education, public health, planning? A widely held view is that voters are alienated from politics in general, especially the young. What then is the key factor in Labour’s losses?

If the traditional industrial base has been destroyed and closed, what gives an area its identity? Leeds: tailoring and engineering – closed. Sheffield: steel – closed. Hull: fishing – closed. Bradford: wool – closed. Barnsley: coal – closed. Huddersfield: cloth – closed. Newcastle: coal, shipbuilding, engineering – closed. Without industry, there is no “political” voice.

Without a political voice, there can be no point in participating in any sham capitalist elections. Labour can only have a claim on the labour movement if there is industry and work, so the deindustrialisation of Britain destroys the Labour Party.

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