

WORKERS

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LIFE & SOUL

RACE AND CLASS

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Living with the enemy

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OFF TO SCHOOL, OFF TO CHURCH?

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts

IT SEEMS that the Treasury has scotched Blair's bid for an £80 million prime ministerial plane, dubbed 'Blair Force One', in which to make his interminable round of foreign visits.

Anything that curtails his visits abroad must be a good thing. Wherever he goes these days, he spreads reaction. And what is more, he diverts attention away from what is happening here, in our own country.

As this issue of WORKERS shows, all is not well. Millions of workers face longer working

lives and shorter retirement (see p 3); Thatcherite thinking continues to dominate transport policy (see p 6); and our children face a proliferation of sectarian schools (see p 8).

But workers are beginning to raise their heads from behind the parapet, as reports about teachers and civil servants on pages 4 and 5 show. They are doing what needs to be done, focusing on Britain. This is where we live — if we want to change the world, we have to start with changing Britain.

Second opinion

SHOULD AMBULANCES be white or yellow? That is the debate that is uppermost in the minds of the European Committee for Standardisation. After commissioning research into the subject they discovered that “the human eye's response to any particular hue reaches a peak with the colour Euro Yellow RAL 1016”!

The EU has advised all ambulance services in every member state to repaint their vehicles and at this moment in Britain the Royal Berkshire Ambulance Trust is carrying out trials with the new colour.

Health and Safety has been cited as a

reason for the change, but strangely another reason is that the red ambulances in France are being mistaken by other Europeans for fire engines!

Some people being quoted in the press who are opposed refer only to the fact that we have had white ambulances for years and this is just another tradition being lost to the uniformity of Europe.

True, but the real argument is that it doesn't matter whether we have white ambulances or yellow ambulances but that we have more ambulances. Anything else is, as they say, a yellow herring...



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**PENSIONS****EU****HOUSING****EDUCATION****AIR SAFETY****MINING****ANTI-EU****CIVIL SERVICE****HOSPITALS****COMING SOON**

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Pensions? What pensions?

THE GOVERNMENT is preparing for an assault on the very principle of pensions. In this it is following in the steps of the last Tory government, which used the EU equal opportunities legislation as an excuse to level up the retirement age for women from 60 to 65 to give parity with men! This equality was to prevent men challenging discriminatory legislation and so force a levelling down. Instead, the government worsened everyone's circumstances.

Now this government is talking of the need to lift the retirement age for all from 65 to 67 years, or if they can get away with it, to 72 years. A good actuary should be able to calculate the significant number of people who, on this basis, would never receive a pension because they died in servitude.

The vast returns on pension funds occur only if pensioners die and the wages docked as delayed payment are never collected. If a population has an ever-increasing life expectancy, then pensions have to be paid and investment fund managers do not generate ever more obscene profit margins.

So the government is changing the rules and ignoring its own declared policy of re-establishing the pensions link to increases in wage rates. It will break the final year salary scheme, so allowing employers to reduce the value of pensions. It will renege on their promise to the trade unions to add defence of pension rights into legislation covering transfer of undertakings (TUPE).

For all workers, the government is changing the rules and making life ever more difficult for those who retire. In fact they are turning back the clock nearly 100 years - in 1908 when pensions were introduced you had to be 70 years old to qualify.

There is one occupation where the final salary scheme pension will not be changed. There is one occupation where the opportunity to maximise your pension in the shortest possible time has now been made shorter. There is one occupation whose pension scheme is incomparably better than any other job. Of course, being a Member of Parliament — snouts in the trough for life!

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

EUROPEAN UNION**Textiles under pressure**

LAST YEAR The European Commission agreed trade measures designed to significantly increase Pakistani exports to the EU, targeting clothing and textiles, which account for three-quarters of Pakistan's exports to the EU.

From the beginning of this year clothing tariffs have been removed, and textile quotas for Pakistani textiles and clothing have increased by 15%. The impact on textile firms in the UK, already under severe pressure, has only just begun.

The agreement was rapidly concluded a month after the terrorist attack on the USA. In return EU clothing and textile exporters will have better access to Pakistan. But exports to Pakistan of these goods amounted only to about 40 million euros a year.

TEXTILES**Closure judgment**

TEXTILE WORKERS at Bradford textile firm W&J Whitehead have won a legal ruling after a receiver sacked them without due notice. This March, after a six-month fight, an industrial tribunal awarded the 600 workers 90 days' wages.

The Transport and General Workers Union fought to retain jobs and come up with a survival plan. But even when that failed, they were determined not to let the receiver avoid his legal obligations.

Peter Booth, for the TGWU, said that he regretted that the ruling was too late to save any jobs, but if it stopped other receivers from acting above the law, those job losses would not have been in vain.

HOUSING

Homelessness at all-time high

LATEST GOVERNMENT FIGURES reveal the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation at an all-time high. There are 78,620 households living in temporary accommodation, 12,110 of them in bed and breakfasts — a rise of 23% on the previous year.

The national housing campaign organisation Shelter has called on the government to allocate more resources to tackle child homelessness, which is a major cause of child poverty and which impacts on health, education and long-term quality of life.

The government has announced a target for ending bed and breakfast use, as well as changes to housing benefit to help housing providers lease from the private rented sector as an alternative.

But, as Shelter says, new initiatives need new resources. The Spending Review 2002 must, says Shelter, include a sustained programme of investment. Some money can be saved by not using bed and breakfasts, which cost twice as much as other temporary accommodation. Shelter estimates that capital funding of up to £250 million would provide an additional 10,000 units of leased accommodation.

A bigger task is to increase the supply of affordable housing. Shelter estimates that 83,000 to 99,000 new affordable homes are needed each year, at an annual cost of £1.7 billion. Other strategies should include reforming the Right to Buy policy, preferably by discontinuing it, or allowing receipts to be ring-fenced for housing investment.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

'Railtrack of the Skies'

THE RECENT £30 million bail-out for the National Air Traffic Services (NATS), another emergency loan to another failed privatisation, takes the total of public money tossed to the air traffic private sector to over £60 million in under 10 months.

The part-privatisation in June 2001 of Britain's air traffic control looks set to plunge deeper into failure. Some 2,000 out of 5,000 air traffic controllers have been made redundant and the planned new £60 million air traffic control centre in Prestwick is on ice.

Britain's skies are the busiest in Europe, with substantial expansion envisaged at Heathrow and Stansted, both of which will get a new runway and terminal. There is the strong possibility of a brand new London



London teachers strike

LONDON TEACHERS surprised everyone, including themselves, when on 14 March 10,000 of them marched through the capital's streets protesting against the proposed meagre increase in the London weighting (see photo, above). This rapidly called strike produced an overwhelming response from NUT members in Greater London.

Initiated by a few local branches, the call for action was eagerly embraced by the majority of members who are angry at the continuing crises in their schools. Unable to attract and retain sufficient teachers to the capital, all of those involved in education, including parents, governors and other trade unions, gave their support to a strike that voiced their despair at the government's continuing neglect of their plight.

London schools have immense difficulty in recruiting new staff and many limp along with makeshift arrangements of overseas teachers, agency supply staff and the unsuitably qualified. Many can no longer provide the stable teaching staff that is necessary for them to succeed at the most basic level. All were agreed that this is no way to provide education for London's children.

Those on strike saw the call for an increase in pay as a first step in addressing the many needs of their schools. Whether the government takes heed or not, the campaign is now sure to continue. With adverts for jobs in the coming TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT likely to break last year's record, this is an issue that will refuse to go away.

airport being built in addition to Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton, City and Stansted. All these developments will add to the pressures on air traffic control.

The likely refusal of the Civil Aviation Authority to accept the proposed NATS 5% increase in air control charges, is expected to trigger further panic amongst the banking consortium bankrolling NATS. Barclays, Abbey National, HBOS and Bank of America are already looking at potential losses of £80 million. They will be looking to the public purse to bail them out.

Dubbed 'the Railtrack of the Skies', NATS is contributing to Stephen Byers' catalogue of failure in the management of Britain's transport systems. Air traffic is teetering on bankruptcy, Railtrack is in administration, London's Tube system is creaking to a standstill due to lack of any investment other than the myriad private finance initiatives and Britain's roads are clogged up by congestion and lack of planning.

MINING

Selby under threat

AFTER the closure announcement of The Prince of Wales colliery at Pontefract where 600 jobs will go by September, UK Coal has now announced that the Selby coalfield is under threat.

The Selby complex revolutionised coal extraction during the 1970s and 1980s. It cost over £1 billion in public investment, but has now recorded a £40 million loss.

UK Coal's response is to "reduce costs, improve performance and eliminate the losses". 100 jobs have been cut immediately, with over 2,000 jobs under threat if the pit is shut down.

All the pits in West Yorkshire are now gone. Only one pit remains in North Yorkshire — Kellingley. South Yorkshire has less than a handful of pits. How long before UK Coal becomes Britain's largest estate agent, using pit sites for housing?

EUROPEAN UNION

Congress moves

THE CONGRESS for Democracy's seventh meeting on Friday 1 March marked a turning point in Britain's struggle to oppose our entering the euro. And in a historic move, the Congress for Democracy has now become Britain's first broad-front, national organisation to work for our withdrawal from the European Union,

widening its remit to oppose the European Union's imposition on us of a new constitution and legal order.

The organisation decided by 52 votes to 39 that it should accept "New Europe" as the lead organisation in a future referendum campaign to oppose euro entry. This decision is aimed at preventing any split in the anti-euro forces — a split that the government and the European Union would undoubtedly have seized upon.

Civil service anger

A NUMBER OF DISPUTES are ongoing in the civil service, mainly about pay. Central government workers are not convinced when the government says it values them. Many openly welcomed a change of government in 1997 but now question Labour's commitment to quality public services. Concerns about pay levels, devolved negotiations and departmental funding seem more real than talk of modernising government services.

- Civil servants at the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Office are considering a three-day strike in late March, escalating their ongoing pay dispute. The workers, based in London, Wales and Scotland, have already held two one-day strikes and withdrawn goodwill. Staff rejected a pay offer that failed to give reasonable progression to the top of pay scales — and then management imposed the offer anyway. The Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS) says its members will call off industrial action if the Ombudsman's office agrees to reach a binding solution arbitrated by ACAS, the government arbitration and conciliation service.

- Meanwhile ACAS staff have just resolved their own long-running dispute. About 900 of them have been underpaid and will get an average of £6,500. Following the introduction of a new pay system in 2001, PCS launched equal pay claims going back 6 years. Members took applications to Employment Tribunals in the face of refusal by management to meet claims. Agreement was finally reached in March this year.

- The Inland Revenue is faced with disaffection among its 60,000 staff. Workers there rejected a pay offer. They too felt that the structure did not enable people to reach pay maximums soon enough. A new agreement reached in 2001 should have started to solve this, but Treasury limits forced the department to offer less than staff expected. After several votes for action and withdrawal of co-operation, management imposed the offer. PCS is maintaining an overtime ban and looking to build a campaign for a better settlement in 2002.

- Members of the two unions at English Heritage, Prospect and PCS, postponed strikes planned for mid-March over their own pay dispute. Talks continue, but action will be on again if there is no agreement by the beginning of April. A high turnout of staff voted to strike after a series of disappointing awards left pay lagging some 10% behind the mainstream civil service. Members at English Heritage are also annoyed management refused to go to arbitration after rejection of the offer. The award of 3.5% was imposed, EH claiming its financial position prohibited any further increases. Strikes will affect prominent tourist attractions, such as Stonehenge and Dover Castle.

PRIVATISATION

Danger to defence

THE DEFENCE SECRETARY, Geoff Hoon, announced the sell-off of QinetiQ, formerly the Defence Evaluation & Research Agency, on 6 March. Prospect, the union representing government scientists, warned of the danger in this step.

Although QinetiQ is said to be a public private partnership, the union fears that

the sale is set up to generate quick profits. It also believes that QinetiQ will be vulnerable to asset stripping, which would result in the break-up of important defence research projects.

The union represents 9,000 members at QinetiQ. A union spokesman said that once sold off, the government would have no control over the company's fate. "QinetiQ is an integral part of the defence capability and, as such, should remain fully owned by the government within its existing commercial framework."

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

Wednesday 1 May

London May Day March and Rally

The march will assemble in Clerkenwell Green at 12 noon and proceed to Trafalgar Square, for a rally beginning at 2.30pm. See www.glatuc.org.uk

World in Danger — End Capitalism!

Celebrate May Day with the Communist Party. Politics, food, drink and comradeship. All welcome. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube Holborn. 7.30pm.

LONDON MEETING

The capital matters

LET LONDON LIVE was the title of a public meeting organised by the CPBML in London last month. The meeting, at the Conway Hall, central London, discussed the central role that London plays in the life of Britain and of the British working class.

"To paraphrase Marx," said the speaker, "the history of London is the history of class struggle." The question for today was laid out as "Who is London run for?"

The answer, at present, is clear to anyone in Britain. But in this "totally hostile environment", workers had to take responsibility for London's future.

- The talk and discussion will form the basis of a future article in WORKERS.

HOSPITALS

Cleaning up

HOSPITALS HAVE BECOME dirtier, but even the government is not blaming the cleaners. Health minister Lord Hunt admitted last year that the move to compulsory competitive tendering in the NHS "undoubtedly reduced cleaning standards". Unison predicted this back in the 1980s. The NHS Action Plan has now allocated £30 million to improve standards immediately. Unison's ancillary and nursing sectors are working together to raise the profile of cleaning staff and their important role.

New measures to withhold payments from contractors will help, but do not go far enough. Cleaning staff, says Unison, need to be part of an integrated team. They should be trained to understand infection control procedures before working on wards. The goal is to bring cleaning staff back into the NHS team.

The government's handling of the capital's underground system Londoners aren't laughing...

Londoners unite to rebuild the Tube

WITH TRANSPORT POLICY now in such complete disarray, and rumours of splits in the Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions (DTLR) and in government, the jokes are coming thick and fast (the 'Provisional DTLR', the 'Real DTLR', 'Continuity DTLR' etc.). But for Londoners struggling to get to work by Tube, and for those who have to manage the underground system crumbling before their eyes, it is no laughing matter.

It is galling for those with superior expertise to have to watch a cabinet minister tell blatant lies to Parliament, as Stephen Byers did last month when he claimed to have made an objective comparison between the government's plans and Transport for London's bond scheme for running the Tube. Now it transpires, he never studied the alternative bond plans.

Byers may have thought there was not much point, since he was only there to be the mouthpiece for Messrs Blair and Brown. Instead, he gave figures which could not be substantiated — "an irretrievable mistake", transport commissioner Bob Kiley told campaigners, adding: "He can't go forward."

Value for money?

Indeed he can't. This was immediately recognised by the London Transport Board and London Underground, who agreed on 8 March that the government's private-public partnership (PPP) was not value for money after all. At the eleventh hour, they pulled back from the brink. No contracts with private consortia will be signed this year. If the government insists, the Select Committee says it will be failing in its "fiduciary duty". Londoners have the chance of a final appeal, and intend to make the most of it.

A referendum is being conducted jointly by the government and Transport for London (TfL) via three websites, or by filling in Freepost leaflets. Already, the response opposing the government PPP has been so overwhelming that the DTLR is reported to have withdrawn its website (missing, presumed lost, inside

www.dtlr.gov.uk). London Underground's site at www.thetube.com has highly biased alternatives — the "Yes" to PPP vote has this next to it: "London Underground says: no more delay — let's get on with fixing the Tube." TfL's own (straightforward) questions are at www.transportforlondon.gov.uk. Only 7% of Londoners appear to back the government.

The full extent of the government's lies and false promises on the Underground will not be known so long as they continue to refuse disclosure. But we don't need the final details to see that their 'negotiations' with private bidders amount to a complete sell-off of public assets, with guaranteed profits on an unprecedented scale, in exchange for a 5% reduction in standards.

The cost of contractors

To pay contractors £1 billion a year for 30 years — far more than was included in the government's spending assessments — capital renewal has been reduced to the minimum, and only applies for 7.5 years. Nothing at all is guaranteed after that.

The government promised their PPP would "unlock" £16 billion. Consortia were to bear the cost of overruns, but a year ago this was capped at £200 million. Now, a government "comfort letter"

assures them they have only to meet £50 million of the cost risk over 7.5 years (i.e. £7 million per company per year), which means effectively that Londoners would pay for all the work through fares and taxes. So risk transfer no longer exists, and there is, naturally, no cap on profits.

In 1999 the government promised £4.5 billion savings through PPP. These figures were disputed by accountants Ernst & Young (themselves costing the taxpayer £1m a week). In reality, public costs have risen by £2.5 billion since bidders were selected. This now works out at a cost — not a saving — of £5 billion.

Mick Rix of the rail union ASLEF told delegates to the south east region of the TUC that the PPP was causing problems right now, under the shadow infrastructure companies (infracos). The buck was passed from one department to another, until a new doorway, for example, cost £3,000. There was further huge wastage on accountants and lawyers.

It is not simply a question of cost. The state of the Underground is now critical. It is deteriorating at an accelerating rate. The track is the worst aspect; it is constantly moving because of water. Only 20% of rolling stock is in reasonable condition. Signal failures cause frequent delays. And overcrowding makes getting to work a nightmare. But the government has opted for a patch-up job, rather than be forward-looking and risk discouraging the private sector.

Under the PPP, the government promised "in the first five years we will see another 500 new or refurbished carriages, with a massive 3,000 (70% of the whole fleet) over 15 years". In reality, the contracts stipulate only 12 refurbished trains by 2008, and on the District Line only. They also permit companies to exclude 40% of a total of around 380 old trains from inspection. They will, of course, exclude the worst and at the same time use obscure algebraic formulae to replace human eyesight and plain common sense as a means of assessing cleanliness — another way of avoiding



'The PPP contracts stand at 135 documents and over two million words'

may be a joke, but

public scrutiny!

The government promised a “20% increase in capacity on the Victoria Line”. In reality, it has made concessions on waiting-time benchmarks — resulting in an increased wait on the Victoria, Bakerloo, and Northern (sub-surface) lines of over 2 minutes, and by over 3 minutes on three other lines.

Originally, 9 out of 12 lines were due for an upgrade. Now, only the Jubilee line



‘The Infracos will still be paid even if Tube services fall 5% below today’s levels’

will benefit; 85% of passengers will see no improvement whatever in the first 7.5 years. The first phase of the Victoria line has been put off till 2011, with a second phase by...2031. Overall, as the guarantees of profits to the infracos show, only a 1% increase in capacity over 7 to 15 years is envisaged.

Upgrades to stations have been reduced from 221 to 89 — and that will mean just a lick of paint, not improved access. The Northern Line (‘misery line’) signalling upgrade has been delayed till 2010, affecting 2 million passengers.

Questioned about safety, Byers told Parliament there was “a double lock on safety”, referring to the Health & Safety Executive and the infracos’ own Safety Cases. But the HSE has reported 52 causes of concern still outstanding under the shadow infracos.



Despite repeated requests, the PPP Safety Case has failed to prove Tube safety corresponds to contractual agreements. The greatest threat to safety remains — the split between operations and maintenance, the break in the chain of command — exactly that which caused the Hatfield disaster.

The government says this is not privatisation. They are lying. PPP transfers all infrastructure to private ownership — buildings by long-term lease, moveable assets (including the trains) by outright title. They will never give them back. PFI jargon obscures what is really at stake.

The PPP provides for no rights of variation or termination of contracts. Even if a crisis were precipitated, requiring transfer to another company, arbitration would drag on for years, till all the most highly skilled section of the workforce had seeped away. The Tube would be in the hands of companies such as Tubelines, and Metronet, ‘paper companies’ with no reserves of in-house talent. Chief engineers already drifted away from these companies to Railtrack. But unlike Railtrack, they could not be taken back into administration.

And all this time, they would continue clawing in profits, draining resources from other transport projects, including buses and traffic schemes. They would make the difficulties over Railtrack look like child’s play.

In spite of all evidence, the government continues to re-iterate, like a stuck record, “there is no alternative to the PPP. To drop plans now would mean delay and increased costs”. But Transport for London says it is ready for work now. Bob Kiley, London’s transport commissioner under Livingstone, paid tribute to the maintenance that is already being carried out, and promised it would be kept in-house, eg. at the Northern Line depot. It would not enter the calculations of the bond scheme.

Kiley’s team from New York, already in London, say four City banks have committed up to £4 billion over 7.5 years, in tranches, and Londoners will be able to say how their money is invested “month-by-month, line-by-line, and station-by-station”. This way, safety would be put before profits, with a saving to the government of up to £900 million.

New York

Track can be immediately replaced and enhanced. In New York, the entire fleet of old trains was replaced or refurbished in 7 years. TFL promises renewal by 2009, compared with the government’s 2019-2031, if ever. In New York, reliability improved by 300% in 7 years.

These are the hard-nosed facts that have persuaded Londoners to reject the government scheme — not zealous ideological opposition to the use of all private capital. There always was going to be an element of private money involved, since most of the wealth workers create is filched from them anyway. So if it will help unlock horns, why not call this the alternative PPP?

There are tiny indications of progress. TFL has won access to discussions between the DTLR and London Underground on its grant for the next 3 years — something that was denied before, in spite of TFL’s responsibilities. But the Treasury has consistently refused talks.

The government is divided and exposed. That gives Londoners a chance to convince ministers there is a better way to go than the risk regime they have embarked on. Even MPs might be useful — they asserted themselves to save Gwynneth Dunwoody, and her all-party transport committee went on the offensive three times in four months, with no abstentions. Not that it should be left to parliament of course. Transport is part of a deliberate attack on public services. Only workers can win that war.

Despite widespread opposition, the government is ploughing ahead with plans for more ‘faith’ schools...

Is it off to school, or off to church?

IN SPITE OF widespread opposition from educationists, local authorities and from within the Labour Party itself, the government has pushed its “faith schools” policy through the Commons. The setting up of new religious state schools is to be actively encouraged by government, and workers in this most secular of societies are to pay for them through taxation.

Ministers under pressure have defended the policy by saying that the new religious schools should be “inclusive” and work with neighbouring schools. This pious sentiment is being derided by opponents of religious schools, but is also disproved by the policies of the schools themselves.

In fact government policy has made religious schools more exclusive. The traditional C of E school has usually accepted children from the surrounding catchment like any other school — often it was the only available school in an area. Its schools have tended to operate a fairly hands-off approach to religion. However, with increasing parental “choice” and selectivity, church schools have become more exclusive, often demanding proof of church attendance by two parents for the child to qualify for a place.

Also Labour policy has been to give state funding to a wider range of religious schools. According to DfES figures, there are 40 non-Christian state schools, 32 of them Jewish — and the new trend is to give public funding to schools with a

strict religious curriculum which all pupils must adhere to — whether Jewish, Muslim or evangelical Christian. The new minority religious schools are being set up precisely to stiffen up a particular type of religious practice in the young, so “inclusivity” is the last thing they want or will offer. It is this trend which Blair’s government is actively promoting.

Constraints

The earliest schools in England were religious, and by the late 19th century the church provided virtually all education. Philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham called for a separation of education from the constraints of religion: science and philosophy required intellectual freedom in order to flourish.

Rapid expansion of education at this time meant the church had to seek public funds, but this was always controversial. Huge growth in non-religious schools changed the balance, but today still a quarter of primaries and one in twenty secondaries are church schools. The churches’ financial contribution is being cut to 10% — workers will stump up the remaining 90%.

In all this debate, it is easy to forget that the British are one of the most irreligious nations in the world. Half the population claims to have no religion, a third actively reject the notion of any supernatural power. Less than a tenth are actively religious. The Church of England itself has been civilised by the working class into being hardly like a church at all

‘In all this debate, it is easy to forget that the British are one of the most irreligious nations in the world...’

(many parents, when asked their religion, say C of E, when they actually mean they don’t have one).

This dominant materialist, rational culture is catching — the children of immigrant families have tended to be much less strictly religious than their parents — hence the desire of the older generation to force their own beliefs on the younger. Talk of “promoting our culture and traditions” becomes a backward-looking attempt to prevent the young from becoming part of working class society in Britain.

Although the new state religious schools have to follow the national curriculum, strict religious observance is often required of all pupils. The freedom of thought and intellectual enquiry, which should be at the heart of education, is likely to figure low on the list of priorities, if at all. For instance, the Islamia primary school in Brent, north London, states its aim to be “to provide the best education, in a secure Islamic environment, through the knowledge and application of the Qur’an and Sunnah”.

If anyone doubts the effect on what is taught as a whole, they should look at religious schools in the US, where reactionary nonsense such as “creation science” is taught as part of the core curriculum (and in Britain: see Box, p 10).

Many bad Labour policies have their origin in aping the worst of the US, and this is no exception. The term “faith schools” comes from there — “faith” sounds so much more wishy-washy and less dangerous than “religious”, even though the schools resulting from the policy are increasingly fundamentalist in ideology.

Exclusivity rules

AL-HIJRAH IS a Muslim secondary school, private at present but due to receive funding from Birmingham council from April. Al-Hijrah started life as a mosque school with 12 pupils in 1988. The present intake of 185 is predicted to grow quickly with state funding, taking Muslim pupils away from surrounding comprehensive schools where at present they mix with children from various backgrounds. The curriculum includes prayer breaks and instruction in Islam, and trips are organised to Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Girls wear white headscarves, and are kept entirely separate from boys, including at break times. As the head teacher has pointed out, the idea that Al-Hijrah should take non-Muslim pupils is ludicrous.

Faith is, by its nature, beyond reason, irrational. If a school is not a place where teachers teach children to become rational beings who use reason as a tool to solve problems, what is it? A faith school, a contradiction in terms.

Interviewed on BBC RADIO 4 in December, the Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey spoke out strongly in favour of "faith schools" which include "other faith-based children", whoever they might be.

Various religious groups in Britain are now keen to get their slice of government cash, especially those which already run private schools. In March, the government approved a £121 million plan for 44 new religious schools, including a £12 million Islamic girls' secondary school in Birmingham, an evangelical Christian school in Leeds, and a new Jewish school in London. The Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventists are looking at "opportunities created by the White Paper". Every crackpot "religion" from the harmless lunatics to the mad and dangerous can seek workers' money to further their cause.

Splitting communities

Along with the attempt to stifle rational thought goes a dangerous trend to split communities along religious lines. The John Loughborough secondary in Haringey, London, a Seventh-Day Adventist school, takes almost exclusively black children with African or Caribbean parentage. Their approval for state funding was welcomed by MP Bernie Grant in the name of parental choice (a Thatcherite concept) and anti-discrimination (THE GUARDIAN, 10 March 1998).

The interests of the children, and of society as a whole, do not seem to be high on the agenda. If you separate children out along religious and ethnic lines, prejudice and discrimination will inevitably increase. In northern Ireland, children walking to the Holy Cross infant school through lines of adults screaming abuse at them might question how adults are serving the cause of ending

Continued on page 10



Church and school: with education virtually the only institutionalised authority the churches have, they are desperate to hold on to it.

One church school's idea of science

AT STATE-FUNDED Emmanuel City College in Gateshead, creationism — a literal interpretation of the Old Testament — is taught in science lessons. According to principal Nigel McQuoid, creationism and evolutionary theory are “both faith positions”. Hence the scientific method which produced evolutionary theory and indeed all scientific theory is equated with religion.

Leading British scientists including Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics at University College London, and Richard Dawkins, Professor of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, have written to Ofsted asking for an urgent re-inspection of Emmanuel's science department. Challenged in the Commons whether he defended Emmanuel's science teaching, Blair said that the school was getting good results and he welcomed diversity in education. The government has designated Emmanuel a “beacon” school.

Continued from page 9

discrimination, although scenes like these have not as yet been witnessed in this country. Parents in northern Ireland who want to put their children in non-religious schools have almost no choice at all.

Religious fundamentalism of any kind is highly dangerous, as the terrorist attacks of 11 September showed. We now know that there are in the world religious fanatics who want to see a return to feudalism and are prepared to kill workers in huge numbers. We have also discovered that Britain produced some of these terrorists and provided a home for others, that their ideology has been actively promoted here and that money

has been collected here by so-called “faith-based charities” to fund their activities. Irrationality coupled with fundamentalism leads to fanaticism in any religion. Even Pakistan, where a number of “madrassahs” — religious schools — have turned out to be training schools for terrorists, has announced its intention to cease state funding.

Opposition to “faith schools” in Britain has been loud and widespread. Trade union concerns were backed up last November, when a poll in *THE OBSERVER* showed that 80% opposed the extension of single religion schools, more than opposed the Poll Tax. The Local Government Association, which represents education authorities in England and

Wales, sees the move as anti-democratic — an “indication of central dictation of local education provision” — and divisive. Phil Willis, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, has called the policy “educational apartheid”.

In December, several reports on the Oldham, Burnley and Bradford riots warned of the dangers, in areas where people tend to divide along ethnic lines, of policies which promote segregation in schools, either by religious admissions policies or in the creation of new religious schools. Where unemployed adults no longer mix at work and children meet only their own kind at school, workers can fall into the trap of turning against each other instead of uniting to solve their problems.

Opposition from within

Blair has opposition from within his own party as well as outside. In January, *TRIBUNE* published an article by Ashok Kumar, Labour MP for Middlesbrough South and Cleveland East, calling on ministers to heed the pioneers of state education 150 years ago by rejecting the attempts by religious institutions to impose “narrow dogmatism” on the young. Labour peer Lord Ali has spoken out against the policy, and in February ex-minister Frank Dobson was quoted in *THE GUARDIAN* saying, “This is an issue of principle. People use public money and exclude children on the grounds of their religion. If somebody suggested they were going to do it on race everybody would be outraged.” In some areas of Britain it amounts to the same thing.

This dangerous, reactionary, anti-working class policy looks increasingly like the pious Blair's personal crusade. Education Minister Estelle Morris has been lukewarm at best, although she has defended the policy publicly. True to present form, Blair's government is set to ignore the overwhelming opposition from workers, politicians, and professionals.

Schools are not responsible for society's ills, whether they are divisions between workers, sectarianism, narrow-mindedness or reaction. But they should not be allowed to add to these problems.

Are they any better?

THE PERCEPTION that religious schools get better results than non-religious schools is unproven, although a quick look at the league tables may appear to back it up. In fact the league table results are influenced by increasing selectivity in the schools “market place” brought about by “parental choice”. A myth for most, parental choice means that children with the most difficulties usually end up in the least sought-after schools, and screens them out of religious schools. A report into religious schools by the Institute for the Study of Civil Society (Civitas) concluded from DfES data that “there is an enormous and unacceptable variation in standards between schools across Britain that was as marked in church schools as it was in local authority schools”.

Backed by the Tories, boosted by Blair and fuelled by some in the media, the anti-vaccination lobby is threatening our children's health — indeed their very lives

To jab, or not to jab?

A STUDY PUBLISHED last month in the *British Medical Journal* shows that the proportion of autistic children with developmental regression or bowel problems did not change between 1979 and 1998; ten years either side of the introduction of measles, mumps and rubella combined vaccine (MMR), into the childhood immunisation programme.

This analysis is yet another that contradicts the findings of Andrew Wakefield and others; formerly of the Royal Free Hospital, and now working at the International Child Development Centre in Florida. They have asserted that the measles virus, and to a lesser extent, vaccines that contain measles, can cause acute and delayed events in the brain.

Four years ago, Wakefield said that the three vaccines should be given separately, at one-year intervals, though he offered little in the way of justification. But a media scare ensued, similar to the one over pertussis vaccination in the 1970s, when a whooping cough outbreak resulted in unnecessary suffering and deaths because concerned parents became equivocal about safety.

Court case

Those with autistic children now have been particularly sensitised to the possibility that the condition may have been brought on by the MMR jab. The Justice, Awareness and Basic Support (JABS) network has been established, and about 1000 parents have joined a court case against the manufacturers, scheduled to be heard in October 2003. Meanwhile MMR uptake is now 84.5% and falling with a measles epidemic threatening.

Wild measles virus does cause delayed encephalitis, but the evidence is that MMR actually protects against it; with the number of associated deaths falling significantly, particularly in those aged 20 and under. Although MMR was introduced into the childhood immunisation programme in 1988 it has been available in Britain since 1972, and in the US since 1971. A number of authoritative studies clearly indicate that

the risk of adverse events from the MMR vaccine is no higher than if the component vaccines are given one by one.

Since initial licensing of MMR, safety has been confirmed by detailed studies over 30 years, through systems analogous to the Committee on Safety of Medicines' "Yellow Card" voluntary reporting system. Some 250 million doses have been issued in 40 countries across Europe, North America and Australasia. Mandatory review of the licence, on a regular basis, over this period, has confirmed its safety. In particular there has been no demonstrable association between MMR and bowel disease or autism.

International

One month after Wakefield's original publication, the Medical Research Council consulted 30 international experts who confirmed the lack of evidence that bowel disease and autism were causally associated with MMR. The Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Medicines Control Agency Joint Committee on Vaccination, the Medical Research Council's Immunisation Working Group, the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and the World Health Organisation all endorse the safety record of the combined vaccine.

The Institute for Infectious Disease Control in Stockholm describes the current UK debate as hysterical. The American Academy of Paediatrics says that there is no scientific reason for, or benefit to, separate vaccine usage.

So the government is right to reject calls for single vaccines to be made available in response to parental and public pressure. Delays of one year between administration of each of the components could lead to non-compliance, a resurgence of the congenital rubella syndrome in pregnant women and an increased incidence of measles.

Measles kills one in 8,000 people that

contract it. Before 1988 an average of 10 to 15 deaths were recorded each year in England and Wales, with 30 children dying in high measles years. With the introduction of MMR, death rates fell to between one and two a year. The last child to die of measles in Britain was a two-year-old in 1992.

In the year MMR was introduced 16 people died of measles in England and Wales. One in 1,000 children affected developed inflammation of the brain or acute encephalitis. A quarter of these were left brain damaged. The most severe complication is sub-acute sclerosing pan-encephalomyelitis, which can occur years after infection but is thankfully rare, with an incidence of one in 100,000. Measles contracted in pregnancy can result in loss of a baby or premature birth.

The Chief Medical Officer for England has launched a £3 million publicity campaign to promote the use of MMR. Every trade union branch should take this up. It will be comprised of television advertising, videos and leaflets. Top-level summits will be held to inform doctors and nurses and to ensure that they address the issue of public anxiety by reference to authoritative research.

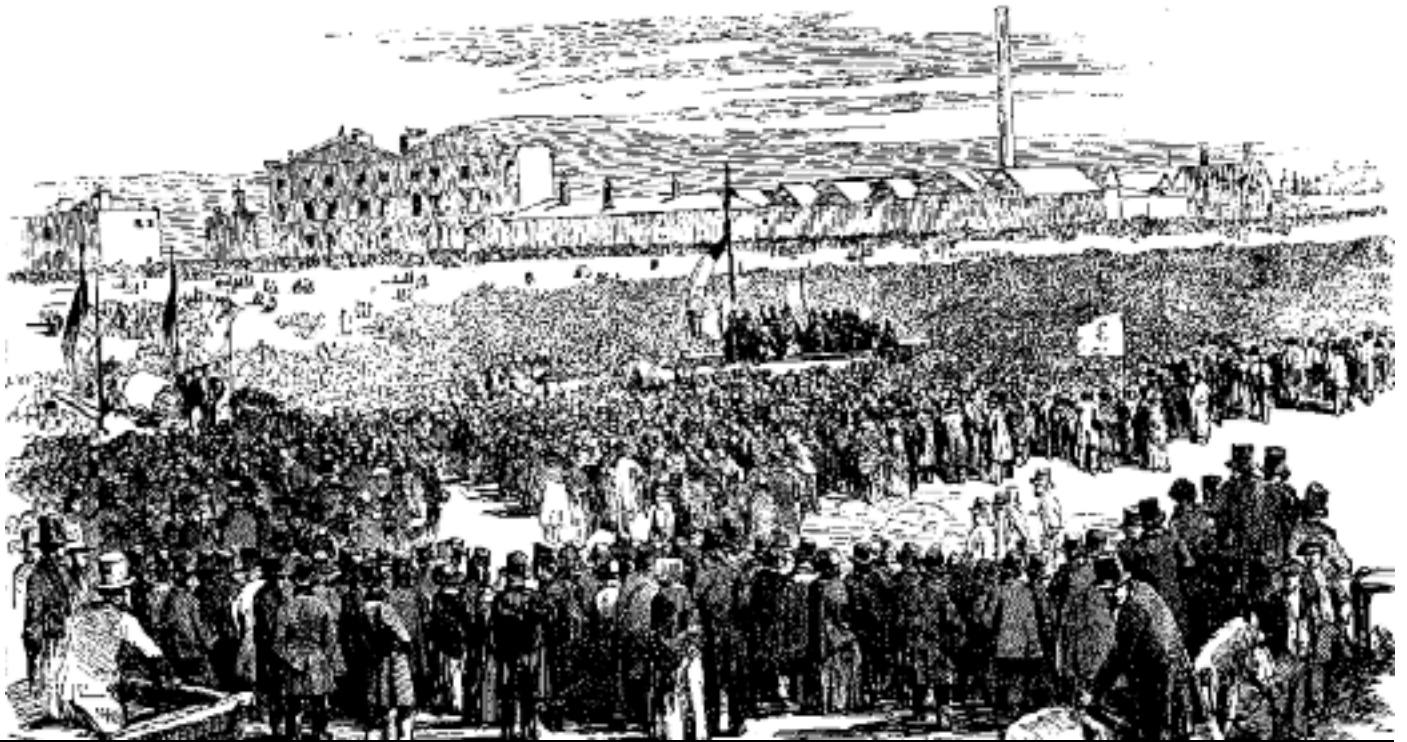
To protect the population as a whole the highest possible level of vaccination rate must be re-established. Current uptake is 84.5% and falling.

Blair's refusal to say clearly that his son had had the MMR vaccine only fuelled public worries about safety. This is not a privacy issue, but a public health issue — but then, no one can expect Blair to recognise anything with the word "public" in it.

To see what can happen when the scares deter parents, look at Ireland, where the Eastern Health Board in Dublin has seen uptake rates fall to 74%. This has resulted in 1,500 cases of measles: 200 children hospitalised, some suffering from inflammation of the brain. Two have died, and many will be left with long-standing disabilities. These are the dangers of reducing compliance with a childhood immunisation programme on the basis of unsubstantiated hypotheses.

The idea that we have to live with capitalism has powerful roots we look at the nineteenth-century origins of working class thought

Living with the enemy



Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common, 1848 (when police banned the proposed march to Whitehall, they dispersed quietly).

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC and revolutionary outlooks are different in all respects. The way they look at the existing world and the philosophy they use to transform it are totally at odds. It is not a simple question of the speed of change; it is the nature of change that is important.

At the heart of social democracy is a way of thinking called 'empiricism'. This means finding immediate solutions to immediate problems and seeing each problem in isolation from the rest. The material root of these ideas lies in the pressure of day-to-day survival under capitalism.

Can it be changed?

To someone who sees the world in an empirical way our present system has existed and will exist for all eternity; it cannot be changed; it can only be modified. Empirical thinking is characteristic of a class 'in itself, a class battling only to survive whatever the context. In this sense it is immature thinking. Mature thinking which is

characteristic of a class 'for itself' is called 'dialectical materialist.' With this kind of thinking the working class sees the complex interconnections all around itself and within itself and takes its destiny into its own hands.

The Party, which has as its only purpose the interest of the working class as a whole, assists the working class in achieving political supremacy by ensuring that its ideology relates all problems to each other to present a coherent overview, rather than a narrow view. The Party has to be based on a 'dialectical materialist' way of analysing the world. This means understanding that ideas come from the material world, that everything has its opposite and that to move forward the contradictions between them have to be resolved. Purposefully directed theory combines practice-theory-practice, thought and action, in all its members, testing all theories in practice. There is no sense in a Party composed of some who are 'thinkers' and some who 'do'. All members must do both.

Karl Marx brought together much of the best socialist thinking that already existed in and prior to his time, he concentrated and analysed it and proved it was viable. He analysed a system, a historical epoch, and his analysis of the laws of capitalism are as relevant today as 150 years ago, although the outward forms of the system have changed beyond all recognition. Marx's achievement was to digest and expand the thought of the working class, to show that its ideology was the heir to progressive thought and action throughout the ages of history.

As the capitalist system develops, human skills, our most precious heritage of all, are cheapened and then denied. Although the bourgeoisie say: "There is no need to think: we'll do that for you, or our computer will", the truth is that all labour depends on hand and brain. You cannot have mental labour without manual labour and all the best ways of thinking have come from the struggle of workers.

The Party must preserve our intellectual birthright, must act as

s. In this, the second of a three part series, ght...

custodian of the old as well as create the new. It is as much the suffering of our grandparents as the liberated prospects of our grandchildren that should motivate us. It is workers after all who fathom the origins of the universe, the tolerance of metals, the side effects of highly targeted drugs, the best way to print books that other workers have written, how to chart the seas and engineer and fly the planes.

Two lines

From the very earliest times the two lines of thinking — social-democracy and Marxism — have co-existed within the mind of the working class, indeed within the mind of every individual worker. You cannot divide workers into right wing and left wing, moderate and militant. Sometimes the most advanced can be the most backward and the most backward the most advanced.

If workers have chosen a gradual reformist approach, preferring the employers to be in political control, where has this popular but odd idea come from?

There have been three distinct stages in the history of the British working class. A stage at which our class was gathering strength in terms of numbers, ideas, and organisation when it fought for survival. A stage at which the great strength it had gained in its fight for survival should have been deployed actually to take over from its exploiters. And a stage now when the refusal to take over in the second stage has led to a rolling back of the gains previously made in the first two stages.

The error of social democracy is that at the second stage, when it was possible to move to a socialist society, it continued to limit the struggle to a patching up of capitalism. The fight for reforms was converted into the ‘theory’ of gradualism. Socialism was corrupted into a legislative programme for a Labour government.

During the revolution that brought the bourgeois class to power in the mid-17th century in England, the class of artisans and small tradesmen put forward democratic demands for manhood suffrage, law reform and religious toleration. In the context of the time, these were revolutionary demands, which the new ruling class of gentry and merchants could not fulfil without giving up their class dictatorship.

These and other radical ideas lived on as an underground current, especially among the London skilled trades. Weavers and tailors handed on the revolutionary tradition through the Jacobin Movement of the 1790s to the new industrial working class born in the Industrial Revolution. They also handed on a tradition of vigilance against reformist turnabouts, timeservers and smooth talkers and a hatred of tyrants and rulers. A powerful revolutionary root has long existed in Britain and indeed is distinctive to our cultural history.

By the time of the Industrial Revolution the working class already had a long tradition of struggle. The clearest thinkers among them did not believe the fight over wages and conditions was the be all and end all of their strikes and riots. They understood that the interests of the employers and workers were antagonistic. They knew that all of the mill owners’ profits were due to the exploitation of their labour power and they also saw through the attempt to disarm them from within with bourgeois thinking.

Missed opportunity

By the early 1830s, when the opportunity came to strike against rampant capitalism, the urban working class could not rise above uncoordinated acts of violence and the agricultural labourers pursued their own separate revolt. This is not to discredit what they did, but simply to emphasise the truth of a potentially revolutionary movement thrashing about in gloom, unlit by revolutionary theory and analysis.

It is not surprising that social democracy during the Industrial Revolution aimed to get rid of the most glaring evils of the factory system, Combination Acts, repressive laws etc. The Radical MPs at Westminster, who claimed to represent working class interests, saw their task as curbing the working class movement into respectable channels. One of them, Major Cartwright, said that Luddism was evil and futile: “It is not by an invasion [of property] that the condition of the poor is to be amended, but by equal laws.” The view, or hope, that if we leave the capitalists alone, they will leave us alone, has prevailed within the Labour Party ever since.

Cartwright toured Luddite areas, trying to persuade the underground trade unionists to give up their secret organisations and illegal activity and instead try to influence parliament by legal means. Peaceful petitioning, reliance on parliament, obtaining social justice through reformist legislation, the evil of independent working class action — these are the hallmarks of British social democracy from Cartwright in 1816 to relying on the prospect of a Labour government to patch up capitalism today.

Chartist struggles

After the 1832 Reform Act, the struggle between the social democratic and revolutionary lines became clearer cut. In the Chartist movement William Lovett put the reformist line — rely on peaceful petitioning of parliament, on gradual persuasion and education of the ruling class so that they will eventually accept the justice of the workers’ demands. Ernest Jones, the friend of Marx, put the revolutionary line — reject reliance on constitutional methods and “prepare for revolution”.

Despite insurrectionary outbursts like the Newport Rising, being torn between the two directions of reform and revolution paralysed the movement. The Government, with a much clearer class-consciousness, shot insurrectionists down and met the petitions with cavalry charges. The Chartist leaders, despite Jones’ criticism, concentrated on immediate demands, with no overall strategic direction.

The working class failed to learn the lessons of Chartism’s defeat. After 1850 the New Model Unions rectified the organisational defects that had made the working class movement open to attack, but they restricted political activity to lobbying Parliament for reforms. As the new strong unions gave workers some success in managing, by struggle, to survive under capitalism, so politically there arose the dominance of the social democratic line that capitalism can be reformed and socialism won without revolution. As if a tiger can be skinned before killing it!

• **Next month: the series concludes with a look behind the growth of the Labour Party.**

Originating across the Atlantic, the fallacy of 'race' has seeped into labour movement thinking...

Race and class

In a new feature, *Life and Soul* will occasionally look back at a work of literature that has changed working class understanding — or has the potential to change it. This month we look at Kalbir Shukra's *THE CHANGING PATTERN OF BLACK POLITICS IN BRITAIN*, published in 1998*.

In her book, Shukra looks at the history of anti-racist and black organisations in Britain between 1955 and 1967, considering 'Black' consciousness in the USA and its impact here. She looks at 'ethnic pluralism and black perspectives' and the origin of certain concepts of black organisation, then considers the history of black organisation in the Labour Party and key concepts of 'race', class and social change.

From her succinct survey of history she draws some conclusions for building more effective anti-racist movements in the 21st century and greater class consciousness rather than separatist identity politics.

Trade unions

The one weakness in this history is Shukra's analysis of the trade unions and anti-racism. Here, in general, she overstates the historic problems and underestimates the successful and important work undertaken by trade unions in recent history, in particular, and of leading black members throughout the trade union movement.

This weakness aside, the book shows how a racist thought — that someone is

different because of a superficial characteristic of the genes — underpins black organisations as much as those they oppose. Throughout her study Shukra is drawn to conclude that theories and organisations that emphasise difference actually perpetuate many of the deep-seated problems of community relations.

Critical

Shukra is critical of the way in which the challenge of understanding racism has been substituted by a preoccupation with the distinctive way of life of self-defined identity movements, cultural or ethnic groups. She shows how certain ideological trends, for example at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at



World in danger End capitalism

Public meeting

May Day is international workers day — our working-class coming together of globalisation in solidarity for peace against war, for plenty not poverty, for production not famine, for literacy not ignorance, for life not death.

May Day and solidarity must give voice to the hopes and aspirations of millions of people that there is a future.

Join with the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) to celebrate May Day and build that solidarity on 1 May 2002.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 — nearest tube Holborn. 7.30pm start.

All welcome

May Day

01.05.2002

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

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

Warwick University, reinforced "the differentiation of communities on the basis of the idea that culture separates ethnic groups, thereby replacing the notion prevalent up to the post-war period that biology differentiates people in the form of 'races'."

Separation

Shukra adds: "Whether separation is understood to be by culture or biology, the acceptance of inherited differences reinforces mythical racialised ideologies."

In general, Shukra concludes that the emphasis on difference not only got in the way of building an integrated labour and social movement but also affected political objectives.

Wider struggles

The book constantly encourages us to recognise that there have been many missed opportunities within labour movement history for emphasising unity of purpose instead of allowing divisions to be reinforced by divided forms of organisation. Trade union organisation, for instance, has suffered from falsely separating out the interests of black and white workers.

The so-called black perspective and black consciousness is limited: "They are limited in the sense that they represent only an understanding developed by a particular social group about itself in relation to the wider social and political economy and do not offer a holistic, liberatory vision of how the immediate interests of every group might be integrated." Needless to say, it is to this wider vision that her proposals for a new agenda relate.

If you want to read more, take a look at A. Montague's *MAN'S GREATEST MYTH, THE FALLACY OF RACE*, and Alain Finkelkraut's *THE UNDOING OF THOUGHT*.

*Pluto Press, ISBN 0 7453 1460 0, pp144

Who are we?

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

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

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

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

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

How to get in touch

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

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

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

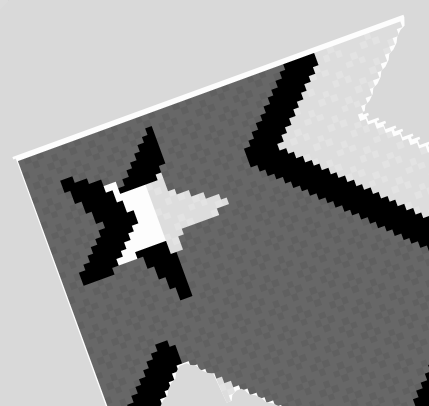
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Back to Front – Return to colonialism

“Zimbabwe is not Blair’s business. Neither is it the business of Bush, who is in no position to judge anybody’s elections...: it is only the business of the people of Zimbabwe”

BLAIR’S ADMIRATION for Thatcher is well known. And he certainly likes to follow where she leads. Thatcher threatened Africa’s nations that if they did not do as they are told, they would lose aid from the West. Now Blair does the same.

In 1985, Thatcher issued a communiqué denouncing the Commonwealth’s agreement to call for sanctions on South Africa. Blair, after the Commonwealth Conference in March, issued his own communiqué denouncing its agreement not to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe.

Blair, like Thatcher, opposes Zimbabwe’s government because it is fighting to free Zimbabwe’s land from the landowners and give it to the people. This is why Blair denounces the election, and why Western agents call for a revolt against the government.

Zimbabwe is not Blair’s business. Neither is it the business of Bush, who is in no position to judge anybody’s elections given the dubiousness of his own: it is only the business of the people of Zimbabwe.

Traditionally, our rulers have claimed that British foreign policy is based on a refusal to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. (Although they did not adhere to this

good principle.)

Now we have a government that does not respect national sovereignty anywhere. As a matter of principle, it favours other countries perpetually interfering in our internal affairs and so it wants the European Union to run things. And as a matter of principle, it favours perpetual interference in the internal affairs of other countries, fomenting crises and involving us in war after war. Those who deny sovereignty betray their own country and expose their aggressive designs.

How can we express our opinion about all this? Blair was forced to promise us a referendum on the euro, but now seems scared to call it. How about having a referendum on Blair’s next proposed war, on Iraq? There’s enough time to organise one because there is no immediate danger to us or anyone else. Nobody is claiming that Iraq is about to attack anybody, and the Whitehall and Washington scaremongers admit it might be five years before Iraq has even what they call a crude nuclear device.

Of course, it would be far better if workers were actually running things, rather than commenting from outside on how badly our rulers are doing, but for now, for a start, let us get together to say what we think.

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