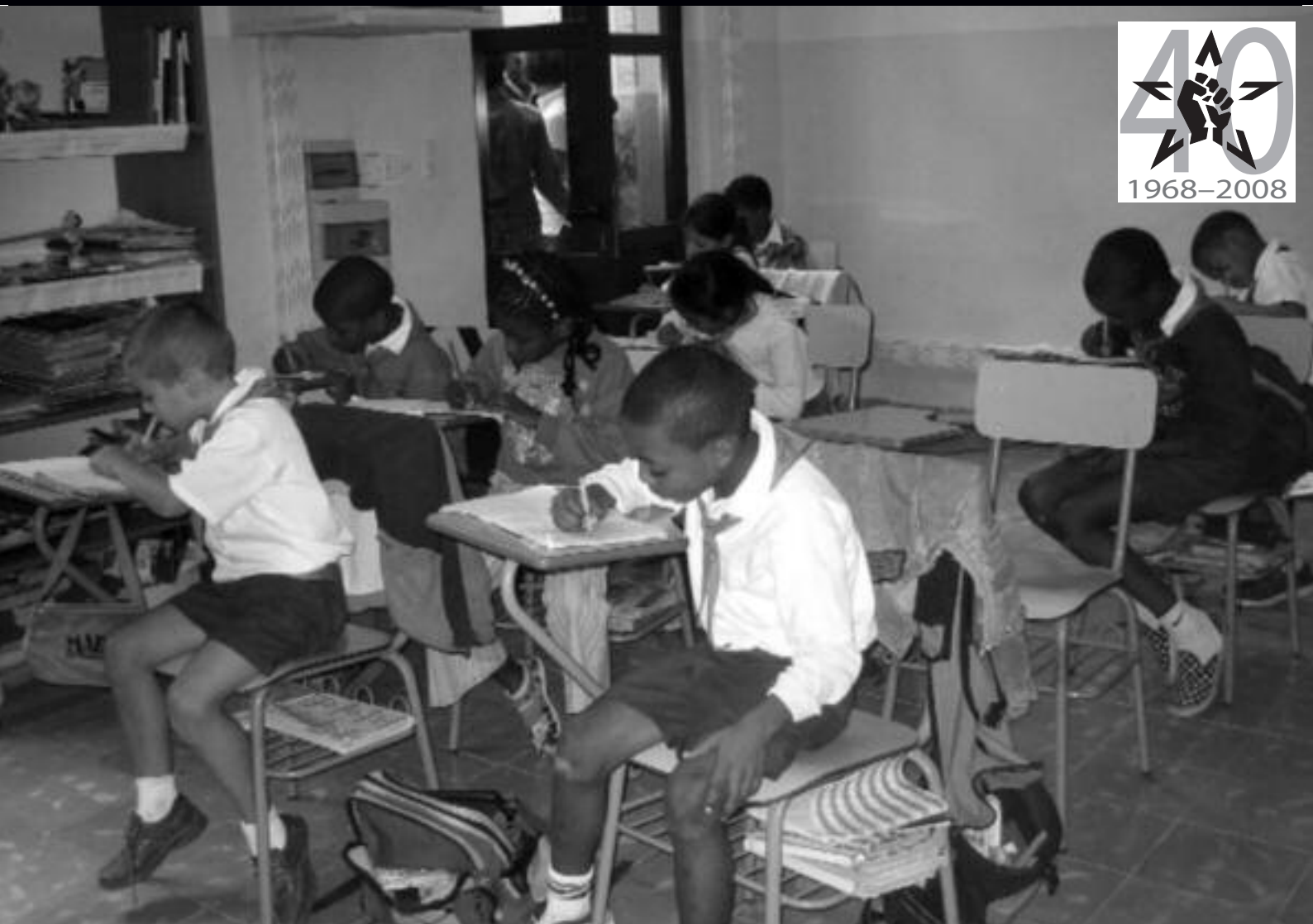


WORKERS

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AFTER CASTRO: CUBA'S FUTURE



Revolt over post office closures

04



Progress in the NHS: it's up to us

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WORKERS

How are the mighty fallen

EVERYWHERE YOU look, the triumphant march of capitalism seems to be in some difficulty. Far from being clever and innately superior to any other form of social organisation, its “success” rests on a foundation of debt. This they call wealth creation.

Now the chickens are coming home to roost, and pecking well deserved holes in Labour’s reputation for “prudence”. They have borrowed and borrowed, and bet on nothing more than a feeling of confidence. What we have ended up with looks remarkably like the stagflation of the 1970s: producer and consumer prices are pushing up, but no one can pay them.

Basic industries are the first under pressure, and many will fold as investment

falls away and the cheap money bubble bursts. Brown and Darling have nothing left to bargain with: they’ve blown it all. With PFI/PPP deals Brown has mortgaged the house many times over without anything to show for it. He sold off half of Britain’s gold reserves for a third of the price they would fetch now. As always, the workers will pay, and as we have come to expect with Labour, and the Tories before them, the poorer you are, the more you’ll have to pay.

The Budget did no more than confirm that the government believes that something will turn up. Its faith in the market is akin to a child’s in Father Christmas. The difference is that Labour’s belief has real consequences for Britain and all who live in it.

The archbishop, the PM, and Lisbon

THE MUSINGS of the Archbishop of Canterbury on “Sharia” law have thrown up some unintended consequences.

Apart from a few who rushed to support, and more who wished to rephrase the clueless Dr Williams, most politicians and commentators were quick to distance themselves from his remarks.

But Gordon Brown, while insisting that “British law must be based on British values”, is the self-same Gordon Brown who signed a treaty in Lisbon

increasing the precedence of EU over British law. The argument is not, at its essence, about the undoubted savagery and backwardness of Sharia law and custom. It about is whether the nation state has the right to make and enforce its own laws.

Ceding those rights to an alien body is precisely what Williams was calling for and precisely what Brown, Blair, Thatcher and all the rest have agreed to whenever a new EU treaty has been signed over the past 30 years.



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**IMPERIALISM**

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The latest from Brussels

Panic over opposition to wars

IN BOTH IRAQ and Afghanistan, the occupying force's position is desperate. Both wars are unjust and unwinnable, wars of choice not necessity – and bad choices at that, wars of aggression, unwise, reckless and brutal.

The Bush and Brown governments lack international support. The USAF and RAF conduct ever more air strikes, unmentioned in the major newspapers, unshown on TV. The insurgency continues, fuelled by US and British abuses. The US state sets conditions of peace and security for exit, in order to block an exit. The American and British dead die in vain.

Just as Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon did, Bush and Brown talk of unwavering resolve and commitment, and lie with unwavering conviction that the wars are in US and British interests, that they are just wars and that the public support them. Yet increasingly the American and British peoples oppose the wars. BBC news programmes talk of events possibly undermining support for the wars, as if large majorities of us had not opposed the wars for years.

The occupations are unmitigated disasters. They have cost the USA's taxpayers possibly \$2.6 trillion. Their costs to British taxpayers are to almost double this year to £3.297 billion – 94% up on last year. Spending on Iraq will rise by 72% to £1.648 billion, and spending on the Afghan conflict will rise by 122% to £1.649 billion.

In Britain, the government is panicking because it has no public support for its wars. Recruitment to the armed forces is down, their morale is low, suicides are up, and equipment is inadequate. Hence their calls for respect for the armed forces, the promotion of uniform wearing, the proposed oath of allegiance for school leavers, and the proposal for an Armed Forces Day.

We can all see that the wars are boosting terrorism, not defeating it. The root causes of terrorism are social, political and economic, and the Brown government's support for the Israeli-US military suppression of the Palestinian people only fuels the backward thinking of terrorists. As with Vietnam, some elements in the US and British states want to solve the problem by enlarging it – attack Iran now, as Cambodia was attacked then.

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

EU CONSTITUTION**Thousands lobby MPs**

ON WEDNESDAY 27 February, nearly 3,000 people from all parts of Britain gathered outside Parliament in an effort to persuade MPs to back a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty/EU Constitution.

Protesters held banners bearing the slogans, "Politicians: where's our referendum?", "Let the people decide" and "Politicians: keep your referendum promise". See article, page 9.

TRADE**Yet another record deficit**

Britain's trade deficit with the rest of the world was £4.1 billion in January, unchanged from December. For goods alone, the deficit – the difference between what we export and import – totalled £7.5 billion, also unchanged from the last month of 2007.

Higher raw material costs meant that import price inflation rose at its fastest rate in almost 15 years. The import price index excluding oil jumped 2.2%, the biggest rise since July 1993.

EURONOTES

The latest from Brussels

Common market – private threat

THE EUROPEAN Commission claims that health, education and social services are all internal market matters and subject to majority vote. The recent directive to “marketise” healthcare is the result. Its introduction is delayed until all EU member governments have – they hope – accepted the Lisbon Treaty. The Commission fears that the directive’s unpopularity might otherwise derail ratification.

The EU wants to make these services private. The Constitution calls them “services of general economic interest” and not “public services”.

The EU’s public spending rules discriminate against long-term investment, and the Constitution would ensure that these rules are even more tightly enforced, because no member state would be able to avoid censure under the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

The EU would gain control of public health. The EU would regulate medical standards. A new “right to preventative healthcare” would open up the NHS to costly ambulance-chasing lawsuits. The Constitution does nothing to rein in the European Court of Justice either. In recent years the ECJ has delivered a string of rulings making it hard to prioritise NHS spending, and allowing those who threaten legal action to jump the queue.

After Lisbon

THE HOUSE of Commons has given the EU a blank cheque: there are 31 areas of the Lisbon Treaty where there is no decision yet on how the arrangements would work in practice.

These include: the powers of the EU President and the EU Foreign Minister; structure, operation and field of action of Europol; new powers and operation of Eurojust; rules on the European Public Prosecutor and its functions; powers of the new “Operational Committee on Internal Security”, size and arrangements of the new foreign policy fund; arrangements for “structured cooperation in defence”; arrangements for implementing the Defence “Solidarity Clause”; and the organisation and functioning of an EU diplomatic service.

Just wait until the “difficult” countries like Britain have ratified the Constitution to see the full extent of the transfer of sovereignty to the EU.



Photo: Workers

ANGRY CUSTOMERS of Orford Road Post Office, in Walthamstow, East London, staged a “queue-in” on 15 March to protest at its planned closure. Teas were served and petitions signed, as the long queue snaked down the road. Like many threatened branches, 1 in 5 of the total, this one is a bustling, busy office at the heart of a community. Of 2,500 proposed closures, many are even profitable, but the Post Office refuses to make the figures public. It’s hard for offices to be viable when so much business, like benefit payments, has been taken away, but who said they have to make a profit anyway? MPs who voted for closure are now worried at local reaction around the country and are hurrying to join campaigns.

Pensions deal at Goodrich

WORKERS AT aerospace company Goodrich have clinched a deal on pensions today following a one-day strike held on Monday 28 January and a continuing ban on overtime.

While the final salary scheme will remain closed to new entrants, the company has agreed that will secure the scheme for existing members going forward. Goodrich has also guaranteed that it will not make any changes to the scheme until 2013 at least.

Unite national officers John Rowse and Bernie Hamilton said, “Unite is disappointed that new staff will no longer be eligible to join the final salary pension scheme. However, the scheme remains open for existing staff and the union has clinched a ground-breaking deal with Goodrich which guarantees no changes to the scheme for at least the next five years. This is an industry first and to date is virtually unheard of.”

Increases in contribution rates have been agreed but will be phased in over two years. The cost of the increase will be partly offset by two instalments of £250 over the two year period. Goodrich employs 1600 staff based across the country.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

London meeting

OVER 100 people attended the celebration of the 100th anniversary of International Women’s Day on 10 March 2008 in London.

Speakers from the Council of Ex-Muslims, Equality Now and Unison addressed the themes of ending sexual apartheid, the dangers of political Islam and its threat to women’s rights.

Speakers were united in their criticism that oppression of women originated from class oppression and capitalism. Clear analysis was presented as to the role of political Islam and Islam in general as a reactionary ideological attack on humanity.

There was withering criticism of the alliance of US imperial designs, especially in the Middle East, and the US nurturing of Islamic terrorism with the false apologists of the so-called Left defending Islamic reactionary suppression of women.

UNIVERSITIES

Strike over course cuts

THE COUNCIL of Keele University in North Staffordshire has approved a plan to close most of the School of Economic and Management Studies' current programmes, threatening 38 of the School's 67 academic staff with redundancy.

UCU members at the School and at the Centre for Health Planning and Management have voted to take strike action. The Keele UCU local association has voted in favour of taking action short of a strike and has held several well

supported lobbies and rallies since January. The local press has also been giving great coverage.

However, despite the best efforts of members, students and hundreds of others who have emailed the vice-chancellor, the university is still hell-bent on proceeding. The final decision lies with the university council. The local association is asking for support from members across the country for a national rally at the university on Thursday 3 April to lobby the council. The rally will start at 10.30 am.

UCU's regional office said, "It is imperative the university understand the anger by members and students at Keele. It is also, we believe, a pilot for the rest of pre-92 institutions. If they get away with it

Ministers slash Remploi

THE CAMPAIGN by the GMB to preserve the Remploi factories looks to have been derailed by the government. The 83 Remploi factories, established after the Second World War and originally employing disabled service men and women, latterly disabled workers, has been sidetracked and buried by callous government tactics. Over 2,500 disabled workers will be made redundant. Twenty-eight factories will close.

The concept of having workplaces which bring disabled workers back into skilled mainstream employment has been destroyed in the name of modernisation. The GMB ran a high-profile lobby campaign throughout 2007 to protest against the closures. This resulted in significant trade union and especially TUC support for the fight against closure at last year's Congress.

To fudge and avoid the issue at the Labour Party conference, Gordon Brown promised a "review": a retired trade union "elder" was appointed to investigate independently. That report has now produced the final blow to Remploi's future – closure.

The false modernisation argument that greater numbers of disabled workers can be slotted into "employment" as opposed to the skilled employment offered by Remploi has been the government's justification for closure. The issue is not about numbers but economics, it is obviously cheaper to have disabled workers working stacking supermarket shelves than learning a skill and making a qualitative difference to society and their own lives.

EU CONSTITUTION

Referendums yield response

TEN REFERENDUMS were held in selected marginal constituencies around the country throughout February. Despite several of the sitting MPs leafletting constituents telling them not to vote, voters gave the polls an unprecedented response. 152,520 people voted across just ten parliamentary constituencies. The turnout across the country was 36.2%.

Voters were asked two questions:

Should the UK hold a national referendum on the EU's Treaty? 133,251 voted for yes - 88%, and 12% voted no. Fewer than 1% gave no answer.

Should the UK approve the EU's Treaty? 89% voted against the Treaty and

8% voted in favour. 3% gave no answer.

Even though the poll was unofficial, the 36.2% turnout means that a higher proportion of people voted in these unofficial referendums than in real local elections in their area. The average turnout for local elections (when not held with general elections) since 1996 is 35.4%. The average turnout in referendums on directly elected mayors – including in London – is 30.1%. So this is the highest turnout ever in an unofficial ballot.

In eight of the ten seats a greater proportion of people voted for a referendum than had voted for the sitting MP. On average the sitting MPs had won 27.5% of the available vote. But of those balloted in this campaign, 31.2% voted for a national referendum.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

Thursday 1 May, 7.30 pm

Let's plan for a future

May Day rally and celebration of the 40th anniversary of the CPBML. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Music, speeches, refreshments and plenty of good company.

ENERGY

Offshore workers unite

FOLLOWING AN 80% vote in favour, the offshore oil and gas workers have voted to merge their liaison committee, OILC, with the RMT.

As the current issue of their magazine Blowout comments, the merger will greatly strengthen workers in the offshore oil and gas industry, and go a long way to fulfilling their vision, "to create a combative, all-industry union to balance the power of the oil companies and the contractors in every possible way".

Another boost has come in the wake of the vote: a long-running battle over annual paid leave has been won.

As feature articles in the last two issues of WORKERS have pointed out, major companies are still committing serious safety breaches and try to erode conditions in an increasingly desperate scramble for oil and gas resources.

PLAYING FIELDS

From sports field to property

THE ROYAL Borough of Kensington and Chelsea wants to redevelop Holland Park Comprehensive School. Its scheme includes the disposal of land for residential development to provide enabling funding.

Local residents have repeatedly questioned information provided by the council over the last 18 months, and it has emerged (and been confirmed in writing by Sport England) that an area of land to the north of the site was used as a hard surfaced pitch/games area but had not been so identified by the borough. What had been described by the borough as a net gain was really a substantial loss – 2,242 square metres of hard play area.

Campden Hill Residents' Association is campaigning for improvements to the school to be funded by the Building Schools for the Future programme, which would not involve the loss of playing fields.



1968–2008

**MAY DAY RALLY
AND
CELEBRATION
OF THE 40TH
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE CPBML
“LET’S PLAN
FOR A
FUTURE”**

**THURSDAY | MAY, 7.30 PM, CONWAY
HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON
WC1R 4RL**

**MUSIC, SPEECHES, REFRESHMENTS,
AND PLENTY OF GOOD COMPANY.**

ALL WELCOME

Public consultation on the Darzi re period of consultation...

Progress in the NHS: it'

LAST JULY, amid a fanfare of publicity in the trade press, and even some national news coverage, Professor Sir Ara Darzi became a well known name. It was he who had been commissioned by NHS London (the capital's Strategic Health Authority) to undertake a review into the health service in London, looking at all of the different clinical specialities, the services delivered and the settings in which they're undertaken, and was charged with the task of proposing recommendations for their improvement.

The overall project was given the title “Healthcare for London, a Framework for Action”. The 136-page document was launched on 11 July 2007. In fact, it had actually been launched the preceding week at a meeting with trade unions, all part of a consultation process which has been presented as inclusive from its inception.

Clinicians were involved in drawing up the original document, and indeed Darzi himself makes much of the fact that he is a practising surgeon – and that the consultation is open to all to influence has been much emphasised. The public consultation ended on 7 March, so the review can now be reviewed.

The Baghdad-born Armenian Ara Darzi is now Baron Lord Darzi of Denham and a government health minister in the Lords. He has been charged with developing a consistent method of review of the NHS across Britain. From the beginning it was clear that the London review would form a blueprint for what was to happen nationally, as in so many areas of life.

The review itself looked at seven specific areas of healthcare provision: Maternity and Newborn Care, Staying Healthy (Public Health), Mental Health, Acute Care, Planned Care, Long Term Conditions and End of Life Care.

Elaborate structure

An elaborate structure was set up to drive the public consultation, with a London commissioning group established with 11 primary care trust chief executives overseeing the development of work in each of these work areas, together with some newly added ones: Unscheduled Care, Diabetes and Major Trauma and Stroke Care.

Many changes have taken place over the years within the NHS in London, and throughout the country, which need consolidating. There is a myth among the public that if you are unfortunate enough to have, let's say, a stroke, then the ambulance that comes to get you will take you to the nearest hospital. In London this is certainly not the case.

The London Ambulance Service, more directly influenced by its workforce and trade unions than any other part of the health service anywhere in Britain, will take you to the hospital best able to deal with the specific health problem you have, in this case a stroke (or brain attack, in modern NHS slang). In doing this it may well bypass one, two or even more hospitals en route to the hospital best equipped to deal with your condition. What Healthcare for London seeks to do is consolidate these working arrangements into permanent organisational forms (or as permanent as the NHS ever becomes).

In many areas this will be problematic. At present 31 hospitals provide stroke care in the capital and the number of specialist centres is fewer than 10. So the plan to concentrate resources by concentrating facilities in a smaller number – 7? 9? The final number isn't yet

view of healthcare in London has just ended, after a long

's up to us



Major trauma: only one centre in London that can deal with the full range of conditions

decided – is difficult for many to stomach.

Instead of having a full range of services available at every district hospital, it will mean that stroke centres will be concentrated in far fewer places but should have a much greater capacity to deal with the complex problems involved in strokes. This will mean for instance that the doctors and skilled health workers concerned in delivering stroke care may well be relocated from hospitals where they currently work into these new specialist centres.

This will be a difficult process for those involved. The question workers must assess is how to balance the greater good for workers across the capital in providing the best possible health care with inconvenience and worse for those who have to move or suffer. The job of the unions is to strike that balance.

Major Trauma is another area currently being worked on. There is only one major trauma centre in the whole of London capable of dealing with the full range of health conditions generalised under that heading. This is Barts and the London Hospital at its Whitechapel site, where the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS, part of the London Ambulance

Service) takes patients.

This is clearly unacceptable for the biggest city in Europe. Many smaller cities have far more trauma receiving centres. So the review was used to propose additional trauma centres – one, two or even three.

Securing approval and resources for this expansion will be extremely important for Londoners and those who work in London. There are currently over 2,500 deaths due to injury in London each year and upwards of 2,000 admissions to an intensive care unit. The professionals in the field estimate that 400 lives could be saved and 1,600 severe disabilities prevented annually by having what would effectively be regional trauma care, spread across centres in London, rather than relying on the existing Whitechapel site.

Recent research has also shown that considerably more people die when transferred to a trauma centre from a local hospital where they may have received initial treatment, than those taken direct to a specialised trauma centre.

The existing facility at Whitechapel manages over 950 trauma patients per year, and in 2006 this service had a 28% reduction in mortality in the most severely injured patients when compared to the

national average.

It is most likely that the outcome of the consultation will propose an additional two trauma centres and this is to be welcomed. Yet some ideological opponents of the overall process, including political activists and even general practitioners, constantly ignore the proposals on trauma.

Perhaps the area where there has been greatest debate and controversy is the establishment of so-called “polyclinics”. This is the proposal to bring together primary care provision, including general practices, in a single building, although collections of buildings could still be identified as polyclinics.

Several models are being developed, from newly built specialised facilities to “Hub and Spoke” facilities where outlying practices can be connected to a single polyclinic centre, and ranging also to include a provision of polyclinic facilities within a major acute hospital. Already University College London Hospital has put in a bid to run such a polyclinic.

Why is there such hostility to this idea? Some opposition is based on the notion that the working week will be increased from 37.5 to 40 hours. This is a figure buried away in Darzi’s technical paper and which certainly does need clarification. But the idea that such a figure will automatically mean those on the standard NHS week of 37.5 hours will immediately have 2.5 hours added to their working week without reference to trade unions is ignorant or malicious; or possibly both.

The other source of opposition is from the GPs, who as self-employed private business people wish to determine themselves how GP practices are organised. Anyone who has tried to help workers employed in general practices to organise knows that some of these are among the hardest-nosed of private employers, and their gathering together in the GP committee at the BMA inevitably fosters their opposition to polyclinics.

It should be no surprise that the polyclinic idea – one of the innovative

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features of the first Soviet Five Year Plan – has taken 80 years to reach Britain. That it should be opposed by so many should be.

The trauma centres and polyclinics highlight the difficulties in looking at how to make progress in Britain. We are so used to all change being negative that when change, partly driven by organised labour, is proposed, everyone throws up their hands in horror.

Senior doctors are as much workers as the “lowest” porter. So when those doctors propose that clinical care be reorganised they should be listened to. It is naïve to assume that everything will be sweetness and light, and the trade unions, led by Unison, are certainly not doing that.

Of course there is a threat of privatisation – the polyclinics will be ripe for American capitalist healthcare providers. But those very healthcare providers are already buying up general practices.

United Health Europe, owned by the American corporation of the same name and run by Blair’s former advisor Simon Stevens and former BMJ Editor Richard Smith, has already won a contract in Derbyshire (which despite the much touted judicial review is showing evidence of actually providing a better service than the previous practice) and is pitching for a contract in Camden, north London.

So the existing GP structure is no defence against US-led privatisation. The answer has to be a clear political one – that the use of private capital in the form of PFI or direct outsourcing to private providers is not acceptable to workers in the NHS or to Londoners.

It has been said that Darzi is in favour of privatisation. It is true that Brown is. But we will not destroy privatisation nor capitalism by opposing polyclinics (or by supporting them, for that matter). Does their establishment weaken us or strengthen us?

Aspirations for improvement

Improved, more centralised primary care has long been an aspiration of organised workers – and was included in the original proposals for the NHS, only to be removed because of opposition from family doctors. That they have been brought forward – at the instigation of people working in the NHS – before we have removed capitalism is no reason to oppose them.

The whole process around Healthcare for London has shown an interesting, and worrying, political truth. As organised workers we have become so used to opposition that we can’t spot something we should support. We are so paralysed by threats, in this case threats of privatisation and closure of services, that we can’t see where best practice ought to be developed, thereby saving lives.

Had workers and the trade unions in the London Ambulance Service 15 years ago not fought off Thatcher’s proposal to completely eliminate what was then, and was for many years, the only London-wide NHS body, then this progress would not be possible.

The proposals for progress are based on the platform of the united, class-conscious and well developed London Ambulance Service, and from that platform must be built a united, politically clear and class-conscious National Health Service. That those in government who are proposing this change share none of those objectives should not worry us.

That they may even be bringing forward some of these proposals to worsen health care and place it in foreign hands is something of which we are aware and which we will need to tackle.

If we are serious about rebuilding Britain, then we must be serious about rebuilding the National Health Service. If we are serious about this then we fight tooth and claw to impose the best proposals that Darzi makes – improving stroke care, increasing trauma care, establishing polyclinics – while rejecting dangerous elements such as the use of PFI, LIFT (another privatisation scam) and outsourcing. Improving Britain – that must be our watchword, and by improving healthcare those working in the NHS can make their contribution to that.

BADGE OFFER – Referendum now. No to the EU superstate!

DESPITE ALL THE promises, Labour is trying to take us into a European superstate without giving the people of Britain a chance to say what they think.

The so-called Constitutional Treaty is just the despised Constitution in another form, as even Giscard d’Estaing, author of the first attempt, has admitted. In backtracking on the referendum promise Gordon Brown is trying to wipe out a thousand years of independence and sovereignty using his tame party in Parliament.

The will of the British people has been clearly expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll. Now it is time for a poll of a different kind, a referendum. The TUC is already trying to renege on its September vote for a referendum. Don’t let power slide over to Brussels.

FIGHT BACK with a Referendum Now badge (actual size 25mm), available from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB, price 50p each, or £4 for 10. Please make cheques payable to “WORKERS”.



MPs may have voted – treacherously – in the House of Commons, but the fight goes on...

EU Constitution: Referendum now!



Photo: Workers

27 February: thousands of people lobbied Parliament, only to be ignored by MPs

THE HOUSE of Commons voted on 5 March to deny the British people a referendum on the EU Constitution. Only a handful of Labour MPs stood by their party's manifesto commitment for a referendum.

The Lisbon Treaty was drawn up to replace the draft European Constitution after it was thrown out by French and Dutch voters in 2005. They called it a 'treaty' by having it tinker around with earlier treaties (those of Maastricht and Rome) to kid us into thinking that it wasn't really a constitution at all.

The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) held a meeting on the eve of the 27 February Lobby of Parliament on the issue, at Conway Hall in London. The content of the speaker's address to the meeting, given below, is all the more urgent to consider when planning what to do next.

What is this EU Constitution? What does it do? And, most important, what are we doing about it?

First, what is it? EU officials rewrote the 2,800 pages of the EU's 17 earlier treaties and acts into a mere 560 pages, so we could, supposedly, easily find out what our governments had signed us up to over the last 30 years. Supporters of the Constitution tried to convince us of its great merits by spelling it out, clause by clause, annexe by annexe, protocol by protocol, from page 1 to page 560. But for some reason, this didn't work, so now they've stopped trying to convince us – they're just aiming to impose it anyway, whether we like it or not.

But is the Treaty of Lisbon any different from the Constitution? Valery Giscard d'Estaing, chief architect of the Constitution, says, "All the earlier proposals will be in the new text, but will be hidden and disguised in some way."

Just like the draft Constitution, the Treaty would change the EU from a Union based on treaties agreed between countries to a multi-national state based on its own constitution. It spells out, for the first time in an EU treaty, that EU law

overrules all national, including constitutional, law. This is a rule of federal states like the USA. So the Treaty is still a Constitution in the usual sense of the word.

What does it do? The Constitution gives the EU many new powers. These include powers over trade, monetary policy, foreign and defence policy and the internal market. They are wider powers than one might think: the European Commission introduced its recent directive to "marketise" healthcare under the internal market so that they could pass it by majority vote.

So the EU can enforce privatisation of health, education, postal services and social services by claiming that all public services are internal market matters. Yet the Daily Mirror slams those who want to debate the Constitution, saying that they should talk about health instead! Under the internal market the EU's leaders could ban nationalising the water industry or the railways as breaching the EU's basic principle of freedom of competition.

The Commission has delayed its proposal to "marketise" healthcare because of protests, though not, as some might have hoped, from this government. The reason they gave was a 'very overloaded agenda', but its officials now admit that Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Holland all opposed it because they thought it would destroy their national health systems. This Common Market in health could mean EU citizens flooding our NHS, making planning impossible.

The Constitution would make free movement of capital, goods, services and labour into Constitutional obligations. The EU will decide all immigration and border control policies, by majority vote. It gives the EU new powers to stop member countries controlling migration: it says, "The Union shall develop a policy with a view to ensuring the absence of any controls on persons, whatever their nationality, when crossing [the EU's] internal borders."

It would give us the "freedom of establishment". This brand new freedom,

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which we didn't even know we didn't have, seems to mean giving the Establishment whatever it wants.

And what it wants was exemplified in December last year, when the European Court of Justice ruled that Finland's ferry operator Viking Line could, under the "freedom of establishment", ignore its agreements with Finland's unions, re-flag its vessels to Estonia and hire local crews on lower pay. The Rail Maritime and Transport union warns that employers will use this ruling to cut wages across the EU because every strike action "restricts the right of freedom of establishment".

Also in December, the Court ruled that strike action by Swedish building workers violated the EU's basic principles.

The Court has ruled that the right to strike is a "fundamental right" under EU law – unless it is against national or EU law, or affects the 'smooth operation of the market', or is contrary to good morals. So that's all very safe then! In the past, British courts' judgements have been overturned by popular trade union pressure. The European Court's judgements have always gone in one direction – greater freedom for capital to operate as it wishes – and have never yet been overturned.

The Constitution would create a full-time EU President who would be a much more powerful figure than the current Council president, yet would be elected by a process about as democratic as the way they choose the Pope. Now Blair says he'll be President if we give him more powers, especially over defence.

The Constitution would create an EU Foreign Minister, to run the EU's common foreign and security policy. Do other international organisations have a President and a Foreign Minister? Does the UN? Does NATO? No – other organisations don't have presidents or Foreign Ministers, not even Chelsea Football Club. As a recent book on the Constitution admits, "No other international organisation has such a structure." It is a huge step towards a new state.

An EU ambassador said, "The issues



Shamefaced Brown at the Lisbon summit, with the Portuguese prime minister.

of the EU Foreign Minister and the common diplomatic service will be dealt with last, after ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by Britain, because the subject is too explosive." EU leaders also plan to take big decisions about the EU President's powers, by majority vote, after ratification of the Constitution by what they call 'difficult' countries - like guess who? So MPs who vote for the Treaty would be signing a blank cheque.

The Constitution would give the EU the power to make laws about: the EU's common trade policy, competition policy for the single market, customs, fisheries, and monetary policy for the eurozone. The Constitution spells out the EU's new goals of lowering customs and other barriers and of ending all controls over foreign direct investment. This would leave us defenceless against foreign takeovers and Chinese and Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds.

Neoliberal

Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson's Global Europe strategy, adopted by the

EU, is a neoliberal free trade policy aimed at serving European capital in its drive to expand into new markets across the world, destroying young industries in other countries. It is also about destroying the EU's social, labour and environmental standards – Europe's "social model" – which Mandelson sees as barriers to free trade. He wants to achieve US standards in these matters. The Treaty expands the powers of this Blair-appointed gentleman to cover all matters of investment, trade in services and intellectual property, covering the EU's 133 different trade committees, which will carry on taking big decisions in secret.

The Constitution would stop the government making laws about the single market, social policy, communications, regional aid, agriculture, environment, consumer protection, transport, energy, 'freedom, security and justice'. It would give the EU new powers to 'co-ordinate' economic and social policy.

The Constitution would abolish the national veto in 63 areas. It would allow

What the Lisbon Treaty actually says...

THE LISBON Treaty's new Article 97b says the "activities" of the member states and the Union "shall include **a single currency**, the euro, and the definition and conduct of a single monetary policy." The previous version specified that the rule about the euro did not apply to Britain; this new version contains no such opt-out from the euro. So not only are they trying to force the despised Constitution on us, they want to impose the euro too.

The EU is taking powers to **control all member states' energy** resources – coal, oil, gas – through its 'competencies' over the internal market and the environment. The European Council has called for the "development of a common approach to external energy policy". The Lisbon Treaty's Article 175 (2) (c) says decisions 'significantly affecting a member state's choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy

supply' are to be adopted by unanimity. The Brown government would still have a veto, but it can't be trusted to use the veto when Britain's national interests so require.

The Lisbon Treaty for the first time formalises the **limits on member states' powers**. It spells out the areas where the EU and its member states have what it calls "shared competences". But it is misleading to call these powers "shared": the EU would have supremacy. Member states would still be allowed to make their own laws, but only in areas where the EU has decided not to use its powers. When the EU acts in those areas, member states are not allowed to legislate.

What would those areas be? Under Article 2C, these areas would be: the internal market, social policy, economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and fisheries, the environment, consumer protection, transport, trans-European

networks, energy, the area of freedom, security and justice, public health, research, technological development, space policy, development cooperation and international aid – all domestic policy, all economic policy, all social policy and a large part of foreign policy. Not much left for Parliament to do then!

The Lisbon Treaty states that "the common security and defence policy shall be an integral part of the **common foreign and security policy**." This common security and defence policy "will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides." The EU wants to use member states' armed forces for foreign interventions 'in accordance with the principles of the UN charter', but it does not require such missions to have a UN mandate. This opens the way to more illegal wars of aggression like Kosovo and Iraq.

the Council of Ministers to end more vetoes without new treaties. It would allow the Council to take whatever powers it considers necessary to achieve their aims where they think that the Constitution does not give them enough powers. And it extends this power to foreign and defence policy and to justice and home affairs. It would allow moves towards a criminal justice system without juries or habeas corpus. It gives the EU the right to extend the powers of its rapidly expanding police force, Europol – which is immune from prosecution above the law.

It would give all these new powers to the EU, adding to the powers of the EU's rulers, while setting in stone its current undemocratic structure. The European Commission would keep the sole right to propose new EU laws. 80% of our laws are made in the EU.

The Constitution says much about rights – but how does this work in the real world? For example, just recently MEPs were alleged to have embezzled £100 million. A secret report was shown

to a few MEPs, under surveillance, at a secret location, where they were told to sign a secrecy agreement and forbidden to take notes or copies. The report didn't name any names, and was not forwarded to the EU's anti-fraud body. Not surprisingly, the European Parliament, its Socialist group and the European People's Party, which includes the Tory MEPs, want to keep it secret. And then the EU recommends this system as a model!

What is to be done?

And lastly, what should we be doing? Lobby outside Parliament tomorrow [27 February]. Raise the idea of a referendum whenever you can, at work, in your union, in your neighbourhood.

London Ambulance workers are holding their own referendum and more than 20 villages have held a referendum. All returned large majorities in favour of holding a national referendum. Another 60 are in the pipeline and in some constituencies MPs have had to agree to support the call for a national

referendum.

In 2005 the three main parties pledged to hold a referendum on the Constitution, so whoever won we should have had it – if parliamentary democracy worked! After the French and Dutch peoples used their referendums to reject the Constitution, the EU's leaders decided to reject, not the Constitution, but the popular votes. They renamed it and took the C word out of the entire text.

Blair said, "What you can't do is to have a situation where you get a rejection of the treaty and then you just bring it back with a few amendments and say we will have another go." Which is exactly what the EU's leaders have done. I realise that this is very odd – we have caught Blair in a truth.

Are we going to let them impose the Constitution on us anyway? Surely not. Surely the British working class will not allow this imposition. We can say no to the Constitution – what could they do to overrule us? We must have this promised referendum, otherwise, comrades and friends, where is the democracy?

Fidel Castro, after his provisional resignation last July, announced President of the State Council and Commander in Chief..

Castro leaves office, and the US's dream of



Photo: Workers

FIDEL CASTRO will not stand for election again. Announcing his decision in February, he wrote, "This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading Reflections by Comrade Fidel. It will be just another weapon you can count on."

Far from the collapse predicted by Cuba's arch enemy, the USA, Cuba is stronger than ever, with many more friends in Latin America and around the world. Fidel Castro has left office with his country in good heart and counting its achievements.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the demise of the socialist bloc, the USA tightened its blockade of Cuba confident that this outpost of socialism would go the same way. As most of Cuba's trade with the former

socialist bloc vanished, the prospect of hunger and shortages was real.

The Cuban Communist Party held a special Congress to devise a strategy for national survival, and Cuban Socialism did not collapse.

Successive US administrations had tended to believe that the Cuban revolution depended on one man – Fidel Castro – and it followed therefore that if Cuba was not going the way of the Soviet Union, they would simply have to play the biological card, and wait for him to die. After all they had made numerous attempts to assassinate him, and they could still have another go.

Assassination attempt

By 1996, Castro was 70 years old and showed no signs of dying. So in November 2000, they made another attempt to kill him. Luis Posada Carrilles, a CIA operative wanted by both the Cuban and Venezuelan authorities for blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976 killing 73 people, tried to blow up the lecture hall of the University of Panama where Fidel Castro was due to address a Cuba solidarity meeting. Once again the attempt failed.

The Bush Administration then drew up a plan effectively to annex Cuba on the death of Fidel Castro and appoint a colonial governor. This, of course, made it impossible for Fidel to retire as Bush would use it as his excuse to implement the plan.

And yet Fidel is only human and cannot live forever. In July 2006, Fidel announced that he was to hand over much of his responsibility to a collection of members of the Council of State while he was being treated for an intestinal illness.

While some in the US announced that Fidel was actually dead and Cuba declared his condition to be a state secret, a planned process began that will see an eventual transfer of leadership to a new generation of revolutionaries.

So why has Fidel Castro been so important that the US government wants him dead before they try to annex Cuba?

The answer to that question lies in his commitment to the working class and to the Cuban revolution, his internationalism and patriotism, his leadership skills, his humility, and his defiance.

Although he was one of many revolutionaries taking part in the struggle against the dictatorship of Batista, the Cuban general who came to power in a coup in 1952, his commitment and leadership was apparent during the attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, his landing in Eastern Cuba in 1956 with the nucleus of the rebel army, and the successful guerrilla war against Batista's powerful US-backed army.

He coordinated the armed struggle with the efforts of the trade unions, students and the urban and rural resistance of the July 26th Movement.

After the revolution, he led Cuba through the difficult times of the October missile crisis and committed Cuba to supporting African liberation movements – after all, Cuba was a nation built on slavery.

Liberation

Perhaps one of the best kept secrets of the time was Cuban military and civil support for the fighters in Guinea Bissau who eventually defeated the Portuguese colonialists, bringing down the Portuguese dictatorship and leading to the liberation of Mozambique and Angola.

More well known was Castro's decision to recommend to the Congress of the Communist Party in 1975, that Cuba provide immediate military and civil support to the MPLA Government in Angola after that country was invaded by South Africa and US-backed military forces from Zaire.

That eventually led to the defeat of the South African Defence Force at Cuito Cuanavale and the Southern Africa Accords which saw the mighty USA having to negotiate with Cuba over independence for Namibia. This is recognised as having played a major part in the subsequent downfall of the South African apartheid regime.

His models were great Cuban anti-

ed on 19 February that he will not stand for election as

Cuban collapse fails to materialise

colonial fighters such as José Martí, Maceo and Céspedes, and his commitment to national sovereignty and patriotism is well known. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, Fidel's patriotism and defiance of US attempts to re-annex Cuba saw provided the only leadership that could ensure the country's survival.

Given that the US had personalised around Fidel their intention to destroy Cuban socialism, it was inevitable that the Cuban people should look to him for leadership. During the 1990s, Cuba lived through hardships that no other country could have survived, but then went on to show solidarity with the rest of the world. Cuba sent 35,000 doctors to over 70 countries and successfully led the fight against the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

'A new generation of revolutionaries are waiting in the wings, showing that Cuba is operating from a position of strength...'

Last year, 184 countries voted at the UN General Assembly for an end to the US blockade of Cuba while the US could only muster Israel and two US Pacific protectorates in its own defence. These things don't happen by accident and are widely attributed to Fidel's leadership.

Now Cuba is moving on. While the

leadership of the country is still in the hands of the old revolutionaries, this is simply to thwart the US plan to take over Cuba and enslave its people.

A new generation of revolutionaries are waiting in the wings, showing that Cuba is operating from a position of strength and the US from a position of weakness.

What an example to the rest of the world and especially our working class in Britain! A working class with the right leadership can successfully stand up to the most powerful forces of imperialism in the world. What a contrast to Blair and Brown and to some of our own institutions, particularly our trade unions!

Some may be sad at losing such an inspirational leader, but his legacy is there for all the world to see, and the struggle goes on.



Cuban schoolchildren: the future of the country now lies with its youth.

In our fourth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML past four decades through the eyes of WORKERS and its predecessors look at the despatch of troops to northern Ireland...

1971: British troops out of Ireland, Ireland



THE ISSUE of northern Ireland is a test of workers' internationalism, today just as it was from 1922 when Ireland was split and Northern Ireland annexed.

Very early in the life of the CPBML, it passed this test when all other political organisations failed. In November 1969, the Labour government used rioting by Unionists as an excuse to send British troops into Ireland. Its aim was to maintain the British state's rule over part of its oldest colony, to keep Ireland divided, by propping up Ulster's colonial minority regime against the civil rights movement's demand for 'one man, one vote'. The Ministry of Defence said that the Army was to "give strong-arm assistance to the local authority." The Army announced, "We are in aid of the civil power."

This open support for Unionism precluded peacekeeping and democracy. The Party at once called for the withdrawal of the troops and for respect for the Irish people's right to national independence and self-determination.

On 5 September 1971, the Party organised a march ending in a rally in Trafalgar Square that called for 'Troops out of Ireland, Ireland one nation'. Our Chairman Reg Birch spoke from the platform, at the foot of Nelson's Column.

“Now is the testing time of workers here. We cannot be free ourselves except we fight for the freedom of Irish workers as they are fighting for us.

What shall we do? We call for the



Photo: Syd Shelton

1978: British soldier on patrol.

withdrawal of all troops – the Stormont Ku Klux Klan, the imperialist forces, the special Ulster 'defence' body, the lot. All workers here, the whole labour movement, all the unions, must support this demand. British soldiers were sent into Ulster by the Labour Government. Their policy of aggression was endorsed by the Tory Government. General Freeland gave the orders 'shoot to kill'. This brought about the armed struggle of people in defence of their homes, their families.

We as a Party say let us end this chapter in the history of British imperialism now! Let the workers of this country say once and for all – get the troops out of Ireland. Let the Irish people decide their own destiny themselves.”

The October 1971 issue of THE WORKER carried an article, 'Workers demand: British Troops out of Ireland now!'

“On Sunday September 5th more than a thousand workers including a large Irish contingent marched through the centre of London to join with an even larger crowd in Trafalgar Square to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

This impressive demonstration of the solidarity of British workers with their Irish brothers in denouncing British imperialism was organised by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). It was an event of political significance. It was the right demonstration on the right issue at the right

by looking at the
sor, THE WORKER, we

one nation!



time.

The situation in Ireland was correctly defined – a colonial war waged by British imperialism against the Irish people. British troops are in Ireland for no other purpose than to kill and terrorise all who challenge Britain's colonial rule which began 800 years ago.

It is a war against Irish workers waged by the same British ruling class that exploits and oppresses workers in this country. Therefore this is a testing time for the workers of Britain. We cannot be free except we declare ourselves in the freedom struggle of the Irish people and take action with them against British imperialism, our common enemy.”

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.

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Back to Front – Get serious

‘What other fundamental reason is there for trade unions to exist if not the fight to determine our wages?’

AS WE enter the fourth month of the TUC Public Sector Unions’ campaign on pay there is a slow realisation that it is going to be protracted and with very few fireworks. Those who thought it was going to a grand heroic charge that would bring down the government’s pay restraint policy have been proved very foolish. Those who saw it more as sabre-rattling are being proved correct.

Unison’s local government pay battle plan has started to unravel at the first hurdle – branches asked to quantify what action they intend taking have significantly refused to respond. The national survey initiated by national office is nearly blank in response.

Admirable statements by trade union general secretaries over the obscenity of poverty pay, and detailed analysis showing government can afford to meet much-needed pay increases, do not replace the missing engagement from the members.

And yet the government must be challenged over pay. What other fundamental reason is there for trade unions to exist if not to fight to determine our wages? But where is the army? And where is the front?

Thirty years of pay research shows that decently paid, skilled staff who feel they have a future deliver higher-quality public services far better than under-paid, under-valued, temporary, casual, insecure staff. But many are also aware of the concerns and fears over employment stability – in Greater London agency and temporary staff employment in some local authorities runs at near to 1 in 4 of those employed.

The fact is that there is a malaise in the heart of the public services, especially local government, which actually does not believe there is a future except fragmentation, division, possible outsourcing or working at arm’s length. The great Victorian concept of civic pride, civic dignity and public service is being eaten away from within by the rot of US-style

market-driven Tammany Hall business concepts.

Local government workers are campaigning for a ‘catch up and match up’ – 6% or 50p an hour for the lowest paid. Grandiose plans have been drawn up to lodge claims across local government, community and voluntary public service providers. These plans see ever-growing groups of members bailing out of the planned strategy as either not applicable to them or they volunteer out of politeness to let someone else get stuck in first. This ‘one size fits all’ mantra beggars belief. Each group must fight on the particulars of their situation.

Either the public sector unions have never studied the history of the fight for wages in Britain or they completely miss the point. Unions that have traditionally negotiated solely according to national agreements have a mindset whereby substantial sections of the membership sit back, do nothing and wait for the national negotiators to deliver. In many ways their thinking and tactics are conditioned by the ‘culture’ of the employer and appear to be stuck in the 1970s. Those unions who fought on a localised guerrilla basis – primarily the engineering and manufacturing unions – were always more flexible in tactics and strategy.

The public sector tactics are stale: deliver a Valentine’s Day card to Downing Street – the broken heart of the jilted public sector worker – first done 15 years ago and nearly every year since. Have photo opportunities. Carry long-winded and intricate motions at tiny meetings of activists.

How do we lift the goal and importance of wages? How to develop a protracted campaign among a membership who consciously forget their history. Are new to struggle or are they unwilling to struggle?

These are the challenges if the question of pay is going to be more than rhetoric. We lose ground every time our bluff is called. We have to get serious about pay.

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