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BUT ARE THE MEMBERS LISTENING?

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY



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WORKERS

“ First thoughts

THE BRUTAL US bombing of Afghanistan has killed an estimated 3000 civilians. A new government, headed by an agent of a US oil firm, has been created, which has, fruitlessly, called on the USA to stop the bombing. But the war goes on, prolonging Afghanistan's agony.

The leaders of the terrorist networks, the supposed targets of all these 'surgical strikes' from 15,000 feet, have escaped, to regroup their forces and prepare another atrocity.

Bush mistreats the prisoners of war, holding them in conditions reminiscent of the 'tiger-cages' the US government's allies used in Vietnam.

The war must be stopped, because it is not a war against terrorism — instead, it is breeding terrorism and making the world more dangerous.

Bush now says that he will attack Iraq this summer. Blair and Straw utter no word of caution, while even the EU's foreign ministers urge restraint.

Second opinion

SO THE GOVERNMENT is not going to grind down the two-ton marble statue of Thatcher to use as ballast in fish tanks or grit for the roads. Nor, sadly, did they agree to its export to stand alongside London Bridge in Arizona as requested by some US neo-Nazi.

Instead they have agreed to amend House of Commons rules to allow the statue to be displayed at Westminster in 2004. The old rules prevented representations such as

statues, portraits and busts being displayed until 10 years after the individual's death. That has been reduced to three years after their death or twelve years after their leaving the Commons.

Why has the second largest Labour majority in history made such a decision only two months after the statue was declared homeless? Surely the country isn't being run by a party of secret Thatcherites?

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**EURO****MANUFACTURE****SAFETY****MINING****EU****NEWSPAPERS****AIRPORTS****PRISONS****COMING SOON****NEWS ANALYSIS**

Budgetary straitjacket

Goodyear cuts back

Fresh consultation

West Yorkshire's last pit

Hostility now a crime

Bradford strike victory

Security staff on strike

Enforced pay settlement

What's on

The fight for a public post

Stability, euro-style

RECENT ARGUMENTS over whether the European Commission should censure Germany and Portugal for approaching the ceiling for budget deficits (3% of GDP) have clearly demonstrated the problems countries in the Eurozone are going to face.

It was originally Germany that insisted on the 3% rule (part of the so-called stability and growth pact) to keep the unruly Latin countries in their place. Germany is now struggling to hold to this limit, and with a difficult election year ahead, a rebuke from the Commission would have been highly embarrassing.

The outcome was a predictable fudge, which shows just who's in the driving seat in the EU. Germany escaped a reprimand, as did Portugal, while criticism of Brown's plans has been further diluted. Germany has promised to be good (probably at the eventual expense of German workers, who will no doubt face cuts in the future).

Gordon Brown also made his feelings plain. Brown plans to borrow just over 1% of GDP to fund spending plans in the public sector, despite EU criticism that he is spending £10 billion too much. He knows that the British public would not take kindly to monetary union under such restrictive terms.

- The first month of trading in the new euro currency has cost Europeans £1.8 billion or 3 billion euros in hiked prices. The Germans have coined the expression *teuro* to describe the new currency, from *teuer*, meaning expensive.

There have been floods of complaints to consumer associations in Germany. The consumer protection regional unit in North-Rhine Westphalia has received 2,500 complaints, with 500 examples of 'rounding-up' identified in the first four days. Bakeries, pubs, grocery stores and pizza delivery firms have been the worst culprits, although the owners of these businesses have tried putting the blame on everything from cold weather to higher fuel costs.

Analysts now expect that prices in Germany will rise by 1.1% in January compared with 0.1% in December. Ordinary consumers will not be impressed by the attempts of the media to deny the link with the new currency.

MANUFACTURING**Goodyear cuts back**

GOODYEAR in Wolverhampton has cut 470 jobs and stopped production of truck tyres. The announcement came at the same time as an agreement with the unions to carry out an independent study into ways of increasing productivity at the plant.

The TGWU representative said that such studies had been successful elsewhere provided the firm made the right amount of investment.

At present specialist tyre production continues in Wolverhampton but local workers are pessimistic about the future. This has been made worse by Goodyear's announcement that it will end the sponsorship of all Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club in a year when promotion to the Premiership looks likely.

TEXTILES**Levi dumps Scotland**

LEVI STRAUSS is pulling out of jeans manufacture in Scotland, adding another serious blow in a catalogue of decline in textiles in recent years.

Some 650 workers were employed between the sewing plant in Dundee and the finishing factory in Hamilton.

The GMB's senior organiser, Ian King, commented: "What Levi's have here in Scotland is a talented and loyal workforce who do not deserve to be thrown on the scrapheap."

However, Levi's 30-year presence in Scotland soured three years ago when 700 jobs were lost in West Lothian and Lanarkshire. The company is looking for lower wages in Eastern Europe or Asia.

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

SAFETY**Fresh consultation**

A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT has been issued to launch a new campaign to reduce accidents in the workplace.

Calling for opinions, the Health and Safety Executive points out that the most common cause of serious and fatal accidents at work is being struck by or falling from a moving vehicle. But there are dozens of other causes of work-related ill health to be tackled.

Trade unions and businesses have been invited to make submissions before the consultation closes on 10 May.

Before then there are several events bringing the issue to the fore on Workers' Memorial Day (28 April) — instigated by the Scottish Trades Union Congress following the Piper Alpha disaster in the North Sea oilfields, and a conference on the topic this month (see What's On, page 5).

HOUSING**Homeless in holidayland**

A HOLIDAYMAKER on the Isle of Wight, particularly from the London area or the Thames Valley, might well be struck by the cheapness of property there. For example, last June terraced houses averaged £76,615 and flats £62,592. Yet a recent report has highlighted the fact that even these prices are out of the reach of a typical first-time buyer and flats make up only 16% of the housing stock.

Over 70% of people have an income below the official national average of £23,000 per annum, with a third being below £10,000.

There is a huge "concealed" homeless problem, defined by the survey as people aged over 25 living with their parents. Less than 9% of such families are on the official council waiting list, despite the fact that many have children of their own.

The Isle of Wight Council owns no houses or flats — all council properties were shunted off to housing associations by the two predecessor councils before the recent local government reorganisation.

PORTS**Dropping the pilot**

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS has introduced a new two-tier workforce as part of a cost cutting exercise. It is trying to use pilots at a number of ports who are less skilled, trained to a lower level, paid



WEST YORKSHIRE'S last remaining pit, The Prince of Wales colliery at Pontefract, is to shut. The pit was opened in 1860, so 142 years of mining will come to an end. Six hundred miners are facing redundancy. There is the possibility of a number of jobs at Kellingley, Maltby or Rossington. Ironically the shortage of skilled miners and craftsmen in mining has led UK Coal to threaten that if men are offered a transfer and refuse it, they will lose any redundancy offer.

The impact on Pontefract will be shattering, with an estimated £60 million being taken out of the town's economy and a further estimated 1,000 service jobs being put at risk. During the 1984-1985 miners' strike (see photo, above), a hit list of 100 pits and 100,000 miners' jobs was identified. Yorkshire has now lost 70 out of 73 pits.

Hostility to EU now a crime

A NEW EUROPE-WIDE arrest warrant covering 32 crimes has been adopted by the EU. It covers crimes which are not offences in the UK, such as hostility to the European Union. An amendment to introduce habeas corpus safeguards, in line with UK legal practice, was defeated in the European Parliament, with both Tory and Labour MEPs voting against for political reasons.

The warrants, which come into force in 2004, will enable a judge or magistrate anywhere in the EU to order the automatic extradition of a British citizen on the grounds of suspicion, without having to present any evidence as at present.

In addition to this new warrant, the EU has introduced extensive 'anti-terrorism' measures, using a technical parliamentary procedure. These were processed on 27 December 2001 during the Christmas recess — the technical procedure circumventing any debate in Strasbourg or Westminster or any other national parliament in Europe. The definition of these 'anti-terrorism' measures has placed a range of civil liberties at risk, including peaceful democratic protest and trade union activity.

less and equipped with inadequate sea-going coasters.

The UK Maritime Pilots Association, a section of the TGWU, has coordinated the response of the pilots. There has been a one-day stoppage and other selective action on the Humber, at Hull, Grimsby, Goole and related ports.

Since the new scheme came in, at least one serious collision has occurred. The 'pilot' in this case was one of ABP's new trainers. This has reinforced the TGWU's claim that safety is being compromised for short-term savings.

NEWSPAPERS**Victory in Bradford**

JOURNALISTS in West Yorkshire employed by the Newsquest group are back at work after successful strike action brought about a new wage settlement in the first strike over pay in a newspaper in the UK for more than 10 years. A half-day strike was all it took to make the employer see sense. The journalists — including those on the BRADFORD TELEGRAPH AND ARGUS — had pledged further action if needed.

PRISON OFFICERS

Enforced pay settlement

THE PRISON OFFICERS Association, which is banned from taking industrial action by legislation introduced by the Tories, is to have an enforced pay settlement of 6% over two years. The government has reneged on its commitment to honour the Prison Service Pay Review Body decision and is intending to pay 3.5% in February 2002 and 2.5% in January 2003.

Though industrial action is illegal, POA members in prisons across the country are expected to work to rule by refusing to work overtime and strictly applying health and safety rules and security procedures. It is expected that logjams will build up in court procedures and that the functioning of the prison service will grind to a halt.

That will not be difficult with Britain's ever-increasing prison population, still the highest in Europe, and with conditions and overcrowding rivalling anything out of Dickens.

Security strike in Manchester

SECURITY WORKERS at Manchester Airport are stepping up their industrial action following attempts by airport chiefs to impose draconian new conditions. Workers have been taking one- and two-hour strikes in an attempt to force management to negotiate. They now plan 36-hour strike action to force the issue.

The overwhelming support for action follows an attempt to impose new shift patterns, a cut in wages of 40% for most workers, an increase in the working week and the loss of 150 posts. Airport Chief Executive John Spooner criticised workers for compromising safety at the airport, ignoring the threats to security that his proposals could lead to as underpaid and demoralised staff try to maintain the safety of 20 million passengers a year.

Threatened workers are determined to highlight the threats to their livelihoods and to the travelling public. The strikes are the most overt response to management threats but other tactics, such as a threatened 'e-mail bombing' to disrupt management activities, may also take place.

Dave McCall, regional spokesman of the TGWU, said: "We are giving notice to the company that we are stepping up action. That's going to mean considerably extended periods of stoppages."

GAS

Safety at stake

OFGEM, the gas industry regulator, has imposed a £100 million a year cost cutting settlement on Lattice, Transco's gas pipeline business. Lattice has responded by announcing 2,400 redundancies. The bulk of these jobs will be managerial/supervisory, along with 600 pipeline engineers.

Lattice has recently employed 800 trainee engineers to meet safety requirements. The GMB and UNISON say public safety will be compromised. Lattice has entered into a 30-year work programme with the Health and Safety Executive to replace iron gas mains across Britain and a skilled workforce will be essential if this is to be implemented well.

As always, the interests of the shareholders (last year's profits were over £1000 million) are set against the interests of workers and consumers. It is difficult to know whose side OFGEM is on. After all, British gas prices rose by over

10% last year. With companies like Lattice making such huge profits, OFGEM could be insisting on cheaper prices for the consumer and adequate staffing to meet safety standards and to complete upgrading of pipework quickly.

NHS

Pay talks continue

THIS YEAR'S PAY increase for nurses, midwives, health visitors and PAMs (Professions Allied to Medicine) has been set by the Pay Review Body at 3.6%. The unions representing other health workers (ambulance, ancillary, administrative, clerical, professional, and technical workers) have submitted a pay claim for 5% or £1,000, whichever is the greater.

The claim also includes a reduction in the working week to 35 hours, reflecting the unions' concerns about low pay and long hours in the health service. They meet again with the employers on 27 February 2002 to continue negotiations.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MARCH

Saturday 23 March
Building Quality Services for the Future, organised by the SERTUC. 10am – 4pm, Congress House, Great Russell St, London. For more info, email theselden@tuc.org.uk.

Sunday 23 March

Trade Union Rights, Health and Safety at Work, organised by the Scottish TUC. 11am – 4pm, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow.

STRESS

Court rules against payments

TEACHERS ARE AMONG those who have lost thousands of pounds when an Appeal Court overturned their stress compensation awards. Part of the guidance issued by the Court implied that employers who offer confidential counselling services and treatments for stress are unlikely to be in breach of their legal obligations.

Legal experts appear to have differing views on the judgement, but the onus has been firmly put back on the worker who must inform the employer about their condition and prove it is related only to the workplace.

Some 6.5 million working days were lost last year through stress-related illness created by Britain's employers. TUC research estimates that 5 million workers believe their jobs are stressful. Over 500,000 workers took sick leave due to stress-related problems last year, at an estimated cost to production of £3.8 billion.

In a recent survey of employers, 89% of those polled rejected the link between stress and poor productivity. But the large number of stress-related cases — there were 6,428 in 2000 — taken to tribunal or court by the unions, would contradict such survey results.

TUC-affiliated trade unions won over £321 million in compensation during 2001 for stress and personal injury claims arising from the sick workplace. Fearful employers are trying to cap stress compensation at £200,000.

David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, commented, "If the employee doesn't like the job because it is proving stressful they must shout or leave." In recent years many employees have dealt with issues such as stress through the courts, and unions have become effective at fighting these claims.

...and deliver us from Consignia

MANAGEMENT OF THE POSTAL service, now termed Consignia, are determined to oversee the full privatisation and sell-off of the service come hell or high water.

The shedding of 30,000 jobs by compulsory redundancies, the dispensing with morning deliveries and the abandonment of the 350-year-old monopoly are all indicators of Consignia's desire to dump the concept of public service and embrace a profit driven ethos.

The abandonment of the state monopoly now opens up control of the service to bidders worldwide. Deutsche Post, the German State monopoly which has been partly privatised and the US TNT company are expected to bid for the UK market.

The Communications Workers Union took widespread unofficial action during 2001 against management practices deemed 'draconian' by the independent investigation into industrial relations within Consignia, headed by Tom 'Lord' Sawyer. The reason why these stoppages were unofficial was simply because the law makes an official strike almost impossible.

Strike action

Now postal workers have voted to take strike action over pay, seeking 5% increases this year as part of a policy to obtain a basic minimum wage of £300 a week over the next two years. At present the basic wage of a postman or woman is £250.53. Around 20,000 postal workers regularly work more than 48 hours a week (breaking the EU 'ceiling').

The CWU has also called for a boycott of the name Consignia by the media and for them to call it by its real name, The Post Office. Even the company's chairman said last month that he "hated" the name.

Billy Hayes, the union's General Secretary, says there is a serious side to the campaign: "Consignia means a profit-centred declining competition-ridden low-wage outfit in constant crisis.

"The Post Office means service to the public; decent wages and conditions to which people aspire rather than reluctantly accept; and a seamless integrated postal service for all. I am in no doubt which option the public wants: we all want to say, 'Cheerio Consignia, welcome back The Post Office.'"

Like it or not, tourism is here to stay. M
it for our livelihood. So it's time to stop
start insisting on a modern infrastruc

Tourism — an issue for tov

FROM CHAUCER'S PILGRIMS in THE CANTERBURY TALES, to the English aristocracy on their grand tours in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the mass market of the post-war years, there have always been tourists. Successive British governments were happy to pocket the revenues, but leave the industry to its own devices. To some extent, the tourist industry colluded with this, preferring market forces to what it regarded as bureaucratic interference.

Today, however, tourism is the fourth largest industry in Britain, employing two million people. Revenue in 2000 was around £64 billion. In rural Britain, tourism generates £12 billion (twice as much as livestock farming), and supports 380,000 jobs and 25,000 small businesses. Many are exceptionally small; of the total UK tourism businesses, 80% have an annual turnover of less than £250,000.

One in four new jobs is in tourism, including farmhouse accommodation, local bus, coach, and taxi companies, garages, museums, and retail. The plight of these fragmented small businesses and sole traders was highlighted in 2001 by the foot and mouth outbreak, and by the terrorist attacks of 11th September. The government rushed to declare the countryside closed for business, oblivious of the effect this would have on urban, as well as rural livelihoods. It was subsequently reluctant to accept a measure of responsibility, and responded with meagre support.

It is this small end of the market that is now calling for proper recognition, ministerial responsibility, efficient channelling of resources, contingency funding to deal with any future crisis, and a job retention scheme — in short, a national strategy to address the systemic weaknesses of the industry.

Regional development a scam

Opinion is divided on the ability of devolution and the regions to deliver resources to targeted areas. Regional development was embraced by the Labour government in deference to the EU, and far from solving problems, seems to be creating new ones. It is a means for the government to devolve responsibility, while still holding the purse strings. There is increasing evidence of divisiveness.

A government decision in 1999/2000 deliberately disadvantaged English tourism relative to Scotland and Wales. The Scottish Tourist Board received £3.77 per head based on tourist spending of £2.5 billion, and Wales received £4.03 based on £1.4 billion, England received only 20p, based on £24 billion!

The British Tourist Authority has traditionally spoken for England's ten regional tourist boards, but when the Greater London Authority was set up, the BTA's grant was reduced, and then frozen, as the GLA channelled funding to the London Tourist Board. Although tourism comes under the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, it has no direct financial relationship with it. Public sector support is channelled through numerous quangos, or other government agencies. DCMS responsibility is passed from one junior minister to another.

The government possesses no information-gathering mechanism of its own, but relies for advice on a multiplicity of unaccountable and self-interested tourism forums. The TUC has no data independent of the DCMS. Not surprisingly, advice is often contradictory. With the BTA still seriously under-funded, there is no co-ordinating lobby. Stepping into this vacuum are some dubious contenders for a leadership role, including the CBI, more

Many of us depend on
to knocking it, and to
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vn and country

sued to defending the interests of the big hotel and restaurant chains, themselves offshoots of some powerful multinationals.

With a White Paper on regional development imminent, the CBI is spearheading an attack on the concept of Regional Development Agencies, as an unnecessary level of local government. There would be some justification, if opposition to bureaucracy were the true motive. In reality, however, the CBI fears that under the "new ways of working", or partnerships, RDAs will bring small businesses much closer to the people, especially trade unions. They are dismissed, with patrician disdain, as "mediocre organisations, full of mediocre people". We are to believe that there is "no army of suppressed talent out there". The GLA is "full of unknowns, deadbeats"!

Full marks to the CBI for articulating what many workers also think; but they then go on to assert that what is needed in place of all this "romantic nonsense" is non-elected private sector control! Even the traditionally private sector tourism industry can see that is not the way forward. The LTB regards the London Development Agency's new responsibility as "very significant — it is imperative that both the Mayor and GLA are fully involved...to ensure benefits for Londoners, tourism businesses and other commercial sectors...".

Destruction of farming

Farmers, on the other hand, have perhaps been too willing to 'diversify' into tourism. The EU strategy of destroying British food production through the Common Agricultural Policy has still not been fully grasped. The enforcement, through incentives, of agribusiness and tourism, while acres of arable land stood idle under the set-aside schemes, was a national humiliation.

The writing was again on the wall when the new Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs was set up, to replace the Ministry of



Hot destination: the British Museum in London (pictured here, the Reading Room) draws millions of tourists to Britain each year.

Agriculture, Farming, and Fisheries. At the height of the foot and mouth epidemic, DEFRA opportunistically moved to quash all thoughts of returning to traditional farming. The countryside as 'heritage', relatively denuded of livestock, was to be made tidy and pretty, ready for the return of the sightseers.

The recently announced 'reforms' of the CAP, rewarding farmers for environmental 'stewardship', but removing the subsidies they rely on for food production, show that the European Commission, with our government's full encouragement, is determined to break British farming. Farmers have pointed out that they, more than anyone, have understood how to look after the countryside.

Farmers also understand what the government does not — that there is an interrelation between wildlife and agriculture going back thousands of

years; farmers need no patronising lessons from the EU. Tourist guides have also pointed out that visitors come to see a living, working, productive countryside.

London matters

Another old hang-up is the view that tourists are primarily a form of pollution, cluttering up the place, talking loudly, and showing their ignorance! But most, by the time they leave, have learned some respect. Would that all British workers had such enthusiasm for their own history and culture. When Ken Livingstone was shown around London's tourist sites, he had a belated Damascene conversion, hailing London's culture as "stupendous", its history as "unique", and tourism a "new leisure industry". Where had he been hiding?

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Continued from page 7

In London, tourism is the second largest and fastest growing industry, employing over 275,000 in hotels and catering alone. London is a gateway to the south east, where tourism employs a total of 650,000. It is also the major point of entry to the rest of the UK.

Regional tourist boards, the most reliable sources of local knowledge, retain responsibility until RDAs are up and running. Some RDAs, for example the South East Economic Development Agency (SEEDA) have expressed reluctance to take on a tourism remit. Some tourist board and development agency areas do not entirely correspond; in the fashionable phrase, they lack 'synergy'. But the LDA has embraced its statutory responsibility for tourism with entrepreneurial enthusiasm, and elbowed the LTB into a mere advisory role, while it consults on a new framework for tourism in London.

The LDA is the government's flagship agency for the UK, answerable to the Mayor. Its economic development plan, ambiguously entitled "Success through diversity", has been carefully crafted to appeal to the Mayor's pet 'socially excluded' groups, as well as to reassure a broad spectrum of business aspirants. It waxes lyrical about "London's creative, cultural... tourism and leisure industries". It is a paradox that, just as the tourism industry is beginning to call for stability, it is given an enterprise-oriented body, eager for risk-taking.

But, like it or not, the LDA is a fact of life in London, and its strategic policies, whether in manufacturing or services, demand to be scrutinised, and challenged. The CBI may see it as a threat, but if workers have any sense, they will seize whatever opportunities there may be in it, while they are still welcome.

Ask the workers

For it is not only governmental agencies that have to be encouraged to support

'Another old hang-up is the view that tourists are primarily a form of pollution, cluttering up the place, talking loudly, and showing their ignorance...'

tourism; organised workers have traditionally been suspicious. Historically, revenues generated by tourism masked decline in production. As part of the low-paid, insubstantial, 'candy-floss' economy, tourism was blamed for a depressing effect on wages. Now, tribute is paid to the part tourism can play in generating jobs in high-value manufacturing, such as the Americas Cup yacht race on the Isle of Wight. Even the prettification of regeneration areas with EU funds (our money), although not the answer to unemployment, could provide the impetus for setting up apprenticeships.

Influencing people

In the current climate of partnership, SERTUC, with its seat on the board, has more than token power — but only if the workers themselves push from below — to influence standards of service, skills and training, infrastructure development, job creation, cultural and environmental strategy, and transport. It is only the relevant unions which can hold the LDA to account, when it fails to deliver on such promises as transforming London into "a high wage, high skill economy in which all will prosper", or "modernising London's infrastructure".

And fail it will. No employers' or government body ever yet granted high wages to workers without being forced. Even the minimum was not achieved without a fight. The struggle for education and training is conducted by workers, not the government.

It is the unions, not the government,

who strive for safety in transport, in hotels, and other workplaces. It was the unionised London tourist guides who recently persuaded the Mayor's transport authority, TfL, to attend to the safety of untrained, poorly paid, non-union 'guides', precariously balanced on open-top buses, and press for their recruitment into the T&GWU.

It is the London tourist guides, and no other tourism agency, who are leading the fight for professionalism. Their national institute for guide training standards, established and controlled by them, will be launched this spring.

London's taxi drivers, unrivalled anywhere in the world, are defending their Blue Book of the "Knowledge" of London's streets, against a perceived lowering of training standards by TfL, in the interest of 'diversity'.

As for modernising the infrastructure, we have seen from the railways what happens if we put our trust in capitalist economics. The working class will have to insist on doing it the working class way.

That means wresting control of the economy and our political system from the stranglehold of the EU, restoring import controls — anything that will release capital to serve workers' needs, and to set free the surplus value, which only our labour power creates.

Real demand

It means, where new jobs in tourism are created on the basis of real demand, such as we have seen at Tate Modern, or with new conference centres such as ExCel in London, such jobs should go to local people, and contracts to British firms.

Without production of vehicles and equipment, hotels and arenas, tourism would collapse. Tourism does not, as the LDA suggests, underpin the economy. Only production does that. For tourism to have a meaningful future, as part of a balanced national economy, its interaction with manufacturing and agriculture must be both understood and respected.

It's Easter. It's time for the teacher union conferences — and unless delegates are careful, another weekend of factional ritual. But in all this, where are the membership?

Off to conference...



Voting at NUT conference: but have the membership been involved, and what notice should they be taking?

THE CONFERENCES of all the teacher unions will take place this year in the context of unprecedented professional unity between them. The NUT has, of course, declared its readiness to dissolve itself along with others to create an entirely new organisation, not based on merger “trade offs” and deals over points of policy or structure — but something completely new and reflective of the nature of the teaching profession at the beginning of the 21st century.

Teacher union unity (see Box, page 11) is a concept whose time has finally come, and no destructive antics will stop it now. Its central importance is surpassed only by the future of the education system itself and in particular, the way it is funded.

Once again the NUT leads the way as its executive has put the question of the

potential integration of Britain into Euroland on the agenda. The union will be undertaking research and discussion to find out how education spending might be affected, and how far the transfer of powers to Europe from Westminster might affect the union's ability to campaign successfully for its policies.

Many people have not yet grasped the importance of the euro as a signal of surrender to the multinationals and their central bank minders. Every item of business on the agenda which has funding at the heart of it, particularly where there is the threat of privatisation, is irrevocably connected to the central question of Britain's membership of the EU and the single currency.

This is for two reasons: the planned expansion of the EU is drawing in more

countries with weak economies which British workers will have to subsidise and secondly, Blair and Brown continue to cut public spending to meet the criteria for joining the single currency to make life easier and more profitable for the financiers.

Hung up on ritual

It often seems horribly appropriate that the NUT Conference is at Easter. Its processes all too often become ritualistic, with the speeches as predictable as the recitation of religious mantras and catechisms (with a good amount of talking in tongues), and in a frenzy of cathartic blood-letting, the union threatens to crucify itself — only to rise again to

Continued on page 10

On the agenda this Easter

Teacher shortages and the growing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention — likely to worsen with the teachers' pay award being well below the rate of increase in average earnings — provides the context for the conferences.

There are clear implications for the central campaigning activity the unions need to undertake. There is the question of a new contract for all teachers, limiting working time and clarifying what is, and what is not, to be included in the role of teachers.

But the question of pay structure, though showing second to workload in teachers' priorities, is of key importance. We go into conference with the government still committed to imposing Performance Related Pay to create competition between teachers, which will result in local and individual pay bargaining.

This is reinforced by the Education Bill, which encourages governing bodies to be 'flexible' in the determination of pay, and variation of national pay and conditions.

In response we need to develop a model pay structure which is based on the unity and integrity of the profession, which rules out competition between workers for inadequate resources, which prevents local bargaining.

Based on professional criteria it would allow career-long progression on the basis of qualification gained from accredited professional development. This would necessitate government investment in the provision of continuing professional development, the employment of extra teachers to facilitate access to it, and the resulting pay increases. What a breakthrough that would be — and yet the reactionaries of the ultraleft oppose it.

The Education Bill shows the government backing off from their previous aggressive privatisation proposals and the motions on the NUT's agenda show that teachers are aware that this is a tactical retreat, not a change of heart. They propose continuing local and national campaigns, work with other TUC affiliated unions and the repeal of anti-union laws which would limit the success of such campaigning.

The NUT Conference agenda also reflects a concern about increasing selectivity, and the need for a broad and balanced curriculum for 14- to 19-year-old students. The government's recent consultation paper, suggesting divergent pathways at 14 for the "academic" and the "vocationally oriented" would take us down an entirely different path, which with "specialist schools" hails the re-emergence of the two tier selective system. Conference will oppose this but will also need to develop a trade union programme, together with other TUC affiliates, for an integrated policy for education, proper vocational education for all, and employment with training for all leaving education.

All of these issues on the NUT's agenda provide the opportunity for thoughtful debate, for strategic and tactical thought, and for unity in moving forward. However, conferences being conferences, and the NUT being the NUT there is plenty of room for division, squabbling and confusion too.

Continued from page 9

resume normal life, blinking in the bright light of everyday political reality as the great stone of Conference is rolled away.

When Jesus emerged from the tomb he asked Mary Magdalene, "Mary, don't you recognise me?" Often teachers find it hard to recognise their union, tattered and torn, after a few difficult days at Easter.

The atmosphere is often theatrical, tribal at worst, as the factions wheedle and whinge, manoeuvre and manipulate, insinuate and insult. Great rallying cries are swiftly followed by deals of convenience. As the faction floor managers glide around the conference, appearing silently and disconcertingly at your elbow, the smaller fry get their chance for their moment of glory — and a mention in the minutes — by bellowing for some procedural device or other to curtail, speed up or slow down debate to suit their factional advantage.

There is much talk in the receptions, bars and restaurants of "how we are doing", and how "we really showed them today." At first an eavesdropper, mindful of the fact that the context is the conference of a union whose members — and the service they provide — is under fierce attack, imagines that this battle talk is directed against the government, the private sector predators, the reactionary education theorists, the enemies facing the workers united.

More often than not, it is in fact concerned with some victory or defeat in securing the success or failure of a largely irrelevant amendment — made important only by its association with one or other of the embattled battalions — the Broad Left (desperate to be known as 'Broadly Speaking'), and the uneasy alliance of the ultraleft CDFU and STA.

The reason that the conference can behave like this is that largely members have turned their back on it, though not on the union itself. Only roughly 1% of members play any part in the processes of the conference — attending meetings to consider motions, priorities or amendments, or attending the conference



itself — and that is to calculate the figure generously.

Yet members do show an interest and are occasionally active in other ways. Perhaps attending meetings on particular issues, perhaps using the union website, taking part in union training or in our professional development courses, making the union work at school level, getting involved in union campaigns. But they do not see the value of the conference.

In the survey the union organised to hear the opinion of members on tactics to be used in the fight against Performance Related Pay, 52,000 members responded, over 25% of the membership. A majority at that time said that they did not favour strike action on the issue.

The Executive listened, not wanting to present the government with the gift of a lost ballot, and wanting genuinely to represent member opinion — only to be immediately accused by the leftists of being undemocratic for not listening to the 1% of the members taking part in the conference which had voted for a motion calling for a token strike, and with spooky, almost psychic powers had predicted (albeit wrongly) almost a year in advance when that token should most effectively be played.

Tears before bedtime

If the members took part in the preparations for the conference, and attended the conference, it could not degenerate in the way it often does into political unreality, and the kind of frenetic hyped-up activity than generally precedes tears before bedtime. The lesson is clear — you don't defeat ultraleftist posturing and noise making with a clever procedural motion or even with an unbeatable argument.

Alternatively, you don't put an end to prevarication and defeatism with a flag waving demonstration or an aggressive tunnel of redtop leftist paper sellers. These tendencies live off each other in an unhealthy symbiotic relationship — a marriage gone horribly wrong in which each individual finds finally that the daily rows are what keep each of them going.

'If the members took part in the preparations for the conference...it could not degenerate in the way it often does'

Unions should reflect the needs, politics, views and priorities of their section of the working class — not those of some self appointed cabal of 'vanguardists' or backwoodsmen. The NUT like all other unions must find ways for the members to take real control.

The focus of union resources, training, support and democratic processes has to move further and further towards the members in their workplaces — in our schools. We need to build strong workplace organisation, and root union democracy there, rather than insisting that members will return, on a regular basis, to attending association meetings if we can only get the right venue, or improve the cakes, or pay childcare, or...

Of course all the big issues will be discussed at the Bournemouth conference this Easter. But will the views of members prevail? Just a look at the motions on the

agenda show that again they were drafted around June of 2001, and put to the faction conferences for agreement. They were then put to association meetings in September and October 2001, and printed and prioritised by the end of January...to allow amendments in February...in time for the conference at the end of March — only nine months after conception!

Left with the conference we have, distant from the membership, and made worse by its format and timetable, it is essential that the executive bring up-to-date priority motions to the conference. But this too will be condemned as undemocratic, because these motions will displace the motions from a small number of poorly attended association meetings that have spent nine months gestating.

An end to factions

To face the challenges of today and those of tomorrow we need a single teachers' union — and one which puts away the factional manoeuvring which some have come to think of as inevitable, allowing a real democratic process to develop without destructive posturing, and with members in control. Every debate on policy, strategy and tactics must be measured against that historic need to organise teachers more effectively and in unity. Let's make sure that the conference season moves that process on.

Coming together

The only people remaining who are opposed to professional unity are the ultraleftists in the NUT who fear for they will be swamped by ordinary teachers' views — and activists of other unions who fear the influence of the NUT's ultraleft! The Easter conferences will ratchet up the drive toward unity in a number of ways, but that drive is more and more clearly unstoppable.

ATL has declared in favour of closer cooperation and wants to explore a Council or Confederation of teacher unions. Most remarkably the new General Secretary of NASUWT has won a position on his executive calling for the widest possible debate among the membership, considering merger with NUT and ATL. There have been joint motions at the three conferences, and joint motions to TUC. The unions are now in the habit of making collective representations to Government, and this year the oral submission to the STRB review body on workload was made jointly too.

Locally, more and more associations and divisions of the three unions are making up their own structures and practices, and working closer together.

The idea that we have to live with capitalism has powerful roots that capitalism works is the biggest lie of all. In this, the first of we examine the ideas that underlie working class thought..

Social democracy or socialism

The capitalist economy has always gone through peaks and troughs. But since the late 1970s we have faced something new, not just another crisis but the absolute decline of the entire system. This system is failing us: it cannot provide jobs for all, nor industries, education, health and housing even when it is booming.

Some claim, on the contrary, that

No, the idea that socialism doesn't work and capitalism does is the biggest lie of all. A variant is that socialism is the problem, and capitalism the solution, as privatisation says. Is a system working when a fertile land abandons half of its productive fields, when an island of coal in a sea of oil abandons domestic coal extraction, when an island fishing-nation

surrenders its fish-stocks to the EU, when the workshop of the world closes, when entire industries are decimated, when all public services are deemed to be private, when industrial training and education become dependent solely on 'the market'?

Something different has happened. We need new solutions to our class and national problems. This means new thinking. We cannot wait for others but must do our own thinking and action.

The pace and scale of this change has caused shell shock, exposing as illusions many of the notions that some in the labour movement have rested on for

Is a system working when an island of coal in a sea of oil abandons domestic coal extraction, when an island nation surrenders its fish stocks to the EU?



socialism is the system that has failed. But which system works? The one that turned the workshop of the world into an industrial wasteland? Or the one that found Russia in ruins and turned it into a great power in the world (until internal weakness threw it away)?

Which system united China and set it on the road of independent development? Which system enabled Vietnam to defeat the self-styled No. 1 power? Which Latin American country has the most independence, the best health care system, the best education, the best environment, the best treatment for AIDS patients, and the most democracy? Cuba.



, and yet the idea a three part series,

years. We enter the next period with a heightened sense of the inadequacy of relying on social democracy to legislate us out of trouble.

Politics itself has become a dirty word to many of those most committed to our class and a socialist future. The word politics has become tainted with the treacheries, ignorance, and gamesmanship of 'parliamentary politics', individual ambition within the Palace of Westminster, and ultraleft posturing within the labour movement.

The great and the good, the propertied few, have generously offered to 'represent' us, the vast majority, while we petition and protest outside if they don't get it right. And when one lot of representatives don't do the job, we are offered MEPs and Assembly members, who also don't do it. This form of politics has got to end. We need to assert our politics as a class. We must run things ourselves and elect and deselect our own.

Workers, all those who have to work to survive, who do not live off profits, have to seize political power and rebuild Britain without capitalists. This is not a new idea. As a Party we have never thought it possible to change Britain through Parliament. The necessary democratic control over production to plan an economy to meet people's needs cannot be legislated for within the existing system. Workers must create a socialist economy. Only the class-conscious working class can undertake this. Our party aims to accelerate that process, to unite all workers to focus on the conquest of class power.

Workers in Britain created the first trade unions to limit industrial capitalism and hence physically survive. We built the first political party to represent our trade union interests in a bourgeois parliament, and back in the 17th century our political strength defeated religious bigotry and division. We are not divided along sectarian lines, nor do we have more than one trade union centre.

The question we have to ask ourselves is if workers in Britain are so

'Workers, all those who have to work to survive, who do not live off profits, have to seize political power and rebuild Britain without capitalists. This is not a new idea...'

advanced, why haven't we built a socialist society? Why have we allowed so much destruction of our industrial base, the source of civilisation and progressive thinking? Why didn't we, at a time when we had bigger and stronger unions that could knock capitalist Governments over, finish the job off and get rid of capitalism? We chose not to and suffered the Thatcherite Tories. Why was this so?

Don't blame others

In trying to explain this, some have suggested that workers' leaders are corrupt and that they have had the power to divert workers from the revolution. But this is an insult to workers. We are thinking beings. If our leaders are bad, then how good are we to elect and tolerate them? To blame the leader is to defer the real explanation by one step.

Others have said that 'the media,' the 'education system', the 'intellectuals' and so on have warped and perverted the minds of workers.

These are versions of the 'mis-leadership' theory, based on the view that workers are stupid. Workers, whether they are miners or neurosurgeons (both in short supply) are not stupid. To blame others is to rely on others: relying on others, not on ourselves, is reneging on our responsibility. We have to do the job ourselves: nobody can, or should, do it for us.

Some say that employers 'bribed' workers from their profits or from the

proceeds of empire, that they just gave us wage increases and various welfare benefits (free education, council housing, health service, etc.) The working class was therefore content to live in peace with its own capitalist class.

Ridiculous though this sounds now, this idea was used effectively to set relatively low paid groups of workers against relatively highly paid groups of workers. The more wages you got, the more the system had 'bribed' you.

Again, in trying to explain how workers behaved, this denied our intelligence in fighting for higher pay in the most skilled sectors. Capital never gave us anything, and welfare benefits, such as they are, we had to force from employers and their state. The British ruling class gained and continues to gain enormous wealth from exploiting each and every one of us, wealth that workers made inroads into, but only by fighting the employer for it.

Class divides the world: employers exploit workers. No notions of rich and poor, of North/South divide, of three worlds (or three ways), or of superpowers, can substitute for this reality. Sweatshops of immigrant labour in the British Midlands are linked to sweatshops built on child labour elsewhere. But our working class unites — our class global solidarity links our actions, our trade union ancestors and exploited workers everywhere.

We are our own worst enemy. Our class has chosen the illusion of the evolutionary method, the road of least resistance.

Social democracy is the theory that you can reform the system, whittle it away peacefully until it becomes socialism. Even this once powerful theory is slipping from working class experience as the trade unions increasingly appear content to pay the Labour Party to do the multinational companies' bidding. Social democracy is our own imposition on ourselves.

• In the next issue we look at how social democratic thinking developed.

An unusual cultural collaboration in an old operating theatre did more than simply illuminate the past...

Music, drama and medicine

THE STEADY REDUCTION of hospital bed numbers and clinical staff — started under Thatcher and continuing to this day — has resulted in the chaotic conditions in hospital wards that inevitably lead to the growth of cross-infections. Similarly reminiscent of the 19th century is the emerging struggle over hospital cleanliness, where research by UNISON has revealed that there is now only one cleaner for every 360 patients. This has been reversed by the action of cleaners and porters at the Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow, who won the return of 212 cleaners and porters after 13 years of privatisation, a result which heralded a breakthrough by the unions involved.

Timely, then, that the Old Operating

Theatre in London became a stage recently for a production *VIEWING THE INSTRUMENTS*, which combined music, drama and medical history to tell the story of surgery before the advent of anaesthesia or antiseptics.

By taking the audience back to the roots of medical provision and procedures, *VIEWING THE INSTRUMENTS* gave a timely and fascinating insight into just how great has been the advance made by generations of workers in the field.

The venue was Britain's only surviving 19th-century operating theatre

— an extension to St Thomas's Hospital, whose history can be traced back to the 12th century. Built in 1821, its patients were the London poor, dependent on the hospital's charity. The attached museum and Herb Garret, dating to the 17th century, offer excellent exhibitions and talks on early Victorian working and living conditions, and the effects of poverty and public policy on the health of the community.

The museum experience provides a salutary reminder that 'state-of-the-art' medical techniques and instruments

during the mid-1800s were actually little different from those used in Roman times. It was only with the development of anaesthesia in 1817, Florence Nightingale's founding of training for nurses in 1856, and Lister's discovery of antiseptics in 1865 that major advances were begun in medicine.

An evening of musical and medical collaboration was very appropriate to bring all of this into focus, especially since there is an intriguing historical connection between music and medicine.

Soothing music

Before the advent of anaesthesia, music could be used both to soothe the patient and describe the operations. Readings and audio-visual presentations of 17th- and 18th-century medical research and procedures were enhanced by the performance of music by Marin Marais, written in the early 18th century, which contained exact instructions to accompany every stage of an operation.



Left: The Old Operating Theatre, Southwark, scene of the performance of *Viewing the Instruments*.



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.

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.

WORKERS

78 Seymour Avenue
London N17 9EB

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

The project brought together participants from all over Britain — Dr Peter Isaacs from Blackpool Victoria Hospital, Philip Parr, actor and director of the Swaledale Festival, Jane Wildgoose, writer and designer from Winchester School of Art, and the three composers Eddie McGuire from Glasgow, and London-based Eleanor Firman and Rachel Stott. The composers showed links between words, gestures and instruments used in music and medicine, and also how even today music can soothe, give the patient hope, and reduce anxiety.

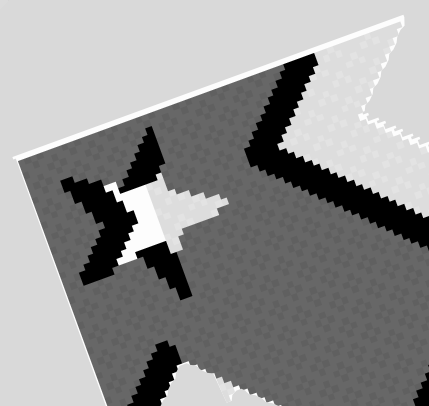
At this time of intensified anxiety and campaigning about the erosion of the NHS, such an imaginative project gives heart to those who are involved in defending it. The project was supported by "sciart", which is dedicated to encouraging collaborations between science and the arts.

In preparing the project a careful investigation was carried out into the problem of communication between the skilled medical staff and the patients themselves — thus pinpointing the misunderstandings that can arise.

The narratives that were heard as part of the investigation provided text for the stage presentation. Medical staff were given time to record their thoughts, revealing intriguing similarities and contrasts between the 18th-century understanding of the body and its problems, and today's. The more relaxed proceedings helped the patients to communicate, too.

Voices of staff and patients — utterances that are becoming increasingly vociferous in today's NHS.

The Old Operating Theatre is at the Museum and Herb Garret, 9a St Thomas' St, London SE1 9RY — a short walk from Tate Modern or the Globe Theatre.
website: www.thegarret.org.uk



Back to Front – Enemy of the people

“When Blair attacks union opposition as the action of ‘wreckers’, he declares himself and his government openly as an enemy of the working class, an enemy of the people...”

WHETHER BLAIR’S now-infamous letter to Romania was linked with a donation of £125,000 to the Labour Party some weeks later is rather beside the point. In any case, corruption is by no means the greatest of evils. Earnest treachery is a long way worse. How dare a prime minister of Britain urge support for a competitor to what is left of the British steel industry?

This is no little “gate” scandal. It is further and damning evidence of a government that sees no obligation to the British people. From this lack of root, of obligation, stems also this government’s devotion to the European Union, an outfit that has just made hostility to itself an arrestable offence (yes, inside Britain, too — see News Digest, page 4).

The denial of root and obligation extends to the trade unions, which gave birth to the Labour Party in 1906 and have nurtured it with members’ contributions. Not that the Labour Party ever returned much in the way of favour. Beer and sandwiches at Number 10, occasionally, but never support for workers in struggle. Like all employers, they oppose all strikes.

Workers and their unions have learnt to live with their duplicitous creation, asking a great deal, expecting a great deal less, but expecting, all the same, that a Labour Party would not connive in their destruction.

What have workers now received for their donations? A government

recklessly committed to privatisation, to the extent that it is imposing on Londoners a nightmare version of Railtrack. Read the small print, and you will find that the private jackals taking over London’s transport infrastructure will be able to operate a service 5% worse than at present and still reap their profits. Health, education, everywhere is facing worse threats than ever we anticipated under Thatcher.

And now Blair attacks all union opposition as the action of “wreckers”. In so doing, he has declared himself and his government openly as an enemy of the working class, an enemy of the people.

The challenge for workers is to consider not just the treachery of the Labour Party, but how we have allowed the betrayal. This is all the more important as self-styled leftists eager for workers’ money offer themselves as replacements for Labour — a fresh twist to the cycle of promise and betrayal that characterised the last century.

Our unions do not need political representation, they need political involvement by workers. Rather than adopt the slogan “No return to the ’30s”, perhaps we should consider “No return to 1906”.

In this issue of WORKERS, we start a three-part examination of the ideas of socialism and social democracy. It will not contain all the answers, but it starts to ask some of the right questions. Let us know what you think.

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