

WORKERS

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IRAQ, IRAN: TROOPS OUT



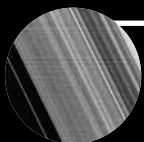
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IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ First thoughts: Thatcherism for ever? ”

THE GOVERNMENT has decided that the referendum question must be, “Should the United Kingdom approve the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union?” But this is seriously misleading. It is not a question of “approving” a treaty – to answer Yes to this question would be to pledge allegiance to what would be our new constitution - the trap would shut.

To answer Yes would be to endorse our becoming a province of a new EU state. The constitution rules that all member states must change their constitutions so as to transfer all their sovereignty to the new state. To answer Yes would be to end Britain’s sovereignty and independence.

The constitution gives a new EU state its

own independence, rather than depending on treaties agreed between sovereign member states. Valéry Giscard-d’Estaing, its architect, has said, “Our constitution cannot be reduced to a mere treaty for co-operation between governments. Anyone who has not yet grasped this fact deserves to wear the dunce’s cap.”

It gives the EU for the first time a legal personality and an independent corporate existence. The EU constitution lays down the form of this new state: undemocratic and corporatist. It also lays down the policies that we would have to follow – Thatcherism, monetarism. Vote for it, and corporatism and Thatcherism would become constitutional obligations.

Second opinion: market madness

THE INTERNAL MARKET has become an obsession with Blair’s gang. John Hutton, a junior minister at the Department of Health, says the government should end the redistribution of surpluses to less successful hospitals and schools and allow the more successful ones to retain the money “to improve their services”.

This is the rhetoric that destroys the

efforts of workers to improve their services. Hospital managers have warned government they will have to close wards before the end of the month because they have run out of money for this financial year.

Some hospitals are already millions in deficit and considering ward closures to balance the books. And Labour promised its NHS reforms would deliver real improvements!



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Rebuilding Britain

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Unions fight EU constitution

LEADING TRADE unionists from more than 20 unions across the country have launched a campaign against the EU constitution, warning that it threatens public services, democracy and manufacturing. The development gives the lie to the impression that the TUC has tried to cultivate, of general support for the constitution.

The campaign, Trade Unionists Against the EU Constitution, or TUAEC, kicked off on 22 January at Unity House, London, the headquarters of RMT, the rail, maritime and transport workers' union, at a meeting attended by 57 trade unionists, with a further 20 unable to come but sending their apologies. The 77 include 6 general secretaries, 19 full time officials and 15 lay national officers.

Welcoming the delegates TUAEC chairman Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, emphasised the need to pitch the campaign at shop floor workers. He reminded all that there would be fierce opposition and funding weighted heavily against us.

Dr Anthony Coughlan from the National Platform of Ireland gave a comprehensive analysis of the treaty behind the constitution. He reminded the meeting that workers in many parts of Europe, like Germany, will not be allowed a referendum and they are placing their hopes for self-government on the commitment to democracy of British workers. Coughlan emphasised that the constitution would create a new European Union as a legal entity for the first time. It would be a big qualitative change from the existing EU built on various forms of cooperation through treaties to a new superstate, a federal Europe.

Unlike normal constitutions, which give rules for election and law making and guarantee certain rights, the EU constitution enshrines capitalist policy and ideology and outlaws socialist change. It is a charter for the freedom of capital and sets in place the gradual abolition of national self-government.

Delegates discussed the need to ensure debate on the EU constitution in all our unions, to promote clarity and strengthen opposition by the membership. Initial focus will be union conferences and this year's TUC, advocating a No vote in the referendum. In order to keep the debate sharp, the political focus is opposition to the constitution. Given the constitution's anti-democratic pro-capitalist ideology each union will identify practically how the EU constitution undermines their members' interests. Every member will be mobilised for the No vote.

The campaign will shortly launch a pamphlet explaining what is wrong with the constitution, and a website, www.tuaec.org.uk.

TRADE GAPS Setting new records

THE US TRADE gap for 2004 was a record \$618 billion, up by 24% on 2003, the previous record. December's shortfall was \$56 billion, the second worst monthly figure ever; the worst was November's \$59 billion. These deteriorating figures give the lie to Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve chairman, who has continually predicted that the gap would lessen.

Not to be outdone, Britain's 2004 deficit on trade in goods and services was also a record : £39.3 billion, up by £7.5 billion from the previous year's record. The deficit in trade in goods alone was £57.6 billion, offset by earnings in services. Exports were down by £2.2 billion.

DOCKS National strike looms

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN Associated British Ports (ABP) and the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G) have broken down over the company's failure to increase its pay offer. T&G workers rejected a 2.9% pay rise, and indicated they would be willing to be balloted over industrial action if talks failed.

The T&G represents around 300 workers across ABP's operations in the UK and a majority of those who are covered by collective agreements with the company. The union also has a growing number of members in the other section of the workforce, which is covered by personal contracts. ABP operates 21 ports, including Hull, Immingham, Cardiff and Southampton. A formal ballot will be run shortly.

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

EUROTRASH

The latest on Brussels

Media bias

THE DAILY MIRROR recently ran a poll on the EU constitution alongside a pro-constitution full page article. Yet its readers voted 72% to 28% against Britain signing the constitution, clearly surprising the paper's editors. Meanwhile, an independent commission has examined the BBC's coverage of the EU. Chaired by Lord Richard Wilson, a former Cabinet Secretary, it included pro-EU and anti-EU figures — and it found that the BBC's coverage was biased in favour of the EU, concluding, "Although the BBC wishes to be impartial in its news coverage of the EU, it is not succeeding." Pro-EU campaigners always complain that the media are biased against them. But now the BBC has been told to put in place guidelines to ensure fair coverage in the referendum.

French fight

THE INCREASINGLY fierce fight to protect the 35-hour week in France is damaging the government's chances of winning a Yes vote in the EU constitution referendum. Early in February, almost 600,000 trade union members marched to protest against the proposed laws to lengthen the working week to up to 48 hours. And at the end of January, the central organisation of the CGT union voted to oppose the constitution, by 81 votes to 18, with 17 abstentions. They said that they "opposed an EU construction marked by the subjugation of social rights to the logics of profitability and competition, the main principles found in the constitution".

Germany's jobs disaster

THE GERMAN MINISTER for employment, Wolfgang Clement, has said that he expects joblessness to rise even further following the news that it had broken a post-war record and topped 5 million in January — over 10% of the workforce. Despite his claims that it would start to fall by the end of the year, other commentators say the true figures are nearer 9 million. Last year unemployment appeared to be stable, but only because about 93,000 people were taken off the register, as they had "little jobs", which paid no social security. Proper jobs, meanwhile, continued to decline.



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

CLEANERS AT THE House of Commons took to the streets on 8 February as part of a struggle to unionise cleaning workers and improve their working conditions. Through the Transport and General Workers' Union they are demanding more pay and better contracts, to bring them closer to their better paid counterparts in the House of Lords.

Commons cleaners are paid £4.85 an hour, the lowest legal minimum for an adult worker. They have just 12 days' holiday, no company pension scheme and only statutory sick pay. They are demanding dignity and respect, which in practical terms means £6.70 per hour, 20 days' holiday, sick pay, a company pension and union recognition. Parliament could face strike action by the cleaners if their demands are not addressed and if a pending vote to take action is supported. The cleaners are realising a long-standing class truth: working-class progress depends on workers standing up for their own interests and getting organised.

Rover still heading for China

THE LONG-OVERDUE wedding announcement of China's Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation and MG Rover, heralded for late last year, still seems to be in a state of uncertainty, despite the Chinese bridegroom's reassuring announcements.

Meanwhile, a local newspaper in the Midlands has revealed that MG Rover has asked 119 workers to prepare to work in Shanghai in order to restructure operations at Longbridge, as well as to provide the necessary technical expertise for any project in China. If China gets access to the technological and research base of MG Rover, what value Longbridge?

There are also suggestions that the company is planning to shift some operations to low-cost bases such as India or South Africa as it attempts to save up to £100 million. It may be that Tony Woodley, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, is being overly optimistic if he believes that the deal is "the last possible lifeline that will keep this very British company alive and going".

In fact, the wider economic indicators are not looking good. China has announced that internal car sales in 2004 dropped by 15%, with indications that internal sales for 2005 will be 6-10% lower. So who needs further overcapacity in the vehicle manufacturing base? Nearly 60% of members of the Engineering Employers Federation recently indicated that they have shifted or intend to shift manufacturing to China. Why would MG Rover buck such a trend? The Chinese may have substituted Mah-Jong for Poker but the workers of Longbridge look as though they are the losers whatever the game.

TEACHING**School challenges government**

A PRIMARY SCHOOL in Essex has said that without extra money it will not implement the workload agreement forced through by the government last year. Instead, the headteacher, the governors and the staff at North Primary School in Colchester are challenging the government to come up with the cash to fund it.

By this September, teachers will be entitled by law to a guaranteed 10% of their working week for planning, preparation and assessment. This is hardly a generous allocation (imagine a lawyer being told to spend 90% of the time in court and 10% preparing and handling the case). But the government has failed to

fund even this modest initiative, and schools are being forced to break the law or employ unqualified staff to fill posts cheaply.

But schools that have indicated that they cannot or will not be meeting their obligation are not to be prosecuted. Instead, government is offering support to encourage them to use other means, such as classroom assistants.

The NUT opposed the original workload arrangement and did not take part in the negotiations. Now other unions are having a rethink. Angry heads have forced their union, the NAHT, to call an emergency general meeting to discuss the matter. Teaching unions will have to work together to decide on the best tactics that will ensure better conditions of service, while forcing government to cough up.

Stock exchange for sale

IT MAY BORE BRITISH workers to death having regular news bulletins every five minutes on every early morning news programme about inexplicable ups or downs on the markets, foreign markets, this exchange, that exchange or whatever, but something is afoot in the London Stock Exchange (LSE). Now, as well as gambling with workers' livelihoods, the stock and share holders are gambling with their own survival, as if in a giant casino.

In 1986 the London Stock Exchange deregulated itself in what was called the Big Bang, rendering it even more unaccountable and footloose. In 2001, with the creation of the single European market, the LSE and the German Börse started discussions about merger. It was obvious that in the carefully crafted European Union the EU Commissioners were not going to tolerate two centres of finance capital. Either London or Frankfurt would have to go.

This merger was scuppered after a cheeky Swedish bid to buy the London Stock Exchange. In turn this was sunk after a daring but doomed LSE bid to buy the French Liffe exchange. Since then bid and counter-bid has followed as the Germans tried to swallow London, the French outbid them both, while the Swiss, Korean and myriad other financial pariahs hung about, angling for the pickings.

Now the French-Dutch Stock Exchange, Euronext, has bid for the LSE, deliberately derailing the German challenge. Stock values for the respective exchanges are up, down and yo-yo-ing around. Someone is making money all the time.

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has warned that if a future owner moved the LSE to another country it might no longer be subject to British takeover and corporate governance laws. The FSA might then have to share authority for investigating market abuse with the authorities of the new owner's country.

The cannibalism within the finance houses of the European Union – the ownership of the Square Mile and its institutions, including financial brands such as the Stock Exchange, Lloyds and the Bank of England – is about one global strand of European monopoly capitalism triumphing over all others, and the EU does not care which that is.

MOBILE TELEPHONES**Profits up, jobs down**

T-MOBILE IS to cut around 800 jobs at sites across Britain, part of a move by parent company Deutsche Telekom (DT) that will see a total of 2,200 jobs axed across Europe, despite a profit of 3.2

billion euros last year and 4% growth. One in eight staff will be affected over the next two years.

The cuts will hit sites at Hatfield, Sunbury, Merthyr Tydfyl, Doxford, Greenock, Warrington and Solihull, as well as shops. The company does not recognise the Communication Workers Union and has refused to consult with it.

WHAT'S ON**Coming soon****MARCH**

Friday 11 March – Sunday 20 March

National Science Week

Science, technology and engineering are crucial to Britain's future as an industrial nation. National Science Week, which takes place every March, is an opportunity for people of all ages to take part in activities showcasing British science. There are events around the country, all coordinated by the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Find out what's happening near you at www.the-ba.net.

Saturday 19 March, 1pm

**National Demonstrations:
Bring the troops home**

One year on from the start of the war against Iraq, 100,000 Iraqis dead, tens of thousands of Iraqis homeless, an economy and a country in ruins. That's the legacy of the Bush/Blair axis. There are demonstrations in central London and Glasgow: for more details on route, coaches, etc, see www.stopwar.org.uk

MINING**Last North East pit closes**

THE LAST PIT in the North East, Ellington colliery, has been closed by UK Coal. The NUM chairman, Ian Lavery, said, "The closure of the colliery will have severe consequences economically and in employment terms for the area as a whole."

Lavery said that UK Coal's continued butchery of mining not only highlights their intention to close the industry down, but "begs the question as to how and why the government and the nation are allowing this company to run the deep-mined British coal industry and in turn, dictate the energy policy of the country".

Meanwhile the European Commission has allowed the German government to authorise multi-million euro aid for the German coal industry, as part of the overall restructuring plan that the commission approved for the country for 2003-5. The total aid will amount to 2.7 billion euros (£1.85 million). In the long term the German mining industry will also face a reduction in production — which is why the aid was allowed.

Identity cards

THE GOVERNMENT wants to control us, the citizens, and a key weapon in its armoury is identity cards. Its proposed scheme is draconian – ID cards would be compulsory. And it is costly – even the government admits that the scheme could cost £5.5 billion. The likely price to each of us is £35 to £40 for a card without a passport, and £85 for an enhanced biometric passport. It's not as if there is public demand: a recent poll suggested only 18% of us would be happy to pay even £30 for a card.

ID cards are an EU idea which Labour accepted in 2000, well before 9/11 gave it the excuse that the scheme was to do with fighting terrorism. And the only research ever conducted into the effect of ID cards on terrorism concluded there was none. Of the 25 countries that have been most adversely affected by terrorism since 1986, 80% have national identity cards, a third of which incorporate biometrics. This research was unable to uncover any instance where the presence of an identity card system in those countries was seen as a significant deterrent to terrorist activity.

Terrorists have traditionally moved across borders using tourist visas (such as those who were involved in the US terrorist attacks), or they live in the country and are equipped with legitimate identification cards (such as those who carried out the Madrid bombings).

Fraud reduction?

Governments have traditionally claimed that ID cards would reduce benefit fraud. But this is not true either. A junior minister at the Department of Work and Pensions, Chris Pond, revealed that of the estimated £2 billion total annual benefit fraud, only £50 million, 2.5%, came from claiming a false identity. Almost all benefit fraud was based on people lying about their circumstances, not about their identity. The £5.5 billion cost of a new ID infrastructure for benefits would be 110 times the annual loss through false identity.

Nor is there evidence that ID cards would reduce illegal immigration or any other crimes. Police need evidence linking individuals to crimes, not evidence linking people to cards. Giving police the power to stop people without reason is an unnecessary and unacceptable extension of the state's powers. It is part of Labour's dictatorial agenda.

The government may try to introduce ID cards under the Royal Prerogative, by-passing Parliament, as the previous government did with the new plastic ID card-style driving licence with photographs. This was introduced from July 1996, to comply with an EU directive. The Home Office has confirmed that the ID card scheme comes from the EU: significantly, the European standard to which the driving licence/identity card would need to conform does not allow for national symbols, only the European Circle of Stars.

We don't have to accept these cards. The Australians defeated the idea in 1987, after massive public protests split the government. New Zealanders also defeated the idea. Canada abandoned the idea last year after public protests.

With talk of a general election in the more, it is clear that bourgeois dem

Don't vote for Blair's bo

THE PAST FEW months have seen British political leaders trying to outdo one another over who will rid our hospitals of the killer disease MRSA quickest. Who can axe the most civil service jobs? Whose figures add up? Who will introduce the most ruthless model of the free market into our health services? Who will save Africa, a continent plundered by British colonialism? And who will implement the Australian model immigration policy best?

But that's about all they squabble over. Blair and Milburn continue to steal Tory policies as soon as they are announced. The new role for a parliamentary opposition appears to be that they find an old idea, reinvent it as a policy, and then the government promises to implement it immediately.

The role of the governing party seems to be to make promises and then do the opposite. Labour's manifesto in 2001 promised not to introduce university top-up fees, so they blatantly introduce them without any shame. Blair promises Parliament, before the invasion of Iraq, that a special trust fund will be set up to safely hold the revenues from the sale of Iraqi oil, but then \$8.8 billion disappears, some to pay for the occupation, some paid to US contractors and the rest literally gone.

An unknown Tory MP defects to Labour, with a great fanfare, because he loves Blair's style and stand on Iraq and the EU. On the one occasion that workers are permitted to vote in a referendum on a government proposition – regional devolution – they decisively reject it by a margin of four to one because they don't want more politicians.

Disrepute

Never before has bourgeois democracy appeared in such naked disrepute. Bourgeois democracy, like the capitalist system it claims to manage, is in terminal decline. Their political parties no longer have any relevance. The Labour Party has abandoned any pretence of its members determining policy. Now it is left to a playground punch-up between Brown, Blair and Milburn. Blair screams that Labour's manifesto for the election yet to be announced will be unremittingly New Labour – more privatisation and neo-liberal market policies on a scale that Thatcher could only dream of. Its party members have left in droves. But Blair doesn't care, because the party is irrelevant as he prepares to hand over to the EU more and more areas of British policy making.

The Tories have had to manoeuvre Howard in as leader after their membership (average age approaching 80) voted in Ian Duncan Smith, the Quiet Man – surely a sign that the Tories are finished. They remain despised by the working class. Howard complains that Labour keeps stealing their policies and they will therefore have to keep them secret until just before the election. They cannot shift their position in the polls despite the unpopularity of the government. The Liberal Democrats try to present themselves as the liberal voice of capitalism but few are listening. They love the EU and they failed to pursue their advantage of opposing the invasion of Iraq by supporting the puppet government and the phoney elections. Simply, they lack courage.

But the latest proposal from the government takes the biscuit. The Law Lords have ruled that it is illegal to indefinitely hold foreigners imprisoned without a reason and without charge or trial at Belmarsh high security prison. No surprise there, then! But what is Home Secretary Clarke's response? To extend such incarceration without

air, it's hard to tell government and opposition apart. More and more democracy is just a mechanism to exclude workers from power...

Bourgeois democracy



Photo: Workers

Westminster: a seat of power, but not for the working class

charge or trial to all British citizens, in order to ensure that foreigners are not discriminated against. The new imprisonment will be within the comfort of your own house, except that you – and anyone living with you – will be tagged, not permitted to leave the house or have any visitors. All communications and behaviour will be monitored, and just so you don't get lonely, there will be a bevy of armed police around your home. No wonder South African writer Gillian Slovo described this as a repetition of what happened in South Africa under the apartheid regime.

Clarke also wants to change the legal system in such cases so that the judge becomes the prosecutor. This is all done, we are told, to defend democracy.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party uses the Freedom of Information Act to dig up dirt on other political parties, the government's Electoral Commission is overruled in its opposition to postal voting, the head of the Electoral Commission warns that people are becoming fed up with all parties, the government is set to give us 24-hour drinking as demanded by the drinks industry and scores of super casinos as demanded by the US gaming industry.

Bourgeois democracy is indeed a mechanism designed to prevent ordinary people – workers – from taking power away from their capitalist ruling class. They can swap one party for another one, or one Prime Minister for another, but they cannot take power. A dictionary definition of democracy describes it as a system of government in which the people have a say in who holds power. No chance of even this limited definition being met, then. And that's without the influence of the bourgeois media.

Funding

Yet our government set up and funds the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (alongside a long list of other foundations for democracy funded by the US and other governments) to show the new democracies of eastern Europe and others, including Iraq, how to manage their new neo-liberal capitalism without giving their own workers any possibility of taking or retaking power.

British political parties create and train parties in these countries in their own image, telling them how to campaign, what institutions to set up, etc. Even trade unions in these countries are given the treatment. These makeovers are all part of

the conditions for membership of the EU capitalism survival club and funded with our money through the Department for International Development.

An example from Hungary of their lessons in democracy gives the game away. Its Social Democrat government conducted a referendum on whether or not to privatise its health service. A majority voted no but the privatisation is to go ahead anyway. The Hungarian parliament voted to withdraw all Hungarian troops from Iraq by Christmas 2004. The Defence Minister ignored this and is sending more troops under the NATO training umbrella and handing over 77 T-72 tanks to the government of Iraq.

Blair, hand in glove with Bush, is forcing what they call democracy and freedom into Iraq at the point of a gun, and presumably they intend to do the same with the others on the US list. If democracy means a system for managing capitalism without the interference of workers, then freedom means unfettered free market capitalism.

Bourgeois democracy, therefore, is nothing other than a mechanism to exclude workers from power. It follows that, as workers, we should make it unworkable and irrelevant. That's why workers should not vote in the coming general election.

Call it abstention, a voters' strike or a boycott, but the higher the number of those not voting, the higher the number of people not giving consent to the government, the more damage to Blair's and capitalism's right to rule and the more damage to their system of control. We should then ask ourselves the question, should we finish the job and take it away once and for all?

If Blair got 40% of 60% in 2001, that suggests that 24% voted for him and 76% didn't. That did bother him because he has tried every conceivable means to reverse the figure. He is desperate for postal voting despite the fact that his own election commission has ruled against it on the grounds that it is open to fraud. Blair is quite happy to countenance fraud in order to get the numbers up. If he wants them up, we should keep them down.

More students are coming raw deal: bigger class

The lowering o

Then everything changed. A year later Tony Blair was swept into office and the scene went quiet. The protests stopped. Higher education continued to suffer, but since then there has been very little of a revolt against the continued cuts in student funding and the wholesale onslaught on much of the sector.

Now government talk is of another expansion of numbers that, on the surface, appears to be a welcome move but, as with previous expansions, is severely underfunded. The sector's workers are once again expected to shoulder the burden. Talk of expansion and increased numbers is a smoke screen to hide the real problems in HE. The entire system is under attack on three fronts, and some institutions face the loss of departments, or even closure.

Research threatened

First there is an attack on research, especially basic research. Universities are faced with convoluted bidding processes for funds, which cause mountains of bureaucracy. They are forced to play games with the farcical mechanism of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This charade pits academics against each other, for a fixed and inadequate pot of money to fund their research.

The RAE puts academic staff under intense pressure to publish quickly and often even if their research is not ready for publication. Research funding depends on accumulating points in a crude system that is open to manipulation and abuse. In fact, a transfer market has opened up, where top researchers are lured away with promises and resources.

Universities are forced to ride roughshod over the needs of staff and the stability and clarity which good research demands is nowhere to be seen. Many researchers are poorly paid and on short-term contracts. Many of these contracts are locally negotiated and fall outside the national bargaining structure negotiated by trade unions for full time teaching staff.

The overall picture is of a fragile research base staffed by over-worked and poorly paid researchers.

Photo: Andrew Ward/www.reportphotos.com



Fighting back: staff and students picket University College London last year during the strike by AUT university staff against low and variable pay, and the new pay structure

THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS in higher education is a measure of the success of the working class. A better educated and more highly skilled population strengthens the entire class. For a hundred years the number of students in higher education has risen. But for the past 20 years these rises have been at the expense of university and college workers, with students getting an increasingly raw deal from the experience.

Nine years ago, in May 1996, the problems were presented graphically by a group of Yorkshire Labour MPs, who

called upon the then Tory government to halt the cuts in their region. They cited the contribution universities make to the nation's manufacturing knowledge base, the essential education of key workers and the thousands employed.

This group of MPs pointed to the rapid rise in student numbers throughout the early 1990s and showed that this was not matched by higher wages or more resources. In other words, the brunt of the expansion of the 1990s was based on the increased exploitation of higher education workers.

ng into higher education, but they are getting an increasingly
s, and workers whose pay is falling behind those in schools...

higher education – and how to fight it

The Association of University Teachers (AUT) has now spoken out, arguing that the government has done too little, too late in dealing with the growing crisis of department closures and job losses engulfing higher education. The consistent message from the AUT to government has been to deal with the distortion in higher education caused by the funding mechanism for research – the Research Assessment Exercise. The union's general secretary, Sally Hunt, has says that while the government delays grappling with the real issue of the distortions caused by the RAE, yet more universities will be closing departments.

With long-established universities such as Exeter closing its Chemistry and Italian departments, and last month Hull announcing the closure of its Mathematics department, the situation is going from bad to worse.

"We are prepared to work constructively with government and higher education institutions to come up with a sensible and workable alternative to the RAE," says Sally Hunt. "But it requires action now, not at some point in the future," she concludes.

Student fees

The second line of attack is student fees. Over the course of a generation student grants have vanished, larger and larger loans have been made available and fees have been introduced. The level of student debt is rising year on year and students are forced to take more and more low-paid jobs just to survive. Many are now leaving university with a crippling debt, which a generation ago would have bought a house.

Yet things are set to get worse. In September 2006 students will be forced to pay fees of up to £3000 a year. Fees pay only for a student's course – all living and studying costs are on top of that. Despite their imminent introduction, most universities have still to set their level of fees. There is likely to be a free-for-all as universities offer rebates on fees, or bursaries, for some groups of students and compete head-on with other institutions. Those who set their fees too

'During the 1990s the trade unions in higher education allowed their industry to become one of the most casualised in Britain'

high may lose students to rival universities. Those who set them too low may find students avoiding what they think will be a cheap course. Over the coming months there will be many losers in the fees game and institutions will be watching each other to see who blinks first. All the unions involved argue that competition between universities offering greatly differing bursaries will worsen, not improve, the prospects for poorer students. Is this the way we want to run a 21st century education system?

Recruiting abroad

Alongside increased fees from British students, English universities have been given the green light from government to increase the number of students from outside the EU. The Higher Education Funding Council for England found that universities intended to recruit 9.8% more students from Britain over four years, but 26.7% more from outside the EU. Students from any of the 25 EU member countries already pay no more than British students to attend our universities. Universities expect income from overseas students to rise by 44.1% to £1.62 billion.

Overseas students already pay on average around £7,000 to £8,000 in fees, and pay yet more to fast-track their visa application. But Universities UK, which represents vice-chancellors, says overseas students are necessary to help with overall costs. The quality of education is again coming second to balancing the books.

With measured indifference, a Department for Education and Skills

spokesman said: "Exactly how universities plan for their future is a matter for them – our universities have already demonstrated that they can handle substantial expansion without having to restrict opportunities for UK students and we have every reason to believe that this will continue."

The third line of attack is on wages and working conditions. Throughout the 1990s staff-student ratios became significantly worse. Teaching groups became much larger, and course managers looked anxiously for ways to reduce costs. During this period, the trade unions in higher education allowed their industry to become one of the most casualised in Britain.

In 1998 the government established the Bett Committee to review pay and conditions in the sector. A key issue for Bett was the poor pay and conditions of those working in the post-92 universities (mostly former polytechnics). Lecturers in these institutions are mainly represented by the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE). Their submission to the Committee included data showing that 44 per cent of academic staff in these universities were part-time and 37 per cent were employed on an hourly-paid casual basis.

The Bett Committee was never going to be a substitute for union action, and when published, its report lamely stated that unduly large numbers of staff were on short-term contracts (especially researchers) or casually employed (particularly lecturers in post-1992 universities). The committee then noted that that there was scope for many higher education institutions to reduce their use of fixed-term and casual employment.

And it gets worse...

Unsurprisingly, conditions in higher education have continued to get worse. But over the last few years there has been both a growing anger and an organised fight back among workers.

Over the past year, in particular,

Continued on page 10

Envious of others' success, the EU wants to set up a European Research Council...

EU bids to grab research

Continued from page 9

NATFHE has been waging a struggle to prevent some institutions – such as London Metropolitan and Bournemouth universities – from imposing inferior conditions of service on their workforce. Last year the union declared an official dispute with London Metropolitan University, following the university's decision to dismiss almost 400 lecturers from their existing contracts.

The university faced a national boycott from academics across Britain, which threatened its existence. Eventually the university agreed in January to time-limited negotiation, conciliated by ACAS. In view of this successful struggle, NATFHE has agreed to suspend its academic boycott and industrial action for the duration of the talks. The pressure from this success has encouraged other institutions to speed up implementation of the Framework Agreement, a nationally agreed pay and conditions package. Until recently, many institutions were dragging their feet and trying to include local variations – all worse of course.

Priority

It is a sad reflection on the low priority the working class has given to its higher education system that the government has been able to sustain so much attack with so little public outcry.

We still have a lot of struggle ahead. Recently, a favourite method of saving money used by course managers has been to find alternatives to teaching, with increased self study and a love affair with e-learning. Any curriculum developments predicated on saving money rather than improving the quality of teaching and research must be resisted.

And now prospects of concerted joint action have improved. Talks on a single new union have moved up a gear. The AUT and NATFHE general secretaries say the talks are entering a new phase. Agreement has been reached on the key principles, which will drive the new union forward. Will this produce the action required to save an industry?

IF THERE'S ONE thing that the European Commission and its backers hate more than anything, it's seeing cooperation across Europe when it has nothing to do with it. It wants to control everything, be seen as the source of funding. Nowhere is this envy of others stronger than in the field of scientific research.

The fact is that European scientists have, over the years, persuaded their governments to work together on costly but vital research in a number of areas. The moves have seen the creation of world-ranking – and world-beating – research institutes involving European (but not just EU) countries.

Examples include the European Space Agency (see article on Cassini-Huygens, p14), with many non-EU countries. Then there are the high-energy physics collaboration in Grenoble, the Institut Laue-Langevin, between France and Germany, and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg. One of the finest collaborations is CERN, the European particle physics laboratory in Geneva, source of a string of stunning discoveries about the basis of matter.

Billions of euros

Now, though, the European Commission wants to get a name for itself in basic research, through its plan to establish a European Research Council with an annual budget of between 500 million and 2 billion euros – so up to £1.4 billion. That's a lot of money, equivalent to more than double the total funding of Britain's Medical Research Council, for example.

The proposal has gathered support from a motley assemblage of industrialists and scientists, most of them (rightly) frustrated with the expensive failure of the EU's Framework research programmes – though as usual some of them are hoping for plum jobs in a new set-up.

But others are wary, led by the Britain's premier organisation of scientists, the Royal Society. While others in Europe, eager to be in Brussels' good books, have timidly kept their doubts to themselves, the Royal Society has spelled out why it is a bad idea.

The society called the proposals "premature", in that, as it pointed out, no one had done a comprehensive study of just how science was funded across the 25 countries of the European Union. As it said, there was no point spending money to fix something if you did not know how it was operating in the first place.

But what may turn out to be the nail in the coffin of this EU proposal is the Royal Society's insistence – echoed by thoughtful scientists across Europe – that any European Research Council has to award grants on the basis of excellence, judged through professional peer review.

To most British scientists, that seems like nothing more than normal common-sense practice. But to the EU, and in particular to its many countries with weak scientific bases, that is anathema – because if money is to be awarded to scientists on the basis of excellence, then most of it is going to flow to scientists in the "north" of the EU, Britain in particular. And the pork-barrel politicians of the EU won't be happy with that: the whole financial basis of the EU is that countries like Britain subsidise the rest.

Meanwhile, scientists in Britain and elsewhere are saying that any funding for the new research council must be additional to national budgets. And industrialists are saying that any funding must be additional to the EU's existing Framework programmes.

The European Commission is due to present its proposals for the composition of the research body in April. With the concerns about where the money is going to come from still unresolved, it looks as though a European Research Council will not be up and running soon, at least not with enough money to have an impact (for good or ill). But that won't stop the commission from trying to press forward.

Anyone looking to be reassured that all will be well need only look at the five-person body set up by research commissioner Janez Potocnik to identify members for the new council: it is chaired by Chris Patten, ex-commissioner, ex-Cabinet minister, ex-MP, and full-time placeman and has-been.

Reg Birch:

engineer, trade unionist, communist

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Will Podmore

His troops are still dying in Iraq, but Bush already has his eyes
Jack Straw is already starting to line up the British government

First Iraq, then Iran? The propaganda machine



Photo: US Navy

Armed and ready in the Gulf: US Hornet aircraft on the flight deck aboard the carrier USS Harry S. Truman, which is providing close air support and conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions over Iraq from its station in the Persian Gulf

NOT CONTENT with the continuing death toll on its soldiers in Iraq, the US is rattling its sabres in the direction of Iran. The US government alleges that Iran is not offering full access and cooperation to nuclear inspectors. Bush says that Iran is stonewalling. Yet the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly said that Iran is giving its inspectors full access. For example, it reported in September 2004 that Iran has let inspectors into every site to which they have sought access.

The US government claims that Iran is using its nuclear facilities to produce nuclear weapons, but this is not proven. The IAEA's Director-General Mohamed El-Baradei concluded from all its

inspections, "Iran has no nuclear weapons program." He then repeated himself for emphasis: "Iran has no nuclear weapons programme, but I personally don't rush to conclusions before all the realities are clarified. So far I see nothing that could be called an imminent danger. I have seen no nuclear weapons programme in Iran. What I have seen is that Iran is trying to gain access to nuclear enrichment technology, and so far there is no danger from Iran. Therefore, we should make use of political and diplomatic means before thinking of resorting to other alternatives. There is no evidence that Iran has made a decision to build nuclear weapons."

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw echoes

the US government, "It is a difficult issue for everybody because you have a country there in which there has been an unquestioned breach of its international obligations under the non-proliferation treaty." There has not been such a breach. The Non-Proliferation Treaty allows countries to get nuclear enrichment technology and to enrich uranium to the level needed to produce nuclear energy.

But even if Iran had a nuclear weapons programme, or indeed nuclear weapons, this would not be a legitimate cause for war in international law. The USA, Britain, France, Russia, China, Israel, India and Pakistan have all had programmes to develop nuclear weapons

n another war in the Gulf, against another oil-rich state. And behind him...

Iran warms up again

and all now have nuclear weapons, but that does not justify an attack on any of them. Iran, even if it developed nuclear weapons, would do what most other nuclear powers do, keep the weapons to deter aggression by other countries.

Covert operations

Iran has never attacked another country. It was the subject of a covert US-British operation in 1953, and a failed US armed operation in 1980, both of which violated its territorial frontiers. Also in 1980, the Iraqi government, with US and British support, attacked Iran and waged war against it for eight years. Iran has not been implicated in any act of terror against a Western country since 1996.

In sum, Iran is not a threat. It is not about to attack anybody. There is no reason to attack Iran.

But there are threats to attack Iran. Who is responsible, and why? In November 2002, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called on the US and British governments to attack Iran once they are finished with Iraq. The Israeli defence minister said in November 2003, "In no circumstances would Israel be able to tolerate nuclear weapons in Iranian possession." The head of Israel's intelligence service said that nuclear weapons in Iran were the greatest threat to Israel since 1948.

In August 2004, Condoleezza Rice declined to comment when asked if the US government would support an Israeli attack on Iran. On 8 September 2004, Sharon said that the international community had not done enough to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons and warned that Israel would take its own measures to defend itself. That same month, the US government sold Israel 500 bunker-busting BLU-109 bombs and 2,500 one-tonne bombs.

Bush claims he now has a mandate to democratise the Middle East and has not ruled out attacking Iran. On 20 January, Vice President Dick Cheney called Iran one of the biggest threats to world peace and warned Iran that the US government would not tolerate their ambitions to obtain or develop nuclear weapons.

He said, "You look around the world at potential trouble spots and Iran is right at the top of the list. One of the concerns people have is that Israel might do it without being asked, that if in fact the Israelis became convinced the Iranians had a significant nuclear capability, given the fact that Iran has a stated policy that their objective is the destruction of the state of Israel, that the Israelis might well decide to act first and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the diplomatic mess afterward." Cheney did not warn Israel against acting as he outlined.

No Security Council Resolution has authorised the threat or use of force against Iran. Any attack on Iran would be illegal, a breach of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force. Article 2 (4) states, "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any member or state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations."

After his January talks with Rice, Jack Straw welcomed Bush's inaugural address in which Bush declared America's global mission to be the spread of democracy to the darkest corners of the world. Straw added, "I expressed support for what President Bush had said. After all, what he was saying was endorsing the very eloquent central tenets of the UN charter – democracy." Actually, the Charter is about preventing the scourge of war by respecting every nation's right to sovereignty and self-determination, the basic principle of international law.

Aggression

Conspiracies to commit wars of aggression have a pattern. First, deny that war is on the agenda. For example, before attacking Iraq, Blair said that his approach was the best, indeed the only, way of avoiding war; Colin Powell denied that Iraq was in US sights and Rice said, "We're going to seek a peaceful solution to this."

Now Straw says that Britain would not join in any attack on Iran, and Rice said

'On 20 January, Vice President Dick Cheney called Iran one of the biggest threats to world peace...'

on 4 February that the question of attacking Iran is simply not on the agenda at this point in time. We have diplomatic means to do this.

As a second feature of the conspiracy, never rule war out as a possibility, to be threatened, publicised and war-gamed. For example, Javier Solana, the EU's foreign minister, says that the EU's military force should be used alongside the USA against any state to stop WMD proliferation. This suggests approval of the illegal attack on Iraq and prepares the ground for a future illegal attack on Iran involving the EU.

Third, constantly assert that the targeted country is run by an outlaw regime that deserves punishment. For example, Bush described Iraq and Iran as parts of the axis of evil in his 2002 State of the Union address, and now claims that Iran is a threat to world peace.

Fourth, refuse genuine negotiations, demand that the targeted country obeys unilateral orders, and trash all those – the UN, the IAEA, the French – who may be calling for negotiations. Bush ordered Iraq to reveal its non-existent WMD and is now ordering Iran to stop developing its nuclear facilities, saying that the USA will not allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

Fifth, when the targeted country refuses to submit, accuse it of refusing all negotiations, claim that it understands no language but force, and prepare to attack.

All parts of the conspiracy to make war on Iran are in place. Remaining silent will allow the war junkies, headed by Bush and Blair, to continue feeding their habit – at our expense.

The mission to Titan, largest of Saturn's moons, was a triumph. European cooperation can flourish when the European Union is

Cassini-Huygens: a Titanic achievement

THE SUCCESSFUL landing on 14 January of the Cassini-Huygens probe on Saturn's moon Titan marks the climax of an epic journey begun long ago and is a fine example of how productive international cooperation, driven by science rather than politics, can be.

Three space agencies were involved from the outset. The Cassini orbiter (named after the Italian astronomer who discovered the gap separating Saturn's rings) was built by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the communication antenna by ASI (the Italian space agency) and the Huygens probe by ESA, the European Space Agency – an independent inter-governmental body, not run by the EU.

Of one thing we can be sure. Had it been the EU and not the ESA involved, the thing would never have got off the ground. The money would certainly have been spent, countless politicians would have been fattened, but it is doubtful whether there would even be agreement on what colour to paint it.

As it is, 250 scientists worldwide are involved in the analysis of the data collected, with 17 nations contributing to

some aspect of the mission.

The Cassini mission began in earnest in 1982, when a joint European and American scientific team proposed a detailed investigation of this remote outpost of the solar system. Fifteen years later, the giant Titan/Centaur rocket lifted off from Cape Canaveral to begin a seven-year voyage to Saturn.

Questions

Previous observation of Saturn and its satellites posed a number of questions which excited the curiosity of scientists, such as why Saturn produces 87% more heat than it absorbs from the Sun. Then there is the mystery of Saturn's rings, and why they differ in colour?

Other questions raised include why the moon Enceladus has such an abnormally smooth surface, and the origin of the dark organic material covering one side of the moon Iapetus.

Chemical reactions in the atmosphere of Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons have also excited interest, as has the source of Titan's abundant methane, a compound associated with biological

activity on Earth.

In seeking an answer to these and other questions, it was clear that detailed international cooperation would be the way forward because no one nation possessed a monopoly on the expertise required.

The Cassini orbiter carries 12 instruments, performing a range of data collection tasks, and on the Huygens probe itself six different instruments measured the physical, chemical and electrical properties of Titan and its atmosphere. A different international team, spearheaded by university departments in France, Germany, America and our own Open University, developed each instrument.

Such an extensive payload makes Cassini-Huygens, at 5.6 tonnes, the largest interplanetary spacecraft ever built. An immediate problem for the team was the lack of a launch vehicle powerful enough to propel the craft directly to Saturn. This hurdle was overcome with a technique known as gravity assist (or fly-by), a manoeuvre that takes advantage of the mutual gravitational attraction between a



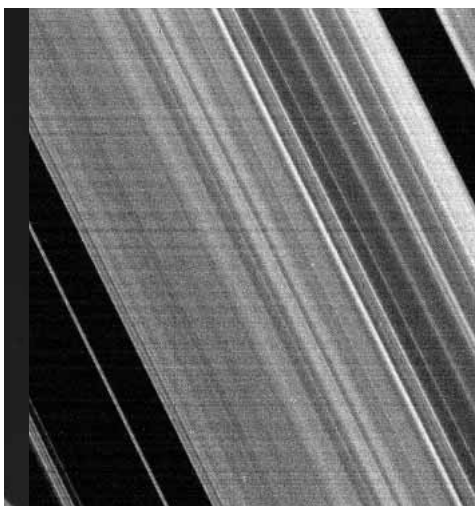
showing how
not in charge...

planet and a moving spacecraft. Essentially the spacecraft gets a boost as it orbits a planet.

To launch a huge assortment of metal, fuel and sophisticated and delicate equipment into the air in October 1997, and have it land on target and talking to us 7 years later is a stunning achievement. It is testament to the capacity of science to surmount challenges, and the power of genuine collaboration.

The news of this triumph is particularly timely given the hand wringing which passes for governmental responses to pressing matters of the day. Forces beyond our control accompanied by a shrugging of the shoulders is the stock reply to demands that we make the world a better place. Science of course, cannot of itself achieve anything. It is a tool. But momentous achievements can help to remind us that we are not helpless.

When the Dutch astronaut Huygens discovered Titan in 1665, the world was astonished that science could enable us to see so far. We marvel again that 350 years later not only can we see Titan, we can reach out and touch it.



International effort: the Cassini-Huygens probe showed what scientists can achieve by cooperation. Far left: one of the first, stunning images from Titan's surface; left, preparing the spacecraft; right, a fresh view of Saturn's rings.

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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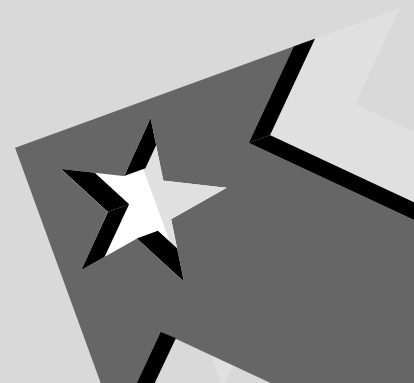
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Back to Front – Merger mania

‘Are we so seduced by the calls for international solidarity, the need to fight multinationals and neo-globalism that we forget that the fight begins at home?’

UNISON says it wants to work closer with the German public service union ver.di. Amicus has entered into closer working with its German counterpart IG-Metal. Are these the first stages towards mammoth EU-wide trade unions in the public services or manufacturing? Or the fulfilling of an EU directive on the trade unions reflecting the industrial structure of the EU?

The number of ex-British trade union general secretaries employed in EU trade union confederations outweighs all other EU nationalities. Today Europe, tomorrow the world?

The TGWU has bizarrely established closer relations with a New York public service union, shipping a number of US trade union organisers over to its London region. The evangelicalism of US recruitment styles will follow shortly.

At home the mergers go apace. Amicus has opened talks with the GPMU, having already taken on Unifi. Rumours of marriage – forced, arranged or willing – between Amicus and the TGWU have also been announced. The GMB, jilted at the altar, looks forlornly for a new partner. The miners, however, have rejected rumours about a proposed merger with the rail and maritime workers.

The TGWU is expected to up its “transport” image, presumably to attract or poach ASLEF members. ASLEF has been riven by leftist antics, resulting in one general secretary being booted out of office by member ballot and another

sacked. Factionalism is rampant, and a once disciplined, proud and effective union has been brought to its knees.

The PCS is facing an unprecedented assault with the government’s proposed job cuts in the Civil Service. But of course there are interesting maths and alliances associated therein: 100,000 civil service jobs to go – 50% of PCS’s membership. An estimated 270,000 jobs to be created in health, education and other public service areas in which UNISON predominates. Perhaps UNISON will swallow a battered PCS in the name of fraternal relations and solidarity?

By the TUC in September 2005 how many of the 12 trade unions with a membership of over 100,000 will still be in existence?

The bigger the unions become, the faster they move away from their original root be it trade, skill or geography. They may have won Investors in People awards and bore their organisers to death with development reviews and management training, but they cannot deliver class identity, consciousness or a strike.

Trade union density of TUC and non-TUC affiliated unions in Britain reflects about one-third of possible members. In the 1970s, the density was two-thirds – so why do we need to look abroad, when we have work to do at home? Are we so seduced by the calls for international solidarity, the need to fight multinationals and neo-globalism that we forget that the fight begins at home?

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