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THE NUCLEAR NETTLE



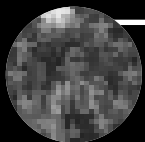
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WORKERS

“ Bolkestein dead – perhaps

IN FEBRUARY over 65,000 trade unionists took to the streets to protest in Berlin and Strasbourg, as MEPs debated the hated Directive on Services. The Bolkestein Directive attracted the most attention, as its implementation would have devastated pay, standards, qualifications and working conditions throughout Europe. MEPs had to wrestle with 404 amendments to this directive (out of an original 1,500!). After a two-year struggle, however, on 16 February Bolkestein was finally laid to rest.

Or was it? The EU Commission has a habit of regularly ignoring the people with whom it pretends to consult. (The EU Constitution is a case in point). While workers celebrate success in closing off key industries such as health, social housing, and social services to the depredations of capitalism, the European Commission hails the result as ‘opening up’ markets to competition.

Well, they would say that, wouldn't they? In fact, they have suffered a setback. With its heart ripped out the Services Directive now falls far short of the original draft. Paul Stevenson of Open Europe said, “Protectionist MEPs have gutted the Directive”.

Capitalist aspirations were soon bolstered, though, by Internal Market Commissioner Charles McCreevy's statement in the immediate aftermath: “The Commission which produced the ‘country of origin’ principle, which was removed from the final text of the directive, will clearly return to it as a matter of course”.

Some MEPs, demoralised by the rejection of the Constitution, had taken pathetic comfort from the temporary focus on the European Parliament. They tried to say it was proof that their parliament mattered. But what really matters is what workers do once they get back home to their unions.

Labour deserved to lose Dunfermline

IN THE run-up to the Dunfermline by-election, one of the town's major industrial employers shut – Lexmark, the computer printer company, with the loss of 700 jobs. The day after the election, the town lost a further 70 jobs as the electronics company Simclar moved more production to “low cost” plants overseas.

No wonder Labour lost the by-election, with its massive majority disintegrating. Not that Labour has learnt anything. It still lauds the lowering of wages, whether in Britain or overseas. It still ignores the industrial base of this country. And the Labour seat next door is held by Gordon Brown...



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County councils to be axed?

JUST AS THEY did in Dunfermline last month, Labour's hugely unpopular policies on issues such as health, education and Iraq will lead to a disastrous showing in the forthcoming local elections in May, when all council seats in London are up for grabs. Labour currently controls the Association of Local Government by one seat. While Labour propaganda implies this will be converted into a handsome majority (which ignores their plummeting vote in recent Greater London Authority, national and MEP elections), more sinister plans are in train.

The Labour Party at present controls only 18% of local authorities in Britain. According to a leaked government memo the Labour Party is proposing to abolish all county councils. Leaving aside the issue of whether 1,000 years of democratic history, flawed though it may be, should be erased, it could get rid of Tory and Liberal Democrat opposition at a stroke by breaking up the mostly Tory stranglehold over the Shires.

Labour is proposing to abolish a further 230 district councils and replace them with single-tier unitary authorities. Multiple-member council wards are to be abolished, to be replaced with single "super-councillors".

London could see the reduction of the 32 boroughs to less than half that number, all under the EU-style office of "The Mayor" - more akin to Gotham City and Batman than the real needs of Londoners. The Cabinet and Mayoral system is to be extended. Currently the elected Mayor of the London Borough of Newham is paid a salary of £70,000+ - so much for an ethos of committed public service! American-style chief executives will be introduced - after all why have a political viewpoint when you can select a brand off the supermarket shelf?

In the name of modernisation and reform, huge geographic authorities are to be created, providing core services from any source (that is, the free market) without any democratic overview. After services like housing, cleansing, social care, planning, transport, construction, environment and policing have been stripped out, any remaining local authority powers will be devolved to new neighbourhood councils.

In the name of democratic renewal and efficiency savings, greater fragmentation is planned to address "local" issues. In London this will speed up the ghettoisation of areas. Overall it will further depoliticise and alienate workers who already recognise the lack of real democracy in any institution from the parish through to Parliament itself.

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

ARMY**Three-year missions**

THE GOVERNMENT is starting the deployment of 3,300 British troops on three-year missions to Afghanistan. There are 893 already in the country, and the government intends to increase the British forces there to 5,700 troops, at a cost of £1 billion.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan currently comprises 9,200 troops. NATO governments intend to increase the force to 15,000. Another 9,000 troops from non-NATO members are also in Afghanistan.

There are 8,891 British troops currently in southern Iraq.

Other operational British troops number 598 in Bosnia, 194 in Kosovo, and 317 on UN missions in Ethiopia, Georgia, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

"Non-operational" British forces number 22,000 in Germany, 11,000 in northern Ireland, 2,800 in Cyprus, 1,177 in the Falklands, 558 on Gibraltar, 39 on Diego Garcia and 40 on Ascension Island.

RETAIL**ASDA fined over union rights**

ASDA WAL-MART, the US supermarket conglomerate and rabidly anti-trade union company, has been fined over £850,000 for breaking employment rights legislation. Attempts by ASDA Wal-Mart to bribe and then force 340 GMB members in Washington, County Durham, to sell their trade union membership, backfired dramatically. Compensation of £2,500 was awarded to each worker involved in the case, with the GMB then going on to win a further 5% pay award.

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Open up, open up

THE EUROPEAN Commission is again urging member states to open up their borders to workers from the 'new' EU members as a way to bolster their economies.

The Commission argues that fears of an invasion of cheap Polish plumbers were unfounded, and asserts, "Freedom of movement of workers is one of the basic freedoms under the European community treaty".

The Blair government predicted that the EU enlargement in May 2004 would mean only an extra 13,000 workers a year coming to Britain. The Commission now reports that 290,695 workers from eastern Europe, including 162,870 from Poland alone, arrived in Britain between May 2004 and September 2005. This is good for employers, who get cheap labour, but it is bad for the working class, whose wages are held down. It also makes it much more difficult for the 4.2 million workers who are on incapacity benefit or are unemployed to move from welfare to work.

Polish unemployment stands at 18.1%, so there will be a continual inflow of Polish workers. Furthermore, British agencies are now setting out to fill certain kinds of jobs exclusively with foreign labour, preventing British workers from even competing for these jobs.

Law, justice...and a convicted forger

THE POLISH right-wing ruling party, Law and Justice, has appointed a convicted forger and embezzler, Marek Plusa, as head of a regional office in Kielce which administers millions of euros a year of EU farm aid.

Firmer and firmer...

AN ARTICLE in the French newspaper LE FIGARO has pointed out that EU and US foreign policies are increasingly in harmony. The article noted that over the last year the EU adopted a "firm" policy towards the Middle East, Iran and Syria, which "looks more and more like that of the US ... Under George Bush's second mandate, never has the EU been so in phase with American diplomacy."

...and tougher and tougher

THE EUROPEAN Parliament said in early February that the EU should take a "tougher" stance against Cuba.



Northampton, 11 February: local people march to defend the youth service

Photo: Workers

Northampton fights youth cuts

THE NEW TORY County Council in Northamptonshire is driving through huge cuts in services, which could result in over 1,000 jobs going, as well as the whole of the youth service, a respite care home, posts which support children with special needs in schools and residential homes for the elderly. Unions and user groups around the county have been mobilising for a series of protests since Christmas, and have succeeded in saving some services.

Members of the Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU) were told on Christmas Eve that the council planned to sack all 197 youth workers and get rid of the youth service. A few pennies would remain for the privatisation of a few projects.

But parents, children and other unions responded well to the call for support by the union, which at very short notice organised a march and rally. These attracted what was described by the Northampton Trades Council as one of the biggest turnouts for a trade union event in the town for many years and what the Regional TUC described as the biggest trade union rally they had addressed in 10 years. Loud cheers came when a call was made to take out an Anti-Social Behaviour Order on a council which is causing mayhem and vandalism.

The council has picked on a non-statutory service, told lies and produced misleading figures to justify its position in relation to the Youth Service. It also knows that the majority of users of the Youth Service are younger than 18 and because there are no elections due in Northamptonshire they are safe to go ahead. This is one reason why the CYWU and TUC call for the voting age to be lowered to 16.

The council argued that an Ofsted inspection described the Youth Service as unsatisfactory. It did – it said the Council spent too little and that management was poor. But it went on to say that 82% of face-to-face practice by workers was good. It placed weaknesses within the service in the context of historic underspending. For example, the government recommends one youth worker for every 400 young people between the ages of 13-19. If this figure were to be achieved Northamptonshire would need to employ 60 more workers. The government says £100 per young person should be spent on the Youth Service. Northamptonshire spends £50 per head per annum, whereas it is prepared to spend £26,000 for every six months a young person is in youth custody. In reality the Ofsted report is being misconstrued for political purposes to cut essential spending.

The council in fact has robbed money given to it for expenditure on young people and spent it elsewhere. This year's cuts are a case in point. It isn't that they do not have the money, but that they are simply diverting the cash to spend on such important initiatives as flagpoles for every school, getting in private consultants and being seen as a low-spending council. Under Labour control Northamptonshire spent £24 million in one year on consultants. The Tories are simply taking this a step further.

The General Federation of Trade Unions and the TUC have called for a public inquiry into the mad proposals of the county councillors. Even the local Labour MP recognises this attack as a savage blow to the most vulnerable. The CYWU has a record of beating local authorities which have tried similar tactics to demolish the youth service, and does not intend to be beaten on this one. It will be digging in for a very strategic campaign.

MOTORS**Job cuts from Ford**

FORD HAS announced job cuts of 30,000 and the closure of 14 plants in the USA. This is a 27% reduction in production. Ford posted a profit, but only from subsidiaries and non-manufacturing sources. Chrysler, recently bought by the German firm Daimler, is to cut 6,000 jobs. General Motors posted an \$8.6 billion loss.

While the US "Big 3" teeter, Toyota, Nissan, Honda and Hyundai are increasing

their production and building a greater market share in the US. If Ford and Chrysler are rocky in the USA then their British factories will also be under threat.

The musical chairs of moving products from one production line to another can only continue for a finite period of time. If the US parent companies are withdrawing from manufacture, how long before the closure of the British operations? Is Dagenham in East London worth more for its acreage and housing potential as part of the Thames Gateway redevelopment than as a centre of engineering excellence?

NHS faces PFI debacle

THE DISASTER of the Private Finance Initiative in the NHS is epitomised by a series of failed schemes in London and the sinking of a central plank of government dogma. The abandonment of the £1.1 billion rebuilding scheme at Barts and the Royal London Hospital will cost the NHS £100 million in consultancy fees. The government was aware of the soaring costs and impossibility of the NHS meeting the financial returns criteria as early as September 2003 but hid the report. Barts, which has been underfunded for decades, now faces increased uncertainty over its future as the government dithers, and costs rise by £600,000 a day because contractors are still being paid to turn up.

The Paddington campus project, another £1 billion scheme, failed without a brick being laid in June 2005. The cost was £14 million in consultancy fees. Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich is facing bankruptcy under the PFI terms, being £29 million in debt in Spring 2006 with a possible default position of £140 million looming.

There are similar financial disasters overshadowing UCLH, Brent, Whittington, Queen Mary's and other trusts the length and breadth of London. The cost escalation of PFI hospital projects runs to over £2.5 billion, with individual hospital consultant and contractor costs ranging from 157% – 425% in excess of original bids. Even the Treasury Head of PFI has described the 14 – 15% investment returns as "too high"!

PFI has milked the NHS dry to such an extent that it could soon be abandoned, something the health trade unions have been demanding for the last decade.

POSTAL WORKERS**Support for Belfast strike**

BELFAST TRADES Council organised a rally in the City Centre on 14 February in support of 800 postal workers on strike for more than two weeks.

The dispute started after trade union officials investigating claims of management harassment and bullying were threatened with disciplinary action if they did not stop their investigation. This led to an immediate walk-out by workers in the depots concerned to protect their union, the CWU.

Management at first refused to discuss the issues raised by what they considered an "illegal strike" but had to climb down in the face of workers who would not go back to work until their concerns were acknowledged and addressed.

Workers saw the recalcitrance and strike breaking actions of Post Office management as a first step to breaking

trade union solidarity in order to introduce changes in working conditions.

The CWU has demanded an independent inquiry into working practices at the depots concerned and for no victimisation of local shop stewards. The lack of any substantial movement indicates that the Post Office sees the dispute in wider terms and feels that it can take on the union as the dispute remains unofficial and the workers without strike pay.

The rally, preceded by a march throughout much of West Belfast led by two Lambeg drums adorned with trade union banners, was supported by CWU delegates from England, Wales and Scotland, and postal workers from the Republic of Ireland. Speaker after speaker condemned the existence of anti-trade union legislation and the Labour Government which has failed to repeal them.

AS WORKERS goes to press indications are that the dispute will end with all the demands of the CWU met in full.

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

Saturday 18 March

Keep Broadcasting Public, 10am–4pm

Conference at Congress House, London, organised by the TUC, the Federation of Entertainment Unions and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom to discuss the forthcoming White Paper on BBC Charter Renewal. For details, email freepress@cpbf.org.uk.

PROFESSIONS**Keeping control**

LAST YEAR, professional associations representing nurses, doctors, pharmacists, vets, various therapists, architects, lawyers, tourist guides, and many others, forced the European Commission to "allow" national governments to determine the level of qualifications of what the EU calls "migrant professionals" (incoming professionals crossing into another country to work). This amendment to the main services directive is called the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive.

Far from helping to open up the market in services to competition, as the Commission claims, those workers concerned took a small but important step towards asserting their national sovereignty. They now have to persuade their governments that they, the professionals, not the government, know what standards are best for their profession. In most cases, these will be higher than the EU requires.

Professionals have a task ahead to educate government and unions about continuing threats to the quality of the services they provide. Government ministers still sound like spokesmen for the employers, bemoaning "restrictive practices" and professional rates of pay. Meanwhile the TUC tries to square the circle, advocating protection of standards on the one hand, but free movement of labour on the other.

Leaders of unions and professional associations cannot have a foot in both camps. If they really want to protect their members' interests, they must fight for their members' right to shape the future of their own professions. Taken to its logical conclusion, there must be no more talk of the EU "allowing powers" or "conferring competences" on national authorities. Those authorities must seize back power for themselves – for good!

Guides challenge TUC on freedom of movement

THE ASSOCIATION OF Professional Tourist Guides (APTG), London members of Amicus, will be urging the union to intervene directly in support of their fight for standards, at their Regional Sector Conference in March. They will be calling for legislative change which will effectively protect professional standards and qualifications.

Inevitably, this will call into question the Treaty of Nice, which remains on the table, allowing parts of the EU Constitution, such as the Services Directive, to be implemented without referenda. This is the Treaty by which the Blair government surrendered national control over the professions and industries to the EU.

The guides want Amicus and the TUC to understand the implications for the profession of the law on freedom of movement, which the TUC promotes, against the interest of its members, and in favour of cheap labour for capitalists.

Confrontation

After 20 years of self-reliance, locked in confrontation with the European Tour Operators' Association (ETOA), without the direct involvement of the union, or its predecessor MSF, the guides want to celebrate their survival and step-by-step ascendancy by giving the employers a short sharp shock.

Guides want the union to tackle the employers as part of its campaign against the Directive.

The ETOA is the worst kind of crude small business organisation, interested only in profit margins, and adamantly opposed to professional standards. It recently threatened to pull out of talks on guiding standards with the British Standards Institute, declaring: "Any chaining of the term 'tourist guide' to qualification, where no qualification is required by either the tour operator or the client, seriously curtails the industry's freedom to provide services and undermines the principle of the [EU] Internal Market".

APTG is a member of the Federation of European Tourist Guides Associations, founded 20 years ago to protect guides in the face of EU liberalisation. At first, guides thought that liberalisation sounded very nice (and liberal), but now they are seeing that they are not the ones being liberated.

The European federation was one of

the professional organisations which recently secured the repatriation of powers to determine qualifications, under the Recognition of Professional Services Directive. ETOA considers this in breach of the Treaty of Rome. ETOA also knows that it will take up to two years or more for the Directive to pass into national law, and they intend to keep up the pressure.

APTG knows that it cannot let its guard down. Together with its standard-setting Institute of Tourist Guiding (also established in response to attacks on the profession), APTG will call on the government to ensure that the Institute is recognised as the only body within the tourism industry qualified to set guiding standards in England and Wales. The Scottish Tourist Guides Association will be seeking similar authority from the Scottish Executive.

Through the Federation of European Tourist Guides Associations, British tourist guides have been made aware of the current problems imposed by ETOA and the Commission on Italy. The Italian culture minister refused to shorten the government's list of 2,540 sites, museums and monuments (many of them Unesco World Heritage sites) reserved for interpretation by qualified tourist guides.

Up before the Court

Despite the fact that the Unesco sites constitute only 2% of all Italy's historical sites (Italy has the most in any one country), the Commission says this is infringing the law on freedom of provision of services. Italy now finds itself (not for the first time) in front of the European Court of Justice.

This could easily happen here in Britain, where there is no formal regulation in this field. There are already many foreign companies established here, employing tourist guides below national rates, especially Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and East European.

The Services Directive gives an added boost to the establishment of European firms, with the promise of barriers to trade removed. Tourist guides are accordingly stepping up their vigilance and liaison with British site authorities to ensure continued support for qualified guiding, despite accusations of 'guide cartels'. Guides will also argue for higher fees, in part to avoid being seen as an attractively cheap labour sector.

With the ballot on act strategy that can lead

Battle lines dra

THE BALLOT for industrial action among the nearly 4 million members of the Local Government Pension Scheme began on 20 February. The first provisional national stoppage is scheduled for 28 March.

At this late stage the trade unions are still divided over strategy and tactics. The mindless baying for indefinite strike action is accompanied by the mind-dead who are incapable of looking to the strengths or inventiveness of the members.

These ideas reflect a failure to keep pace with the composition and changes within the pension scheme. Two-thirds of scheme members are women, half of scheme members are part-time. Some of the top occupations within the scheme are classroom assistants, care assistants, home carers, catering staff and nursery nurses. Therefore any industrial action will place the most vulnerable, such as children, the elderly and those with learning disabilities, at greatest risk. A callous government and callous employers care nothing for these staff or those they serve.

Privatisation

Local authority services have been decimated through privatisation, outsourcing, contracting-out and competitive tendering over the last 25 years. Unfortunately the thinking of too many local government trade union activists is locked into the 1970s. Calls to pull out critical core groups of workers, be they computer staff or traffic wardens, come up against the brutal reality that many of these workers are no longer employed directly by local government or remain in the pension scheme.

The employers and government learnt a long time ago what their vulnerabilities were and have systematically moved the goal posts. Privatisation may have been fronted as a finance market-driven strategy, but it was and is about destroying the ability of workers to get organised.

An industrial action strategy which only argues for parity with an already flawed deal (teachers, civil servants, health workers) and does not tackle either the European directives that are

ion now under way, attention is turning to the tactics and to success – or failure – in the fight for pensions...

awn in local government pension war



18 February 2005, Northampton: local government workers march over pensions.

Photo: Workers

solution which collapses in the very near future.

Also, such a two- or three-tier pension scheme, still institutionalising a detriment for new and young workers, is fraught with problems.

This is because research by economic and financial institutions is clearly indicating that what the government will gain by forcing through longer working and reduced benefits for some will be offset by loss of taxes and income and additional expenditure in higher benefits for others.

Any savings the government makes will be marginal – an estimated £3 billion out of a scheme valued at £89 billion, although all such evaluation of savings is highly questionable in the first place.

The trade unions reluctantly find themselves in a dispute which they did not seek and probably never contemplated ever occurring. The error arose from a mistaken view that pensions were somehow sacrosanct and untouchable.

Some are saying that the scale of possible industrial action over pensions is on par with the General Strike in 1926. However, parallels could also be drawn with a whole host of 1920s disputes which shattered wages and trade union organisation. The General Strike was a defeat which took the British labour movement nearly 50 years to recover from. This is not a comparator we want. The last thing we should be drawn into is a set piece battle on the government and employers' terms – which is exactly what is looming.

the key reason for the attack on pensions has arisen and our right to decide how our deferred wages are to be utilised – our sovereignty – is speeding into a cul de sac.

Any deal based on the health model is built on sand. The employers'

organisations in health, the NHS Pensions Actuaries (soon to be privatised!) and the Treasury mandarins are already loudly stating that the 'deal' for health workers is unsustainable. So what is being advocated as a solution for LGP Scheme members – parity with Health – may be a

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The US and the EU are using the row over cartoons to whip up war fever against Syria and Iran...

War fever is back

THERE IS A great and growing danger of a wider war in the Middle East, drawing in more and more countries. Chaos is increasing in Iraq and Afghanistan and tension is rising in Iran, Syria and Lebanon. Israel is intensifying its occupation and bantustanisation (from the extreme form of the ideology of ethnic racism found in the old apartheid South Africa) of Palestine.

The US and the EU are using the row over cartoons satirising the Muslim prophet Muhammad to whip up war fever, particularly against Iran and Syria.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, speaking at a joint news conference with Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, said that some countries "have also used this opportunity to incite violence...I don't have any doubt that...Iran and Syria have gone out of their way to inflame sentiments and to use this to their own purposes. And the world ought to call them on it."

Iran has an alliance with China, and Syria has a defence pact with Iran. So any attack on Iran or Syria could well drag China into war in the Middle East, which could grow into an even wider war.

In a mirror image of the USA and the EU, some fundamentalists are indeed trying to whip up hatred and incite violence. Some Danish imams twice visited the Middle East, in December and January, to publicise cartoons of Muhammad, first published in a Danish newspaper in September.

One of the imams, Ahmed Akari, has admitted that they took three extra caricatures downloaded from extremist sites on the Internet that were far more inflammatory than the original nine. As a result, Western embassies in Iran, Syria and Lebanon and elsewhere have been attacked.

Threat to Iran

There is a growing US-EU threat to Iran. Blair threatened on 27 October last year to take military action. The USA and Israel have both consistently refused to rule out attacking Iran. 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 IAEA's Director-General concluded from all the IAEA's inspections, "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."'

German chancellor Angela Merkel recently compared President Ahmadinejad to Hitler, saying, "In my view, Germany is obliged to do something at the early stages ... we want to, we must prevent Iran from developing its nuclear programme." Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, backed Merkel's call for tougher action and accused Iran of being "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism". Yet Jack Straw claims, "Nobody is talking about invading Iran or taking military action."

And why is there this threat? Ostensibly, because Iran is developing a nuclear programme. Iran has announced that it would resume "commercial-scale" enrichment of uranium, which was suspended in 2004. It insists that its nuclear programme is intended only for electricity generation, reducing its dependence on oil. Iran's Foreign Ministry has called for resuming talks with the EU and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Authority.

The IAEA's Director-General Mohamed El-Baradei concluded from all the IAEA's inspections, "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."

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of

Iran said, "There are no restrictions for nuclear research activities under the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] protocol, and Iran has not accepted any obligation (not to carry out research). How is it possible to prevent the scientific development of a nation?" He said the presence of IAEA surveillance equipment at Iranian nuclear facilities proved that Iran had nothing to hide. "How will world public opinion accept their propaganda campaign against Iran when IAEA cameras are installed on all nuclear sites?" he asked.

But the real reason, as with the illegal attack on and occupation of Iraq, is oil. Iran has oil reserves of an estimated 93 billion barrels, 10% of the world's reserves.

Threat to Palestine

The USA, along with its ally Israel, opposes any peaceful settlement of the Palestine question. The Blair government goes along with the charade that the US is interested in a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the Middle East.

The US state monotonously votes against UN Resolutions opposing nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. It regularly opposes Resolutions urging a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question, with a two-state solution, the principle of land for peace, and an end to "all acts of violence including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror".

It denies the application of the Geneva Convention – on the protection of civilians in time of war – to the occupied territories. It refuses the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people.

It supports Israel's exclusion of Palestinian children from the rights of the child and the Geneva conventions.

It opposes the view that the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories were illegal and that settlement activity must cease (a view consistent with Security Council resolution 465 from 1980, which had been adopted unanimously, including the affirmative vote of the USA).

And it opposes calls for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Syrian territory conquered in 1967, in the context of a comprehensive peace.

We are as little as five years away from an energy crisis – and unions are, rightly, calling for investment in nuclear energy...

Nuclear energy: grasping the nettle



Photo: Workers

Dungeness, Kent: home to two nuclear power stations, one (Magnox) due to be decommissioned in 2008.

THE DECISION by a major engineering union to call for new nuclear generators in Britain will give much needed impetus to the presently hollow debate on energy. The assertion by Amicus last month that we are as little as five years away from an energy crisis may have ruffled a few feathers, but it remains virtually unchallenged within the industry. The question is, what can be done?

At present, nuclear generation provides about a quarter of our electricity. It is a significant element in the fuel mix along with coal, gas, oil and to a much lesser extent renewables (wave, wind, solar, hydro etc.), yet in the face of accelerating consumption, up by 19% between 1990 and 2001, the nuclear contribution is set to decline to 16%. Within five years, a third of our nuclear power stations will reach the end of their working lives and close. Over the next 10 years, 10 nuclear power stations will close, with only two set to replace them.

The viability of Britain as a modern industrial economy is inextricably linked

to a reliable, cost effective source of energy. Recent events, e.g. the stand-off between Russia and Ukraine which jeopardised the supply of gas to Europe, have hammered home the danger of dependence on an external source.

Abandoned

But the truth is that for decades successive British governments have abandoned our capacity to be self reliant in terms of energy. From the selling off of North Sea oil to the highest bidder, through the complete elimination of the domestic coal industry, to the “dash for gas”, the pattern has been the same: the relinquishing of the strategic control of the power needed to drive industry.

The latest irresponsible act has been the government’s agreement to the sale by BNF of its subsidiary Westinghouse Electric to Japan’s Toshiba. Almost half the reactors operating in the world today run on Westinghouse technology. As countries throughout the world start looking at nuclear again, there will be a

queue for those wanting to build new stations – and Britain will be at the back.

The Energy White Paper, published in November last year, maintains the theme. “...We do not propose to set targets for the share of total energy or electricity supply to be met from different fuels. We do not believe Government is equipped to decide the composition of the fuel mix. We prefer a market framework, reinforced by long term policy measures, which will give investors, business and consumers the right incentives to find the balance that will most effectively meet our overall goals”.

Such craven devotion to the wisdom of the market would be laughable if it were not so foolhardy. For we are indeed uncomfortably close to an energy gap where supply cannot meet demand. It is estimated that if things stay as they are, British power stations will be unable to supply 20% of our peak demand for electricity in 10 years’ time.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

So there is a debate to be had. And at the heart of it is the often vilified 'N' word. Proponents of nuclear energy stress the long-term dependability of supply and a safety record that bears comparison with any other energy industry. Here's the British Nuclear Energy Society. "...It is not long ago that the UK was amongst the world leaders in nuclear energy, through its birth, development and consolidation. We invested considerable resources in the form of cash and very capable and committed people. Nuclear power is now mature, with some 450 commercially operating nuclear reactors worldwide, performing at very high levels of safety and reliability. The UK has a great opportunity to reduce our dependence on future fuel supplies from politically volatile countries, but it must be grasped now. By learning from our own past experience and from current world best practices, we have a unique opportunity to plan for the replacement of the existing nuclear stations with top quality new designs."

'Weapons reactors do not produce electricity, and reactors which produce electricity cannot make bombs. The technologies are distinct and independent...'

For some, however, nuclear power and nuclear weapons are two sides of the same coin. And for others, it is waste disposal and contamination which pose the greatest threat. These are genuine concerns and cannot be ducked. As is so often the case, we need to go back to science to find solutions to these dilemmas.

Bombs

Plutonium-239 and highly enriched uranium-235 are the isotopes essential to

the production of atomic bombs. They come from reactors fuelled with uranium-238 whose only job is to produce the weapons grade isotopes. A reactor intended for energy production would not use this process. It produces a mixture of plutonium and uranium isotopes, but it is essentially impossible to separate out the weapons grade isotopes in sufficient purity for bomb making. (Britain, America, Russia and France have all tried but failed to do this, despite the best scientists and all the money in the world to throw at it). Weapons reactors do not produce electricity, and reactors which produce electricity cannot make bombs. The technologies are distinct and independent. We have the knowledge to make weapons and the knowledge to produce electricity. We can do one, or the other, or both. Simply turning our backs on nuclear production of energy will of itself have no impact on weapons production.

There is a case for an internationally agreed and independent verification procedure that could distinguish energy production from bomb making. But the stress here must be on "independent". The atomic experts sent into Iraq discovered that the plants they were investigating were not for bomb production, and were summarily withdrawn by the US because this was not what it wanted to hear. Similarly, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty does not prevent states from acquiring these weapons; it merely restricts membership to the club of suppliers that sell on the open market. It is also used to dissuade developing countries from becoming self-reliant.

Iran

Note how it is used to foment war on Iran by making the non-scientific claim that energy-producing power stations will be used to make bombs. Iran asserts its sovereign right, quite correctly, to develop and progress its nuclear industry to meet its own needs. The present threat of a nuclear explosion in Iran comes from Bush and Blair.

Some warn of a terrorist attack directly on a nuclear power station causing a catastrophic nuclear explosion.

The promise of fusion

SCIENTISTS HAVE long known that nuclear fusion has the potential to generate vast quantities of energy without the dangerous by-products of nuclear fission. One kilogram of fusion fuel would produce the same amount of energy as 10 million kilograms of fossil fuel.

The biggest practical difficulty is in generating and controlling the intense heat necessary, some 100 million Celsius, many times hotter than the centre of the sun. The technical obstacles are immense, but a joint scientific project has been under way since June of last year, aiming to find a solution to these difficulties.

The International Thermonuclear Reactor (ITER) presently under construction in France is the most expensive joint scientific project after the International Space Station, and involves collaboration between European countries, the US, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China.

The project has an estimated cost of 10 billion euros and is expected to run for 35 years, based on the site of an existing nuclear research centre near Marseilles. It is intended to produce the first sustained fusion reactions and would pave the way for a prototype commercial power station.

Clearly, with a lead-in time of 35 years, scientists are not underestimating the enormity of the task. There will be no overnight solution. But there is an understanding that pooling of expertise and knowledge, together with genuine co-operation, is the way forward for such groundbreaking projects.



Photo: Workers

Wind power, Yorkshire: even fervent devotees of alternative energy concede that it makes only a minute contribute to overall supply

But again, the physics tells us that, unlike the confined space of a bomb, a reactor core is too large a space for neutrons to collide with fissionable material at a sufficient rate to trigger an atomic blast. It would fizzle rather than explode.

Meltdown and contamination are another issue of great concern, with Three Mile Island and Chernobyl put forward as cautions. And so they should. But again, the point is, what can we learn? In 1979, at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, a cooling system malfunction led to the meltdown of the reactor, and though the reactor vessel was not breached, some radioactive gas was vented into the atmosphere. More modern, carefully designed systems have substantially reduced this risk.

Chernobyl

In 1986, at Chernobyl in the Ukraine, a reactor meltdown was accompanied by massive explosions. Some 30 people were killed on the site, and the resultant radioactive cloud affected large areas of Northern Europe. The number of deaths (largely cancers) attributed to the fallout from Chernobyl is calculated now at between 8,000 and 16,000. A tragic loss of life certainly, but not unavoidable. Faulty reactor design, inadequately

trained personnel and an abysmal safety set-up were the decisive factors at Chernobyl and do not have to be repeated.

Perhaps the most difficult problem of all is the disposal of waste, which is highly radioactive, and must be kept away from people. The most radioactive isotopes decay the fastest, so that after 10 years the waste is 1,000 times less radioactive. After 50 years, the waste is less radioactive than the aluminium ore from which it was extracted in the first place. Dangerous undoubtedly, and a long-term challenge, but not insurmountable. Burying deep underground encased in blocks of glass is one proposal, but much more work needs to be done. And new designs of reactor produce less waste, with more efficient reprocessing. What cannot be tolerated is the notion that if something is potentially dangerous we must stay away from it. Driving a car at 70 mph is risky but can be done safely, though once unthinkable.

The development of renewable energy extraction (wind turbines, solar panels, wave power and so on) has developed dramatically in recent years, but even its most fervent devotees will concede that it makes only a minute contribution to overall supply. A feudal economy might

struggle by on renewable energy production, but not an industrial one.

The material case for developing nuclear technology as the cornerstone of a sustainable energy policy is compelling. Exploitable reserves will supply us for many thousands of years. (The fission of one atom of uranium produces 10 million times the energy produced by the combustion of one atom of carbon). Fossil fuel supplies are much more finite, and will become increasingly expensive as extraction becomes more difficult. Theoretical work on nuclear fusion (the combination of atoms to produce energy much as the sun does) is promising but needs further development. (See box left). What is fundamental in all of this is the notion that progress is sustainable.

In the event, now likely, of an 'energy gap', there are two basic responses to the outstripping of supply by demand. One is to increase supply, in which case nuclear development is pivotal. The other is to reduce demand, and here we're not talking about turning off a light bulb. Do away with industry, with transport, with everything that makes modern life possible. This is a recipe for stagnation, and will, ironically, be a source of far greater misery for the people of the world.

Motivated by the shortage of doctors, government is pushing the writing out prescriptions. But is it really a bad idea?

Nurse, can you write me a prescription?

YOU DON'T GET to hear about a change until it is already way down the line. So it may come as a surprise when you first encounter a nurse, not a doctor, writing out your prescription. In fact nurses have been training as extended formulary nurse prescribers since 2002 and as supplementary prescribers since 2003.

What does this mean? The term "formulary nurse" relates to nurses prescribing independently, that is, without recourse to a doctor's signature on the prescription. Importantly for the present debate, it also means prescribing within their competency. This term can mean within one or across several specialisms, depending on the nurse's job.

Supplementary prescribing relates to nurses prescribing within a clinical management plan (CMP). These two phrases – within their competency and clinical management plan – are important because they tell the patient that nurses can only prescribe independently if they meet at least one of two criteria: either they are prescribing in an area of nursing in which they are qualified and experienced or they are prescribing under the auspices of a CMP, a patient's personalised plan. These plans are devised with the patient's and the GP's involvement as well as that of the nurse.

Other nurse prescribers are district nurses and health visitors who are able to prescribe from a limited formulary, mostly dressings.

Finally, nurses can prescribe under Patient Group Directives. An example of this is the flu vaccine given to at-risk patients. But they all amount to the same: nurses, like doctors, cannot prescribe outside either their competency or their responsibility.

Nurse prescribing is a difficult issue because there is no question that the government is motivated by the shortage of doctors.

Typically, a cheaper and more numerous set of workers are being drafted in to fill the gap. But on the other hand, nurses are well placed, within the strictures above and with proper training, to prescribe for patients whom they will frequently know better than the GP. It is a

'Nurses should have the pharmacological education they need for the background theory to prescribing that GPs and pharmacists receive...'

waste of time, and frankly degrading for the nurse, to have to wait around outside the GP's door for a signature on a prescription. The chances are the GP won't even look at the prescription because he trusts the nurse, even without training for prescribing, to make the right decision. Nurse prescribing means that the nurse can follow the patient through to a conclusion. It is easier for both the patient and the nurse, and yes, the GP too.

Campaign

It is tempting to stand on principle and oppose nurse prescribing, knowing the politics behind it. Nurses are aware that they are being used: for all that they may seem down to earth, caring types, they are also educated, intellectual professionals – reflective practitioners in the jargon of the trade. But the Association of Nurse Prescribers has been campaigning long and hard for the extension of nurse prescribing, and with growing support from nurses. They have their own professional reasons for wanting to prescribe and nurses will always put that before politics, like it or not.

In addition to campaigning for better pay, and for the employment of more GPs and nurses generally, the Royal College of Nursing and other nurses' organisations need to ensure that the training is well funded. In particular, nurses should receive the pharmacological education they need for the all-important background theory to prescribing that GPs and pharmacists receive as an essential part of their training. Already, those nurses who have gone through prescribing courses are experiencing the satisfaction

of speaking to GPs and pharmacists on equal terms. They are able to give their input into the whole discussion on the best patient care and to provide the patient with the explanations they need about the drugs. As the nurses become more experienced in prescribing, there are calls for them to become training supervisors. Currently this role is performed by GPs who are overstretched even when they are supportive of nurse prescribing.

Inevitably, doctors are not wholly in favour of the extension of prescribing powers to nurses. They worry about nurses' capacity to understand the pharmacological theory because many will remember how much trouble they had themselves. Reasonably they point out that nurses (and many others along with them!) are likely to be less academically able and are educated to a lower level than doctors. This is a serious point, which cannot be dismissed as mere protectionism or out of some liberal notion of false equality.

Like GPs (though unlike pharmacists) nurses do not need to know how to make up drugs. Also like GPs, they do need to know how the drugs work on the body, what can inhibit or accelerate their absorption, how they interact, their side effects and appropriate clinical applications. This knowledge can be presented in a perfectly understandable way to the increasingly well-educated nursing profession while taking into account that they do not have, and neither do they need, advanced qualifications in chemistry. The pharmacology theory given out to medical students may benefit from being repackaged for nurses, with more focus on practice – an approach that may also work best with the proposed multidisciplinary training. Patients should be confident that all those with responsibility for prescribing have had rigorous, and accessible, training.

As the nurse prescribing training is intensive and very time consuming, nurses' organisations will need to renegotiate caseloads. But this is an issue that is not confined to prescribing. Nurses cannot carry on with the necessary level of

e idea of nurses

continuing professional development and be expected to maintain the same level of work for the same level of pay. Prescribing, another responsibility, means more time-consuming duties, even taking into account their not having to wait around outside GPs' doors. Like GPs, nurses will have to ensure they keep up with the changes in drugs; like GPs they will have to know the BNF inside out and backwards for their specialism. The BNF is the British National Formulary, produced by the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. It is the Bible of all those responsible for drug prescribing and nurse prescribers have to learn to refer to it at any moment.

They also have to learn how to resist any unethical persuasion from the pharmaceutical companies, already rubbing their hands with glee at the thought of fresh recruits. The companies will be increasing their production of pens and mouse mats with the corporate logos, but provided they don't start offering free chocolate (!), nurses can learn to be just as capable as doctors in brushing them aside.

...and the pharmacists

Other groups of health service professionals are also being trained up for prescribing – most notably the pharmacists. This is one group where any concerns about inadequate knowledge and training really do have no place. It is to pharmacists in hospitals and chemists that doctors turn when they need to know more about a drug, and nurses will do the same. However, pharmacists may have a conflict of interest if they are running a business where profits depend upon the sale of drugs. And a patient might not actually need a drug, but advice from their doctor instead. As for the other groups, for example, physiotherapists, the case will need to be made for and against them as it has been for the two groups discussed here.

Current concerns about nurse prescribing relate to the extension of the nurses' formulary to the whole BNF. At present nurses are only allowed to



prescribe independently from a limited formulary (number of drugs) even within their own competency, but many find this hardly less constraining than before they became nurse prescribers. To give any group of people access to a vast range of drugs creates a potential danger, whether they be nurses, pharmacists or GPs. If we had the real number of GPs we need then each one of them would still be a potential danger. But ultimately we rely on these people and the system of training and regulation to protect us. Of course, they are not foolproof or the Shipman murders would not have occurred. However, it is just as likely that we will have more watchful eyes in our surgeries and our hospitals to spot a potential Shipman as it is that another one will be created by the opening up of the BNF to nurses.

Of course nurse prescribing is still

controversial, not least amongst nurses themselves. Understandably they worry not only about the training, the increased workload and keeping up to date but also the heightened risk of making a mistake. Beverly Malone, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, talks of creating maxi-nurses and not mini-doctors. Nurses and doctors each have different roles in patient care. Each is dependant on the other but traditionally it is the latter who has the higher status since they have to reach a higher academic level, train longer, and carry more responsibility associated with risk-laden duties. But nurses are increasingly unprepared to be seen in a servile role and are taking responsibility for looking at how they can best provide quality patient care. Nurse prescribing, a risk-laden duty, is one part of that debate.

A new and timely book is packed full of evidence that will help demand withdrawal from the EU...

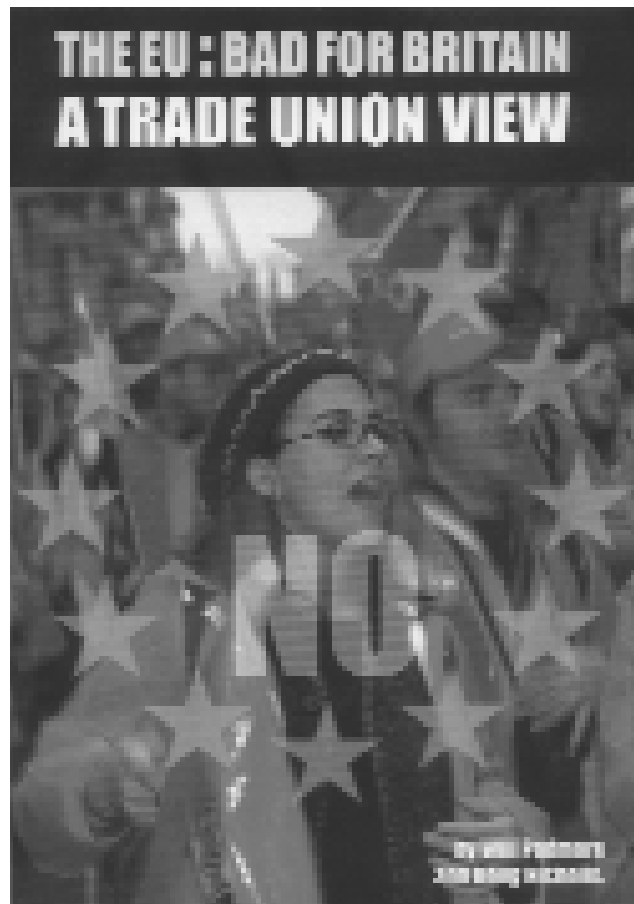
Why the European Union is bad for Britain

INCREASINGLY, British workers are recognising that the EU is damaging their interests, blocking any possible gains for workers and their trade unions in any EU state. So it is timely that this highly readable and well researched analysis is now available, providing extensive and rigorous evidence. It is essential reading that undoubtedly will assist in the process of moving workers from dissatisfaction to outright, conscious opposition, demanding withdrawal from the EU.

The book's historical sweep is apparent from the opening chapter, which outlines succinctly all major developments between 1950 and 1992. It describes the inception of the European common market.

It notes that in the beginning the British political establishment had no wish to join this union: the governments of Churchill, Eden and Macmillan were against participating in European integration.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the opinion of government and people was hostile to a supranational authority that would have the right to close down our pits or steel works and interfere in our economic life. It points out that initially the EU's founding strategy was to deal with economic targets, leaving the attainment of political targets till later. The aim was a



steady leaching away of sovereignty in the basic economic arena. Meanwhile behind the scenes they carefully prepared for political union.

At a certain point, when all the countries had been lured into the bag of economic union, they would tighten the drawstrings and declare full political union. Thus the European Coal and Steel

Community in 1951 paved the way for the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the EEC.

By the 1960s, however, attitudes in the political establishment started to change, as Britain's economic prospects darkened and its relative powers declined. In addition, the US government put increasing pressure on Britain to join Europe. Though De Gaulle's France vetoed Britain's entry during the 1960s, in 1973 Heath signed Britain into the EEC. In 1975 Wilson's Labour Government with a mix of lies and false promises managed to win a referendum on remaining in the EEC. Later Thatcher was to endorse the Maastricht Treaty and one of her last acts was to join the disastrous ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism).

The authors then report comprehensively on the drive to a single EU state in the years since 1992.

If you are interested in discovering what kind of creature the EU state is, then there is a mine of information outlining the undemocratic workings of the EU and its institutions. The EU functions like a giant corporation, its unelected quangos make the laws, the EU takes away not only our national sovereignty and independence, but also our democracy. The European Commission, the apex of everything in the EU, is an appointed not an elected body.

The book informs us not only how the Commission operates but also the EU President, the Council of Ministers, the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice. A thorough examination follows of the endemic corruption within the EU.

There is a valuable section on the political and economic costs of EMU (Economic Monetary Union) and its effect of increasing flexibility in the labour market and worsening growth and unemployment.

Bring out your badges

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Another section of the book provides a cautionary tale describing the adverse effect on the British economy and British industry of the EU with additional segments outlining the damaging effects on our agriculture, fisheries and public services.

The authors conclude with a rousing message of Yes to independence and sovereignty, and Uut of the EU. These two examples from the thought-provoking conclusion are an indication of the quantity and quality of ideas expressed within it.

Sovereignty

Asserting sovereignty is the root of wisdom for a country, just as joining a trade union is for workers. For each it is the birth of dignity; for neither is it an end in itself. What matters is what you do with it. We have been careless of our inheritance so now both trade unionism and British sovereignty are under attack.

To assert and fight for the sovereignty of Britain should be as natural to workers as joining a trade union. Both have the same aim: to keep our freedom. Asserting our right to decide what happens in Britain parallels asserting the right to have a say in our wages and conditions of work. Nobody has a right to interfere in Britain's affairs, any more than we have a right to interfere in any other country's affairs.

National sovereignty is vital. No country run from outside ever amounted to anything. Sovereignty has been one of the great dynamics of human development – if a country does not run its own affairs, those who control it prioritise their own interests, at the expense of the controlled country's interests.

Buy this book and your understanding of the dangers posed to our class and country by the EU will be multiplied a thousand fold.

THE EU: BAD FOR BRITAIN, by Will Podmore and Doug Nicholls, £8 (ISBN 0-9542112-5-1), is published by Bread Books, PO Box 1806, Coventry CV6 1YJ.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

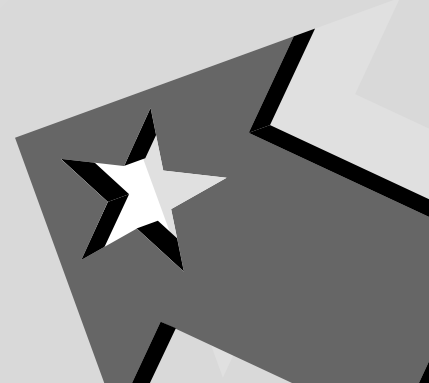
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Back to Front – Workers of the world

‘Within the British TUC and unions, there were bans on communists and “fellow travellers” holding office, even in the trades councils...’

REMEMBER the World Federation of Trade Unions? Established in 1945, it created a world trade union organisation to represent the working class of the world just as the United Nations was to represent the nations of the world following the defeat of fascism. It supported the anti-fascist forces in post-war Greece and Spain and was responsible for many countries withdrawing their ambassadors from Franco’s Spain.

In 1949, at the height of the Cold War, the British TUC supported by the US labour federation, the CIO, walked out of the organisation – creating a split in the world trade union movement that has lasted to this day. The divisive issue was the US Marshall Plan. In the interests of unity the organisation did not put it to a vote; however, the splitters persisted.

The British and US trade union centres then set up the rival International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), as an anti-communist opponent of the WFTU, to promote Cold War politics by attacking the role of the trade unions in socialist countries. Within the British TUC and unions, there were bans on communists and ‘fellow travellers’ holding office, even in the trades councils. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ICFTU continues with such activities to this day.

It used every trick in the book to ensnare the South African unions into its web in the early 1990s, knowing that there were many communists in the COSATU leadership. It abused the ILO to try and punish Cuba’s CTC union centre over so-called ‘independent’ unions in Cuba, and supported the Venezuelan CTV trade union centre whose leadership was actively

involved in the attempted coup d’etat in that country. It has now merged with the World Confederation of Labour, an anti-communist trade union centre established by the Catholic Church and active in Latin America.

Meanwhile, the WFTU suffered severely following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It had become too dependent on the Soviet trade unions and was stereotyped by the existence of Cold War blocs. Now, following the success of its 15th Congress held in Havana in December 2005, a reinvigorated WFTU has emerged. The congress, which saw representation from more than 250 trade unions from 71 countries, hammered out the ‘Havana Consensus’, defining its policy objectives and strategy.

There were union delegations from all over the world. Conspicuous by its absence was the British TUC – which said it could not attend as it was attending the Cosatu Congress in South Africa. Yet Cosatu had a high-profile delegation at the WFTU Congress.

The 25-point Havana Consensus described the urgent situation facing trade unions and the working class across the world, also the networks needed to strengthen unity. It reasserted the founding principles of the WFTU from 60 years ago: “We must confront the predatory logic of the capitalist and imperialist system, as it is an illusion to confine oneself to addressing only its excesses!”

Now may be a useful time to reflect on the history of our TUC after its break from the WFTU and compare where the two differing analyses of our world have led.

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