

WORKERS

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MARCH 2007 £1



SEPARATISM – A CAPITALIST DREAM



National protest to defend the NHS | **03**



Revealed: the EU/US plot against Cuba | **08**



Richard Dawkins and the delusion of religion | **14**

WORKERS

“Unity, not separatism

ALL OVER BRITAIN collectivism is under attack from capitalism. In places, that attack is being resisted by the working class. Collective, unified class action is indeed our only defence, which is why employers and their political henchmen hate it so much.

One of the key collectives disliked by capitalism is the one that gave birth both to it and to the working class: Britain itself. Once of value to the employers, Britain and the working class unity based around it are now seen as an obstacle.

Their solution is two-pronged. Take power away from the centre, from Britain, and give it either upwards, to Europe, or downwards, to a splintered nation. So we have European integration on the one hand, and separatism and devolution on the other.

Devolution within England was dealt a strong blow in the North East in 2003, with the referendum rejection of John Prescott's plans for regional government there. But that has not deterred the Scottish National Party and its deluded dreams of "independence".

What is independent about becoming a province within the European Union? About joining the euro, and thereby handing your economy over to the unelected European Central Bank? And what about the rest of Britain – are we to have no say in the future of our country?

Nowhere is working class collectivism hated more than in Brussels, as it gears up to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which set the foundation of the economic predecessor of the European Union. Among the flurry of integrationist and reactionary legislation that continues to flow are proposals from the European Commission to outlaw collective bargaining and trade unionism (see Eurotrash, page 6) .

The EU Green Paper "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century" is intended to remove any defensive or protective role from trade unions in support of their members. The proposed legislation, welcomed by Blair and the TUC (how surprising!) clamours for "flexible working practices" which in reality are about the labour movement acquiescing to and prostrating itself before whatever capital in the EU demands.

Collectivism in the form of trade unionism is to be replaced by further individual rights consciously designed to make it impossible for workers to strike, bargain or protect themselves. The European Union, based upon the Fascist concept of destroying organised labour, now seeks to outlaw the basis of trade unionism and render us powerless. That we cannot permit.



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB
ISSN 0266-8580

www.workers.org.uk
Issue 102, March 2007



Contents – March 2007

News

Health fight goes national, p3; Hospital protest marches on, p4; Civil servants in national strike, p5

03

Features

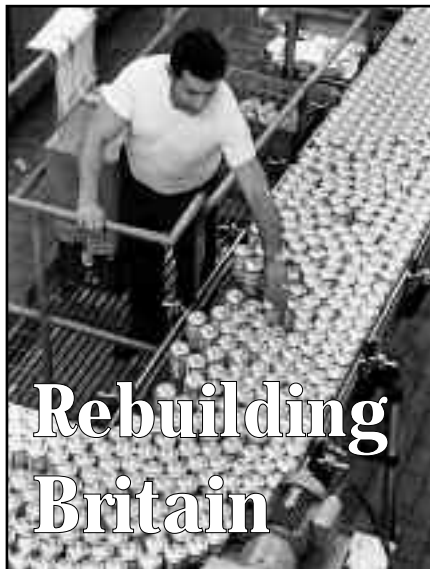
Revealed: how the European Union is conspiring with the United States against Cuba, p6; At the crossroads – do we allow Britain to split?, p8; A strategy to take our NHS away, p12

06

Book Review

Richard Dawkins and the dangerous delusion of religion, p14

14

**HEALTH****STEEL****HOSPITALS****AGRICULTURE****CIVIL SERVICE****SILICON GLEN****ENGINEERING****BLOOD SERVICE****WHAT'S ON****EUROTRASH**

Campaigning goes national

Mouse swallows elephant

North east London fight

Protest over milk pricing

National strike

Computer firm occupied

Pump company targeted

Pickets against cuts

Coming soon

The latest from Brussels

Health fight goes national

SATURDAY 3 March will see numerous events across Britain as campaigning against the continued drive by the government for greater marketisation and private sector control over the National Health Service gets under way. There will be rallies, demonstrations, pickets, conferences, marches, leafleting and other activities.

The various campaigns to defend the NHS all recognise that the only public service which is essential to everybody from cradle to grave is health care. The greatest concern is that the proposed model for future care proposed by the government is the US model, whose sole core is profit. Though ministers continually bleat that health care will remain free at point of need, the public purse is pouring billions into private finance schemes, outsourcing, marketisation, management consultants. The existing NHS deficits, totalling £1 billion, are dwarfed by the more than £45 billion being leached away by private capital. But all the NHS Together unions know that a lobby of the House of Commons in November 2006 and a day to focus the public and politicians' minds – 3 March, a Saturday, ludicrously called "a day of action" – are in themselves not going to change the government's avowed direction of travel.

As Thatcher's repeated remark that the NHS was safe in Tory hands became a byword for deception, so Labour's repeated promise that it will not privatise the NHS is daily proved false. For example, Labour handed over the complete Lymington NHS trust to private contractors. It wants to place all NHS procurement in private hands. And so on. Faced with this, the NHS Together Alliance has to be a long-term one to win the hearts and minds of those employed in health care provision and those who survive by using the NHS.

The Alliance recognises that the new financial year in April will bring greater financial constraints on NHS trusts – more cuts, more closures, more redundancies. The drive to foundation status, setting competing profit-driven trusts against one another, will re-shape the NHS as the weakest go to the wall. The misnomer of "reconfiguration of services" across the country is rapidly seeing trusts merge and services being realigned geographically or on the lines of specialisms, the hiving off of shared services and cost cutting – all intended to ensure fragmentation and chaos.

Transfers to the private sector, especially to virulently anti-union multinationals, require the health unions to concentrate on maintaining organisation and relying on unity, not division. The campaign in health cannot be one of stopping cuts and retaining what already exists – too much rooted in the last century – but about determining what health provision is required for the 21st century and looking forward for the next 50 years.

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

STEEL**Mouse swallows elephant**

AS REPORTED in the January edition of *WORKERS*, the British steel industry is in a continued state of turmoil. And once again, a foreign buyer is the cause.

Tata, the Indian manufacturing conglomerate, has beaten Brazil's Companhia Siderurgica Nacional in the head-to-head takeover battle for the Anglo-Dutch steel maker Corus. The result was an artificially inflated buying price for Corus – shares worth £2.00p in 2005 traded for £6.08p today, which then resulted in the largest drop in Tata's shares in recent times.

Community, the union formed in 2004 out of the merger of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and the textile and clothing union KFAT, has issued a stark warning to Tata: publish plans for future investment and preservation of steel producing capacity in Britain or face resistance across the industry.

The response from Tata's chairman was to refuse to give any guarantees on jobs or investment. The "mouse which has swallowed an elephant" may find it cannot digest its victim.

OUTSOURCING**Prudential exports jobs**

PRUDENTIAL – Britain's second largest insurer – has started its first transfer of jobs to India. Some 210 jobs will be lost in Stirling and Reading and transferred to a low-cost processing centre in Mumbai.

The union Amicus warned that the company "may be planning to pull out of the UK altogether".

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Our flexible friends...

THE EUROPEAN Commission is calling for the abolition of trade union rights. A Green Paper, "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century", follows a 2006 White Paper on "flexicurity". This asserted that workers could have job security if they embraced flexibility. It stands reality on its head: labour rights result from struggle by organised workers, not their acceptance of market forces.

The Green Paper attacks employment protection as a drag on the labour market. It claims that obligations on contractors to monitor their sub-contractors discourages foreign subcontractors and presents an obstacle to the free market in services. This view permits the single market to override collective bargaining and institutionalises social dumping: simply, it drives down wages.

An example is the recent Vaxholm case, a direct challenge to collective bargaining rights. A Latvian firm, Laval, operated in Sweden using low-wage Latvian labour in breach of Swedish law. Swedish workers took industrial action to defend their pay and conditions. The Commission backed the Latvian firm against Sweden, claiming that Sweden's labour laws contravene EU laws on free movement.

...and back home in the UK

THE TUC and the CBI have launched a joint campaign to encourage adoption of "flexible working practices". TUC general secretary Brendan Barber claimed that these would give employees "more choice" and "people would get to see more of their friends and families." Blair said recently, "Today's European model has to be less about traditional forms of protection and more about modern forms of empowerment."

Running away from a referendum

THE GOVERNMENT wants to avoid a referendum on any new EU treaty, and it is trying to explain how. The logic, though, is rather strange. A spokesman said, "We think the best European Constitution is a simple Constitution. The result... would be that we would not have to hold a referendum." Meanwhile, Europe Minister Geoff Hoon says there is no need to hold a referendum on "every single change in the treaty".



Photo: Workers

Hospital protest marches on

THE LARGEST PROTEST seen in the north east London borough of Waltham Forest took place on 3 February as upwards of a thousand people hit the streets to call for their local hospital, Whipps Cross, to stay in the face of proposals that could lead to the downgrading of services (see photo, above).

The downgrading proposals are part of the comically named Fit for the Future process being pushed through by the new strategic planning authority for the capital, NHS London (see "A strategy to take our NHS away", page 12).

In a lively and highly organised campaign, local health workers, trade unions and patients have taken the offensive. They are calling for Whipps Cross to stay as a fully funded and fully functional District General Hospital, and have garnered support from all the local MPs – some of whom stand to lose their seats at the next general election, so great is the local groundswell of opinion.

Campaigners are now waiting for a date to be set for formal public consultation on the Fit for the Future proposals. This was due to have begun in January, but now looks like being delayed past April.

AGRICULTURE

Protest over milk pricing

DAIRY FARMERS dressed as cows and Women's Institute members in milk baths have protested in Downing Street against low producer milk prices. They want government protection from "unfair" practices by supermarkets. The decline in the dairy sector is closely linked to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Over 10 years 15,000 dairy farms have stopped production. The remaining 20,000 are run at an average loss of 3p a litre of milk. Retail prices have risen from 42p to 51p a litre over that period, yet the price paid to farmers is down from 25p to 19p. This is amongst the lowest in Europe.

The Competition Commission has announced an investigation into the buying

power of supermarkets. The environment secretary, David Milliband, appealed to farmers to cooperate. This may not be the answer farmers want.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says that milk prices are a commercial matter for companies and their suppliers: the government cannot and should not get involved in price negotiations as long as competition rules are respected.

The 2003 CAP reforms, which the government also supports, cut subsidy to the dairy sector and opened up competition. It's no surprise that supermarkets have taken advantage to drive down prices and increase profits. That's what the single market is about. Increasing efficiency and investment are secondary, as Britain's farmers are discovering.

SILICON GLEN**Occupation at computer firm**

WORKERS AT the Simclar computer components factories in Irvine and Kilwinning, Scotland, occupied one of the plants after the company closed them without notice, sacking the 420 workers.

Willie Paterson, organiser for the union Community, said it was despicable. "This came out of the blue," he said. "Staff turned up this morning at 8.30 to locked premises and were told they were out of a job with immediate effect."

During a protest outside the Kilwinning

plant, said Paterson, "the factory gate was opened and the workforce took an instant decision to occupy".

The workers see the company going into "administration" as a ruse to avoid a consultation period and redundancy payments to highly skilled workers with up to 18 years' service.

The occupation lasted overnight. Meanwhile, a picket continues at the Simclar headquarters in Dunfermline.

The closures are a direct consequence of the NCR Dundee relocation and axing of 650 jobs detailed in last month's WORKERS. The company blamed "competition from low-cost economies".

National civil service strike

ON 31 JANUARY about 200,000 civil servants struck in support of their jobs, conditions and public services. Support for the action, which was called by the Public and Commercial Services Union, was widespread. Further action is planned, including strong support for the TUC's "Work Your Proper Hours" day on 23 February, where members are being urged to take full rest and lunch breaks as well as leave work on time. So far the government is unmoved.

Workers were on strike across central government and other public bodies. Galleries and museums were shut; court cases and driving tests disrupted. Tax offices remained open, but without a full service. The Welsh Assembly cancelled its debates. A two-week overtime ban followed the day of action.

The dispute is about government plans to "modernise" the civil service. Cabinet Office minister Pat McFadden questioned the need for a strike. He said "... no organisation, including the civil service, can be immune from the need for change, both to ensure value for money for the public and to adapt to new technology."

Civil servants doubt the government's commitment to maintaining services, and question the direction of the changes being made.

The Public and Commercial Services Union recognises that the challenge is to maintain support among its members and build momentum. It wants to link the national campaign on services with what's going on in the 200-plus negotiating units. Unless it can do so, there will be no pressure on the government to meet their concerns.

ENGINEERING**Pump firm targeted**

A SUBSIDIARY described as "a still profitable, world-class centre of engineering skills" – Weir Pumps of Glasgow – has been sold to a Swiss company, Sulzer, for nearly £50 million. The other price tag is the loss of 450 of its 700 workforce.

The full plans envisage the halving of its British workforce in Glasgow and Leeds from over 1,200 to 600.

The 135-year-old company's products are central to ships' engines, oil installations, desalination plants and power stations. Weir Group boss Mark Selway, who will remain in Glasgow as head of a company that will still employ 8,000 worldwide, said, "China and India are where the growth is in this business, so the question was should we invest in facilities

there, or create a serious European player which will be able to compete globally?"

BLOOD SERVICE**Pickets against cuts**

UNISON and Amicus members picketed Blood Centres in Leeds, Birmingham, London, Sheffield, Southampton, Newcastle, Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford and Manchester on 14 February in protest against proposed cuts.

Highlighting this modern day St Valentines Day Massacre, the unions attacked the plan to move to three super-centres – North London, Bristol and Manchester – as devastating to Britain's blood service. Amicus members will bear the brunt of job losses and the destruction of highly skilled centres of excellence. They returned an 81 per cent vote for strike action in an indicative ballot in late 2006.

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

Saturday 3 March, just about everywhere in Britain

NHS Together Day of Action.

Rallies and marches in Sheffield, Leeds, Sunderland, Birmingham, Bristol, Truro, Folkestone, Maidstone, Woking, Winchester, Brighton, Lymington, Oxford, London, etc.

There are also numerous other events, including "Hands around Hospital" vigils the evening before in Plymouth and Gloucester.

For the really active, there is a hill walk to the top of Skiddaw, Cumbria, to unfurl a NHS Together banner. Lots more being organised: see the website for details: www.nhstogether.org.uk

Thursday 8 March, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

London in the 21st century: booming or crumbling?

Public meeting organised by CPBML/WORKERS magazine. All welcome. The catchphrase is "London: World Class city". Is this your experience of London – its transport system, housing, employment and services? Come to the meeting – see advertisement, back page.

MUSEUMS**Campaign against closures**

MORE THAN 200 people attended a mass visit to the William Morris Gallery in north east London on 14 February as part of the campaign to prevent its closure, along with that of the Vestry House Museum, a local history museum, archive and former workhouse.

Waltham Forest council plans to limit access to weekends and school holidays at both. Education programmes will be taken to the schools rather than inviting schools to the museums. Work at both is to be restructured, meaning the loss of jobs, skills and expertise, leading to the almost certain complete closure of the museums.

Great support for the two museums has been expressed in a sustained campaign (see February issue of WORKERS) and no good reason has been given for this destructive move, which will save considerably less than the £56,000 quoted. No explanation has been given of where the money is to be redirected, but councillors make it clear they are implementing a policy of central government.

Using the unelected EU Commission and without the knowledge of the president is taking steps to support US plans to subject and recolonise Cuba

Revealed: how the European Union is conspiring to overthrow the Cuban government

IN MAY 2004 and July 2006, George Bush approved the report of the 'Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba', a plan to overthrow the legitimate government of Cuba and to recolonise the country.

The plan imposes measures on Cuba now, designed to bring an end to the revolution. The economic blockade has been tightened: the US Treasury has seized Cuban assets frozen in the US since the Cuban revolution; there is US pressure on international banks to stop handling Cuban accounts; remittances from Cuban Americans to their families have been cut off; and visits by them banned, using the device of redefining "family".

\$80 million is being distributed to counter revolutionaries on the island and the radio-electronic war has been stepped up with more transmitters pouring out counter revolutionary broadcasts.

US citizens face jail for visiting the island, and sales of medical equipment to Latin American countries have been banned if there is a possibility that the

equipment may be used by Cuban doctors.

This last ban would affect Operation Miracle, which is restoring sight to millions of low income Latin Americans. Products containing Cuban nickel are also banned from import into the US. The recent eviction of a Cuban trade delegation from a Hilton Hotel in Norway and a worldwide ban by Hilton on Cuban guests is another manifestation of this policy.

The Cuba Coordinator

There is even a US government official known as the "Cuba Coordinator", one Caleb McCarry, who would presumably become the Colonial Governor once he has secured regime change. He has the same duties and title as Paul Bremmer had in Iraq.

McCarry has an interesting background. He played a key role in the US-funded destabilisation campaign designed to overthrow the democratically elected president of Haiti, President

Aristides. The former Republican Party official, linked closely to the US intelligence services, directed his placeman in Haiti, Stanley Lucas, to meet up in the Dominican Republic with Convergence, the anti-Aristides coalition comprising the organisers of a previous military coup and remnants of the hated Tonton Macoute.

It would appear that McCarry and Lucas were hand picked by the US State Department to link US funding to the opposition they were manufacturing. The rest is history. As the band of killers, criminals and mercenaries from former regimes took Cap Hatien in the north of Haiti, US embassy officials in the capital Port au Prince gave Aristides the choice of remaining unprotected against McCarry and Lucas's band of killers or board a US plane to Africa and exile.

Planned recolonisation

So this is the man the US has appointed, not only to tighten up the blockade to overthrow the Cuban government, but to organise the recolonisation of the island.

His remit from the US government is that the blockade will continue until certain conditions are in place inside the island: all properties would be returned to former owners within one year, including all the homes from which millions would be dislodged; all nationalised property would be returned to previous owners such as the Mafia and companies such as United Fruit or their successors, overseen by the US government via a US Commission for the Restitution of Property Rights.

All aspects of the economy would be privatised, including health and education; all cooperatives would be dissolved and the grand estates of old restored; social security and pensions would end and a special work programme for the elderly would be introduced forcing them to work as long as their health holds out. This would be overseen by the US government through the Standing Committee for Economic Reconstruction.

Maximum priority would be given to

Out of their own mouths...

THE FOLLOWING is an extract from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's briefing with Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez and "Cuba Transition Coordinator" Caleb McCarry, held in Washington, DC, on 10 July 2006. The full transcript is available on <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/68776.htm>.

QUESTION: A draft of the report mentions classified annexes. Is there a part of this report that will not be made public?

MR. MCCARRY: Yes, there is.

QUESTION: And – okay. Could you also address – your colleagues spoke earlier about helping a transition government keep security in Cuba. That implies, possibly, some sort of American military or police assistance. Can you talk at all

about what sort of military security plans you have in place? And do you envisage any possible, sort of, confrontation with Venezuela over Cuba in that respect?

MR. MCCARRY: Well, the report, in terms of perspective recommendations, does include a recommendation regarding providing support during a transition, as authorized by U.S. law, to assist the Cuban security forces in making the transition to working under a democratic government. That –

QUESTION: Does that involve the deployment of U.S. forces?

MR. MCCARRY: That's – I just gave you the – recited the part of the report that does refer to, prospectively, in the future with a transition government, the kinds of assistance that might be provided.

e of most member states' parliaments, the Commission
colonise Cuba...

Conspiring with the United States against Cuba

'Workers has learnt that unelected EU commissioners have met several times with McCarry, the US Cuba Coordinator.'

repression of Party members, trade unionists, members of other mass organisations and those 'government sympathisers', under the direction of the US State Department. Maybe the US base at Guantanamo Bay would have a new purpose!

Now, you may think that this will never happen, that the EU would condemn the plan for what it is – a gross violation of a country's sovereignty and unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. Surely, after the calamity of Iraq, the British government would not support it. Think again!

Top-level meetings

WORKERS has learnt that unelected EU Commissioners have met several times with McCarry, the US Cuba Coordinator. The issue was raised at last years US/EU summit with a view to securing US/EU coordination on the US strategy.

The EU has already banned all high level diplomatic contact with Cuba. From last June to date, the EU and the US have been negotiating to achieve a plan of action to bring EU policy on Cuba in line with that of the US.

The Finnish President of the EU at the time would not agree to the plan, but with Germany, whose Chancellor is so close to Bush, now holding the Presidency, it is expected that in June 2007, when a reviewed EU policy on Cuba is to be announced, the new policy will be identical and integrated with US policy.

All this is being done without the knowledge of most national parliaments



Black flags in Havana: the flags, in Anti-Imperialism Park opposite the US Interest Section, obscure the US's electronic billboard propaganda.

Photo: Workers

in the EU countries by the unelected EU Commissioners. It is being led by Britain, the Czech Republic and Poland, with opposition coming from Spain, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Ireland with other EU members in between.

Not only does this represent a gross violation of Cuba's sovereignty and

independence as well as interference in Cuba's internal affairs, but it demonstrates how, not just British, but EU foreign policy is now being determined in Washington. It also represents interference in the internal affairs Britain, as it takes away from our country the right to determine our own foreign policy.

As Labour's support crumbles in Scotland, the vultures are gathering for the pickings. But it would be a disaster for the workers of Britain...

At the crossroads – do we allow Britain to ...



A history of industry and working class struggle (from top): factory occupation at Plessey, Bathgate, 1982; protest against school closures, City Chambers, George Square, Glasgow, 1993; fishing fleet, Mull; Robb Shipyard, 1981.

A MAJOR PRIZE FOR THE European Union in its quest to kill nation states and create a Europe of regions would be the first ever secession of a major portion of one of its member states. Yes, it's Britain – on course for this treatment as the Labour "war" Party gives up the ghost and connives with separatists who pledge to ballot for Scottish independence on winning a sufficient mandate at the next Holyrood elections for the devolved Parliament in May 2007.

Who will suffer?

Whose vital interests do not coincide with this push? Yes, it's us – those who work and live in Britain, who only by deeper unity can resist the globalised intensification of exploitation, led by the EU and the USA, which lowers our standards, degrades our culture and denudes us of our popular sovereignty.

For over three decades WORKERS has argued intensively against this break up of Britain. The urge for separation in Scotland and Wales came in spasms as things in Britain went bad, particularly during the Thatcher years and now – in many ways worse – during the Labour years. The expensive path of opting out from the bad dream was taken, in the form of a Scottish Parliament.

A slow wake-up call

But seven years of growing disillusionment is a slow wake-up call. A massive jolt came from the brave and tireless campaign at the grass roots level that defeated the Labour and European Union attempt to impose a Regional Assembly on the north east of England in 2003.

The fact that the People's Campaign Against the Euro Region could decisively rout the European Union and its many major supporters (including trade unions in the north east) gives inspiration to the thought that separatism in Scotland can also be rolled back. Even if after next May, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and its motley crew of allies in Labour, the Scottish Socialist Party, Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) do launch a

ering. They think that breaking up Britain could bring them rich

split?

referendum on “independence for Scotland” we can look forward to fighting it and defeating the proposal decisively.

Working people increasingly despise politicians – hate being fleeced and taken for dupes by them.

Conflict over oil?

As people drop out or seek to opt out from Labour’s privatised “war-footing” Britain, the party’s long-established political monopoly in Scotland is crumbling. As its strategists say, its “polling position is bleak – a major concern”.

With forthright statements against the NATO attack on Yugoslavia and condemning war in Iraq, the SNP leader Alex Salmond has seduced many wavering trades union and Labour members into the euphoria of his campaign for a brave, new, capitalist Scotland. Going almost unremarked are his unequivocal statements over several years on the benefits of EU membership, and now his pledges that Scotland would change to the Euro after independence. Enticing promises on Council Tax and to pensioners, coupled with bravado on the seizure of North Sea oil reserves make titillating reading.

But the unstated reality begs the questions: Who actually owns and controls the oil? On breaking with London, who is Salmond now pledging allegiance to? A short answer might be global capitalism, the European Central Bank, Brussels.

A sensible warning to make at this stage would be: remember peaceful Yugoslavia’s descent into civil war and break up into the petty statelets of the Balkans. An EU plan? It is also worth taking a look at how our fellow working classes in Spain, France and Italy dealt with separatism in the form of Catalan, Galician, Breton and Northern League nationalism.

Remember, too, break-up by default: where was the referendum when the Czechoslovak state dissolved in 1993? Evidence shows now that unity was the desire of its people then. Beware of those

‘On breaking with London, who is Salmond now pledging allegiance to? A short answer might be global capitalism, the European Central Bank, Brussels.’

on “the left” who hold their own version of a public debate, announce a “progressive consensus” and then proclaim the “settled will of the Scottish people” (the favourite phrase of John Smith, Donald Dewar – and now the Tory, Cameron).

Free from US and EU

With more than enough fire power dug into the loch sides and hardened airfields to wipe out humanity, an independent Scotland – with a rump of Labour and Tory not far from power – could opt to keep its nuclear armaments. A forward US base for over half a century – and one that is ripe for enhancement – it is caught between a militarising EU and a USA ambitious to expand.

Just look who Salmond and Holyrood’s First Minister are marching with on the farcical New York parades on Tartan Day (now institutionalised by the US Senate)! Just over 30 years ago, Edinburgh received a new US consul. His name was Funkhauser. He had previously been Kissinger’s adviser on oil strategy, was a “counter subversion” expert in Vietnam and an experienced Central Intelligence Agency agent in Europe.

Funkhauser’s cryptic remarks at the time can now be better understood: that on the future of Scotland depends “the future of Western industrial life. Scotland is where the action is. It is towards Scotland that the forces are converging that will determine the outcome.”

Now, only through unity can we as a

class determine that outcome, by preventing the increased US domination of a separate Scotland. The final freeing of ourselves from an enfeebled US predator has to be combined with the task of nationally liberating ourselves from the European Union.

The warning given then of “Devolution today, separation tomorrow, annexation the next” has echoed down the decades. It could now become a reality and we alone can bring the process to a halt. Only then can we build a united Britain, harness resources and begin building a future. Labour and the SNP, going down with a desperate and declining capitalism, are blocking the way.

Building a historic unity

Regionalism, separatism, petty nationalism – all were made redundant by the Industrial Revolution, the demise of feudalism and the forging of a nation of workers who looked out for each other, who were determined to fashion a new and better world by their own power, efforts and inventiveness. The historic process created during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and subsequent leaps in scientific thought, created our modern secular society with its rich tapestry of culture.

We can be proud of the united class that arose, capable of defending itself, with great potential for progress. The futile attempt to restore the old Catholic, feudal monarchy was finally buried at Culloden in 1745 in the last battle on British soil. Thereafter it was the onslaught of capitalism that was felt in equal measure from the east end of London to the east end of Glasgow, from the shooting of the Calton weavers to the transportation of the agricultural workers of Tolpuddle, from the fish gutters of Orkney to the tin miners of Cornwall.

And on, right up to the present: many heard the recent BBC Radio documentary (KNOCKING DOWN THE PAST, 4 December

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

2006) exploring an exchange of experiences between tenants of the Gorbals in Glasgow's south east and those from the Market Estate in north London. Both groups had demanded – and achieved – demolition of their high-rise slums and rebuilding of the estates. On visiting the London estate a Gorbals delegate emphasised “many of the problems are exactly the same”.

As well as in the countryside, the urban areas of Britain share a remarkable amount of common experience. Just think of the common heritage of songs and humour of say, Glasgow and Newcastle, Aberdeen and Liverpool.

Once separatism is defeated, progress can be made in deepening unity – STUC, Welsh TUC and TUC moving closer together, a common football league, British teams at international competitions (rejected for the 2012 Olympics!) could be among hundreds of consequences. And the recent years of struggle to maintain public-sector housing stocks has also garnered common experience – from Birmingham in 2002 to

the recent rejections of housing stock transfers in Edinburgh, Stirlingshire, Renfrewshire and Highlands.

Never separatist

The unity we speak of has been forged over centuries. We could even look back to our first popular resistance movement – the Boudiccan revolt against Roman invasion and occupation leading up to the year 62AD. This spread to the Grampian Mountains where the Roman advance was halted 22 years later.

The speech assigned to the leader Calgacus by the historian Tacitus was the first clear definition of imperialism, condemning the enslavement by the Empire and containing the famous description “they created a desolation and called it peace”.

Petty squabbles were eventually set aside as the “Marriage of the Thistle and the Rose” (James IV and Margaret Tudor) in 1503, accompanied by a treaty pledging “perpetual peace”, paved the way (via the Battle of Flodden) for the Union of the Crowns (James VI of Scotland becoming James I of England in 1603). This led on to the union of the English and Scottish governments in 1707 (in the teeth of

separatist scorn), an event to be commemorated during this 300th anniversary.

Following treaties and votes dissolving both Parliaments the union creating Britain became law on 1 May 1707. An added benefit for Scotland was its rescue from near bankruptcy following its disastrous attempts to become a colonial power by seizing the Darien peninsula (now known as Panama) in the 1690s.

The Royal Bank of Scotland – set up largely to acquire funds to reimburse the creditors – remains a powerful force to this day with a £26 billion turnover and a 5 per cent stake in the Bank of China. A full role in Empire followed – just read about the Scots behaviour in the Indian Mutiny, the Opium Wars etc.

But it was the forging of a single working class during the centuries of industrial revolution that really made the nation and its future potential.

By the 1730s in the east end of Glasgow the first associations of weavers started to form and link into a common culture of resistance throughout Britain. Organising defence against intensive exploitation continued apace, from the Glasgow Association of Cotton Spinners in 1820 to the convening of the first ever delegate conference of trades unions called by the Glasgow Trades Council in 1864 – all well documented by the People's Palace Museum in Glasgow Green.

Most of this energy and power to change the world was gradually manoeuvred into safe channels. And with their absorption into the Labour Party, a cosy “living within capitalism” outlook evolved and persisted for generations, especially in Scotland.

Others like John MacLean propounded revolutionary ideas (even being appointed as the first Bolshevik consul) but ended up – broken by imprisonment – in a cul-de-sac of separatist ideals. Some resisted bravely but despite the defying of the World War I Munitions Act and Churchill's tanks (sent against strikers in Glasgow's George Square, 1919), the establishment's

1869: Britain's first US-owned factory

SCOTLAND'S FIRST big experience of global capitalism came in 1867 when the mass production lines of the Singer Sewing Machine company of the USA set up in Clydebank. It was the beginning of an era in Britain. (Surprise, surprise, they left for Taiwan in 1980, creating a ghost town. A worker at the time described it as completing the job Hitler could not finish.)

However, a century of working class experience was gained and was influential nationwide. The owners' insult that they had employed “trained gorillas” had earlier infuriated workers there. The factory became the largest in the world by 1911 and their rush to

maximise profit around those years resulted in a strong fight back. It was unskilled women workers who led the rest of the 8,000 out on strike, achieving unionisation in the course of the action. Local anger was then harnessed into a Britain-wide struggle.

Historians point to World War I as bringing women into industry but for many years before, the primary employment in Clydebank for women was engineering. It was that spark from Singers that led on to actions by seamen and dockers, coal miners, carters, Dundee jute workers, rail workers and Aberdeen quarrymen in the years leading up to 1914.



Photo: Workers

The People's March For Jobs, led by the pipe band, George Square, Glasgow, 1983

fear of proletarian revolution receded.

Those acts of resistance by workers were never separatist. The Defence of The Realm Act struck hard in 1916-18 at workers in Sheffield, Newcastle and Glasgow; and from Petrograd to Clydeside, skilled metal workers were at the core of the movement in those years – but Scots workers were closely coordinated with workers in Tyneside, Sheffield, Manchester and Coventry.

Looking now at the last 35 years of class struggle we see that all the important actions in Scotland have been strongly part of, or assisted by, Britain-wide solidarity.

Think of the occupation, work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) in 1971. It indeed did become a prototype for the next 30 years: Plessey's (Alexandria 1971), McNeil's Engineering (Glasgow 1972), Robb Caledon Shipyard (Dundee 1981), Plessey Bathgate (1982 with Plessey Liverpool in solidarity), Timex (Dundee 1983), Caterpillar (Uddingston 1987), Kvaerner Engineering (Clydebank 2000). Many actions revealed strong national coordination; for example the successful strike of the six BBC orchestras (Musicians Union 1980) and the Miners Strike of 1984 (with great cooperation between the strong National Union of

Mineworkers presence in Kent, Wales and Scotland).

And right up to date actions continue – the brief but decisive occupation of the Simclar electronics manufacturing factory in Kilwinning in February brought national attention to the constant leaching of skilled jobs to lower-wage countries and the severe decline of the once trumpeted sunrise electronics industries of Silicon Glen.

EU plans

The Labour Party in Scotland has no interest in such proud histories of struggle, nor in a resurgent class creating a new industry for a future Britain. Obsessed with running capitalism (badly!), meddling endlessly in the minutiae of people's lives, trying to control the arts and constructing an independent foreign policy (taking Malawi under their wing and parading through the avenues of New York, for example), they are taking Scotland towards an abyss of separatism.

Scottish Labour are kowtowing to the European Union on industrial contracts (for example, CalMac and shipyard contracts being allowed to go to Poland) and on the biggest piece of regionalisation ever to threaten Britain –

devolution. They are now in no shape to resist SNP pressures to push well beyond this towards the continued break up of our nation.

As Alex Salmond dreams of seizing “a future boost to Scotland's balance sheet of £65 billion” in oil revenues and “a £1 trillion asset for our future” in possible discoveries, Labour fumbles for arguments, failing to counter SNP campaigning.

In 2002 it was revealed, under the 30 year rule, that the Foreign Office had produced a confidential paper in 1971, a year before joining the European Economic Community, outlining even then the 12 regions to be created in Britain by the European Commission – and planning began in 1965. It was a precondition for European Development Fund distributions. This led to the founding of the Scottish Development Agency, a precursor to devolution. The Scotland Act paved its way in 1978. Voting on it seems to have been merely a nicety along the road!

Long term planning or what? Will we find the break up of Britain in still-to-be-revealed confidential papers too? It all goes to show the seriousness of the task to finally defeat such ideas. And only workers – united – can carry out that task.

First they came for the Regional Health Authorities, then the District Health Authorities. Now a new management tier is in place – and it is a deliberate threat to the NHS...

A strategy to take our NHS away

THE TUC CURRENTLY characterises the constant changes being wrought upon the National Health Service as a “permanent revolution”. If the foundation of the NHS after World War 2 was a revolution, then the changes are more like a permanent counter-revolution.

At the lobby of Parliament on 23 January, the TUC’s call was not for the changes to be halted, but for them to be slowed down. It has to be admitted that it isn’t the catchiest of slogans; “What do we want? Things to be slowed down. When do we want it? Errrr...now, but slowly.”

The TUC’s opposition is unengaging and does not give recognition to the significance of the changes nor to the damage they will inflict if allowed to continue. There is a sinister purpose in government’s constant reforms of NHS management – the deliberate sowing of confusion hides a break-up of health services into bite-size pieces for private takeover. It must be understood and exposed.

In WORKERS, we have covered government health policy from a variety of perspectives. For example, there have been articles on the use of private, often foreign-owned health companies used in the NHS as a means of fragmenting and handing over control to others.

These companies frequently emanate from countries with no national health service to speak of, particularly America. Articles have also appeared on the threat to hospital departments and hospitals themselves, on the reconfiguration of Primary Care Trusts and consequent job loss – the list is extensive.

One area that has not yet received our attention is what is known as the intermediate-tier of management in the NHS, Strategic Health Authorities. These, too, have been subject to immense and damaging change.

Twelve years ago, Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) were abolished. These were large and labour-intensive by today’s standards, employing over a thousand people each. They were responsible for planning health care,

‘A majority of London’s 700 plus SHA employees were union members. Only a minority of the approximately 130 retained will be.’

training different grades of employee, including an input into medical and nurse training and the holding of contracts. They also headed a cadre of managers who could be introduced into hospitals and departments where there was perceived to be a need to strengthen this level of administration.

Negotiating with unions

Importantly, not only did RHAs have notional representatives of the public, (which is all that local councillors can ever really claim to be) they also had a negotiating function, being the point of contact between NHS employers and NHS employees through their trade unions.

The Regional Joint Committees determined both regional and local policy as well as interpreting national agreements. In 1995, Virginia Bottomley abolished them. They were replaced by smaller regional bodies, losing hundreds if not thousands of jobs across the country.

While this can be explained in part by the introduction of progressive waves of new information technology systems, rendering this work less labour-intensive, RHA functions were also split up. Some of the educational and training elements went into higher education; others were to devolve to hospitals themselves.

This change came at a time when hospitals were forced to become NHS Trusts, thereby becoming freestanding corporate bodies – the greatest single break in regional administration, effectively ending it.

The situation carried on until after the

1997 general election.

Within three years of Blair entering Downing Street, a new plan “shifting the balance of power” was introduced, which abolished the only remaining tier of local management above hospital level, the District Health Authorities (DHAs).

The DHAs had formed an integral part of the old regional structure and were swept away, shifting the balance. In the case of London they were brought together in a single London body for the NHS, which in turn was swiftly replaced by five new bodies known as Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs).

Lo and behold, after less than five years these bodies have now been replaced by a single SHA for London, called NHS London.

This process is being mirrored throughout the rest of the country, and untold hundreds of millions of pounds wasted on these unwanted unnecessary and inefficient changes.

While the Tories bleat on about wasting public funds it is we who are the true conservatives. We want to conserve our precious assets and not see them squandered in this cavalier fashion. In the course of these transformations, now tagged the “permanent revolution” quoted above, thousands of skilled administrators and health workers have lost their jobs.

Example of London

By way of example, before July 2006 the five Strategic Health Authorities in London employed over 700 workers. They were planners, administrators, managers of specific projects and providers of support to hospitals throughout the capital. On 1 July 2006 they were supplanted by the new NHS London.

By the end of March 2007, the new body is to have no more than 135 employees. That figure will be reduced further to somewhere a little over 120. This is not only mass unemployment (at the time of writing over 200 people have gone under various negotiated packages, leaving an even greater number to be sacked at the end of March). The job



Marching for Whipps Cross Hospital, north east London: the review of hospital provision in the area is being driven by the new strategic authority, NHS London.

losses and the reorganisation which is causing them are symptomatic of a new kind of NHS.

The opposite of an NHS

The new NHS is a body which is no longer national, no longer a service and only notionally to do with health. It is not national because already Wales and Scotland effectively run their own services (changes that require further analysis) but there is a fragmentation and an internationalisation of the health service under way.

The erroneous phrase “globalisation” is frequently kicked around to describe what is in effect a control by principally American-based transnational companies. This phenomenon is now to be visited on the NHS.

Companies such as Kaiser Permanente, United Health are being encouraged, indeed dragooned, into running not just the provider side of health care (hospitals, clinics and so on), but also the commissioning side (“planning”, “organisation”, and indeed

the previous “purchasing” side of the dreaded Thatcherite internal market). Management consultancy companies such as McKenzies and KPMG are also heavily involved.

So this new NHS does not need skilled administrators. Instead, it needs people who can oversee the transition from a service run by health workers for the people of Britain into one run by private companies for the benefit of their shareholders.

And that is what is happening in the transition to the new Strategic Health Authorities. Human resource managers (previously personnel officers) are now being transformed into “business leaders”. A whole host of babyish terminology is introduced to hide the fact that the failed transfer of public assets to the private sector is being contemplated (outsourcing for privatisation; marketisation for outsourcing and so forth). This equally applies to the names of those carrying out these functions.

What lies ahead? There is speculation that Brown already has plans in place for

his first 100 days. Speculation includes the proposing of “independent” boards on the NHS, much like Brown handed over governance of the Bank of England to a board. Should this happen, then the last vestiges of planning and organisation which Thatcher assiduously began dismantling over 20 years ago will be in prospect.

Independent of what one may ask? The politicians want it to be independent of them so that when the proverbial hits the fan they don’t smell.

In practice it will be independent of working people and in particular of their trade unions, whose very presence within the administrative heart of the NHS, these new SHAs, is now compromised. A majority of London’s 700 plus SHA employees were union members. Only a minority of the approximately 130 retained will be.

This pattern is replicated across the country and is a deliberate attempt to drive organised workers out of the planning system.

Rule from without

Moves to dismantle the NHS are not just about closing hospitals; some hospitals need to close. Neither is it about reorganising services; this, too, is needed from time to time. It is about ensuring that the NHS is removed from the control of the people who pay taxes and no longer planned by those who work in the service.

What lies ahead is a service governed by definition from “without”, preferably as far without as you can get, perhaps Texas being the optimum location.

The challenges ahead are great and the ideals for which generations of British workers have fought to establish a National Health Service are threatened as never before.

A debate on the scale and pace of change is necessary. But we must not limit ourselves simply to calling for bad things to happen more slowly. We want to put an end to these bad things and to start having changes introduced which benefit us and our families.

A new book by an Oxford professor subjects religious claims and rational, scientific examination...

Richard Dawkins and the dangerous delusion

JUST HOW dangerous can religion be in 21st century Britain? Not many years ago you might have thought not very – in this country the “official” religion, the Church of England, is toothless and lame, knocked into submission and put in its place by an advanced, secular working class.

Well, Richard Dawkins wouldn't have agreed with you then and certainly wouldn't now. He sees religion – all and any religion from the most extreme to the

mildest, with no quarter given to the C of E – as fundamentally anti-science and therefore dangerous indeed. In *The God Delusion* he subjects religious thought to the powerful scrutiny of the scientific mind – where's the evidence, does it stand up to rigorous examination? – and goes on to lay out the implications and consequences of religious belief.

This is a roller-coaster of a book, and a great read for anybody who is worried

about the apparent growth in superstitious thinking in Britain and, indeed, anyone who enjoys the merciless yet passionate application of rational thought to superstitious hocus pocus. (Incidentally, he deals with Christianity in the US too, although we can't do much about that. Interestingly there have been some real successes there for brave people who are prepared to fight against Biblical teaching in schools. We are having less success here on this front.)

No wonder Christian creationists and god-botherers of all kinds fall over each other to demonise (literally) Dawkins. He is a lucid, materialist, Darwinist thinker and also sharply witty. There are places where you will laugh out loud, although this is a deeply serious book.

Dawkins points out that natural selection has not yet been bettered as a scientifically convincing account of our existence as human beings, of the awe-inspiring diversity of the natural world, and the magnificence of the universe as we know it at present. He of course allows that there is a great deal we do not know, but insists that all human knowledge about why and how we exist must stand the test of scientific examination.

The mark of the scientist

Religious anti-science campaigners often say that since any scientific theory can be rejected if the evidence accumulates against it, that showings that science is no more certain than religion as an explanation. Dawkins disproves this. If new evidence is found to prove him wrong, he will admit it, he says. This marks out the scientist from the religious, who can never be proved wrong because their ideas cannot be tested but rely on “faith”. He demonstrates with utter conviction that Darwinism is incompatible with religious belief.

He demolishes the Bible – “a chaotically cobbled together anthology of disjointed documents” – pointing out that Christians who claim not to take chapters like Genesis literally any more are simply cherry-picking the bits they like. Why accept any of it then?



Blake's hellfire and damnation: attempts are now being made to drag thought backwards

d attitudes to

ion of religion

Those who cite "faith" as a justification for religious ideas might as well believe in fairies at the bottom of the garden. Who's to say this is any worse than believing that if you murmur private thoughts in your head a man in the sky will hear your thoughts and may act on them, or that if you blow yourself up along with lots of commuters on tube trains you will go to paradise to be waited on by virgins (presumably this doesn't work for women – a common fault with religions)?

Contempt for indoctrination

Dawkins reserves his greatest contempt for those who seek to indoctrinate children with religion, without allowing them to grow up to make up their own minds. This part of the book is particularly important in a time when government is handing over schools to religious organisations while giving them freedom to teach creationism alongside scientific ideas (or hatred of Jews in a west London Islamic school). He shows how the religious are afforded great privilege and a dangerous undeserved "sensitivity" – protection from being "offended" by cartoons about the Prophet, for example ("if you say we're a violent religion, we'll kill you!").

Britain is a deeply secular society, launched on this path by Henry VIII's schism with the Pope, and progressing with an independent-thinking and materialist working class. It seems unbelievable that thought can go backwards. There is a growing divisive tendency to refer to people (including children) by religion, and for the religious to claim not just tolerance but respect for beliefs that do not stand up to any rational scrutiny. The anti-science lobby increasingly pressurises schools, universities and research institutions. The so-called "left" have fallen for this in a big way with the nonsense term "Islamophobia" being used in an attempt to dull critical thought.

A worrying miasma of confused thinking, and one which makes Dawkins's *THE GOD DELUSION* feel like a blast of fresh air.

The God Delusion, by Richard Dawkins, Bantam Press 2006, ISBN 9780593055489

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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