

WORKERS

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TUC: BACK TO THE WORKPLACE



Health Coalition set to destroy NHS

09



Academies Gove's frustration

12



Marxist thinking Workers are thinkers

15

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“Crying out for a national plan

BRITAIN IS becoming more lop-sided and divided due to the anarchy of capitalism and the deliberate strategies of the EU.

A recent report by the influential Work Foundation reveals that northern cities have been hit harder by the slump, with higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of employment in “growth sectors” and greater numbers of low-skilled jobs. Proposed public-sector cutbacks will hit these areas even more as they rely heavily on public-sector jobs. London’s unemployment is now officially 9 per cent, even higher than Wales.

Britain cries out for a national plan to regenerate the whole country in an integrated

fashion, to provide work, investment and hope to all regions of the country. Current strategies will exacerbate and heighten the differences. There is no national plan, whilst the EU’s master plan appears to focus only on those areas across Europe that are situated near the major intersecting road, rail and air networks, consigning parts of each nation state not adjacent to these key EU hubs to a policy of neglect, lack of investment and decline.

Our class must demand investment for the whole of Britain and identify an integrated development plan for our country. Once-economically active areas must not be allowed to become stagnant, depopulated backwaters.

Money for misery

ACCORDING TO government figures, and on top of the defence budget, £18 billion was funnelled into military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan between September 2001 and March 2010. £8.22 billion was spent in Iraq; £9.9 billion in Afghanistan. This total does not cover items such as soldiers’ salaries or long-term care for the seriously wounded and excludes diplomatic and reconstruction costs (add a further £2 billion) – colossal sums of

money extracted out of workers’ taxes.

Money squandered in imperial wars causes death, destruction and untold misery in far off lands, all for the greater good of oil companies, all to intimidate developing nations to be in sufficient awe of finance capital. A Britain controlled by workers would use these resources to develop industry, education, health and an infrastructure of roads, rail and civil engineering projects.

Cover image of 2009 TUC Congress © Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com



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Contents – September 2010

News

A budget for the City, p3; Death knell for Europe’s coal, p4; Housing targets scrapped, p5; News Analysis: The unwinnable war, p6

03

Features

TUC: Back to basics, p6; Coalition set to destroy our NHS, p9; Under attack – but schools frustrate Coalition academy plans, p12

06

Historic Notes

Unions in illegality: the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, p14

14



BUDGET	Nice for the City
TRADE	And still the gap grows
MINING	Death knell for Europe's pits
EDUCATION	College cuts
HOUSING	Targets scrapped
FOOD	Tate & Lyle sell-off
PAPAL VISIT	Opposition grows
EUROBRIEFS	The latest from Brussels
NEWS ANALYSIS	The unwinnable war
WHAT'S ON	Coming soon

A budget for the City

THE COALITION'S first budget, in June, was a budget for the banks and the City: those who caused the crisis are to be subsidised by the working class, the vast majority. Employers are defaulting on their debts to us when they close down our pension plans. We should default on what they want. How much longer can we put up with the disaster and farce that is capitalism in absolute decline?

The government aims to cut benefits by £11 billion, spending by £40 billion, and most departmental budgets by 25 per cent over the next four years.

Financial analysts Lombard Street Research criticised the G20's failure to boost growth on 28 June. It said, "The chief effect of budget tightening will be to hammer global demand, causing a fresh recession." Even the government's own Office for Budget Responsibility pointed out that the proposed spending cuts would cut output next year. It forecast three years of falling wages and warned that the budget increased the risks of another slump.

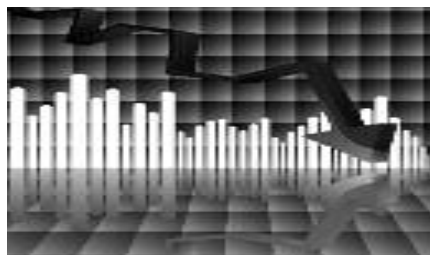
The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development said that the budget would cut 725,000 public service jobs by 2015. The Treasury itself forecast that the budget would cost 1.3 million jobs by then, 600,000 in the public sector and 700,000 in the private sector. The government absurdly said that the biggest private sector boom ever, of 6 per cent growth a year, would fill the gap left by the cuts.

The budget brought a smaller than expected rise in capital gains tax, to 28 per cent on higher-rate taxpayers, and a £2 billion levy on the banks. It didn't touch bankers' bonuses, despite earlier talk of ending 'unacceptable bonuses'. It cut corporation tax from 28 per cent to 26 per cent in 2012 and 24 per cent over the next two years. Deutsche Bank said, "Taking 2 per cent off the 2012 tax rate for the five banks listed in the UK would increase profit by £1.16 billion, that is it should almost offset all of the banks tax. Overall a good outcome for the banks."

The banks are doing very nicely, but they still aren't lending, so many small businesses are going under. Goldman Sachs lost its clients a billion dollars, but still paid its partners bonuses of \$3.8 billion last year. (It recently paid a \$550 million fine, the biggest ever levied on a Wall Street bank, for deceiving its clients about Abacus, a subprime mortgage-backed financial instrument, whose designer aimed to sell it short.)

The government wants to freeze public sector pay for two years. By contrast, since 2008, the salaries of the CEOs of Britain's top listed companies have risen by 5 per cent, to an average £3.1 million. Their salary packages have quadrupled since 2000, while share prices have fallen.

TRADE And still the gap grows



BRITAIN'S TRADE gap was £3.8 billion in May, a two-year high, up from £3.5 billion in April. The City was, yet again, surprised by the "unexpected" rise. The gap in goods was £8.06 billion, up from £7.41 billion in April. Imports were up by 2.4 per cent, exports down by 1.6 per cent.

So much for the "export-led recovery" we are promised. The government wants every country to cut demand by tightening fiscal policy – and is then surprised that exports don't rise!

TOURISM Serving, not making

WHAT FUTURE for Britain? A report by accountants Deloitte and Oxford Economics predicts a surge of 60 per cent in the value of tourism after the 2012 Olympics. By 2020 tourism could account for £188 billion of Britain's economy, surpassing manufacturing, which currently generates £160 billion.

Tourism is expected to expand and create more jobs – 200,000 – faster than construction, retail or manufacturing during this period. A nation no longer of the industrial workshop of the world but leisure assistants, theme park guides, retail and restaurant waiting staff. A service nation taken to the extreme.

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or email to rebuilding@workers.org.uk

EUROBRIEFS

The latest from Brussels

Over-paid and over there

THE COALITION government has made much of high earnings in the public sector, claiming that restriction will help economic recovery. So far it has said little about the cost of the EU or its unelected officials. At least 1,023 of them have higher salaries than the UK Prime Minister, including EU Foreign Minister Catherine Ashton, the Commission President, 6 vice-presidents and so on. The Commission admits it doesn't know the true numbers, which could be much greater. EU officials also get low tax rates.

Power grab

EUROPEAN CENTRAL Bank President Jean-Claude Trichet wants the European Commission to have powers over every country's budget. He said, "The ECB believes that a true quantum leap is needed in the framework for surveillance and adjustment of fiscal policies," adding, "we need the equivalent of a fiscal federation." He said "surveillance" means, "Conscious management of wages and costs in order to maintain a healthy position for the economy within a competitive environment..."

The costs of trading emissions

A REPORT from think tank Civitas has warned of the extra energy costs from the EU's emission trading scheme, its renewables targets, and its climate change levy which taxes energy use in businesses and the public sector. Britain's 2009 "Renewable Energy Strategy" suggested that by 2020 the surcharge on electricity prices could be as high as 33 per cent for domestic users and 70 per cent for business users. The Department of Energy and Climate Change says the proportion of electricity coming from renewables fell by 7.5 per cent in the first three months of this year compared with 2009.

The cap's not fitting

NEARLY FOUR out of five new jobs in Britain have gone to foreigners over the past three months according to government figures. There is an immigration cap limiting skilled workers who can come here to just over 24,000. But the new figures show that more than half the foreign workers in new jobs, 77,000, would be exempt because they come from within the EU.



Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

18 July, commemorating the six Dorchester labourers arrested in 1834 for forming a trade union, and then transported to Botany Bay: three great, great, great granddaughters of James Hammett - Laverne Hunter (L), Kathy Claxton (R) & Lillian Wood) lay wreaths on the grave of James Hammett in Tolpuddle, Dorset.

Death knell for Europe's coal

THE EUROPEAN Union has accelerated its programme of phasing out coal subsidies, jeopardising more than 100,000 jobs. Effectively, all hard coal mining in Germany, Spain, Romania, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia deemed as loss making may be forced to close.

The European Coal and Steel Community treaty ended in 2002 after more than 50 years. Once the treaty had expired EU states were no longer "allowed" to subsidise their national coal industries. A regulation to provide subsidies for hard coal was adopted but only on the basis that subsidies were linked to pit closures of alleged uneconomic pits. The European Union initially indicated that phasing out of subsidies would be extended to 2022. This was shortened to 2018 and has now been reduced again to 2014.

The decision to bring forward the pit closure programme is a reflection of the economic crisis within the European Union. European miners are paying the price of cheap imports and having the European Union's financial crisis passed from the bureaucrats in Brussels to the mining families of the Germany's Ruhr, North West Spain, Romania's Jiu Valley and so forth.

The decision to accelerate the closures is being crowed over by such organisations as WWF and Friends of the Earth, which deem it a "financially smart, socially just and environmentally effective policy that the EU must show more of". Smart if you are a failing capitalist, socially unjust if you are a miner and environmentally mumbo jumbo if industry is not going to be applied to resolve environmental problems.

The destruction of Europe's mining industries reflects the destruction in Britain, France and Belgium over 25 years ago. Destruction of Britain's mining industry is reflected in the National Union of Mineworkers having only 1,611 working members (from over 250,000 in 1979). NACODS, the deputies' union, has only 339 deputies in membership.

EDUCATION

College cuts

SPENDING ON higher and further education could be cut by 25 per cent over the next four years. This would mean a loss of more than 33,000 jobs in further education colleges in England, and more than 22,500 jobs in England's universities.

Even without these cuts, it is now looking as though 180,000 university applicants will miss out on a place this year. University and College Union general secretary Sally Hunt said, "It is not scaremongering to talk about a lost generation of learners. It is disgraceful that thousands of applicants will be denied the chance to fulfil their potential at university."

FOOD

Tate and Lyle sell-off

TATE & LYLE, Britain's 150-year-old sugar and syrup producer, has sold its sugar and refining businesses to the US American Sugar Refining company (ASR). This is the latest in a series of sales as the company dispenses with what it regards as less profitable investments, subsidiaries, properties and assets.

The East London (Silvertown) sugar cane refinery, established in 1878 and the largest in the world, remains for the time being, 550 workers having transferred to the ASR Company.

Tate & Lyle was one of the few remaining industrial users left on the

Thames. It sold its Greenwich refinery to the French company Syral in 2007, which closed it in 2009 with the loss of 150 jobs. The Silvertown refinery, similar plant in Portugal and Vietnam, the Tate & Lyle brand name and Golden Syrup factory are all part of the sale.

The sale is likely to end 150 years of British-owned production in Britain whose profits in previous days paid for, built and filled the Tate Gallery and related art galleries.

The sugar cane refinery business in Europe has seen prices cut by the European Commission by 36 per cent in the past four years. How long the Silvertown refinery can survive with its new US owners and as part of London's historic riverside is a concern for all.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 5 September

Burston Strike School Rally

11am till 4pm, Burston, near Diss, Norfolk

The annual rally commemorates the strike and celebrates those who continue to fight for trade union rights. Speakers, including union general secretaries and Tony Benn, and music. Organised by Unite and Sertuc. For more info, see www.unitetheunion.org/news__events/events/burston_rally_2010.aspx

Saturday 18 September

Protest the Pope

March and rally. March leaves Hyde Park Corner 1pm.

Say no to the Pope's official visit to Britain. Supported by a number of organisations, including the National Secular Society. More info at www.protest-the-pope.org.uk.

Thursday 23 September

"Default on the debts – let the banks pay! Rebuild Britain"

7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

Public meeting organised by the CPBML. All welcome. Come and discuss how to save Britain from the abyss that capitalism has led it to.

Housing targets scrapped

Photo: Workers



THE COALITION government has scrapped regional social housing building targets and planning with immediate effect from July 2010. This effectively stops public sector build of 85,000 homes and places an estimated 100,000 construction jobs at risk.

This will mean the lowest level of social housing build in Britain for over 100 years, at a time when 4.5 million people are on housing waiting lists and an estimated 2.5

million live in overcrowded or unsanitary conditions. The reduction in public sector building will drive provision into private-sector build and greater expansion of private landlords and their buy-to-let enrichment schemes.

In addition to manipulating social and council house building, Cameron has announced his intention to strip council house dwellers of their right to tenure. In other words, you will not be able to stay in your council home for life but for limited five- or ten-year tenancy agreements.

What this really is about is politically clearing council estates which don't vote Tory – a re-run of the clearances practised by Wandsworth in the 1980s. It is about manipulating voting patterns by changing the composition of constituencies so as to ensure built-in Tory majorities. This will dispossess millions of people who either cannot or do not want to buy their council property, depriving them of shelter and security.

PAPAL VISIT

Opposition grows

THE PLANNED visit of Pope Benedict XVI in September, ex Hitler Youth Movement member, is generating widespread opposition (see What's On, this page).

Campaigning organisations of secular bodies, equalities groups and victims of clerical sexual abuse have called upon the government not to fund the trip.

Cameron has already pledged an estimated £20 million of public money to

support this visit from Rome, this at a time of financial cutback of Britain's services and industries.

The last Papal visit to Britain in 1982 was a financial disaster for the Catholic Church. It was the only visit abroad by the then Pope John Paul II, anti-communist Pole, that actually lost the Church money as Britain shunned his visit and the trinkets and tat that was promoting the visit.

Ironically, without a state subsidy the Pope wouldn't have come. This follows on the Vatican announcing that it has been in deficit for the last three years. Effectively, the Vatican City is bust.

IRAQ

Ex-MI5 head speaks out

THE FORMER head of MI5, Baroness Manningham-Buller, told the Iraq inquiry in July that she believed the intelligence on Iraq's threat was not "substantial enough" to justify the war. She said she had advised officials a year before the war that the threat posed by Iraq to the UK was 'very limited'. She had told the senior civil servant at the Home Office in March 2002 that there was no evidence that Iraq was involved in the 9/11 attacks.

She told Blair, after the invasion, about the growing domestic threat from terrorism: he accepted her argument and doubled the number of MI5 staff. So much for all his claims that attacking other countries would make us safer.

PRESIDENT OBAMA must be the last person to think the Afghan war is winnable. He recently sent another 30,000 US troops to join the 120,000 NATO troops there. Even disgraced US General McChrystal said that US strategy was not working in key parts of the country. In April, US troops withdrew from the Korengal valley, after losing 42 dead since 2006. 1,000 British troops have withdrawn from Sangin district, after losing 99 dead there since 2001.

The leaked war logs show that between 2004 and 2009 NATO forces killed 195 civilians and wounded 174 in 144 incidents, mostly unreported. In 21 incidents, British forces shot or bombed Afghan civilians, including women and children, killing at least 26 and wounding 20. NATO routinely covers up these civilian casualties, falsely alleging that all the dead are Taliban fighters. A secret Task Force 373, drawn from 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, targets alleged Taliban leaders for killing. US forces are still holding 757 people at Bagram, without charge or trial.

2010 has been the worst year since coalition forces topped the Taliban in 2001, and June was the worst month since 2002. 103 NATO troops were killed in June, the highest total for any month of the war. British troops are being killed at twice the rate of US troops, and at twice last year's rate. British dead numbered 331 by 13 August.



1,074 civilians have been killed so far this year, 212 in June alone. NATO forces killed 210 civilians between 1 January and 30 June, 94 in airstrikes. NATO drones have killed 14 alleged terrorists and 1,140 civilians, 440 this year alone. The Afghan army, supposedly being trained to take over the war from NATO forces, has a 25 per cent desertion rate.

The US has decided to pull out. Obama set a July 2011 deadline for starting to withdraw US troops. Cameron says he will start withdrawing British troops next year and hopes to complete withdrawal by 2015. By setting these dates, they admit the war is unwinnable.

So why not bring the troops home right now? Things cannot improve for the Afghan people while their country is occupied. Across Europe, Britain and the USA, big majorities want the war to end as soon as possible. Withdrawing from Afghanistan would save at least £4 billion a year - more than enough to cover the £11 billion the government is cutting from the social security budget over the next five years. Workers must defend Britain in Britain, not in someone else's country.

Grand policies and posturing w movement from the current ons strategy will work: workplace o

TUC: Back to the wor

MANCHESTER HOSTS the 2010 TUC, the 142nd in its history. The challenges facing the TUC are very stark: the Coalition government and what the TUC represents to them, and on the other hand what they represent to the TUC, could never have been further apart.

Cameron's government is trying to finish the Thatcher-Blair-Brown destruction of the British working class as it now constitutes and organises itself: roughly 28 million workers with 7.5 million in the public services, 6.2 million in distribution, hotels and restaurants, 5.5 million in banking and finance, 2.6 million in manufacturing, 1.5 million in transport, 1.4 million in other services, 1.2 million in construction, 220,000 in agriculture and 176,000 in energy and water. There are 4 million self-employed, 2.5 million unemployed, 18.4 million "economically inactive" - which includes 2 million on benefits, 12 million pensioners and nearly 1 million 16-to 19-years-olds not in education, employment or training.

So the attack on the public sector is not about deficits or financial witch doctor voodoo economics but aims to eradicate the last major collectively organised sections of the trade union movement. It is designed to fragment and disintegrate health and education provision, as well as civil society as organised through local and central government, through the institutions (right or wrong) which are the sinews of British civil society, culture, cohesion and national identity. What the TUC and labour movement has to grapple with and understand is that the Coalition wants to end all the vestiges of collective thought, action and organisation which have epitomised Britain since the Civil War in the 17th century.

Harsh facts

There are harsh facts to consider. In 1979 the then Transport and General Workers Union had over 2 million members. When merging with Amicus to create Unite in 2007 it had less than 750,000. In 1979 the National Union of Mineworkers had over 250,000 members, in 2010 just 1,611 members. 400,000 workers are employed in chemicals and pharmaceuticals but trade union density is estimated at 10 per cent or less. A million worked in textiles in 1979, 105,000 in 2010, with over a third of the workforce aged 50 or older, an ageing workforce not being replenished or their skills preserved.

According to the National Strategic Skills Audit for England 2010, the 20 fastest declining trades from 2001 to 2009 include: assemblers of electrical products - 69 per cent drop; assemblers of vehicles and metal goods - 61 per cent drop; bookbinders and printing - 58 per cent drop. The list continues with metal machine operators, precious instrument makers, tool makers and fitters, printers, plastics processes, textile and garment trades etc. 1 in 10 workers in Britain is officially considered to have no qualifications at all.

The 20 fastest growing occupations include: conservation and environmental protection officers - 124 per cent rise from 2001 to 2009; leisure and theme park attendants - 102 per cent

Will not save the labour laught. Only one organisation...

Workplace

rise; driving instructors – 91 per cent rise; beauticians and related occupations – 63 per cent rise etc. What value does a theme park attendant, driving instructor or beautician bring to the pot without industry?

Another stark indicator to reflect on is the number of days “lost” (the government’s and employers’ definition) through industrial action: in 1979 29.474 million days, in 1998 0.282 million days and in the first six months of 2010 – 299 days. Those 299 days include all disputes involving 10 or more workers. 1 day lost in the manufacturing industries; 29 days in transport; 257 in the public sector (none in health); 4 in education; 8 others. Of course, disputes won without having to strike are the best kind, but these figures reflect a more general reduction in workers’ collective action of any sort, whether strike or other.

It’s all about work

The challenge facing the trade unions is how to preserve, if not resurrect, the collectivity and consciousness brought about by work and the identity with work. British workers have always defined themselves in any opening conversation by ‘what do you do for a living?’ Disintegration of employment disintegrates consciousness. The retention of jobs and minimising of job losses ensures that the root of trade union existence – employment – continues to renew organisation. Being in work builds awareness: awareness builds the union, which gives rise to aspiration, expectation, hope and life. That consciousness gives rise to class awareness.

Analysis of the Thatcher years, 1979 to 1997, shows that about 1 million manual, predominantly male, skilled full-time jobs were destroyed. They were replaced with part-time fragmented, unskilled work. The same process has continued apace during the Labour and Coalition governments.

The Chief Economic Adviser to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development commented in mid-July 2010 that the number unemployed “suggests the pace of jobs recovery has slowed since



The TUC routine: motions, motions everywhere.

Photo: Andrew Wiard/www.reportphotos.com

the spring, placing a question mark over whether the private sector will in the short-run generate enough jobs to offset mounting public sector job cuts. Moreover, while the jobs market improved in the spring all the net new jobs being created were either part-time, temp positions or filled by the self-employed. The number of full-time employees continued to fall while the number of people working part-time because they could not find a full-time job further increased to reach 1.06 million.” So in other words, to ensure collectivity is frustrated, work is to be part-time, fixed-term, short-term, agency, unstable, unskilled, and rootless.

‘Martini’ employment

Some employers describe it as the Martini effect – any time, any place, anywhere, so long as the employer can get workers for low wages and long hours. The greatest challenge is still the right to work, not as some phoney front organisation trying to muscle in on workers’ genuine concerns but simply the idea that a working class that cannot work cannot exist. Work, skill, community, identity, consciousness all arise from our historic recognition and understanding that we are workers.

How will the Coalition respond to the policy proposals from Congress? Scrap Britain’s draconian anti-union legislation?

Non-runner. Enhance workplace rights? Non-runner. Develop equalities and end discriminatory practices? Only as far as the EU tells them they have to, in order to divide and rule. End child poverty and defend the welfare state? Non-runner. Intervene to defend manufacturing? Stop attacking pensions? Non-runners. Defend social housing? Non-runner, as the clearing of council estates has already been proposed. Develop a balanced energy and climate policy? Non-runner. Defend the public services and stop cutting them? Non-runner. Defend the NHS and state education? Non-runner. Support the England World Cup 2018 bid? Absolutely, more flag waving from Cameron. Health and safety issues? Banning sun beds (yes, there is a motion tabled on this) will be seen as on par with last year’s anti-high heel campaign. It is bound to be used to ridicule the trade unions as “irrelevant and old fashioned” by fake suntanned Coalition lobbyists and lounge lizards.

How will the TUC and affiliates respond to the Comprehensive Spending Review scheduled for 20 October 2010, the brazenly trailed 25 to 40 per cent cuts in public spending? Firstly we have the European TUC lobby and rally in Brussels on 29 September, the European TUC’s

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

opposition to the EU's austerity and cuts. There will be rallies and events, mainly sponsored by Unison in a low-key fashion across Britain. Then the TUC's week of action, 13 to 20 October, climaxing with a lobby and rally of Parliament on 19 October. Action or inaction – what makes anyone think that the Coalition with a leader and deputy publicly committed to out-Thatcher Blair/Brown will take any notice?

Even before the Comprehensive Spending Review is announced, local councils are vying with one another as to how they can merge, share, hive-off, sell-off, privatise and outsource in some places everything including the Town Hall cat. Others are dreaming of strange cooperative mutual models with not-for-profit social enterprise nonsense writ large.

The NHS will in the government's words become the largest social enterprise in the world before it is eaten up by multinational health corporations (see page 9) and sees the local social enterprises go bankrupt as contracts are switched.

The drive for academies in school

provision, already faltering despite the Coalition's hype, is about the destruction of state school provision (see page 12).

Holding up US health care and education provision as models for Britain reflects how unhinged the Coalition really is and how perverted and corrupt this breed of politicians is. But what happens after the week of action – and the demonstrations in Wales and Scotland which fall outside of the week of action so the Scottish and Welsh TUCs can demonstrate their "independence"?

The challenge for workers

If the Coalition is successful with its plans then the challenge of organising workers remains, be that within the privatised public services or within the changed industrial landscape of Britain. 1 in 4 workers is in a trade union, the 58 trade unions affiliated to the TUC – 6.2 million workers (and a similar number in staff associations or non-affiliated) need to seriously reflect on whether four big unions dominating the movement actually reflect the needs of the membership. Britain's trade unions, thousands of them over the years, reflected a different identity and purpose.

In the face of fragmentation and ever

growing non-unionisation or derecognition by default (in that no one recruits) then back to basics it will have to be. Elaborate structures and perfect policy will have to give way to workplace organisation. Grandiose pronouncements and posturing must be replaced with small-scale guerrilla skirmishing, rebuilding the strength of our army, training a new generation of leaders and fighters, entrenched in the place of work, however that is defined.

The trade unions grew originally in industry dealing with capitalists. The growth in the public sector came later but reflected changes in Britain's infrastructure after the 1914-18 world war, after capitalism began its absolute decline in Britain. The attack on the public sector now and the attempted reconfiguration of Britain by the Coalition need a new response. Not electronic campaigning, photo-shots and gimmickry but talking one-to-one with our fellow workers to produce a rebuilding and resurgence – protracted, unifying – of all those who labour.

Cameron boasts, "We are all in this together." We are, and we are here to see them off with their predecessors Blair and Brown's Labour and their role model Thatcher.



CPBML/Workers Public Meeting, London Thursday 23 September, 7.30 pm Default on the debts – Let the banks pay. Rebuild Britain!

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square,
London WC1R 4RL. Nearest tube Holborn.

Capitalism has taken Britain to the abyss, and wants to be paid for it. But there is an alternative. Come and discuss how the working class can take control and rebuild our country. Everybody welcome.

They said they would defend the NHS. They lied. But then, that's what parliamentary democracy is all about...

Coalition set to destroy public healthcare

BEFORE THE General Election in May, the Tories told us that there would be deep cuts in public expenditure caused by bailing out the banks. But Cameron was adamant that the NHS would be ring fenced along with International Development. It made him sound almost angelic. Both Labour and the Lib Dems argued that nothing should be ring fenced – and Labour said in August 2009 it would cut the NHS budget by £20 billion over four years. You could almost think the unthinkable – that the NHS might at least be relatively safe with the Tories under the Tory cuts regime to come.

We now know that the reason why International Development budgets were to be “ring fenced” is to support the war in Afghanistan. But what about health?

Days before the election, Cameron promised to increase funding on the NHS year on year, fund cancer drugs that were currently denied certain patients on cost grounds and committed himself to NHS staff “who do such an incredible job”. Three years ago, Cameron said, “We will never change the idea at the heart of the NHS – that healthcare in this country is free at the point of use and available to everyone based on need – not ability to pay.” Three months after the General Election it's quite a different story. We now know just how savage the attack will be.

The NHS budget that the government is “ring fencing” is the budget set by the last Labour government and is £20 billion short of what is needed to maintain existing levels of service and care. Estimates of 20,000 job losses are rumoured on this count alone.

So how is it proposed to cope with this black hole? All 10 strategic health authorities and 152 local management bodies known as primary care trusts (PCTs) are to be abolished, affecting more than 60,000 managers. The NHS in England has set aside nearly £1.7 billion this year for reorganisation – more than seven times what it aims to save on management. The money, held back from the front line, will help pave the way for GPs to take over budgets from managers.

Other details give us an insight into the



Photo: Workers

Unison NHS march in 2007: Labour laid the ground for the Coalition attack on the NHS.

government's direction. It has lifted the cap on the number of private patients that a trust can treat while simultaneously abolishing targets, including that for waiting times. This will encourage NHS trusts to use the income from private treatment to subsidise the activities squeezed by the black hole.

Going private

Some trusts are already looking at treating up to 30 per cent private patients, enticing patients from wealthy Middle East countries. The NHS Christie Hospital in Manchester has signed a deal with a US private health company called HCA for a new private cancer treatment centre with the profit split 50-50 between the Christie and HCA. Many other trusts are already marketing their services abroad. The consequence of all this will be to lengthen waiting lists, forcing the sick to pay if they

can, to jump the queue for treatment.

In another move, Lansley carried out Cameron's promise to fund the expensive cancer drugs that were previously considered unaffordable. How did he manage this? With sleight of hand, he simply transferred the entire budget of £50 million allocated for personal care at home for the elderly with critical needs, to pour it into the pockets of the pharmaceutical companies. The government wants to make us pay for care in our old age.

No consultation

While the Coalition's NHS White Paper puts at its centre the meaningless mantra “there will be no decisions without me” (meaning the patient) the government is rushing to implement its proposals without any consultation or parliamentary consent.

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

In a deliberate move to destabilise NHS workers, Health Secretary Lansley has made a series of crude attempts to make changes on the ground without even putting primary legislation to Parliament.

Lansley announced that NHS commissioning budgets would be transferred from primary care trusts (PCTs) to GPs. David Nicholson, NHS chief executive, is instructing NHS trusts to act on announced reforms without regard for recent protocols requiring public services to wait until consultation is complete and primary legislation is in place before implementing reforms. Consequently some PCTs, thinking or being told they will be redundant, are already beginning to fold. Where they have not folded, morale has nosedived with consequences for their ability to perform.

Just as Gove is railroading his privatisation of education without parliamentary scrutiny, so Lansley is using

the budget shortfall to push the government's agenda through even though the closing date for comments is not until October (the earliest primary legislation can be put to Parliament). Private companies are lining up to take advantage of the weakness of the current commissioning regime at a time when the government has abolished the targets that were intended to hold them to account.

Attack on skill

So what about Cameron's swooning about NHS staff "that do an incredible job"? The Council of Deans, which represents all universities delivering nurse education, is hearing "unofficially" (presumably in the same way PCTs are being told "unofficially" what to do) that they are to cut the number of nurses starting training each year from 2011 to 2014 with the aim of reducing the numbers in training by a third. The aim, apparently, is to "change the shape of the workforce" in acute hospital settings from the present

proportion of 70 per cent registered and 30 per cent health care support to 40 per cent registered and 60 per cent support worker.

Given the legal requirement that a registered practitioner must delegate whatever a health care support worker does, this will also require legislation and go before parliament before it can be approved. This "reshaping" or deskilling of the workforce was what precipitated the crisis at Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust, where there was an exceptional number of deaths. Crucially, professionals failed to act collectively to maintain standards - this is the lesson for us now.

GP commissioning

Far too many people in and around the NHS are convincing themselves that the White Paper represents simply an alternative way of organising our healthcare; that GP commissioning is just a variant on PCT commissioning. Nothing could be further from the truth.

There have been two previous attempts to have GP commissioning: GP fund holding of the 1990s and Practice Based Commissioning. Both were voluntary and both received scant support from GPs, not enough to make it a national system. Now Lansley, in an illiberal top-down decision, is to force all GPs, not just those who want it, into commissioning of services. What does all this mean?

Well, Lansley may be right when he says that GPs know their patients better than anyone. But only those they see. What about the more than 90 per cent of their lists who never come through the door? How will they commission services for them? GPs, of course, will not be able, never mind not be willing, to undertake this work. They came into medicine to save lives, not to save invoices. But United Health Europe will be willing and able, as will Kaiser Permanente, Tribal Group and all the other parasitic foreign-owned purveyors of profit out of illness.

Why this reliance on GPs, and an end to even the initial kind of planning represented by Professor Darzi's "Next Stage" review? Of the near 40,000 GPs in England, many, a majority, are private

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain is planning a series of public meetings in London throughout autumn and spring 2010-2011. All meetings will be held in the Bertram Russell room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, 7.30pm start.

M The meeting dates will be: Thursday 23 September; Tuesday 16 November 2010; Thursday 3 March 2011; Thursday 23 June 2011. The meeting themes will be announced nearer the date. Interspersed with these public meetings, the Party runs regular political study and discussion groups for interested workers.

M The Party's annual London May Day meeting will be held on Sunday 1 May 2011, in the Main Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL, nearest Tube Holborn, 2.00pm start with speakers, food, bar and interesting political discussion.

M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to info@workers.org.uk

M And if you're out and about this month, meet our WORKERS sellers at Burston on 5 September (for details, see What's On, p5).



contractors not NHS employees. They can therefore be more easily offered money, bribes, to run their little corner of the NHS and entirely ignore the rest.

This is why the government's focus has been on unravelling the polyclinics in London – the first attempt in 60 years to plan away the under-doctoring endemic in the private contractor system, which has led east London into being a veritable desert of GP practices.

Labour laid the ground for everything the coalition is planning to do to the NHS – as it did with academy schools and the attempt to privatise Royal Mail. The market structures, foundation trusts, even the insertion of US corporations into commissioning and GP consortiums, were all products of Blair's vision of "public service reform". So Labour's "opposition" to the assault on the NHS is hamstrung by its own record.

The future

So what does all this tell us about the future of the NHS? It tells us that capitalism, in a state of absolute decline,

has total contempt for the health of Britain's working class. Its nature is to strive to make profits irrespective of the consequences for workers. Capitalism does not want an ageing working class unless they are prepared to carry on working into old age. Our living longer is a burden for capitalism unless it can make money out of the ageing.

Professionals in the NHS who know what is happening fear that it marks the end of the NHS and the beginning of a private, low-quality health system.

It's not that the government believes that a market way is a better way to ensure healthcare, or GP provision in east London or anywhere else – it simply doesn't care about GP provision, or about the NHS, or about our health. It cares only about profit: making it and making sure that everything else in Britain is capable of producing it. A real contribution to understanding what to do about this attack is to understand that, and to understand it quick.

And the only people who can stop this potential carnage are ourselves – workers

inside and outside the NHS. After World War II, Britain had a financial budget deficit many times today's as a proportion of GDP. What did we do? We invested in the creation of a free National Health Service. We also invested in industry through a programme of nationalisation and planning. There is simply no reason to implement Labour's £20 billion cut unless it's the smokescreen for the complete destruction of our National Health Service.

Health workers do not have to take this and other attacks on skill lying down. A practical approach in every workplace, using our local knowledge and expertise needs to be applied. Workers in every unit should ask questions about the ratio of registered to unregistered staff, link a safe ratio to patient safety and make the public aware of it, and fight attempts to dilute skill.

They should also attend their union branch and discuss what workers think is needed to ensure safety and quality for patients, fight for that – and make sure the local population knows what the workers think. It starts in the workplace.

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Education Secretary Michael Gove thought he would have more local control. After all, it was merely an acceleration of Labour p

Under attack – but schools frustrate Coalit

COCKY, ARROGANT and ignorant, Michael Gove epitomises the attitude of this government. So confident was he that school governors and heads would eagerly rush to break links with their local councils and communities, that he has pushed his plans to turn thousands of schools into state-funded academies through parliamentary procedures at breakneck speed.

When he had decided that almost 1,500 schools “expressed an interest” in becoming an academy early in July, Gove arrogantly pronounced that most if not all these schools would become academies by September. What he failed to mention was that any school which registered on the website to obtain information would be added to the “expression of interest” list.

NUT local associations did some good work with a useful union briefing document in ringing round local schools on Gove’s list and discussing the implications with head teachers (although many heads said they had never intended to apply anyway!).

As the days went by and the expressions of interest did not rapidly translate into firm applications for academy status, head teachers found themselves receiving increasingly frequent and frenzied phone calls from the Department for Education. Heads were reminded of the money that might accrue; they were instructed to start TUPE negotiations and to take advantage of the legal advice available to them – all before the Academies Bill had been enacted and before governing bodies had had the opportunity to discuss any proposals to change their status.

In London, the representatives of various sponsors of existing academies were brazenly approaching schools with a view to securing an interest in any new academy trusts that would be established (that gives the trustees the direct ownership of the school’s capital assets).

Gove’s confidence began to wane, as there was no great rush to sign up. The daily pronouncements dried up even though the parliamentary opposition was muted – no promise to remove academy

status if they were returned to government, for example.

By the third week in July, the word from the DfE was that the government would be more than delighted if they had 400 new academies up and running by September.

So they won’t be happy with the rather limited list of 153 schools that have applied: less than 10 per cent of those declared to be eligible for the first group and less than 1 per cent of all the schools in England.

Labour policies

This government’s intentions for publicly funded education were made clear by Gove from the beginning. Labour’s drive to break up local authorities by pushing them increasingly into a greatly reduced role, especially as commissioners of local education provision rather than as direct providers, and the associated privatising of school education, has simply been speeded up.

Anyone who doubts this should take a quick look at the relentless stream of Labour schools white papers, culminating in “Twenty-first Century Schools”, published shortly before they lost the 2010 election. They might not have been implemented so quickly under Labour, but Gove’s schools policies were essentially written for him by Ed Balls.

Just to take some examples from Labour’s record:

- The academies programme, which created state-funded schools independent of local authorities and “free” of much of the regulatory framework which applies to neighbouring schools (curriculum, financial accountability, pay and conditions of staff etc). These schools are effectively controlled by private or other external sponsors, although the sponsors rarely stumped up the cash and in the end were relieved of the obligation to pay anything for the privilege.

- The significant spread of religious schools, allowing additional religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism to receive state funding for separate schools, splitting local communities and dividing



School students joined the lobby against governm

children off from one another

- Seeing educational attainment in terms of how “groups” are doing, eg Pakistani girls, Afro-Caribbean boys. The fact that attainment is clearly linked to family income (employment, housing, health etc) is ignored in favour of seeing children in terms of ethnicity and religion. This has served to emphasise the interests of individuals and groups over those of the collective, the whole class or school – unfortunately the unions have fallen for this tactic in the name of promoting “diversity”

- Narrowing the primary curriculum through the iniquitous SATs league tables which effectively force schools to teach to the end-of-year tests or be named and shamed, and then be subject to “school improvement intervention”

- Ignorance of and disdain for the evidence from good quality educational research, preferring rafts of new

than a thousand schools straining to become independent of policy. But the teaching profession has taught him a lesson...

Education academy plans



Protesters demand health policies called by education unions in July this year.

Improvement Programmes often based on a ministerial visit to schools in the US that use the latest fad

- “Parents know best” - ranking the views of parents above professional expertise when determining educational policy. This goes with the myth of providing “parental choice” of schools – used to justify the Free Schools policy by Gove, and in practice potentially giving access to our money for all sorts of weird and crackpot organisations to run their own schools. This will be very expensive.

- Promoting competition between schools by extending the use of league tables

- School league tables together with “parental choice” has led to huge hikes in house prices near to highly ranked state schools, so that the well off can legitimately get their children in to those schools. This will continue under Gove.

- Ofsted, the all-powerful schools

inspection system which now inspects just about the entire state sector including social care and prisons, acting as policeman to enforce government policy.

- The huge growth of the private sector under Labour, with Private Finance Initiative new builds leaving school buildings effectively owned and controlled by PFI “partners” for decades to come, and the mushrooming of private companies and consultancies such as Capita and Serco, making huge profits from the public sector.

Battle for control

All of the above constituted an attack on education professionals in their workplaces and trade unions. That some good things happened under Labour is undeniable – children’s centres for instance – but the overwhelming thrust was disintegration of public education, attacking the very notion and reality of a

state education “system” which can plan for the educational needs of a whole nation with a productive economy. It is a bitter irony that Ofsted now inspects schools on their promotion of “community cohesion”, when government has used the education system to break up communities.

Labour speeded up the process of opening up the system for private profit, broke up the effective system of local education authorities which know their local community of schools and act in the interests of all schools, set school against school, moved powers away from local authorities to central government, and did their best to undermine educational professionals at every opportunity. Schools are central to all governments – how they seek to educate the young is a crucial test of real intentions. Labour kicked open the door and Gove has simply walked through – no wonder he was able to act so swiftly.

So what should we do? A “fight all the cuts” approach is pathetic, and misses the point. It is undeniably true that money was wasted under Labour – especially in the promotion of hugely costly pet ministerial programmes with little basis in reality, on private consultancies and on quangos.

There has been struggle. A quarter of primary children did not sit the SATs tests this summer due to head teacher action, rendering the league tables due in the autumn fairly meaningless.

Since the election, the response so far to the academies carrot is heartening, and in spite of Labour’s policies there is real and potential power left in schools. We know that the agenda is now one of wielding the axe to cut jobs on the ground – what is the state of our unions in schools to be able to tackle this? The basic, hard day-to-day organisational work on the ground will be needed for us to be able to come together to fight.

How can a developed nation with an educated working class accept that “we just can’t afford” educational progress, with schools run by professionals in the interests of all children and the country? A rejection of this notion and assertion of our agenda is the starting point.

Capitalists and workers are engaged in a constant battle to exert control over pay and conditions as the two classes contend in the sphere of industry. This is as true now as it was at the birth of our class society.

Unions in illegality: the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800

WHEN THE 18th century began, the guild system still applied. A guild comprised several kinds of "class": from the merchants (or large masters) to the apprentices, though power rested in the hands of the merchants. Therefore small masters and journeymen began to form unions of their own to protect themselves and their interests. Nevertheless they failed to obtain incorporation or the right to create combinations, effectively compelled to secrecy when it came to organisation.

During the 18th century, mercantilist capitalism gradually gave way to industrial capital. The old methods of wage fixing became ineffective. A rising class of capitalist employers prompted the emergence of defensive labour organisations, combinations of workmen whose cooperation was the only means at their disposal for survival and protection. The combinations, embryo trade unions, were mostly of skilled and semi-skilled workers, artisans and craftsmen. They aimed to achieve abolition of the worst evils of the capitalist system and some improvement of living conditions. More and more trade clubs or societies were seeking to fix wages and conditions by collective bargaining. Employers resisted these efforts, constantly petitioning the government to uphold 'ancient law' and suppress the 'unlawful' organisations of workers.

Class clashes were numerous: 383 disputes were recorded between 1717 and 1800, but most incidents went unrecorded or were settled without recourse to law or officialdom. Most of the disputes centred on wages. In 1766 the shipwrights of Exeter, for example, decided not to work for masters who were seeking to employ them at "less wages than have been from time immemorially paid to journeymen shipwrights" and imposing longer hours than had been "usual and customary".

Some combinations were powerful and effective, threatening their masters to "strike and turn out" if their demands were not satisfied. During the 18th century, many acts were passed outlawing combination in one specific trade or

another, as for example in 1718 against wool combers and weavers. In the same period workers lost several laws affording limited protection in this or that industry.

Repressive

Although the launch of the proceedings remained in the hands of the employers, the Combination Acts brought the government into a more repressive role against trade unionism because of fears that it would spread to the newly industrialised regions, especially the Midlands and the North, a goal only partially achieved.

The outbreak of war against revolutionary France intensified these fears because it was thought that revolutionary ideas would spread among the working class and that the unions would become centres of political agitation.

So at the end of the century, the government gave the "masters" complete control of their workers. As the Industrial Revolution in Britain got underway, all the legal restraints on workers in particular industries were standardised into a general law for the whole of industry. All the regulations and laws that recognised a worker as a person with rights were withdrawn or became inoperative. Initially, the act against illegal oaths was used to break up the existing trade unions. Then, the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, originally specific to the millwrights, were turned into a general prohibition and outlawing of trade unionism.

The acts forbade any combinations of workers to act together to improve their wages, reduce working hours or otherwise change their conditions of labour, with any violation punishable by three months imprisonment, or two months of hard labour. Magistrates, who were usually agreeable to the employers, passed sentence. It was the first time that penalties were prescribed for workmen as a class.

Ingenuity

With trade union organisations declared illegal, workers hoodwinked their



The Battle of Waterloo: it marked the end of the legislation brought in during them.

opponents by reappearing as mutual benefit associations or similar bodies. (There are no limits to human ingenuity.) A large number of secret organisations carried on the fight against the employers and spurred the workers into resistance.

Where the government partially managed to constrain trade union development and activity, it did so more as intimidation than through undertaking prosecutions. Unions operated in a context of risk rather than of full and constant constraint. Over twenty-five years of illegality, the Combination Acts did not stop workers' organisation nor were they totally enforced.

Convicted

Thousands of journeymen were convicted under these Acts, whereas no one employer was. The Times Compositors

influence and control
of work and
several centuries ago...

1799 and 1800



Napoleonic Wars, but not of the anti-union

Union was suppressed in 1810 after they asked for a rise in their wages. Workers employed in the new factories and mines were constantly persecuted and often forced to combine secretly, for instance the iron founders in southern Wales. Resentment grew into opposition, most notably in the Luddite rebellions of 1811 and 1813 (to be featured in a forthcoming 'Historic Notes').

Introduced in wartime, the acts were not repealed with the return of peace in 1815. Repeal came in 1824, celebrated by an outburst of strikes. In 1825 a less stringent law was put in their place.

The temper of young industrial capitalism was harsh. Workers were refused education, political rights and any voice in their conditions of employment but they did not succumb and found ways to make progress.

WORKERS ARE THINKERS

from our series on aspects of Marxist thinking

Nothing is more insulting to the history of working class struggle than the notion, born of ignorance and malevolence, that workers have to be instructed and commanded to do the correct thing. Indeed, according to some of the disconnected, to do anything at all.

Of course, individual workers are capable of behaving in a way that invites instruction and command. Religious adherence is an example that springs to mind. This is a voluntary suspension of responsibility for independent thought, a description that applies to all religious-like behaviours, some of which may describe themselves as 'political'.

Any behaviour guided by any form of idealistic thought is susceptible to the process of command by those further along the path towards the attainment of the ideal state. The racially pure shall rule the world and remove the contamination of the inferior. Those closer to God shall rule the less enlightened and those most pure in their 'socialist' ideals can do anything they like to anyone. None of this has been the history of workers in Britain. We fought the Nazis. We are the least religious class in the world and have consistently rejected all political idealisms.

How many initiatives by national union executive bodies are truly successful unless the impetus for such activity came from well-attended branch meetings? Therein lies the problem. The avoidance of responsibility, and consequent suspension of participation, leads to the temptation of structural leaderships to substitute themselves for the absent class and indulge in a delusion of commandism.

How annoying it must be for would be 'theorists' that the working class refuses to behave according to their design. How wonderful that in practice, in Britain at least, no workplace could be successfully ordered to act in relation to a struggle particular to that workplace.

This is not some failure in the evangelical talents of would be leaders or some anarchistic streak within the working class. Those involved in practice know that success depends on the analysis of the situation by collective thought, via exchange of mind between those involved. This analysis is refined through successive stages of the ongoing practice.

Such independent collective thought is the most powerful weapon that workers have in confronting class problems. When it can be truly expressed via a national organisation, such as that developed by the Amalgamated Engineering Union, then a whole skill sector and/or industry can become a massive power. How about a Communist Party as a class-wide one?

Past success has been entirely due to the ability of the working class to develop forms of organisation that allow its component thought to determine action. The only thing that can defeat this is the cessation of exchange of mind by workers themselves. Workers are thinkers because they have to be.

Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
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Back to Front – Deeper into darkness

‘Why accept or tolerate a moribund system that is intent on our destruction and demise?’

DAVID CAMERON, seeking the high ground on behalf of his Cutback Coalition, postures a rose-tinted vision of “The Big Society”. But his velvet-glove soundbites hide an iron fist: “Cut Government Down to Size”, “Free People and Communities to Help Themselves” and “Involve Voluntary Organisations”. The Coalition offers seductive sounding phrases to soothe reaction to the ruling class’s next Big Leap Backwards.

But no amount of rhetoric can hide the fact or assuage fears that capitalism intends to remove yet more essential social fabric from our society that will make workers’ lives even more perilous.

Strip away the rhetoric and what is their project? In a nutshell, capitalism’s dark age is to be deepened in some key ways. Huge cuts in public service for the long term. A further privatisation phase attacking schools, health provision, parks, libraries, post offices and beyond. The encouragement of the voluntary sector and philanthropy to displace state or council services (echoes of the Victorian mutual help schemes here - they’ve obviously read their history). The replacement of public service jobs having negotiated conditions of service by free or cheaper voluntary or private providers without negotiated conditions.

The Big Society rehearses unpalatable ideas under a “Big Lie”. Beneath the verbiage, it is a clear declaration of war. The Coalition wants to promote a last-ditch survival plan for dying capitalism whereby no countervailing opposition in the form of public services will be tolerated. In its senility, capitalism

attempts to recreate in the 21st century the naked, raw, conditions from the 18th and early 19th century.

That harsh environment was found wanting, and failed, largely because British workers organised against it. For example, by the late 19th century, municipalisation pioneered the provision of public services across a range of socially necessary areas.

Today, we must take stock of what is happening, see its harm and act in our own interests. To do nothing is to invite greater and greater inroads into the quality of our lives. To do nothing is to welcome pauperisation, degradation and social misery on a scale not witnessed for centuries.

We must come together collectively to defend and enhance our jobs, our industries, our services, our conditions of service, our publicly organised provision, our pensions. We must come together and change our thinking. A protracted Battle for Britain is developing that will decide the future shape and nature of our country.

Workers are grappling with capitalism’s absolute decline. Why accept or tolerate a moribund system that is intent on our destruction and demise? We must start to assert our needs; we must start to take mental and physical control of our land; we must start to refashion our economic and political landscape.

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