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The working class and trade unions are facing an historic challenge. Corporate-driven globalisation has changed for ever the relationships between workers and employers, in both public and private sectors. Old-style compromises are out and confrontation is in as jobs are moved from Britain to lower labour cost countries and public services become commercialised.

Yet the present leadership of the trade unions - including the so-called "awkward squad" - is clearly incapable of taking up these new challenges. The membership of the Transport and General Workers Union has fallen from two million to 835,000, while the TUC has lost half its membership; hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have gone without a fight. And the capitalist New Labour government meets only verbal opposition as it part-privatises, outsources and introduces competition in public services.

UNISON's leaders have fallen silent on foundation hospitals, which open the way to full-scale privatisation in the NHS. FBU leaders ran away from a fight with New Labour over pay and conditions and signed a rotten deal that threatens to undermine hard-won rights. As one firefighter said: "The crisis in the FBU results from the refusal of Gilchrist and other leaders to confront New Labour and its public services agenda. Rather than appeal for support they left the FBU isolated and scraped together an agreement that apparently got them off the hook."

A programme for action

The Movement for a Socialist Future proposes the following programme around which we can build a new leadership in the trade unions:

- **OCCUPY** workplaces threatened with closure or job transfers.
Demand the opening of company books
- **APPEAL** for support from the corporation's entire UK workforce, not just those immediately threatened
- **WIN** backing from workers employed by the same corporation in other countries
- **BUILD** links and support from trade unionists in other countries, urging them to refuse to accept jobs switched from one country to another
- **OPEN** the trade unions to all workers in Britain, especially migrant labour from EU and non-EU countries
- **LAUNCH** a special recruitment drive aimed at black and minority ethnic workers suffering the most from unemployment and low pay
- **UNITE** workers in towns with those in the countryside oppressed by seasonal conditions and poor pay
- **NO** to the EU of capitalists - **YES** to a socialist Europe
- **LAUNCH** a campaign for democratic ownership and control of transnational corporations by the workforce in whatever country they operate
- **CUT** the working week with no loss of pay as an immediate solution to unemployment
- **RECLAIM** pension funds from corporate speculators
- **URGE** the building of local Assemblies to win community backing, help keep workplaces open and develop alternative political representation to parliament
- **SUSPEND** payments to and totally break from capitalist New Labour
- **CONVENE** a conference of trade union, working class and socialist organisations to plan a political way forward

Globalisation and the EU

Globalisation has produced powerful, competing trading blocks like the European Union and NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement area. Some, like TUC general secretary Brendan Barber and TGWU leader Tony Woodley, pin their hopes on the EU as a moderating force against the "Washington consensus" - the full-blown market capitalism advocated by London and Washington. They urge membership of the Euro as a way of "saving British jobs". But a choice between European capitalism and the Bush-Blair axis is no choice at all.

The EU is first and foremost a capitalist trading bloc that is desperately trying to compete with low-wage areas like China and India. There are five million unemployed in Germany alone, for example, and a ruthless attack on conditions and pensions is under way there. Spain, too, has massive unemployment, plus an impoverished workforce of migrant labour living rough while working for food processing corporations. Now the EU has expanded, employers will move investment to Eastern Europe where wages are lower.

For trade unionists it is not a question of supporting either models of capitalism, or regional blocs, but of transforming our organisations and involving them in a strategy to end capitalist rule. There is nothing to gain for the working class and everything to lose from a more integrated European Union. That does not mean a nationalist or anti-European stance, but recognition that the interests of workers in Europe are not identical with those of the capitalist EU. We should campaign for a socialist alternative to a capitalist-dominated EU and join with workers in other European countries to campaign for rights and jobs, against unemployment and poverty pay.

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government but of the state itself - the police, armed forces and secret services. The union leaders left the miners to fight alone - and the fact is that they themselves are now paying the price of that betrayal.

The forces of production and finance transcend borders and this is sufficient to undermine the basis of nationally-based reformist policies and programmes. This is the process that has produced New Labour as the self-proclaimed champion of free-market capitalism. New Labour is not a right-wing version of "old" Labour. It is a new party that has broken from the past, whatever the occasional murmuring of dissent. It is rapidly replacing the welfare state with the market state, where the role of government is to facilitate the operations of the global corporations.

Massive shift in power

As the campaign group International Forum on Globalisation, notes: "As social activists, we need to recognise that the world today is no longer effectively ruled by nation states, let alone democratically-elected governments. Instead, there has been a massive shift in power out of the hands of nation states and governments and into the hands of transnational corporations during the final quarter of the 20th century... the prime role of governments is to reorganise their national economic, social, cultural, and political system for efficient transnational competition and profitable investment. In effect, we are living in a new age of globalisation that is characterised by forms of corporate rule."

New Labour unashamedly promotes the virtues of global capitalism. Patricia Hewitt, the Trade Secretary, told the CBI employers' organisation on November 17 2003: "We are hearing siren voices in the US and Britain to pass laws against it [stop companies moving activities overseas] and who say: 'Don't put public contracts with companies that might decide to put some of their operations in India.' It is easy to see the benefit of jobs saved but more difficult to see the long-term cost to consumers and to business competitiveness." It is not possible to "reclaim" or "relaunch" Labour. It has become a capitalist party and the working class movement has to face this reality, complete the break from New Labour and build a new political movement.

The market forces unleashed by globalisation have changed the way we live - from what we eat to how we are governed. Since New Labour came to office, Parliament's role has diminished still further towards vanishing point, while a presidential-style apparatus has developed around the Prime



in the face of mounting job losses. This is precisely the reactionary approach that will undermine the TGWU's campaign to recruit thousands of workers into the union. It is based on appealing to a state and a government that is committed to the global market economy, not to improving workers' conditions.

Recruiting migrant workers

In response to the tragedy of the migrant workers killed by the tide while cockle picking in north west England, the TGWU is supporting an early day motion in parliament which calls for a change in the law relating to gangmasters. This is all very well, but what the TGWU should do is to recruit these workers - whatever their official employment and immigration status. That would prove more inspiring than pleading with the government to control the gangmasters or the employers to improve conditions, a policy destined to fail almost before it is launched.

Instead of trying to regulate capitalist globalisation, the trade unions must develop policies which are an alternative to the market state and economy. A rapid increase in membership is only possible if unions and workers pitch into the struggle to take control of the economy on behalf of the majority.

We need a leadership that starts from interests of workers within the global economy as a whole, not just from the point of view of workers in Britain. Issues like globalisation, climate change, industrialised food production, the use of biotechnology, treatment of plant and animal life, education, security at work and elsewhere, pensions, housing, and questions of political representation concern the working class immediately.

The corporations must not be allowed to play groups of workers in different countries off against each other. For example, call centres threatening to relocate should be occupied and a campaign launched against offshoring. The campaign would show how global capital is calling the shots politically and economically, using divide and rule tactics. Such a campaign would call on other workers in the community to defend the jobs and launch a struggle for democratic ownership and control of the company in every country where it operates. It would show how the only interest of the employer is profit, made through the destruction of jobs and communities, and that the interests of workers are the same, wherever the corporations employ them.

Appeals would be made for workers in other countries not to accept jobs taken from others. All workers employed by the corporation and its affiliate companies would be urged to act, not just call centre staff. Transformed in this way, trade unions could inspire a movement to develop against the corporations with social ownership as its goal. Success would enable workers in richer economies like Britain to aid the development of jobs and conditions in poorer areas through mutual aid. We would advocate socially-led globalisation and production for need as a viable alternative to the profit-driven system we have today.



Trade unions and the state

We are living through an ever-closer merging of the state, politics and economics into a sinister type of corporate rule, especially in Britain and the United States. This is one of the most significant outcomes of corporate-led globalisation. For capitalism not only has economic power - crucially it has political power too. Only this is more disguised, taking the form of an apparently democratic process open to all. But the overwhelming majority of the population have no direct control, access to, or involvement in the running of the state. Occasionally we are consulted through a general or local election, or a referendum. We have the right to choose our rulers - but not the right to change the class that rules over us.

After an enormous struggle by millions of people, the British ruling class finally conceded the right to vote to all male workers in 1884 and to women after World War I. Historically it was a great advance compared with feudal society, based as that was on despotic rule by an absolute monarch, landowners and the church. These major reforms also, importantly, helped to create and reinforce a definite view about the nature of the state which is still with us. The message was that capitalism offered democratic opportunities and that the state was the arena where reforms and changes could be made. Revolution was unnecessary because, it was argued, parliamentary democracy could not only keep capitalism in check but was also a way to achieve socialism, or at least socialist-type policies. There were periods when the working class was able to use its strength to win reforms through parliament, such as trade union rights, the eight-hour day and the welfare state.

Labour Party and capitalism

When the trade unions and socialists formed the Labour Party at the beginning of the 20th century, it was on the basis that working within and through the existing state was the only way forward politically. The result was that the trade union bureaucracy became incorporated into the state, while still compelled to take on the employers from time to time. The Labour Party and trade union bureaucracies have played a crucial role in perpetuating illusions in parliamentary democracy for over 100 years. Their aim was and remains the avoidance of open conflict with capitalism in favour of compromise.

But globalised capitalism is not in the business of making concessions or promoting reforms. That was the lesson of the great miners' strike of 1984-85. The miners were confronted with the whole weight not only of the Tory

Renewing traditions

No return is possible to pre-globalisation days, when unions could strike compromises with nationally-based employers and governments. Those days are gone for good and we must build the movement out of the new conditions that globalisation has created. Looked at boldly, they offer fresh opportunities for working class internationalism and a joint struggle against the market state.

Trade unions have an historic opportunity to shed backwardness, sectionalism and nationalism and renew the great traditions of the movement, from Tolpuddle to the building of mass unions. In Britain, the changed nature of work throws up new challenges and opportunities. The increase in casual and part-time work makes it harder to organise and recruit. However, there are fewer divisions between different kinds of labour. The privileges of a middle-class, white collar existence hardly exist for the majority who are deeply exploited by their employers. The old craft and skilled divisions of the past are being overcome as is evident in the mergers of the smaller craft unions and their integration into larger organisations. With globalisation, trade unions are combining into a unified whole to become industrial general unions.

The intense globalisation of the last 25 years has produced a new international division of labour whose interests are the same in each country. At present, they are brought together by information technology and collaborate across borders and continents to make goods for the corporations. This fact provides the real possibility of uniting workers in different countries for a common purpose - to rid the planet of capitalism. A new leadership in the unions in Britain would make this global, socialist approach its number one priority.

The TGWU's Woodley has said that "while capital is global and labour is local we are going to be at a disadvantage". In a speech in Newcastle on April 2 2004, he said it was time for the unions to act to stop "offshoring" - or the export of jobs. The unions should take on the "do nothing" lobby, he urged. Fine words, but his policies are based on appealing to New Labour and to "good investors".

Woodley praised the Bush-dominated US Senate for passing a package of measures to curb the jobs flight from America and Germany's chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, for declaring that offshoring was "unpatriotic". Woodley called on New Labour to encourage firms to "keep production here" and "for tax and aid policies which reward the good investor and punish the bad". In this way, he declared, the market could be made "our servant, not our master". In your dreams, Tony! His policies amount to hopeless nationalism

Minister. New Labour has politicised the top of the civil service through the use of appointed advisers and introduced business-style techniques into the state machine itself.

The loss of legitimacy that has resulted is clearly seen in the turn-out for general elections in all the major capitalist countries. In Britain, it has fallen from 82% in 1950 to 59% in 2001. The fall between the 1997 and 2001 elections was a remarkable 12%. A recent report by the Hansard Society showed that people are interested in politics and want to have a say in how the country is run. And yet there was a clear finding that people don't believe Parliament is amongst the institutions that have most impact on their everyday lives.

What we have in Britain can perhaps be termed an unfinished democracy. The struggle for the vote produced enfranchisement for the masses, many of whom saw the vote as a route to transforming society; today they are effectively unrepresented. All the main political parties stand for the same thing and defend the status quo. Real economic and political power, as it always was, is exercised behind the scenes in secret. The people are excluded from this process, as they always were.

Parliament has no independence

The institutions of parliamentary democracy cannot be said to serve the interests of the majority who have to work for a living in call centres, offices, shops, factories and service industries. Parliament has no independent power. It is an integral part of a state which will always maintain capitalist property. In any case, this state can never be true to the ideals of democracy as it is beholden to the ruling propertied and financial elites, who are motivated by economic self-interest.

Trade unions must take part in a struggle to extend the right to vote and give it a new significance. This requires us to create new forms of democratic representation. These will base themselves on workplace and community representation at local, regional, national and international levels; new bodies must have executive power with direct representation of all sections of society. They will replace the existing state institutions - parliament, monarchy, civil service, judiciary, police, army and so on. A separate, privileged political class and state bureaucracy will no longer exist to stand above society as a whole.

The break-up of the postal service is answered only in words by the Communication Workers Union leadership. Postal workers were left to walk out on their own while their leaders hid behind Tory/New Labour anti-union laws. In the 2004 budget, Gordon Brown announced that 40,000 civil service jobs were going. The leaders of UNISON and the GMB, instead of denouncing this savage attack, praised Brown for "bringing help to the front line services". Civil service union leaders have limited action to calling for talks with the Chancellor and the Cabinet Office. It is said the losses will be through "natural wastage", but the axe has already begun to fall with over 1,000 jobs being cut in the Department of Education. Amicus general secretary Derek Simpson, elected on a "left" ticket, has introduced autocratic rule inside the union and become a Blairite. He was the union leader wheeled out to denounce Clare Short when she exposed the UN bugging scandal.

Today most trade unions present themselves as a place to go for insurance, cheap holidays, credit cards and legal advice. Should we be surprised, therefore, that very few young people are joining trade unions, and that members are leaving organisations that are hardly fighting bodies?

Nor have the union leaders made any effort to join with or support other movements against globalisation. They have given minimal support to the massive movement against the invasion of Iraq, or to the new anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements. As a result trade unions have had minimal effect on these new movements. Despite all the pre-war talk, there was no industrial action by the TUC or its affiliates to stop the war. They thereby missed an opportunity to win young people to their side.

The reason for the crisis of leadership is quite simple: these union leaders are 100% committed to the status quo and have no independence from the state or New Labour. Any opposition is restricted to rhetoric. Britain has the most vicious anti-union laws in Europe, but there is no campaign against them and they are obeyed without a murmur. In fact, the union leaders hide behind them in order to avoid supporting members resisting New Labour's policies. And the reason for that is clear - the union leaders believe that a world economy dominated by transnational corporations is all powerful. Nor can they imagine a world without New Labour - unless it is in the shape of a Tory government.

What is clear is that this type of trade unionism has no future and leads down the road to the destruction of the union movement as a fighting force in the working class. Only a new leadership, one based on a commitment to independence from the state, advocating alternatives to corporate globalisation and New Labour, can breathe new life into the trade unions.

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