

Working together in the Norwich region

News, Opinion & Statistics ...

Issue 9, November 2007

This is the first of a regular (hopefully) monthly selection of edited articles from the various publications that the branch subscribes to. My intention is to reflect the interests of the broad range of members, but, of course, ultimately, the choice and emphasis is personal. Please send in your reactions.

CUBA SI (Autumn 2007)

1. *Editorial* on the 40th anniversary of Che Guevara's execution in Bolivia:

"Amazingly, the same man who killed Che, Sergeant Mario Teran, has had his sight restored by Cuban ophthalmic surgeons working in La Paz as part of the sight-saving programme 'Operation Miraglo'."

2. "Interviewing Fidel", p.22:

"... no one will ever leave here to commit an act of terrorism in the United States...We would be a species of fanatical idiots if we were to blame the North American people for the differences between our governments."

LABOUR BRIEFING (October 2007)

1. *Editorial*:

"...Brown's very public embrace of Margaret Thatcher only adds insult to injury and reminds us that the unpopularity of the Blair Government was rooted in substance, not just a clash of personalities.

...A change of policy is necessary – a comprehensive programme of public housing, an end to marketisation and privatisation in the public sector (including city academies), an expansion of public transport, the restoration of trade union rights and civil liberties, withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and the cancellation of Trident would be hugely popular with party members, trade unionists – and Labour voters."

2. Glen Ragawalla "Brown's Imperial Future", p.5:

"...It has been under Brown that ministers and officials have begun to speak of the 'generational struggle' they are waging in Afghanistan – an open-ended military commitment with no talk of a gradual drawdown of troops as in Iraq ... there is little evidence that the British are winning against the Taliban, and the opium crop [which supplies over 90% of the world's heroin] is growing – by 34% over the past year alone."

3. Brian Denny "Crow's Crime? Class Struggle!", p.23:

"The unbridled vilification of RMT General Secretary, Bob Crow, ceased briefly during TUC [Congress] week when *The Independent* decided to ... allow him to speak for himself ... Just for the record, RMT members at Metronet voted 96% for strike action ... and opposition to the renamed EU constitution was discussed and agreed by the union's AGM ... Crow's real crime here, it seems, is that he reflected the demands and interests of his members to the best of his ability as honestly as possible.

On the Metronet dispute, the union gave 5 weeks' notice to the bankrupt company, its administrator and Transport for London of its intention to strike (with sister union TSSA) in defence of jobs and pensions. The union made it clear that jobs and pensions would not be the price paid for the failure of a PFI project that has already seen a staggering 750 million pounds robbed from the Tube network. Yet any sense of urgency from any of the three parties notified only appeared on the day the strike started.

The union suspended the action and, following 8 hours of talks, an interim pension was withdrawn in favour of a full scheme, hundreds of planned redundancies were lifted and none will be carried out without notification.

RMT also asked delegates to reject the renamed EU constitution and for the TUC to back the GMB's call for a referendum on the issue, which the Government promised us 2 years ago. The GMB motion warned that the constitution 'could be a Trojan horse' for the mass privatisation of public services across the EU."

LABOUR BRIEFING (October 2007) continued...

4. Rob Kelsall (GMB) **“Fight Low Pay Now!”**, p.28

“In a modern day David and Goliath battle, parking attendants working for NCP in Enfield took on and defeated the biggest private equity company in Europe, 3i, NCP’s parent company. They won their fight for union recognition and for their union, GMB, to submit an independent pay claim for the first time ... In 5 days of the most magnificent strike action, employing various tactics including a demonstration outside 3i’s HQ, which brought it to a standstill, this small dispute became an international news story, forcing itself onto the pages of the ***Wall Street Journal*** and ***FT*** and onto television ...

... led and organized by GMB, corporate bosses glimpsed what they could witness if the whole trade union movement moved onto the offensive. New Unionism has presided over the ever-declining living standards of British workers. A return to a more militant industrial struggle would prove decisive in transforming the economic landscape for workers and their families.”

LABOUR BRIEFING (November 2007)

1. Gordon Nardell **“Can’t Pay, Low Pay”**, p.8

“... under his Chancellorship – as Gordon Brown misses no opportunity to remind us – the UK economy grew consistently. How?

The theory is breathtakingly simple. Offload the burden of incurring debt from the public to the private sector: a privatized version of Keynes in which consumers, not the state, borrow to fund demand ... As the UK economy grew from 1997, so did the scale of private debt: up from 196.8% of GDP in 1996 to 250.1% in 2003. Unsecured debt as a proportion of GDP grew at an especially alarming rate with the 2005 value 50% higher than the 1997 value.

Socialists are not killjoys. Borrowing to pay for that holiday or new telly isn’t harmful itself, but UK private debt has several particularly unsustainable features. It has risen not only as a proportion of GDP, but crucially, and even more rapidly, as a proportion of income: that is, it has become harder to repay. In 1997 personal debt was 104% of personal disposable income. By 2005 it had risen to 154% - a riskier position than in even the US, where the corresponding figure was 126%. Worse, the debt has been disproportionately incurred by the people likely to face the greatest difficulty repaying it, those on the lowest incomes. ... [the] Bank of England ... in 2005 reported that those on annual incomes of less than 4,500 pounds had an average unsecured debt-to-income ratio of 1.03 – 4 times the average for the whole population ... The ratio steadily declined for higher income groups: just 0.07 for those on more than 60,000 pounds a year.”

2. ‘A London postal Worker’ **“Save the Postal Service!”**, p.9

“A big thing has been made of businesses ‘deserting’ Royal Mail in favour of its competitors during the strikes. It is rarely mentioned how these competitors organize their deliveries: they use Royal Mail’s workforce. Royal Mail acts as a kind of ‘Network Rail’: competitors may transport the post across the country, but they aren’t going to invest in their own national workforce and infrastructure to deliver it – as there is already a system they can milk.”

3. Dr John Lister **“Darzi: Down the Karzi!”**, p.11

“The inconclusive and insubstantial findings in the interim report of Lord Darzi’s much-heralded review of health services in England - plainly rushed out as a device to regain New Labour’s lost credibility on NHS issues – appear even weaker with another 18 months to go before polling day. ... [His] findings confirm that patterns of provision of GP services continue to fit the ‘inverse care law’ first identified in the early 1970’s: the availability of good quality and well-resourced primary care services tends to be inversely proportional to the need for it!

... The day after the ... report was published ministers unveiled a list of 14 giant private companies (4 of them major US healthcare insurers) who are now approved to bid for lucrative contracts advising Primary Care Trusts how to spend their 70 billion pound-plus targets for commissioning.

This new and drastic lurch to privatization has, if anything, even less evidence to support it than previous New Labour policies. Not one of the corporations now licensed to get their teeth into NHS budgets has any experience at all of commissioning universal or comprehensive services for whole populations.

LABOUR BRIEFING (November 2007) continued...

4. Tim Root *“Is There A Climate For Change?”*, p.13

“Five sixths of Britons believe global warming is currently happening, while four fifths believe it will almost certainly accelerate over the next few decades. People want to do their bit to help. However, the derisory amount the Government has allocated to its Low Carbon Buildings Programme has frustrated many who applied for grants to install renewables in their homes.

The Government should introduce a feed-in tariff to pay a premium price for electricity which householders add to the national grid. Such a tariff has led to Germany generating 200 times more solar electricity and 10 times more wind electricity (despite having less wind) than Britain. It also helped create **250,000 jobs** in the German renewables industry...

... Green taxes [in the UK] have fallen from 3.6% of national income in 1999 to 2.7% now.”

5. *“The John McDonnell Column”*, p.15

“... membership of the trade union movement in Britain has fallen from 13 million at its [pre-Thatcher] height to 6 million today. Fewer than half the workers in employment are now covered by collective bargaining agreements.

Today over 20% of our population is classified officially as income-poor compared with 13% in 1979. Nearly 4 million ... of our children now live in poverty even though most live in families with a parent at work. Total personal debt in Britain stood at 1,300 billion pounds this year, with 300 people a day becoming insolvent and, according to the Bank of England, 1 in 13 is struggling to pay their mortgage.

... The pay of company bosses has risen by nearly 300% in the last 15 years, rising at 7 times the rate of the average worker’s pay.

...Making a connection between poverty, inequality and trade union rights would force New Labour to address the need to restore trade union rights and freedoms. This would alienate the allies upon whom it now relies in big business (for its funding) and in the media conglomerates (for mobilizing its electoral support.)”

6. *“The Alan Simpson Column”*, p.23

[In the last tax year] Only 50 out of the largest 700 companies were major payers of corporation tax (contributing around 500 million pounds each.) If the 200 big corporate tax dodgers coughed up, [the] Labour [Government] would have a massive budget surplus that allowed for real investment and some of the structural change that Britain urgently needs.

Brown’s legacy, as Chancellor, is to have turned Britain into a tax haven where multinationals can offset all of their borrowing (wherever in the world it is invested) against their UK tax bill. The UK taxpayer is subsidizing the international speculator. The low-paid worker gets no pay rise, so that the private equity company can make no tax contribution. The generosity of Brown’s socialism embraces the rich, and the brutality of capitalism clobbers the rest of us.”

7. *“The Geoff Martin Column”*, p.25

“The director of Nursing at Maidstone has been seconded over to work on PFI while his staff were crying out for support...Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells were spending 3.5 million pounds on management consultants while C Difficile was ripping through their wards and 300 posts were axed and vacancies frozen. That money would have put more than 100 extra nurses and support staff onto the wards and probably would have been enough to contain the hospital-acquired infections.”

LABOUR RESEARCH (September 2007)

“Who Are the New Union Recruits?”, pp.22-23

“...union membership numbers may be on the up, but recruitment is not keeping up with growth in jobs...

For example, in 1995 union membership among associate professionals – a category encompassing a huge range of jobs including nurses, estate agents, lab technicians, media workers, police officers and train drivers – stood at 920,000. By 2005 this had leapt 41% to over 1.3 million. And union membership is set to make a further 11% increase by 2010... [whereas in contrast] union density...last year stood at 28.4% compared with 31.7% a decade ago.”

LABOUR RESEARCH (October 2007)

1. “Focusing In On Brown’s Proposals”, pp19-20

“...while unions are fighting to retain their voice within the Labour Party, Gordon Brown is enthusiastic in involving others in formulating government policy. On becoming PM, he promised to lead a government of ‘all the talents’, proclaiming his ‘mission’ to provide ‘the best chances for everyone’ – and last month asked 2 Tory MPs and a Liberal Democrat to lead government reviews.

Another newcomer was Sir Digby Jones, the former Director-General of the CBI, one of 5 new ministerial appointments from outside the Labour Party. His elevation to the peerage and the post of Minister of State for Trade & Investment was greeted with amazement by trade unionists: Unite Joint General Secretary, Tony Woodley, described the move as ‘desperate’, while Paul Kenny...queried ‘how many times he has voted Labour.’

In fact, the new Lord Jones of Birmingham is taking the Labour whip but is not expected to join the party – and he is certainly no lover of trade unions. At a CBI dinner in 2004 he claimed that unions were becoming ‘increasingly irrelevant, every day’. On retiring from his CBI post last year, he described them... as ‘backward-looking’.

A considerably more controversial figure is Damon Buffini who has been appointed to the Business Council for Britain...Buffini is the managing partner of private equity firm Permira, which has been the subject of a GMB campaign relating to the thousands of job losses endured at the AA ...and...Bird’s Eye under its ownership.

As **Guardian** journalist David Hencke put it, “Once again the unions ...[look like]...the one group that Labour does not wish to acknowledge, except when it comes to filling party coffers.”

2. “TUC Exposes Widespread Abuse of Eastern European Migrants”, p.28

“A TUC-commissioned report...**New EU Members? Migrant Workers’ Challenges and Opportunities to UK Trade Unions** has found that migrants are 10 times more likely as indigenous workers to be paid less than the National Minimum Wage, and about a quarter have no written contract...”

...the report...found that ‘all of the most complained-about employers were making a profit – one of them over 45 million pounds a year.’ Furthermore, each of these companies was able to pay its highest paid director between 100,000 and 600,000 pounds a year.

Concluding that better pay for migrant workers is easily affordable, the report notes: ‘What is happening is exploitation, not economics.’ Echoing this sentiment, TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, is calling for ‘the full force of the law’ to be used against ‘those profiting from such appalling ill-treatment’.”

LABOUR RESEARCH (November 2007)

“Fears Grow That Union-Busting Firms Will Be More Widely Used”, p.7

“...Unite...last month lost a battle for recognition at Kettle Foods...owned by private equity group Lion Capital. The union lost a battle to keep the bargaining unit to the 171 production workers where there was greater support for recognition. The CAC ruled in favour of the employer saying the bargaining unit should consist of all staff except senior managers.

Kettle Foods had engaged the services of a firm called Omega – a subsidiary of US union-avoidance firm The Burke Group, which helped T-Mobile counter unionization in 2003-04. It was represented by law firm Eversheds, which has also been linked with firms avoiding union recognition.

...Omega helped Kettle organize ‘months of anti-union briefing’, according to Unite organizer Mike Hubbard. This meant that ‘by the time we got our access to staff...most people were under the impression that if they voted for the union they would be immediately called out on strike.’”

STATISTICS

WORKPLACE REPORT (No.50, September 2007)

Average Pay Deals (Weekly Earnings), August 2007:

Whole Economy	4.2%
Manufacturing	2.7%
Services	4.6%
Private Sector	4.5%
Public Sector	3.1%

Average Weekly Earnings By Occupation, 2006:

All Workers	565.80
„ Male	622.30
„ Female	477.30
Managers	853.70
Professionals	768.10
Assoc. Professionals	584.20
Admin & Sec	375.30
Skilled/Craft	471.80
Services	330.30
Sales	313.20
Operatives	434.90
Other Manual	337.80

WORKPLACE REPORT (No.51, October 2007)

Inflation, September 2007:

	2006	2007
RPI (January 1987=100)	200.1	208
% Annual Increase	3.9	3.6
Consumer Prices Index % Inc	1.8	2.4

Minimum Wage Rates from 1/10/07:

Age	Increase	Rate
22+	3.2%	5.52 (+0.17p)
18-21	3.4%	4.60
16-17	3%	3.40

(Employers who provide accommodation may deduct up to 30.10 from wages.)

If you would like more information about your union branch, contact Keith Rowley for details.
secretary@norwichgmb.com or call **07979 684494**

Please have your say... Next Branch Meeting:
5th December 2007, 7:30pm, Angel Gardens PH, Angel Road, Norwich