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BREXIT Cromwell, we
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WORKERS



Negotiations: let's have clarity

"NOTHING IS AGREED until everything is agreed," said Theresa May and European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker after the end of the first stage of the Brexit negotiations. That form of words also appeared in the joint report from the negotiators which the Commission presented to the EU Council on Thursday 14 December.

They might as well have added, "Nothing is clear until everything is clear." The language in the report is in many places capable of several interpretations, and there is virtually no detail to explain the billions of pounds we are supposed to pay the EU for the privilege of leaving.

Much may never become clear, such as the size of the bill, or what "due regard" will be paid to judgements of the European Court of Justice. Eventually, in the nature of things, the status of the Irish border will become clear, but what that status will be is not clear now.

What the people of Britain need is clarity, the kind of clarity that they showed in the referendum of June 2016. They voted to leave the European Union, and they expected that we would be out by June 2018. Then-prime minister David Cameron had vowed repeatedly that if the referendum went against him he would invoke Article 50 immediately.

It was crystal clear that leaving meant getting out of the single market. It was, indeed, the only thing that Cameron, Osborne, Gove and Farage – in fact, all the campaigners on both sides – agreed on.

Yet now the government and the EU have agreed, in the section on Northern Ireland, "In the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation..." What do those words mean? Not clarity, for sure.

And yet, as the second stage of negotiations begins, one thing has actually become clearer: the EU is desperate for an agreement, if only because it desperately needs money. Brussels has backed down on many of its demands, and it changed course swiftly after a brief (reportedly, very brief) phone call between DUP leader Arlene Foster and Theresa May.

Britain is not Syriza-led Greece. We don't have to roll over and agree to diktats from Brussels. That should give fresh confidence to Britain as the negotiations proceed.

"No deal is better than a bad deal," Theresa May told the Commons in her report-back on the negotiations. It's time for the government to start acting more as though they really believe this.

Too much of the negotiations gave the impression of British negotiators going cap in hand to Brussels like loyal subjects, at whatever time of the day or night suited the EU. It's time to toughen up.

No deal should be our starting position. We just want out. And if the EU doesn't start cooperating, no deal should be our final position. ■



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The Scottish parliament building, Holyrood.

A budget devised to divide

THE RECENT budget issued by the devolved government in Edinburgh marks a split in the united approach to taxation in Britain. Under the SNP's separatist and pro-EU thinking, divergence in tax matters has been established.

The idea is to set Scotland on a path to separate financial governance, "fiscal autonomy" in other words. It is separatism by stealth after "independence in Europe" was solidly defeated in 2014 and with the SNP unable to obtain a second referendum.

Another tactic is attempting to pursue an independent foreign policy, illustrated by Nicola Sturgeon's meeting in December with Chinese vice-premier Liu Yandong in Edinburgh.

Last year was not a happy one for the SNP. Nearly 30 per cent of its membership voted for Brexit – independence for the whole of Britain, not separatism for the northern portion. Opposition mounted to its planned merger of British Transport Police into Police Scotland, especially from the RMT and TSSA trade unions. Centralising the Fire and Rescue Service has resulted in over 700 frontline firefighters losing their jobs. And the SNP is still reeling from general election losses with big names booted out in fishing and rural communities.

Now that the detail of the December budget in Scotland has been digested, it is clear that the SNP is implementing its own brand of "austerity", including over £70 million to be cut from the NHS Scotland capital budget. In July the annual NHS property survey put the maintenance backlog at £887 million. NHS Scotland's capital expenditure had already dropped from £537 million in 2015 to £336 million this year.

Tinkering with tax bands satisfied no one. And this budget does nothing to build industry or create jobs. The economy is stagnating, growing at a third the rate of the rest of Britain. The budget's main aim was furthering the separatist and pro-EU agenda. ■

PENSIONS

Academic ballot

UNIVERSITY WORKERS across Britain were being balloted in December as *Workers* went to press, over whether to fight to prevent the closure of their University Superannuation Scheme, a final salary arrangement.

The ballot gives university workers the opportunity to take action to overturn a manufactured pensions prescription that deliberately fails to measure pension assets and liabilities using a balanced approach.

Despite the employer's pretence, the scheme does not have a long-term funding problem.

What's more, the accounting format used to produce the alleged deficit has been orchestrated by the European Insurance Occupational Pensions Authority, whose offices are in Frankfurt. As the EU regulator, it delivers its pensions diktat for Britain through its UK offshoot, the Pensions Regulator, whose main office is in Brighton.

Anyone who works in pensions knows that deficits cannot at any point in time be projected into the future with much accuracy. To suggest otherwise is simply "false precision" designed to prompt pension closure.

The other point to consider is Brexit. By leaving the EU, British workers will be looking to develop our economy rather than being reliant on debt-fuelled consumption funded by foreign capital.

All of this and much more represents a strategic opportunity to create wealth based here in Britain that can be used among other things to support state and occupational pension planning. We want no more EU-prompted pension closures. ■

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 020 8801 9543 or email workers@cpbml.org.uk



Photo courtesy Unite



BiFab workers marching in Edinburgh on 16 November 2017.

ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk...

Scientists fear US block on research with Cuba

Concerns have been raised that the US government is limiting scientific collaboration between US and Cuban scientists – to the detriment of US citizens.

Care home crunch

Care provider Four Seasons is in talks with its creditors – another symptom of a widespread, deep-rooted crisis.

No Russian interference in Leave vote

Those wanting to undermine the EU referendum result try to blame Russian interference. The facts don't support that.

Vultures feast on housing shortage

A case going through the High Court shows how regeneration schemes are often merely a curtain raiser for the demolition of council-owned housing.

New tech university for Hereford

The government is giving up to £15 million over three years to support the establishment of a new, private, tech university based in Hereford city centre.

EU army defeat

On 13 November the government dramatically drew back from EU military integration schemes.

Plus: the e-newsletter

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Work-in saves jobs

DECISIVE ACTION by the workers at Burntisland Fabrication (BiFab) has saved their jobs. In the middle of November the company, which makes equipment for the oil and gas industry and the renewable energy sector, was on the brink of going into administration, and payment of wages ceased.

But the workers and their unions, GMB and Unite, quickly organised a work-in. They decided to continue to work to complete their current contract – for Beatrice Offshore Windfarm in the Moray Firth – despite having no guarantee that they would be paid. Members of both unions guarded the gates so that equipment and materials could not be removed from the yard in Methil, Fife.

The 1,400 workers are spread across three plants: Methil, Burntisland and Arnish on the Isle of Lewis. The unions were told that the company's financial crisis resulted from the main contractor, the Dutch-owned Seaway Heavy Lifting (SHL), not paying BiFab for work already completed. The largest stakeholder, the energy giant SSE, was in dispute with SHL.

The solid work-in, combined with a vigorous march through Edinburgh on 16 November attended by over 1,200 workers, spurred the company and its contractors into efforts to solve the crisis. Within days a financial package was agreed with BiFab and the project contractors: SHL, SSE Energy and JCE Offshore.

This secures the work until the end of the contract in April 2018 with assurances from government that assistance would be given to seek further contracts.

At the rally in Edinburgh, Gary Smith, GMB Scottish Secretary, was adamant in his praise for the workers' action: "If you had not taken the stand that you have, if you had not occupied those yards, I promise you – your yards would have closed on Monday. You are an inspiration to the trade union movement."

The reasons behind this crisis and the cash flow problems have not yet been fully exposed. The two other major fabrication companies are unaffected by such problems.

Another positive outcome from this action has been the high level of joint planning and co-ordination between the two large trade unions in the industry. ■

CUBA

OU backs down

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY has now agreed to admit students from Cuba after criticism from educational unions and others. This reverses the position the OU held since 2014, based on a view that it could not go against the USA.

This came to light when the OU refused to allow a Cuban student onto a course this summer because he came from "a restricted country" subject to "international economic sanctions and embargoes".

The OU's justification was that it "...considers that [the OU] falls within the

jurisdiction of US regulation with regard to economic embargoes. The OU has a number of employees who hold US citizenship (and are therefore subject to US regulation wherever they are in the world) and other significant links with the US (notably using US financial systems)."

The newly formed National Education Union was one of the organisations which criticised the OU's stance. The NEU Joint General Secretary wrote with great clarity, "It appears that the OU not only prioritises US law over UK law, but US law over fairness and equality." The same clarity would be welcome from the new union when it has to comment about judgements from the European Court of Justice. ■

EDUCATION

Inter-union agreement

A GOOD development: the new National Education Union (the NEU, a merger of the National Union of Teachers and the smaller Association of Teachers and Lecturers), Unison and the GMB have agreed not to poach each other's members.

The agreement will prevent infighting for support staff in Britain's publicly funded state schools. But the merger itself has a negative side: the National Union of Teachers, rather than concentrate on its traditional core of teachers, is following the long-established – and failed – road of incorporation and takeover epitomised by recent GMB and Unite mergers.

The NEU is another example of the business trade union model at the centre of trade union executives' thinking, be they self-proclaimed left or right. It fails to address the fragmentation of workforces

and education provision, or to recognise the need to oppose market thinking in education.

Instead, the NEU follows the approach taken by Unison and GMB: no overall strategy; taking a small minded, local approach; ignoring changes in education provision over the last 30 years; poaching each other's members week in week out, wasting time and effort and treating members like sheep. The only disruptive tactic Unison and GMB have in their arsenal is industrial action in schools, again treating members as passive, since even that action is only on the coat tails of the teachers.

At the same time, any steps to strengthen joint trade union unity – NEU, Unison, GMB (and Unite to a lesser degree) – within the workplace and against the employer will be positive. Rivalry and competition only leads to division and failure. Unity and new tactics have to be the order of the day. ■



Neat symbolism: US Navy fighter flies over the new HMS Queen Elizabeth.

The ever-shrinking Navy

IF NOTHING ELSE, the Ministry of Defence has a sense of humour: with only one month left of the 2017 calendar year, it designated 2017 as "The Year of the Royal Navy".

Roughly 100 mariners are now involved in protecting Buckingham Palace, a first in changing the guard history. While this might be good for tourism as an oddity, it is rumoured that the Navy is so short of sailors it cannot crew its ever-dwindling pool of gunboats.

The entire Navy currently appears to consist of just 19 frigates, 7 submarines and 2 amphibious landing ships. Not nearly enough to rule the waves. The landing ships *Albion* and *Bulwark* are apparently being measured up for sale to the navies of Chile and Brazil. This will mean an end to large-scale British landings or invasions – a good thing.

The only helicopter carrier the Navy has, *HMS Ocean*, is scheduled to be scrapped. Naval helicopter pilots flew more sorties in Afghanistan and Iraq than their Army compatriots so a carrier is no longer needed and 1,000 Royal Marines become redundant.

Since the mid-2000s the Royal Navy has run its fleet on a leaseback scheme with the VT Group (Vosper Thornycroft ship builders; Lord Thornycroft is past Chair of the Tory Party). All this is to be compensated for by the aircraft carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth*, the largest ship the Navy has ever had, whose completion date is some time in the 2020s. Its full carrying capacity of 40 aircraft is to be tested on the US seaboard, so perhaps HMS QE will end up flying the Stars and Stripes. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

FEBRUARY

Tuesday 20 February, 6.30 pm

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

"Stop the EU War Machine!"

CPBML Public Meeting

During the referendum campaign anyone who warned that a European army and a common defence policy were coming was dismissed by the establishment as a fantasist. Now everything is out in the open – and it's taking shape in front of our very eyes. Come and discuss. All welcome.



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EU

New call for integration

MARTIN SCHULZ, head of Germany's Social Democrats, wants to push for ever-closer European integration to build a "United States of Europe" by 2025.

"I want there to be a constitutional treaty to create a federal Europe," he said on 7 December in his speech at a party convention in Berlin, as he urged his party to clear the way for talks with Angela Merkel's conservatives which could lead to a new German government and put an end to an unprecedented coalition deadlock.

The constitutional treaty would "be presented to the member states, and those who are against it will simply leave the EU," he said. ■

The current president of the European Commission wants taking steps towards the creation of a unified European m

On the march towards a



© European Union 2014 - European Parliament

30 June 2014: the Eurocorps parades the EU flag to open the session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The Eurocorps has been operational since 1995. Currently 11 states are involved, including Turkey. It has been deployed in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

SINCE OUR vote to Leave, the EU establishment has moved rapidly towards setting up an EU army with a single central command, without any national, democratic controls. Given the EU's aggression in the past – look at Kosovo, Ukraine, and the bellicose stance against Russia – this is a dangerous development. It would give the EU, acting as a bloc, a free hand to beat the drums of war where it chooses in the world.

“It’s time to move to a ‘Schengen’ of defence’.”

Our governments act aggressively too, of course. But they are subject to control by the people, when we choose to exercise it. Brexit should bring increasing awareness and exercise of our power to do so. Before the referendum, EU supporters told us that claims from the Leave side about moves to unify Europe's armed forces “are nothing more than fantasy”, as *Guardian* columnist Jennifer Rankin put it on 27 May 2016. Lord Ashdown said the idea of an EU army was “nonsense”.

During the campaign the European Commission kept quiet about defence. It was under strict instructions not to do or say anything that could have helped the Leave vote. Once the voting was over, the EU showed its true intent.

Germany's Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, took the opportunity to make things clear in September 2016 during a visit to Lithuania – which now houses a German battle group of around 1,000 troops. “It's time to move forward to a European defence union, which is basically a ‘Schengen of defence’,” she said.

A month later the European Commission unveiled its EU Defence Action Plan. “A stronger European defence requires Member States' joint acquisition, development and retention of the full-spectrum of land, air, space and maritime capabilities,”

The EU has long charted a course towards defence union and has created a set of tools to this end: a Security and Defence Implementation Plan, the European

it. So did his predecessors. And now the whole EU is military, along with unified defence research...

a European army

Defence Agency, a Defence Action Plan, the Defence Industrial Development Programme, a European Defence Research Programme...the list goes on.

The EU is pursuing all this to expand “EU sovereignty” – President Juncker’s words – across defence, which was the EU’s ambition from the start.

Political problems, not least the flat refusal of British public opinion to countenance the absorption of British armed forces into a Euro Army, stalled the project for decades. Brexit has cleared this objection.

Our vote to leave the EU was a key trigger for EU initiatives. Four days after, the French and German Foreign Ministers pushed for a European Security Union. Plans were always wrapped in a cloud of denial but the long-term intent was clear, as Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, said in 2000: “When I was talking about the European army, I was not joking. If you don’t want to call it a European army, don’t call it a European army. You can call it ‘Margaret’, you can call it ‘Mary Ann’, you can call it any name.”

Permanent

The EU plans to integrate member states’ militaries into joint EU units by triggering something called Permanent Structured Cooperation, or PESCO for short. In June 2017 the European Council called for it to be “inclusive and ambitious”. The Commission is frank about its aims: “PESCO is both a permanent framework for closer cooperation and a structured process to gradually deepen defence cooperation within the Union framework.”

The European Defence Agency, an arm of the European Commission, is pushing “a European defence research programme to start when the current funding programme ends in 2020”. It’s talking about a budget of some €500 million which “... would place the EU among the top 4 of defence research & technology investors in Europe” – omitting that as a result most member states would have to give up their own defence research.

What has all this to do with us, given we have decided to leave the EU? Well, the EU is desperate to seize control of our military

Continued on page 8



Kogo (CC-BY-SA 3.0)

A Eurofighter Typhoon at Germany’s Manching airbase in Bavaria.

Brussels eyes procurement

THE NEW EU Defence Fund is to be supported by billions of euros from the European Investment Bank (EIB) which exists to “contribute to EU policy and objectives”. Britain is the joint-largest shareholder in the EIB, so the EU is aiming to reassign our money. The Fund will be able to offer money to British firms to join EU-led procurement projects, giving these firms a financial incentive to demand involvement in the EU’s “defence single market”.

In fact the EU wants a single military procurement policy, coordinated by a newly empowered European Defence Agency. This is a particular threat to Britain, with its highly developed defence manufacturing and research complex, because compliance with EU defence directives is a condition of participating in the EU’s defence industrial schemes.

At present, we are “permitted” to choose our domestic suppliers in shipbuilding, aircraft and other manufacture. To do so means invoking the EU’s Article 346, the national security clause, to exempt us from EU rules that tendering must open defence contracts to “cheapest-wins” EU-wide competition except when a member state regards domestic manufacture of a specific

item as a matter of national security.

And the EU wants to end this exemption. Its Court has recently reduced the scope of Article 346 and the EU Council can at any time amend the items it covers. The EU wants to create a single EU defence market in which member state governments could not protect domestic defence jobs and industry, Scottish shipyards for example. This “rationalises” defence industries. Each would specialise, so countries would lose some national capabilities, leading to interdependency.

Even the government’s National Shipbuilding Strategy of September 2017 adheres to the latest EU rules on cross-border defence tendering. About one third of naval ships (frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers) are reserved as Britain-only build while all others (such as patrol, mine-countermeasure, hydrographic, amphibious vessels and Royal Fleet Auxiliary) will be open to international tender.

The GMB union rightly complained that the strategy does not allocate enough shipbuilding to our shipyards. This EU procurement policy squeeze also applies to building helicopters, armoured personnel carriers, artillery, aircraft and firearms, and to conducting research. ■

Continued from page 7

assets. Britain accounts for a fifth of the EU's total defence spending. The EU wants us to pay for a close association with EU defence.

Britain's defence research spending is about £1.8 billion a year. We are the leading defence research power in Europe with the highest level of defence research related exports. This is due not to the European Defence Agency but to our long history of defence research, military spending and scientific excellence. The EDA currently has a budget of just £27 million, of which Britain pays the second highest amount, more than a tenth of its budget.

The EU Parliament, in its November Defence Union report, said that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy "should lead in due time to the establishment of the European Armed Forces". Various bodies are being brought into action to make this a reality. The EU's External Action Service has also produced its own Security and Defence Implementation Plan with the aim of tying EU defence capabilities to its foreign policy.

The EU sees the close connection between defence supply and defence policy – and wants to make it even closer. The European Defence Action Plan aims to make a European military a reality with a €5 billion target for defence spending, a €500 million target for spending on military R&D, a single market for defence, defence industry ratio-

nalisation, joint capabilities held at EU level, and EU engagement in security of supply (which implies intervention abroad).

The May government approved these two plans at EU Council meetings in late 2016. The EU Commission has told the government that because "decisions over EU Defence Union were taken unanimously", Britain is expected to "play its full role while it remains a member".

The Foreign Office, in its Strategic Defence and Security Review of December 2016, proposed "continued UK involvement in EU Common Security and Defence Policy". Foreign Office minister Alan Duncan told MPs on the European Scrutiny Committee there was "support from other EU states for UK engagement in EU defence policy after Brexit" and he wanted to "avoid hampering such future cooperation".

Opposition

But there has been deep opposition here, and at the EU Council meeting on 13 November the government dramatically drew back from its previous consent to EU military schemes by refusing to enter the EU's PESCO military union agreement.

The new EU Defence Fund is to be supported by billions of euros from the EU's European Investment Bank. Britain is the joint-largest shareholder in the bank, so the EU is aiming to offer our own money to British firms to join EU-led procurement projects, giving these firms a financial incentive

“It should lead to the establishment of the European Armed Forces.”

to demand involvement in the EU's "defence single market".

The EU's drive to integration has built-in "mission creep". Signing up to any part of industrial, technological or strategic cooperation involves being bound into EU military planning for a common EU defence, and drawn into contributing to EU defence funds.

EU military integration, a single EU foreign and security policy, along with an EU treasury with a single budget and a single all-EU currency, all add up to a single EU state.

Now we have decided to leave the EU, we should stay outside its defence schemes and should certainly not engage with them as a sweetener for the negotiations.

In the interest of peace, we must maintain exclusive control of our armed forces, and redirect the away from aggression and towards defence. With our fishing grounds to protect and facing new enemies in the world because we have struck out for independence, they will have plenty of defending to do. ■



CPBML/Workers

Public Meeting, London

Tuesday 20 February, 6.30 pm

“Stop the EU War Machine!”

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

In the referendum campaign anyone who warned that a European army and a common defence policy were coming was dismissed by the establishment as a fantasist. Now everything is out in the open – and it's taking shape in front of our very eyes. Come and discuss. All welcome.

Disputes about staffing and pay are sweeping through the rail industry...

Guards battle still raging

STRIKES TO halt the removal of guards continue on many passenger franchises. As we go to press, the RMT has announced further strike action during December on Merseyrail, Greater Anglia and South Western Railway.

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) has backed the RMT's campaign to keep guards on Northern's trains. It is a key player in Rail North, the body that jointly oversees the Northern franchise with the Department for Transport. Indeed, not one council served by Northern supports driver only trains.

The chair of the combined authority's transport committee, Keith Wakefield, said, "The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has supported RMT's concern for passenger safety under the proposed driver only operation. Given the disruption to passengers we have urged that the Government intervenes to bring about a fair settlement like they have in Scotland, which gives assurances to vulnerable passengers."

The agreement in Scotland guaranteed the role of the guard on new trains and resolved an early dispute with RMT over the issue. A similar settlement has been reached with the Welsh government.

'Human shields'

Labour politicians in Merseyside don't see things the same way as they do in West Yorkshire. The RMT says the Merseyrail dispute could be easily resolved if senior politicians on Merseyside followed national Labour Party policy and supported the guards instead of acting as "human shields" for profiteering private rail companies.

The RMT's dogged campaign against driver-only trains seems to have shifted transport secretary Grayling into conceding he cannot stand in the way of its reaching deals to retain a second person. It remains to be seen whether the RMT feels able to give any ground over exactly what the second person on the train does.

'The RMT needs to consider its tactical options carefully.'



Workers

RMT protest outside parliament, 1 November 2016, calling for guards to be kept on trains.

The RMT has so far insisted on retaining the status quo. Its problem is that Southern has effectively managed to move away from the need for any second crew member on all occasions. Other companies may be able to force the issue to that point too. The RMT needs to consider its tactical options carefully to achieve its strategic aim of stopping the spread of driver-only train operation.

Pay

Virgin West Coast offered its staff a 3.2 per cent pay increase, broadly in line with other train operating company pay deals. But it then decided to pay its train drivers another 5.9 per cent. This was mostly justified by increased productivity, but about 0.9 per cent was to buy out a claim for a shorter working week.

Not surprisingly TSSA, representing white collar workers, and the RMT pointed out that they too had outstanding claims for a shorter working week, and they should receive 0.9 per cent as well as the drivers.

Virgin refused to budge. Incensed RMT and TSSA members voted overwhelmingly for strikes. The first, on 15 December, was solid, in a company which has seen little or no industrial action since Virgin took over from British Rail in 1996. More strike dates are scheduled running into January.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said "Richard Branson's Virgin is top of the TOC rich list having long enjoyed the benefits of publicly funded new rolling stock and infrastructure. This will be hard to stomach for workers striking on the West Coast...for workplace equality and justice."

Manuel Cortes, TSSA general secretary, accused Virgin of dirty tricks, cynically causing disruption by allowing an easily remedied dispute to escalate into a full-blown strike.

At Virgin Trains East Coast, RMT members were balloting in December in a separate dispute over pay and conditions. This followed acceptance of the company's 3.2 per cent pay offer by TSSA and Unite, after the company dropped the most draconian proposals for changes to conditions.

Of this dispute, Cash said, "With the Government lining up a £2 billion taxpayer-funded rescue operation for Virgin's East Coast operation, while the company are already raking in the best part of fifty notes per mile, the travelling public will be demanding to know why rail in Britain has descended into this outright chaos at their expense.

"We will not stand by while Virgin East Coast attempt to impose a two tier workforce with different terms and conditions for our members." ■

The government talks about having a strategy, but the real services cut, and taxpayers and passengers picking up the

A long way from a belie

THE PRIVATE TRAIN companies that run Britain's passenger rail services are finding life very tough at present. On the one hand, recently awarded franchises run by Stagecoach, Virgin and First are failing. And on the other, attempts by the privateers to cut costs by screwing down pay rises and having many more trains staffed only by a train driver are being doggedly resisted by rail workers and their unions.

The East Coast route has twice been handed over to private franchisees to run. Each time the operating company promised an unrealistic level of payments to the government out of their profits. And twice the franchise holders handed the franchises back. The state ran the services very successfully at a profit for several years in between.

Now, the third franchise holder to run East Coast finds itself in the same position as its two predecessors. The latest franchise holder is Stagecoach – Virgin holds a small stake and allows Stagecoach to use the Virgin brand for the company, known as “Virgin East Coast”.

Failure

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling is desperately trying to spare Stagecoach and Virgin's blushes as well as his own. He tried to conceal the failure of the private operators by suggesting that ending the franchise in 2020, three years early, was part of a new “partnership” approach to running railways. In reality Virgin and Stagecoach were going to pull out of Virgin East Coast anyway.

This so-called partnership looks much like the model in Scotland, where publicly owned infrastructure operator Network Rail and the private passenger train operator work more closely together to overcome the problems of splitting ownership of track and trains. In Scotland, this means both parties sharing a common head manager.

Grayling was less forthcoming about the fact that this move spared Stagecoach and

‘Passenger numbers have stagnated.’



Workers

Passengers at King's Cross Station, London

Virgin the need to make nearly £2 billion in payments to the Treasury. It wasn't missed by the stock market though – the announcement saw shares in Stagecoach shoot up by 13 per cent.

It would of course be much easier to bring both sides of the equation into public ownership and control as the rail unions are campaigning for – but Grayling and his corporate allies are ideologically opposed to anything that prevents the privateers from making a fast buck.

Network Rail, the government-owned company responsible for railway infrastructure, was created after the failure of the privately owned Railtrack. The Hatfield train crash in 2000 cost it over £500 million and exposed the disastrous state of the railway network under Railtrack's management.

Now that Stagecoach and Virgin have effectively received a massive cash injection, rail union RMT has seen the opportunity to press home its claim for an inflation-plus pay increase for the East Coast staff, and is cur-

rently balloting them for strike action.

But it is not just East Coast that is in financial trouble. First is reported to be losing big money on the recently awarded Transpennine Express franchise. It is believed to be consulting its lawyers about how it can extricate itself from commitments to increase its payments to the Treasury from £6.8 million in 2017/18 to a massive £178.9 million by 2024/25.

Passenger numbers have stagnated over the past year after many years of astonishing growth. The figures were dragged down by 0.4 per cent nationally because of a 1.3 per cent fall in London and the South East. Much of the fall was down to the bitter and long-running Southern dispute over the proposed removal of guards.

RMT believes that another recently awarded franchise, Arriva Rail North (known as “Northern”) is also at risk. Again this is because of an over-optimistic projection of passenger growth, which assumed a 25 per cent increase in demand over the 9-year

...ity is that overambitious forecasts are likely to leave
...e bill...

...viable future for rail

duration of the franchise. In the nine years up to 2016 rail passenger numbers grew by about 50 per cent overall. There were already signs that increase would not continue. Growth in regional railways, such as the area served by Northern, was much less – around 35 per cent.

This growth assumption had driven Northern, a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn (German state railways), to promise to cut public subsidy for the rail services it runs by a staggering 85 per cent, from £275 million to £39 million in 2025/26.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said, “Far from a Northern Powerhouse there is now a real danger of a full blown Northern rail crisis. First we have the East Coast franchise being terminated early and now it emerges that the Transpennine Express could follow suit and the sustainability of the Northern franchise is built on sand.

“The government is engaged in fantasy franchising where over ambitious projections of passenger growth, combined with the reality of falling passenger numbers, is a toxic combination that is likely to torpedo the government’s whole franchising programme leaving passenger services vulnerable to cuts and the taxpayer left to pick up the bill.” He went on to call for a full inquiry into the sustainability of the government’s rail franchising programme.

Ticket costs

The main reason for the sudden arrest of passenger growth is almost certainly the exorbitant costs of rail tickets at a time when living costs are increasing much faster than pay. And those ticket prices rose still further in January, up by 3.6 percent based on the July 2017 Retail Prices Index.

Analysis of routes into six cities found the average annual season ticket would rise by £100 from £2,740 to £2,840. That compares with an average rise last year of £44 for the same tickets. (These figures are an average across 85 of the most commonly bought annual season tickets for commuters into London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Bristol.)

Many workers in the public sector and elsewhere who have been subject to a government-imposed cap on their pay will find that fare increases may mean they will not

“The government is engaged in fantasy franchising.”

be able to afford to continue to travel to their work. And rising housing costs, especially for workers in the big cities, are forcing many to live further from the workplace.

Meanwhile, many private train companies continue to make massive profits. According to Cambridge Economic Policy Associates and the transport consultancy SYSTRA, the over-extended Virgin East Coast franchise received an astonishing £48.49 per train mile in 2015/16 from passenger fares alone – £708 million revenue in a year. Virgin West Coast, another Virgin-Stagecoach franchise, was slightly behind with £46.33 per train mile but overall earned more passenger revenue: £1.017 billion.

These huge sums outstrip even those received by the lucrative London and South East commuter franchises including GTR’s Southern. Even so, passenger revenue here was still a very healthy £34.81 per train mile for a franchise that has been widely criticised for atrocious performance.

The RMT has accused those franchise companies of putting private profit before public safety. And the issue that exemplifies this is the government-led move to have

many more trains crewed solely by a driver.

Grayling’s announcement in November of the government’s “Strategic Vision for Rail” largely recycles previous announcements despite claims that it will “boost jobs and housing”. It may propose to open a few rail lines closed by Beeching in the 1960s. It may be a tinkering with what many now regard as a completely broken franchise system, including splitting up the disastrous Govia Thameslink Railway of which Southern has been a part. But there’s not much in this strategy that’s a believable approach to the future of railways in Britain.

Mick Whelan, general secretary of train drivers’ union ASLEF, said of Grayling’s plans “There is nothing bold about them, and they will do nothing to improve our transport infrastructure, nothing to increase the number of jobs in this country, and nothing to help build the homes young people so desperately need.”

The solution to the woes of Britain’s railways is to invest massively, not just in the much-needed extra capacity that HS2 will bring, but in expanding the rail network as a whole. The profit motive and the franchise system hold the industry back. These are once again putting profits before safety. We must not return to the disaster-strewn period overseen by a privately owned Railtrack.

The bold strategy which would stimulate economic growth would be to return Britain’s railways to public ownership, where they belong. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of London public meetings in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL, continues on Tuesday 20 February at 6.30 pm with the title “Stop the EU war machine!” (see notice, page 8). There will also be May Day meetings across Britain on 1 May; titles and details to be announced.

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 send an email to info@cpbml.org.uk

What happens when the government introduces a childcare scheme and childminders are quitting – and parents and grandparents are

How politicians created a

CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS in Britain are a costly mess for working parents. Britain's proud history of innovation and quality in early years education was never matched by making it available for most families. Now the situation is becoming even worse.

In 2015 the Conservative election manifesto committed to fund 30 hours of free childcare a week for England's 3- and 4-year-olds. This was understandably greeted with cautious optimism by parents run ragged by trying to juggle childcare with work.

The last Labour government had already introduced a universal free entitlement of 15 hours weekly for 3- and 4-year-olds for 38 weeks a year (so no help during school holidays). This means that a child in any registered form of education or care can receive the free offer, whether with a private day nursery, state or independent school, playgroup, or childminder.

Children in state nursery schools and classes don't pay anyway, but these had to increase part-time places to 3 hours a day to meet the requirement.

Access to the free 15 hours is limited to where there are enough places available, although the great majority of parents who want it have managed to get it. But with the roll-out of the 30 hours from September 2017, the situation has been very different.

This offer is means tested – only parents both working more than 16 hours a week and earning in total less than £100,000 a year are eligible. Astonishingly, foster children are not eligible. Most importantly, parents have to be able to find providers who are offering the free places. And that is proving increasingly difficult.

The provision of early education and childcare in Britain has suffered from the

'The number of registered childminders in England has crashed.'



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Underfunded plans to extend childcare have left many areas with shrinking provision.

refusal of successive governments to plan nationally for it, or to fund it directly. It would be simpler and much more helpful to pay to provide free or cheap childcare, as is done in many other European countries.

Provision

Here, the government pays an hourly rate per eligible child to local authorities, who pass it on to providers, minus admin costs. Providers in turn have to prove, twice a year, how many children of the right age they have on their roll. Some areas might have lots of provision, others almost none.

This is where problems arise. The government has set the average hourly rate it will pay for a child at £4.94 – and that is generally below the actual cost of care.

Recent research by the Pre-school Learning Alliance found that 74 per cent of

providers will struggle to offer places at this price. The Alliance estimates the shortfall is around 20 per cent – and the government scheme does not allow nurseries to charge top up hourly fees.

There are regulations about child/staff ratios and the qualifications of staff which mean that care for babies costs a lot more than for 3s and 4s. In the past most private day nurseries have managed financially by balancing out what they charge parents for children of different ages. The 15 free hours offer stretched private nurseries' ability to balance the books. The 30 hours offer makes this far more difficult.

As a result many providers are offering only a limited number of funded places, making up the shortfall by charging fully for other non-funded places, raising the rates for hours above the 30 free ones (a full-time

scheme but fails to fund it properly? Nurseries are closing, picking up the bill...

a childcare crisis

place is around 50 hours a week), or charging for “extras” such as food and nappies which had been provided free.

The scheme began operation on 1 September 2017. More than three months later around 40 per cent of parents in London, East and South East England have still not been able to get hold of a 30 hours funded place for their child.

As if this were not bad enough, childcare provision nationally is shrinking. Since 2012 the number of registered childminders in England has plummeted by 22 per cent.

In the past two years alone Ofsted (which has a special section accrediting childcare providers) has shown a loss of 1,146 providers – childminders and day nurseries – from the Early Years Register. Four-fifths of those which have dropped out of the register had been rated Good or Outstanding by inspectors.

One reason is soaring property prices. Day nurseries are often housed in large Victorian buildings. In areas of high housing costs they can suddenly find themselves forced to close when rents skyrocket. Ironically, when their buildings are converted into much more lucrative flats, the new parents who move in discover that childcare is even more difficult to find.

Soaring costs

Childcare is particularly expensive in England. In London the normal daily rate is a minimum £55+ for a 2-year-old, more for a baby, and rates are not much cheaper elsewhere. The TUC estimates that childcare costs have risen over four times faster than wages over the past decade. Most women have no choice but to return to work after having a baby, to pay for rent or a mortgage, yet they can find it is not financially worthwhile. And anyway there might be few or no childcare places available in their area, or long waiting lists.

At one time many urban local authorities offered council-run day nurseries offering some free places, and ran nursery schools with all or some full-time places. There are now very few council day nurseries as cash-strapped councils are reduced to operating few services above what is statutory.

State nursery schools are considered to be the “jewel in the crown” of early years

Out of control?

THERE IS a wide variety of education and group care for pre-school children. The reality for the great majority is a nightmare of complicated hard-to-understand provision and of managing different arrangements. Control is hard to achieve.

State nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools have staff which must include fully qualified teachers. They are free for parents, but usually operate during school hours only.

Private day nurseries charge fees, but they offer longer hours more suitable for working parents. They must be managed by and include qualified staff, but rarely teachers.

Childminders charge to look after small numbers of children at home.

Independent schools may include nursery classes, sometimes with teachers, normally for a high fee.

A few employers provide workplace childcare, knowing that they can attract and keep skilled women workers, but this is vanishingly rare. Many women would prefer to keep their childcare arrangements under their own control.

Add to these breakfast and after-school clubs and holiday schemes for pre-school children, and the picture becomes even more complicated.

All providers must be regulated and inspected by Ofsted, but beyond them there is a world of unregulated and illegal group childcare. No one knows how common this is. ■

care and education, with the great majority inspected found to be “outstanding”, yet these too have been closing or threatened in recent years as being too expensive to run. Yet research makes clear their importance for children’s later educational achievement.

The sheer cost of childcare if it’s available at all has led to a massive growth in grandparent care. Just look at who is pushing buggies along the pavement in your area, or visit drop-in sessions for babies and toddlers, and you will notice many grey hairs on the carers.

The *Daily Telegraph* recently quoted an estimate by think tank The International Longevity Centre that around nine million grandparents are currently saving families in Britain an average of about £1,600 each a year in childcare costs. This figure assumes they look after one child each – yet many care for siblings too, saving even more.

Almost half of carer grandparents provide over 16 hours weekly, even though 39 per cent are still working. In fact, after parents themselves, grandparents are the biggest providers of childcare in Britain. Those who try to divide the working class by setting the older generation against the young never mention this (nor that one in four mortgages is part-financed by the owner’s parents).

Although many grandparents enjoy their grandchildren’s company, taking regular responsibility for caring for them can take a toll on health as well as time. Looking after healthy babies and toddlers requires quite enough energy, as young parents are well aware, but grandparents often provide back up when a child is too sick to attend their usual childcare. Looking after children with special needs is even more onerous.

At one time many women had the option of giving up work when they had young families. Now it is rarely a matter of choice. Of course it is good that many mothers want to pursue a career, but for women who have to cobble together part-time or casual jobs to make ends meet it can be exhausting juggling work and childcare, with the permanent fear of arrangements breaking down when children or carers are ill.

The patchwork of childcare provision, with its gaps and high costs, puts a strain on families. Why shouldn’t employers be required to subsidise or pay a national childcare levy? Workers in their trade unions could take up this demand as part of the struggle to improve pay and conditions, and for equality in the workplace. We need properly planned, reliable, good quality and free or reasonably priced childcare provision. This would greatly improve working lives. ■

Stop all this talk about higher productivity being the route to rise will capitalists be forced to invest...

No pay, no productivity

ECONOMICS COMMENTATORS have a way with words that tends to obscure the truth. When the latest set of official figures on investment were published at the end of November, the Press Association noted that the economy appeared “sluggish”. That’s overgenerous – the data show an almost complete lack of investment growth.

And before anyone starts shouting “Brexit!”, it’s worth pointing out that the worst performance in investment occurred in the third quarter of 2015, before the date of the referendum had even been announced – an actual decline over the previous quarter of almost 5 per cent.

The results of this dismal performance are clearly visible in another set of figures, those dealing with productivity – output per hour. When the Office for National Statistics released its bulletin covering labour productivity from April to June 2017, it estimated this had fallen over the period.

The decline in productivity was small – 0.1 per cent – but any kind of fall is really bad news, even though the decline was not uniform throughout the economy. Productivity in the service sector was estimated to have risen by 0.2 per cent. But that was not enough to cover a shocking 1.3 per cent fall in manufacturing productivity.

Officials from the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) said in December 2017 that productivity was a bigger challenge than Brexit.

“The big issue economically is productivity. If we could do something to address that successfully it would completely swamp the Brexit consequences, whatever they are,” said Sir Charlie Bean, its top macroeconomist.

Productivity is indeed the big issue. The OBR has been puzzling about it for years. Five years ago, in an article aptly headlined “The Productivity Puzzle”, it examined a number of possible reasons for the long-term decline of productivity.

“Machines are pricing themselves out of work.”

In the end it was still baffled. “It is unlikely that any single factor fully explains the fall in productivity,” it said. “The balance of the arguments...suggest that a significant proportion of the 15 per cent difference between the current level and a pre-crisis trend level is structural, although there is doubtless also a cyclical element.”

Which is all as clear as mud.

That confusion and lack of analysis probably explains why the OBR has an appalling track record in predicting what will happen to productivity.

In these grim economic times, anyone looking for a good laugh could start with the Resolution Foundation’s briefing paper (see <http://bit.ly/2oi2zCQ>) produced in response to the autumn Budget – specifically at Figure 1, which shows precisely how wrong all the OBR’s forecasts have been.

The real scale of the productivity debacle, though, is shown in the Resolution Foundation’s Figure 2. It comments, “The awfulness of the UK’s recent record on growth in output per hour is even more apparent when viewed over a longer period...”

That longer look shows that the past ten years have been the worst decade for productivity growth since...1812. Yes, 1812, the year nominated by *BBC History* magazine as Britain’s worst ever, the year Napoleon invaded Russia and the United States declared war on Britain, the year the prime minister was assassinated.

Strategy

While commentators on the recent official figures lined up from all sides to explain why investment and productivity are so low, the government produced its White Paper on Industrial Strategy – putting productivity front and centre.

“For all the excellence of our world-beating companies, the high calibre of our workforce and the prosperity of many areas, we have businesses, people and places whose level of productivity is well below what can be achieved,” wrote business secretary Greg Clark in his introduction.

He went on: “So this Industrial Strategy deliberately strengthens the five foundations of productivity: ideas, people, infrastructure, business environment and places.”



The government’s Industrial Strategy is full of initiatives

The White Paper is full of initiatives on this, that and the other, many of them laudable. But there is almost nothing about wages, except to assure us that higher productivity will lead to higher wages.

Social democrats have two answers to the productivity puzzle. Neither is right.

The first explanation is that the problem is demand – business won’t invest because people haven’t got enough money to buy goods. Yet industrial production since Brexit has been strong. The second is skills – productivity is low because there is not enough investment in training.

Tony Burke, assistant general secretary of Unite, says it’s no wonder productivity is dropping: “Our workforce is undereducated, exploited and demoralised.”

In 2015 Unite analysed manufacturing productivity in Britain, the US, Germany and France. “One of the biggest problems facing

higher pay. In fact, the reverse is true: only when pay rates



atives – but none relate to pay.

the UK is that lending and investment still have not even come close to their pre-crisis rates and this has forced some companies especially SMEs to hire cheap labour instead of buying new machines that would make them more productive,” it said.

It all comes down to the platitude that productivity is low because investment is low. And why is investment low? Their only answer seems to be that there was a financial crisis in 2008.

Nowhere does Unite address the question of why SMEs are able to hire cheap labour – because that would force the union to acknowledge the consequences of the free movement of labour from the European Union, and of immigration in general.

Most unions appear to believe that higher wages will flow from higher productivity and higher skills. It would be nice to see the evidence for this. The facts show the

opposite: since the start of 2008 real wages have declined in Britain by about 3 per cent, while productivity has risen (by a little under 1 per cent).

The big financial crash took place with the collapse of Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008. But the productivity slump was already well under way by then.

“Labour productivity – the economic output produced per hour worked – has, for many decades, grown steadily at 2.3 per cent a year. All that changed in 2007, since when it has stubbornly flatlined,” blogged Sheffield University Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation Richard Jones two years ago.

Free movement of labour into Britain from Poland began in 2004, and from Bulgaria and Romania in 2007.

A classic case study is academia itself. It is undeniable that the productivity of academics is increasing. A survey by academics’ union UCU in 2016 put numbers to this: 83 per cent of staff in higher education reported a rise in the intensity or pace of work over the past three years; in further education the figure was 95 per cent.

Shrinking pay

What has been the result of this rising productivity? Pay rates in 2016 were a massive 14.5 per cent lower than in 2009. While academic pay has shrunk, academic immigration from the European Union rose from 10.9 to 17 per cent between 2006/07 and 2015/16, according to Universities UK.

Blinded by their love of the EU, most academics seem unable to work out why universities have no trouble filling teaching and research places while morale and pay rates plummet. The answer is simple: there are plenty in the EU who earn a lot less.

When labour is cheap, capitalists will have less incentive to invest. Why should they? And labour in Britain is cheap, driven above all by uncontrolled immigration.

We’re always being lectured by our rulers that “you can’t buck the market”. And to make sure that wages stay low, they have rigged the labour market through free movement so that the supply of labour is, effectively, infinite. Wages, like everything else, are affected by supply and demand: when supply exceeds demand, the price will drop.

“Blinded by their love of the EU, most academics seem unable to work out why.”

All this may be a big puzzle to the government and the TUC, but Karl Marx saw to the heart of it more than 150 years ago. There is indeed a link between productivity and wages: not that rising productivity produces rising wages, but that rising wages produce higher productivity.

Chris Dillow from *Investors Chronicle* put in nicely in an article for the *Financial Times* in November 2017: “The flipside of people pricing themselves into work is that machines are pricing themselves out of work.”

Marx had already observed this relationship in 1865, in *Wages, Price and Profit*, a series of lectures he delivered in London. He noted that the rise in agricultural wages in England from 1849 to 1859 led to a rise in productivity. Faced with higher labour costs and unable arbitrarily to raise prices, landowners turned to new technology – introducing machinery of all sorts, adopting more scientific methods, and so on.

“This is the general method in which a reaction, quicker or slower, of capital against a rise of wages takes place in old, settled countries,” Marx said.

In those days, before mass transport, modern communications and free movement of labour, landowners couldn’t place a job ad in Poland and have a migrant workforce in place virtually overnight. Now they can, and they do.

Britain’s forthcoming departure from the European Union gives an unprecedented opportunity to the labour movement to re-assert control over the labour market. Instead of promoting free movement, unions should fight to stop the flow of migrant labour. Then and only then will greater education and training lead to higher wages and to a more productive economy. ■

A century after the Bolshevik Revolution ushered in worker lessons continue to reverberate around the world...

Revolution: which side are

WHEN FREDERICK Engels was asked in 1889, on the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution, to explain its significance, he declined on the basis that it was too early to say.

The 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution has been commemorated in every country in the world, with comment by political parties of every description, with praise, with support, with confusion – and every counter-revolutionary lie ever invented.

Any appraisal of the century since the Bolshevik Revolution must also consider its mirror image: a century of counter-revolution, still ongoing.

Here in Britain the Trades Union Congress has commemorated the Russian Revolution. This is fine. But we commemorate the Bolshevik Revolution, and there is a fundamental difference.

Rule by workers

The Russian Revolution was the coming together in February 1917 of myriad forces for change to sweep away Tsarism. The Bolshevik Revolution in October that year was the sweeping away of capitalism and of the bourgeoisie, creating the first dictatorship of the working class and peasantry in history. The world was stood on its head.

What was Tsarism? In short, the most reactionary, bloody, oppressive, anti-worker, anti-peasant, anti-people, anti-progress regime to have blighted the history of the world.

Everything belongs in a historical context. In Britain we finally destroyed feudalism, along with Charles I, in 1649. France had its great revolution in 1789. Russia lagged years behind.

In applying Marxism to Russian conditions the Bolsheviks were able to understand the unevenness and the contradictions inherent in development, and lead a great revolution.

Russia was a combination of reactionary forces: feudal landowners who retained serf-

dom until the 1860s; religious bigotry and backwardness truly worthy of the Dark Ages; and capitalism in its infancy but fuelled by French and German finance. Dissent was brutally suppressed, along with workers, peasants, women and the national minorities, who numbered over half the population.

What was to be done?

In the face of this oppression and ignorance, the task was straightforward: build a revolutionary organisation based upon Marxist principles and analysis. It had to be capable of uniting the workers' and peasants' movement under working class leadership to smash the system to pieces.

That is what the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership did, never deviating from focusing on Russia and building the Party.

Inheritance

The workers and peasants of what became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics inherited the revolutionary destruction of Tsarism, the civil war that followed, the defeat of the Allied intervention, and the devastation of industry, transport, health, education and civil society. They started with nothing. But in destroying the old system, the Bolshevik Revolution produced a reaction: the counter-revolutionary

'The world was stood on its head.'

scum which still feeds the blackest forces of reaction across the world.

From day one of victory, the enemies of socialism strained to throttle this new, unique workers' and peasants' state at birth. It has been estimated that in the lead-up to the Nazi invasion of the USSR, over 200 fascist counter-revolutionary organisations festered in the nations bordering the Soviet Union.

The ceaseless attacks by the world's bourgeoisie against what was the first workers and peasants state, its ideas and its practice, continue to this day.

It has been the same wherever people have stood up for independence, sovereignty and self-determination – China, all the Peoples Democracies in Eastern Europe, and even those which tried a parliamentary road, such as Chile. All have been attacked.

There is still undying hatred of Lenin, dead 93 years, and even more of Stalin, dead 64 years and the architect of the USSR. He promoted the building of social-

The aims of Soviet socialism

1. Build industry as the base for socialism.
2. Build the industrial base to defend socialism, being ready for the war that was coming and had been in the making since 1917.
3. Build industry where there wasn't any. Power generation, metals, transport, textiles, defence, oil, construction etc.
4. Build industry to liberate people – quality of life, ideas, thinking etc. Socialism is for the uplifting of life not levelling down.
5. Build education – schools, nurseries, universities, vocational education, technical education, art and literature, adult education, post-work education. There is no limit to the intellectual abilities of people.
6. Promote education to obliterate all

religious backwardness.

7. Eradicate illiteracy, lifting the cultural level and understanding of the most backward and downtrodden. Build parks, theatres, museums, libraries, sports facilities, train artists, musicians and writers, establish innumerable newspapers in dozens of languages and media outlets.
8. Build a health service. Provide pensions, workers' rest homes, holidays etc.
9. Establish the equality of women in all spheres of life.

Only a revolution genuinely committed to the interests of the people, to obliterating poverty and hardship would commit to such a course. ■

• This article is an edited and shortened version of a speech given at a CPBML public meeting in London in November 2017.

ers' power, the

Are you on?

ism and ruthlessly defended the Soviet state against all-comers – left or right, internal or external.

Driven by their racist ideology Nazis and fascists massacred peoples of the world. The Soviet Union united and developed its peoples to protect themselves, peace and socialism. You may have been part of a specific republic nationality but you were united as Soviet citizens.

The Soviet working class and peasantry crossed from the capitalist world into the uncharted lands of building socialism. They saw off the doubters, the armchair theoreticians, “the Old Imbeciles” as Lenin described the Old Bolsheviks. Asserting the new industrial Soviet working class was vital.

There could be no ready-made solutions for the Soviet working class. Nor are there for us in Britain, though the principles that guided them point the way (see Box, left).

They had to socialise and collectivise agriculture to take the USSR from the 16th century into the 20th. This resulted in a brutal civil war in the countryside as rich peasants fought against the socialist revolution.

Success

Of course, tactical mistakes were made but the strategic success of the policy was vindicated. The USSR was fed and capital was raised to assist industrialisation. The peasant of the 16th century became the Soviet citizen and worker of the 20th century, and the Soviet peoples defeated Nazism in the Second World War.

Under the Soviet constitution of 1936 (often called the Stalin Constitution, though never by Stalin), citizens had the right to work, to leisure, to material maintenance in their old age, in illness and incapacitation, and to education. Compare that with Britain in the 1930s – and today.

Every revolution since 1917 – China, Albania, Cuba, Vietnam and others – has been based on the principles and practice hammered out by the Bolshevik Revolution.

And every revolution lost must return to the issue of rootedness, of dealing with the analysis of real events, with the Party not becoming divorced from the class. Along with this, workers need to comprehend the sheer scale of orchestrated worldwide



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**КАЗАК,
ТЫ С КЕМ?
С НАМИ ИЛИ С НИМИ?**

Poster from around 1919 calling on people to take sides. Translated it reads, “Cossack, who are you with? With us or with them?” – the question is asked by the Bolshevik peasant, soldier and worker.

counter-revolution grounded in the heartlands of capitalism – London, Washington, Berlin, Paris.

Lenin described the dictatorship of the proletariat as “a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a more powerful enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by its overthrow...a stubborn struggle – bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative – against the forces and traditions of the old society”.

What lessons do we see for Britain today? First, we need clarity about class: there are only two in Britain – those who labour and those who exploit irrespective of how the world of work is cosmetically redefined. Exploitation is exploitation. Anything which divides us is the enemy.

We also need clarity about nation – we

need to take the boot of the EU off our necks as a class to be able to deal with our own bourgeoisie.

We need clarity about industry and our ability as a nation of workers to produce, and clarity that struggle through Parliament will never bring success.

We must prevent war. Never mind Trump – the EU beats the drums of war daily. Who is their enemy? Why, us of course.

We need to build the Communist Party. Our working class has been around a long time: we are not a Party looking at a blank sheet of paper. But we need organisation and it must permeate every aspect of our thinking and our working class. It is our life blood for growth and renewal.

The challenge is to change the world and we start by defeating our own ruling class and their allies in the EU. ■

Tenants at Grenfell Tower could not have done more to attract more than penny-pinching profiteers – a whole system had

Grenfell: no control, no a

AS WE AWAIT the outcome of the Moore-Bick Inquiry into the Grenfell fire, one thing should never be forgotten: that it was the tenants themselves who fought hard to prevent it, the Grenfell tenants and the Grenfell Tower Leaseholders Association (GTLA).

One of their last posts was entitled “Playing with Fire!”. In it the tenants warned: “It is a truly terrifying thought, but...only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord [the [Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation], and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of Health & Safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders.”

The GTLA could not have done more to attract attention. For years it published reports, sent emails, and blogged, while power surges caused smoke to come out of their light fittings, computers, washing machines and TVs, until the whole electrical system went into meltdown. For doing this, two of them were sent threatening letters accusing them of harassment. Both died in the fire.

Whitewash fear

Now hundreds of thousands of documents are to be examined including residents' correspondence warning of fire sent to the Council. Tenants suffering from trauma and loss fear a whitewash. They also fear signing away any right to an equivalent home down the line by accepting unsatisfactory rehousing now. So they remain in B&Bs.

The tenants rightly distrust both local and central government authorities. The whole political system that produced a fire just waiting to happen is still there – and is now expected to rehouse them.

Of course the inquiry will focus on the lack of statutory regulations regarding fire-retardant cladding. The Fire Protection Association wants this changed. British safety regulations in general are inconsistent. But who is qualified to set specifications? Who are the “experts”? That should be clear, but it isn't, so the inquiry will look at qualification to set specifications.

There was once a national body concerned with building control and materials, called the Building Research Establishment (BRE). In 1996 – when the EU was making



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Flowers left by a church near Grenfell Tower, west London, ten days after the deadly fire.

aggressive inroads into national institutions with the full backing of Labour and the unions – the BRE was put up for sale. It could have formed part of a proposed National Centre for Construction, but both Tory and Labour governments rejected the idea of a national body.

So the organisation that concerned itself with community safety in the event of fires ceased to be a national asset. Now called the BRE Trust, on the face of it a charity, in reality it seems to be a dubious global group of businesses, gift-aiding its business profits to itself. It is that same privatised BRE doing the Grenfell tests.

Nor is there a foolproof system of

accountability by either local or central government. In the absence of a national mass housing policy Kensington & Chelsea, along with many other local authorities, washed its hands of responsibility and created an “arms-length management” structure (known as an ALMO) for housing that played a big part in taking disastrous decisions aimed at saving money without regard to safety. This system is still in place and must be changed before similar disasters become widespread.

The Kensington & Chelsea Tenants Management Organisation, now belatedly sacked, is such an arms-length management structure. In 1996 responsibility for

tract attention to the risk of fire. But they were up against
d been designed to take control away from them...

accountability



Grenfell – and the Housing Revenue Account of £21 million – was transferred to it. There were politicians on its board, including Labour’s Emma Dent Coad, now so vocal in blaming the Conservative council. And there were eight tenant members, who must bear some responsibility.

For profit

This organisation was set up for profit, under laws that ensured the profits were non-taxable and that the whole outfit was exempt from Freedom of Information requests. It is a private company with appointed tenants paid to sit on its board.

It was this board that dropped the

original Grenfell Tower contractor to save money on its refurbishment. Meeting on 26 May 2016 the board discussed “Value for Money Procurement” and decided to put in place a manager to “promote and embed a Value for Money culture”, as required under a new EU Directive on Procurement Rules for Housing Associations and public bodies.

Here the GTLA were completely up against the Tenants’ Management Organisation, that in no way represented them. The name is deliberate obfuscation. Landlords and parliamentary parties don’t like independent tenants’ organisations, which they can’t control. They prefer to work with hand-picked, paid tenants.

We should not underestimate the role genuine residents’ associations can play in planning for better housing, not just on council estates, and not just in London, but on the streets and terraces up and down the country. Nor should they underestimate themselves, but play a part in upgrading Britain’s building regulations, which are clearly inadequate.

Class

Tenants’ and residents’ associations must draw up their own independent constitutions based on their understanding of the class-based conflict of interest between landlords and tenants, and on traditional British democracy. Where this awareness is weak, landlords control meetings.

But the emergence of tenants groups on the Grenfell estate shows that despite the multicultural nature of their estate, tenants’ instincts are to fight for their class interests against their landlords, however confusingly named. Unfortunately in this case the fight was too late. That lesson will have to be learned.

Grenfell was not a ghetto. It housed a cross section of the working class. It was built to Parker Morris standards on space – standards which Thatcher did away with. In the words of a Grenfell survivor (a chauffeur by trade, whose daughter overcame trauma to take her chemistry exam the same morning and passed with flying colours): “We loved our home in that flat. I invested in it.”

There were compromises from the start. Some of the original concepts of architect Peter Deakin which were integral to a sense

‘Even now many new blocks are going through the planning process with only one stairwell.’

of community and safety, such as a first-floor walkway connecting to other blocks, were abandoned. Grenfell remained unintentionally disconnected from its surrounding buildings.

The focus had shifted from social need to clamping down on antisocial behaviour. Grenfell Tower, with its single stairwell, had at that time two means of entrance and escape, but these were reduced to one, through one constricted lobby, as we saw in the fire.

Even now many new blocks, including luxury blocks, are going through the planning process with only one stairwell, and fire exits reduced to make way for shops and other commercial space.

But it was not building design alone that killed Grenfell residents. It was years of indifference from those in authority, poor maintenance, complacency, and the loss of control that comes from subcontracting and outsourcing to consortia on the other side of the globe.

The trade paper *Construction News* says 60 firms were involved in the Grenfell refurb. There had been a gas leak, and National Grid’s subsidiary distribution arm had installed new gas risers and pipes which were left exposed. Then in March this year the subsidiary was sold to investors including the Qatari Investment Authority, renamed Cadent Gas. Rupture of the gas mains added to the number of deaths.

Cost was also the reason given for not installing sprinklers. After the deadly Lakeland House fire in Southwark in 2009, the coroner’s recommendation for retrofitting

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 19

sprinklers was ignored. His report warned about maintenance work and renovations reducing existing fire protection.

Where there has been deregulation, regulate. Control construction and maintenance. It took the fire of 1666 to draw up the London Building Acts, with effective legal enforcement by surveyors and inspectors who took their professional responsibilities and expertise seriously, regardless of any defects of national or local government. A bit like the civil service. Grenfell proves the system of regulation and enforcement today is unfit for purpose.

‘A wholly preventable act of manslaughter.’

The Grenfell Tower was fatally compromised. The refurbishment was signed off without scrutiny, both inside and out. Residents pointed this out in 2013, and a blog in 2014 by a technical designer and campaigner pointed out the gap between concrete and windows (pulled forward) which created a funnel, hence the speed and ferocity of the fire.

Deliberate

Grenfell must be a wake-up call to the whole country, that radical change is needed. Described as a “tragedy” as though it were a simple accident, it was instead a wholly preventable act of manslaughter, part of a lethal chain of greed and deliberate neglect – they call it “managed decline” – replicated across Britain.

What happens in London could equally happen in Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham, Cardiff and elsewhere. Nine similar blocks have been identified in Salford, others in Portsmouth and Plymouth, also private ones in Scotland.

A fire like this could change everything. It could halt the headlong rush to put profit over people’s lives. But only if we make it happen. ■

PFI – lucrative and lethal

REMEMBER PRIVATE Finance Initiatives? These 30-year lease-back deals to bring public money into private hands are now notorious as very bad value for money. Over three decades, they have also been engines of obsessive deregulation to the point of criminality. They are everywhere.

The Grenfell cladding was one of the PFI projects. It’s not untypical: there are thousands of substandard PFI buildings – hospitals, schools, and in the private sector as well.

PFI started in a small-scale way under John Major in 1992, but were wholeheartedly embraced and developed by the new Blair government in 1997 as a quick fix. Now they are a source of righteous indignation, hence shadow chancellor John McDonnell’s probably over-optimistic promise to bring work back in-house. Labour wants power – so its own unpopular policies are glossed over as “Tory housing and regeneration policies”.

Camden too

The Chalcots estate in Labour-run Camden, evacuated so hurriedly after the Grenfell fire, is a PFI contract, still up on the contractor Rydon’s web page as maintaining the tower blocks for the duration of the contract – not only the cladding refurbishment but maintenance, servicing and fire-safety.

All this work went to the same contractor as at Grenfell, using the same subcontractors (Harley Facades and Lakehouse), which are already under investigation for malpractice. Another ALMO, Hackney Homes, signed off allegedly defective work by Lakehouse.

It comes down to professional standards and taking responsibility. In PFI projects designers are not in charge. Architects are employed simply to raise Right To Buy value, to be able to say a house is “architect-designed”. But if asked to be yes-men for the developer, architects can be quite awkward. And they expect a professional level of pay.

A year before the refurbishment at



C. Hoyer/shutterstock.com

Burnt-out Grenfell Tower, the day after the fire.

Grenfell the council role of Construction and Design Co-ordinator (architects department) was in effect abolished, and regulations were changed to make the Tenants’ Management Organisation responsible for health and safety.

Kensington and Chelsea’s Department of Building Control was still responsible for signing off the cladding via the Tenants’ Management Organisation. But since the architect was cut out on grounds of cost, Full Plans on Completion could not be submitted. Instead, the Tenants’ Management Organisation had to rely on the honesty of the contractor and subcontractors.

And there was on-site inspection from a visual point of view only – not subjected to close scrutiny. (Current building regulations allow this). The completion certificate states “Completed Not Approved” – because, the Organisation said, architect approval “was not required in this case”. ■

With Britain's independence movement facing new challenges, a fresh book looks how to fight, and win...

Diary of a nobody

Brexit: How the Nobodies beat the Somebodies, by Sebastian Handley, paperback, 160 pages, ISBN 978-1999715694, i2i Publishing, 2017, £9.98. Available on Kindle.

"MY NAME is Sebastian, and I am a nobody." So opens a slim but jewel-packed volume that sets out to explain how Britain overturned the establishment and voted to leave the EU. And it does so from a particular perspective – that of a relatively isolated campaigner in one of Britain's most Remain-friendly cities, Brighton.

In just 160 pages Sebastian Handley, a Brighton-based singer, songwriter and performance poet, has written one of the very best books on the referendum campaign and certainly the most entertaining.

Why did we win? "When the history of the Revolution [as he calls the vote] is written it will be tempting for someone like Max Hastings to simplify the story into a narrative where one individual (Farage or Johnson) led the peasants to a stunning victory. They didn't. The war was won not by one great leader but by thousands of nobodies who incrementally broke down a vast institutionalised lie."

As for Remain: "I would say there's only three things the Remain campaign got wrong: 1, Too monolithic [...] 2, Poor ground campaign [...] 3, Shit product. I can't put it any kinder than that." He concedes that the Remain campaign was "actually fairly strong but when you have such a bag of crap for sale, however passionately you flog it, there are only going to be so many people weak, scared or stupid enough to buy it."

What shines through is his utter conviction that the argument for independence "really was a progressive argument". As he observes, "The only reason why Guardian readers tended to disagree was because they conflated the EU with a progressivism that it didn't deserve, and Brexit with a right-

'The war was won by thousands of nobodies...'



Self-made sticker – showcased on the cover of Sebastian Handley's book.

wing agenda that we didn't deserve either."

After the referendum, many campaigners thought the job was done. Now, with the fight to leave the EU entering a new phase, and in the teeth of unremitting hostility by the establishment, Leave groups are being reinvigorated. Indeed, some have been formed by people who didn't campaign during the referendum but were shocked at the vicious attempts to deny democracy.

Reaching people

All this makes Handley's short book quite literally essential reading, because it looks at what works and what doesn't. He is particularly strong about social media and how to reach as many people as possible.

Handley suggests paying Facebook to promote posts: choose a few posts, decide how much you want to spend, tag them, choose the age/gender of recipients and press Go. Then check which got the most shares to help aim the next post.

Delivering leaflets door-to-door is one of the most effective ways to campaign, he says. It gets your arguments into people's homes. They see that your campaign is alive, and it bypasses the media.

You can get many more leaflets read by delivering them to homes compared to a street stall says Handley. But that didn't stop him setting up his stall and making contact

with new allies. Here, too, he has a tip: "One thing you learn in street campaigning is not to get embroiled in conversations with people who agree with you because that isn't winning any votes."

Towards the end of his book there is a telling photograph of the Brighton Brexiteers – fully six of them in a pub. Just six. "Is that why we won? Well, yes and no. The margin of victory was over a million votes so even if none of the Brighton team had done anything we would still have won," he writes. "But the point is that there were lots of autonomous leaderless ramshackle groups like us up and down the country."

In fact, says Handley, being leaderless was the campaign's greatest asset. In a particularly thoughtful section he talks about a *Daily Telegraph* article by Dan Hodges written towards the start of the campaign that concentrated on the perceived splintering of the Leave campaign. Initially, the article depressed him (because the splintering was real). But read his conclusions:

"Hodges' error here was to think the referendum would be just like a general election but just on a bigger scale, and that unity was vital, in fact unity was lethal. It was the splintering of the Out campaign that won it." He adds teasingly, "I will explain why later."

Buy the book to read this explanation. And to arm yourself for the battles ahead. ■

The high point of achievement for the British working class in the post war years that followed. But how did 1945 happen?

Highs and lows – from the 1930s to the 1980s

WHAT OCCURRED before the Second World War deeply affected working class thinking and shaped attitudes about the type of post-war society we wanted.

Wealth and privilege and glaring class inequality were seen as fundamental problems of British society in the earlier decades. “No return to the thirties” and “Never again” were common, heartfelt refrains during the war. People had fresh memories of the empty promises made by the ruling class and its government after the First World War.

The people enthusiastically embraced new aspirations for post-war society because they had intensely disliked the bitter backdrop of the interwar years.

Grievances were many – the mass unemployment that had persisted for two decades, the harsh industrial and political set-backs following the tactically inept General Strike of 1926 that took a long time to wear off, the indignities of the 1930s Means Test, the general decay, idleness and dole in the widespread depressed areas that included industrial Scotland, the North-East coast, much of South Wales, parts of Cumberland, the city of Dundee and so on.

By the end of the 1930s there were signs that the working class was emerging out of the economic and political depression. There were concentrations of workers in new industries chiefly in the south of England. After a decade of losses, by 1937 there were increases in trade union membership and even some industrial unrest. Also, 1938 to 1939 witnessed increased rearmament activity.

‘By 1943 more than a third of married women were at work.’

To win the conflict with Nazi Germany, the British establishment gradually had to remake the Second World War as a people’s war, a total war, where the potential of the people was unleashed as the bedrock of victory, whatever reservations the ruling elite had initially.

As the war took effect, the government struck a contract with the people. For its hard work, the people would receive a guaranteed job, a living wage and care in times of need. The demand for munitions and productive workers created full employment – an unusual condition under capitalism. Workers took advantage to strengthen their collective bargaining power.

Though the largely conscripted troops endured poor pay and conditions (only the previously long term unemployed would have felt better off), war workers had higher wages and better job security.

By the autumn of 1940, unemployment was virtually unknown in Britain. By 1943 more than a third of married women were at work too. Lots of factory workers were producing munitions, tanks and guns and earning better wages than before the war.

Suspicion

Mass-Observation was a social research organisation set up in 1937 which became very influential. According to its reports at the beginning of the war there was a widespread suspicion of government, which was felt to be solely representative of the failed ruling class. With the Churchill-Labour Coalition from May 1940, there was a concerted effort to widen the base of government and to govern in a different way.

During the war the government, rather than employers, controlled manpower, wages and working conditions through the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act passed in 1940. Strikes were deemed illegal under wartime Defence Regulations on the argument that the nation needed the



1934: March organised by the National Unemployment Council.

maximum productivity.

Despite that, by 1942 the number of days taken by industrial action was back to its peacetime high. There were more than 1,700 strikes in 1943 in engineering factories mainly producing munitions, tanks and aircraft and nearly 2,200 in the following year.

Production did improve but the working class also largely retained its independence. Aircraft production was taken under Whitehall control and by 1944 more than 1.7 million people were engaged in building bombers and fighters. Joint Production Committees between management and workers were created to increase war output, which was achieved. After the war these were shelved despite an economic crisis.

The Second World War heralded a period of full employment and comprehensive welfare provision. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, the British people rejected the war leader, Churchill, in the General Election of 1945 and voted in

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ed Workers Movement.

Attlee's Labour Party government that was to nationalise many industries and services as well as establish the National Health Service.

And yet this high point was followed just a few decades later by the low point of Thatcher's election in 1979 and the era of privatisations and finance capital domination of Britain. What is the explanation for this woeful transformation?

Our high point seems also to have bred our low point. Did the British working class come to believe that the post-war advances were permanent, that reform of the exploitative system did not depend on working class organisation but on legislative enactments and alliances between unions and governments? Could our high point have become the source of our weakness?

Can a working class ever cease to fight against the encroachments and domination of capital? We must always aim to be independent, collectively organised and building our network of power. ■

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

NO ADVANCE WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist held its 17th Congress in 2015. The published Congress documents are available at www.cpbml.org.uk. At that time the need to leave the EU was urgent, and on 23 June 2016 the working class of Britain took the vital step to eject the EU from Britain and entered a new epoch. The tasks identified at the 17th Congress remain as relevant as ever, and the decision to leave the EU makes the question of Britain's independence immediate and practical. The tasks facing the working class and Party are:

Develop a working class industrial strategy for the building of an independent industrial manufacturing base for Britain, including the development of our energy industry. Our capacity to produce is the basis for providing the public services the working class needs.

Rebuild Britain's trade unions to embrace all industries and workplaces. The trade unions must become a true class force not an appendage to the Labour Party or business trade unionism. Reassert the need to fight for pay.

Preserve national class unity in the face of the European Union and internal separatists working on their behalf. Assert workers' nationalism to ensure workers' control and unity. Resist the free flow of capital and the free movement of labour.

Oppose the EU and NATO (USA) militarisation of Britain and Europe and the drive towards war on a global scale. Identify and promote all forces and countries for peace against the USA drive for world domination by economic aggression, war and intervention. Promote mutual respect and economic ties between sovereign nations on the principles of non-interference and independence.

Disseminate Marxist theory and practice within the working class and wider labour movement. There is no advance to socialism without Marxism. Develop again our heritage of thinking to advance our work in and outside the workplace.

Re-assert that there are only two classes in Britain – those who exploit the labour of others (the capitalist class) and those who are exploited (the working class). Recruit to and build the party of the working class, the Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist.

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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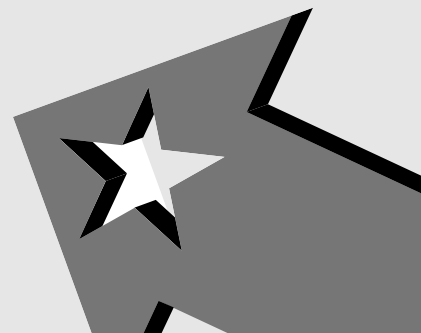
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email info@cpbml.org.uk

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We need a Cromwell now

‘Self-important MPs – and there are plenty of them – must be made to understand that any sovereignty that parliament holds is merely on loan from the people.’

THERE ARE few more nauseating sights in politics than that of ardent pro-Remain MPs standing up for their constitutional right to “scrutinise” Brexit-related legislation. For they are, virtually to a woman or man, the same MPs who spent years nodding through a flood of EU laws.

Such a torrent, indeed, that whole articles, books and doubtless PhD dissertations have been devoted to working out how many legal acts the European Union has produced to be incorporated into British law or British social and commercial practice.

Rough estimates suggest between 1,000 and 2,000 pieces of EU legislation each year for the past 25 years, and goodness knows how many before that. All of it has had to pass through the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee – a task so overwhelming that around two-thirds of all proposed EU legislation is accepted with no further action or comment (according to the House of Commons Information Office, Factsheet L11).

Now consider that the Scrutiny Committee has just 16 MPs. You’d think in a parliament where around 70 per cent of the members voted Remain that they would be clamouring for a seat to scrutinise all this vital legislation. Actually, no. In the current committee, just 5 of the 16 are Remainers. That’s how much they care for parliamentary scrutiny.

All of which sets a little bit of context for the vote in parliament on Wednesday 13 December, when by 309 votes to 305 they hobbled the government’s ability to negotiate the way in which Britain will leave the European Union.

“Theresa May has resisted democratic accountability. Her refusal to listen means she will now have to accept parliament taking back control,” said erstwhile opponent of the EU Jeremy Corbyn. This from a parliament that has for decades ceded control to Brussels.

Meanwhile, in an act of the deepest political dishonesty, Remainers from all parties took to the airwaves to declare that the vote to

Leave the EU was all about returning sovereignty to Westminster, and here’s an example of it.

Only the most cynical kind of politician could claim that the great referendum vote was about making Westminster sovereign. It was about bringing control back to Britain.

It was the people who voted to take back control. Yes, control in parliament, but only to the extent that the elected representatives of the people carry out the will of the people.

And the will of the people is absolutely clear. In the largest single vote for anything in the history of British politics, the people said, “We want to leave the EU.” Not, “We want to leave the EU but still be subject to EU laws.” Not, “We’d like to leave the EU but only if parliament has spent years mulling it over and agreed that we can.”

To be clear: electing representatives does not of itself make a system democratic. True democracy – the word means rule of the people – is a system of rule where the people’s preferences govern public policies. It requires elected bodies and elected officials to carry out the people’s will without imposing their own preferences.

Self-important MPs – and there are plenty of those – must be made to understand that any sovereignty that parliament holds is merely on loan from the people. The people are sovereign over parliament. Those who depart from the principle that parliament derives its authority from the people, and must serve the people, are on a road that leads to fascism. They have forfeited the right to rule.

It’s not the first time parliament has stood in the way of progress. In 1653 Oliver Cromwell famously told the so-called Rump Parliament to quit. “You have sat too long for any good you have been doing lately ... Depart, I say; and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!” he told them. Soon after a sign appeared on the doors: “This House is to be let: now unfurnished.”

We need a Cromwell now. ■

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