

WORKERS

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017 £1

SHIPPING UNIONS PLAN FOR INDEPENDENCE



EU No deal is best
SPAIN EU and regions
HOUSING Market chaos
CARE Crisis deepens
BROADBAND Slow, slow
PAY Call that a campaign?

WORK All about class
1917 The revolution
that changed the world
plus News,
Book Review
and more

WORKERS



No deal is what we want

THE SPECTACLE of a British prime minister scuttling back and forth to Brussels, cap in hand, displaying a desperate desire for a Brexit deal with the EU, is a shameful betrayal of the people's decision in the 2016 referendum.

At home we're subjected to Project Fear II, with the same dire warnings from the same old voices, now bitter in defeat, that we heard last year: that there will be Armageddon unless we give in to EU demands. They were proved wrong then, and they are wrong now. Of course, most MPs voted Remain, and want to somehow reverse the decision to Leave. They, with the Labour Party – "we respect the democratic decision to Leave" – are handing weapons to the EU to undermine Britain. This is treachery.

And as for the banks, let them threaten. Goldman Sachs might leave Britain? Off you go.

What does the EU want?

They want money from us, plenty of it, because they are afraid of how they will cope with the loss of the vast British payments into their coffers. If we promise money now, they come back for more, and more, and more.

The EU wants to force Britain into a transitional period, as long as possible, to prolong uncertainty here, weaken our economy, and give banks and financial institutions time to decamp.

They treat us with autocratic contempt and

insults – of course they do – exactly like they did with Greece. It's been dubbed diplomatic water-boarding. But we're not Greece and we need to show them why.

We don't need a trade deal. We trade with the US, our largest trading partner, under World Trade Organization rules, without a trade agreement. In fact, the EU's intended trade deal with the US – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP – was opposed here by many who now want a trade deal with the EU. Why? Ask the question and you encounter vague mentions of British jobs. Ask again and the argument falls apart.

No wonder voices here have grown saying the best deal is no deal. With the government at last talking of preparing for no deal, and a Sky poll finding 74 per cent feel no deal is better than a bad deal, the EU has become strangely conciliatory. They need a deal. We don't.

British negotiators should now withdraw all concessions made so far, return home, and prepare to leave the EU to trade under WTO rules while we plan for an independent future. If the EU wants to make offers, we'll consider them, but from strength not weakness.

In its history Britain has been prepared to assert its sovereignty and stand up to foreign tyranny. We must do so again. ■



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB.
ISSN 0266-8580

www.cpbml.org.uk [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)
Issue 203, November/December 2017



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Leeds bus pics (CC-BY-SA 2.0)



Optare demonstrator bus, 2014

Manufacturing future for North

THE VOTE to leave the EU has induced a frenzy of pessimistic media forecasts about the future of investment and productive activity in Britain. Yet such pessimism is confounded by what's happening on the ground.

For example, since the summer Yorkshire has seen foreign and British-based capital busy investing in post-Brexit Britain.

Boeing has launched production of new aircraft parts in Sheffield. The company cited the quality of skilled workers in the district as the key factor in deciding to site production there.

Toyota is basing the production of hydrogen cell technology at the Advanced Manufacturing Park in Rotherham. This technology will be used for its first generation of all-electric cars. And Optare, which builds buses in Sherburn-in-Elmet to the east of Leeds, has just won a £21 million order from New Zealand for 114 Metrocity vehicles, its largest ever.

Siemens in Hull is expanding production of a new generation of wind turbines for DONG Energy. This company is developing the Hornsea wind farms off the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire coasts. These are planned to reach a total capacity of 4GW in the first two phases, amongst the largest wind farms in the world. Meanwhile Drax, Britain's largest power station, has partly moved from coal to biomass and has applied to convert the final two of its coal-powered generators. Drax aims eventually to raise generating capacity to 7 GW, linked to 200 MW battery storage (twice the size of the vaunted Tesla project). Together this would provide on-tap energy to balance fluctuating wind and solar output.

Under the North York Moors work has started on the 1,500-metre deep tunnels for the Woodsmith potash and polyhalite mine. Opening in 2021, it will employ around 1,000 people with a further 1,500 jobs created in addition to those in the construction phase. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk.

RELIGION

It's secular Britain

THERE'S A decline in religious belief in Britain. Yet religious groups have a disproportionate influence over our education system and government.

The recently published British Social Attitudes survey based on interviews in 2016 shows 53 per cent of British people state they have "no religion". In 1983 the figure was 31 per cent.

The downward trend is likely to continue as 71 per cent of 18- 24-year-olds state they have no religion. Overall 15 per cent define themselves as Anglican, with only 6 per cent claiming to be practising Christians. Yet the bishops still retain unelected seats in the House of Lords at Westminster.

Self-defining religious groups run a third of publicly funded schools despite the evidence that young people are the most irreligious. Declining religious organisations resort to massive propaganda assaults in an attempt to recruit and radicalise. These are largely from overseas – for example Saudi Arabian money going to Islamist sects, and Jehovah's Witnesses receiving from the USA.

Britain is clearly a secular country and has been so for many years. The norm should be the separation of any religion from public funding, prevention of foreign funding, removal of all education from religious bodies, and all preaching to be in English.

Along with this all religious courts should be abolished so there is one law for all: no Sharia courts, no Church courts, no Jewish courts. It is impermissible to have any vestiges of medievalism, tribalism or witchcraft in Britain. ■

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



ON THE WEB

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

Carillion on the brink

Carillion, a British company running construction and facilities management services across the globe, posted a £1.5 billion loss in the first half of 2017. This has been followed by a retreat from outsourced and private contracting across the Middle East, North America and Britain.

Who should run the bins in Brum?

Bin workers in Birmingham have been in dispute about job losses for over three months. Action is suspended for now, but the dispute is not over yet.

RMT challenges TUC General Secretary on the EU

The RMT union continues to challenge the TUC's favourable and unrealistic view of the EU. The TUC believes that the single market is good for British workers and that the UK can remain in it after Brexit. Neither is true.

Yorkshire Academy chain quits

Wakefield City Academies Trust announced in early September that it is pulling out of the 21 schools it runs. And in Bradford, a pathfinder academy is in special measures within three years of being rated outstanding.

TUC: 150 years young

Workers need trade unions more than ever. Founded in 1868, the TUC is now preparing for its 150th anniversary.

Plus: the e-newsletter

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Volodya Senkiv/shutterstock.com



Ukrainian tanks in Mariupol, southeastern Ukraine, where heavy fighting continues.

The toll of Ukraine's war

UKRAINIAN ARMED forces fire on the civilian population of the Donbass on a daily basis. None of this gets reported in the British media.

But killing civilians is having a serious effect on Ukrainian servicemen's moral and psychological condition, according to local media. There are frequent reports of soldiers, committing suicide having returned from the "line of engagement", and of drunken incidents where grenades explode and kill after they have been thrown about by Ukrainian servicemen on leave.

On 23 September a soldier died in Kiev after throwing a live grenade. The explosion injured three other people. A day later in Kharkov a 23-year-old serviceman who had just returned from the fighting in the zone controlled by pro-Russian forces used a grenade to commit suicide in a stairwell of a block of flats.

These incidents and many others prompted the military psychiatrist of the Ukrainian armed forces, Colonel Oleg Druz, to say that 93 per cent of the participants in the Donbass hostilities from the Ukrainian army side "are a potential threat to society and need treatment". He paid for that comment by being removed from his post.

A spokesman for the Donbass workers, who do not recognise the EU-led puppet administration in Kiev, says they are bombarded every day. After the soldiers return home "they continue to see 'enemies' in their cities and destroy them along with themselves."

Brexit doubters here in Britain should look closely at what has been happening in the Ukraine since 2012 and then resolve to accelerate leaving the EU by all available means, along with demanding EU hands off Ukraine. ■

CHILDREN

Record numbers in care

THE ASSOCIATION of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has blamed welfare reforms, reductions in family support services and rising poverty levels for fuelling record numbers of children being taken into care.

The ADCS said austerity policies and an increasingly fragmented approach to public services are placing pressure on communities and harming the poorest households.

Official data show 72,000 children were in care in England at the end of March, up 3 per cent on the previous year, and the ninth successive year that this number has risen. ADCS president Alison Michalska, director

of children and adult services at Nottingham City Council, said more support was needed, including greater flexibility in the benefits regime. ■

POVERTY

Worst in London

LONDON HAS the severest poverty in Britain, a new study shows. The poorest fifth of London households own just 0.1 per cent of the capital's wealth, according to the Trust for London, which notes 58 per cent of those are in working families.

"Over 2 million Londoners are struggling to make ends meet. That's more than the entire populations of Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and Newcastle combined," said the Trust's policy director. ■

TRAINING

New skills centre

IN-COMM TRAINING has joined forces with Hyfore to develop an Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centre next door to its current site in Aldridge in the West Midlands. Hyfore specialises in producing workholding equipment – vices, clamps, chucks, fixtures and jaws – for the engineering manufacturing sector.

This will be a world-class training hub that will provide an extra 420 Apprenticeship Trailblazer places between now and 2022.

It will also provide more than 1,200 upskilling courses in prototyping, R&D, operational excellence and data analysis.

The new centre will be equipped with world-class Computer Numerical Control

(CNC) machine tools. (CNC is the automation of machine tools by means of computers executing pre-programmed sequences of machine control commands.)

It will also house a robotics line and fluid power stations (fluid power uses fluids or air under pressure to generate, control and transmit power), a dedicated electrical and electronics section, material testing, material handling and grinding capabilities.

The centre will also provide a 16-seater Mastercam and CIMCO (Computer Integrated Manufacturing Company) CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing) studio to help students to develop their design for manufacturing skills.

This is an initiative which should be replicated in all our major cities if we are to have the advanced manufacturing sector that an independent Britain needs. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Thursday 16 November, 6.30 pm

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

“100 Years after the Bolshevik Revolution”

CPBML Public Meeting

In 1917 the workers and peasants of Russia changed history. A century on, the ideas and thought that it inspired are still changing the world. Come and discuss. All welcome. Note earlier time.

North West bus pay strike

MORE THAN 2,000 Unite bus workers in 11 depots took strike action on Thursday 19 October over pay, paralysing local bus networks in the North West.

The striking bus drivers along with engineering staff are employed by Arriva, a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, the German state owned railways. This is the same company that RMT is currently in dispute with over proposals to axe guards on the local trains in the same area.

Depots at Birkenhead, Bolton, Bootle, Green Lane (Stoneycroft), Macclesfield, Runcorn, St. Helens, Speke, Southport, Winsford and Wythenshawe have all been picketed. These depots normally provide bus services across Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South Lancashire and North Cheshire.

The dispute is over Arriva's refusal to pay an inflation matching pay increase at a time when inflation has shot up to 3.9 per cent, but it is also about Arriva's divide and conquer tactics of giving pay increases to some depots but not others. Pay differences are as much as £1.73 an hour, and Arriva's latest offer could increase that to £2.00.

Unite regional officer Neil Clarke said: “Arriva...has huge financial resources. All we are seeking is a fair and reasonable pay award against a backdrop of spiralling inflation and soaring living costs.

“Our members are fed up with pitiful pay offers and Arriva's ‘pick and mix’ approach to wages where some depots get a pay rise and others don't. This has resulted in wage inequality across a number of depots and is in stark contrast to the company's claim to be an industry leader in the treatment of its workforce. We urge Arriva to put its money where its mouth is and stop treating its loyal workforce so abysmally and that it starts investing in the people who generate the wealth within the business.”

As *Workers* went to press, further 24-hour strikes were set for Monday 23 and Monday 30 October. ■



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MIGRATION

The truth is out

WHEN BULGARIA and Romania joined the EU the government said that we would not have an influx of workers coming to Britain and helping employers to depress wages still further. Official figures show the opposite – and it's still going on.

Data from the Office for National Statistics published in October show the number of Romanians and Bulgarians resident in Britain soared by 79 per cent in the previous two years.

Last year there were 413,000 citizens from the two countries resident in Britain, up from 230,000 in 2014. Some 80 per cent of the total were migrants from Romania. The majority from both countries were aged between 16 and 49 years, and all but 11,500 of those aged 16 to 64 were working. ■

Trade unions involved in British shipping have set their minds on what we will do if we leave the EU. In so doing, they are setting an example

Unions plan a future for



Jane Rix/shutterstock.com

Container and cruise ships in Southampton, Britain's busiest port.

AS AN ISLAND, Britain depends absolutely on shipping. It is reckoned that 95 per cent of all external trade comes in and leaves by sea. That's 496 million tonnes of maritime freight handled from ships at British ports, and more than 22 million passengers moved on short sea, continental and international cruise ferries.

For all that, the industry is in decline, short of skilled staff, and increasingly turning to other countries to supply labour. The

'The annual Day of the Seafarer could become a memorial event in the UK.'

scale of that decline is staggering. Sixty years ago Britain was responsible for 18 per cent of world shipping. Now it is 0.8 per cent – the word "decimation" doesn't even come close.

During the referendum campaign most of the organisations representing British shipping were in favour of staying in the European Union – with the exception of the RMT union, which represents ratings. The employers, through the UK Chamber of Shipping, said that membership of the single market had brought benefits that shouldn't be lost.

What benefits? Four decades ago, shortly after the referendum that confirmed Britain's membership of the European Economic Community, there were 90,000 British seafarers. Now the figure is below 23,000. It is set to go lower still. Over a third of UK officers are due to retire in the next ten

years, says officers' union Nautilus International.

With ratings the situation is even more dire. In the early 1980s there were 30,000 British ratings working at sea in the UK merchant navy. By 2015 it was down to 8,830 – and the RMT says that "the majority" of these are due to retire by 2020. Half of the ratings are older than 40, a figure that rises to 74 per cent among deck ratings and 76 per cent among engine ratings.

Note that there are actually 87,000 ratings jobs in the UK shipping industry. But as the RMT notes, only 10 per cent of them are held by people living in Britain.

It's a situation mirrored, albeit not quite as badly, across Europe. European shipowners use what the RMT calls "social dumping" – importing workers from low-wage countries and flags of convenience to raise profits. Only 40 per cent of the 516,000

ends to exploiting the opportunities that will open up when
to the whole trade union movement...

British shipping

seafarers in the European shipping industry actually live there.

That's where the politics of "free" trade and the "free market" lead: freedom for the employers, virtual slavery for workers.

A protest in Liverpool highlighted the fact that not one British seafarer will be employed on Atlantic Container Line's new fleet of five ro-ro container vessels – even though the ships are registered in the port.

If things go on like this, said RMT general secretary Mick Cash on the International Maritime Organisation's annual Day of the Seafarer in June this year, the day "will become a memorial event in the UK".

Perversely, none of this stopped the council of Nautilus International, when it met in April 2016 two months before the referendum on leaving, from agreeing that "the best interests of the maritime profession and the shipping industry would be secured by the UK remaining in the EU".

Opportunities

Since the referendum, though, the industry has been at the forefront of those in Britain planning to make the most of the opportunities of Brexit. Like many in Britain who voted Remain, they were never enthusiastic about the European Union, well aware of many disadvantages of staying, and using phrases such as "on balance" to justify their timidity.

Nautilus responded to the vote immediately: "The British people have spoken. And they've said very clearly that they wish the UK to exit the European Union." Then, in October 2016, it published its "Charter for Jobs", calling on the government and the shipping industry to secure the future of Britain's maritime sector.

The RMT, which had campaigned for Leave, also produced a strategy for jobs for British seafarers, focused around a campaign called Save Our Seafarers 2020, or SOS 2020 for short.

Launched at Nautilus's UK branch conference in Cardiff, the Charter for Jobs revolves around ten key points (see Box, right) – "an SOS to deliver on promises made during the European Union referendum debate in 2016, and prioritise jobs, skills and a decent future for UK maritime professionals".

Training is central to a future for British

'Plenty of young people would like to train for a career at sea.'

shipping. Nautilus wants the government to foot the full cost of training British seafarers – at present it is covering only 36 per cent of the cost of training, which makes Britain the second most expensive country in which to train.

The fact is that plenty of young people would like to train for a career at sea. Many companies report three to four times as many applications to train as there are places available.

Part of Nautilus's demand is for revised

"tonnage tax" commitments. Tonnage tax was introduced by the Labour government to increase profits of shipping companies by allowing them to avoid corporation tax. Instead, they are taxed more favourably on the basis of an assessment of notional profits based on the tonnage of ships.

If that sounds like a dodge, well, it is. Companies that opt for tonnage tax are supposed to sign up to a number of commitments, including one to train new staff. But as Nautilus points out, the number of officers being trained is insufficient even to replace those who are leaving.

Even worse, says Nautilus, some tonnage tax companies have no intention of employing British officers once their cadets have obtained their certificates of competency (CECs). The reason is simple: CECs are easy for non-UK seafarers to obtain, and these staff are cheaper to employ.

Continued on page 8

Nautilus's Charter for Jobs

1. Provide 100 per cent financial support for the cost of training UK-resident seafarers to avoid a serious maritime skills shortage within the next decade.
2. Review ship-owner tax relief schemes (Tonnage Tax), so the UK remains attractive to owners whilst promoting the training and employment of UK-resident seafarers.
3. Maximise the employment of British seafarers in UK shipping.
4. Develop a national maritime strategy with support from trade unions, government and industry.
5. Invest in UK maritime education and training so Britain retains its world-leading status.
6. End support for the Red Ensign Group of registers and encourage British ship owners to return to the UK Ship Register.
7. Improve the system for issuing foreign seafarers with Certificates of Equivalent Competency (CEC) to deliver more opportunities for British seafarers.
8. Apply the National Minimum Wage

(and the National Living Wage) and the Equality Act to all vessels engaged in UK waters.

9. Promote the employment of UK-resident seafarers on routes between UK ports including the North Sea offshore sector.

10. Maintain all existing health, safety, environmental and employment legislation following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. ■

• The full text of the Charter for Jobs is available at www.nautilusint.org



Workers

Continued from page 7

The current system, says Nautilus, creates a pool of non-UK seafarers competing for jobs against unemployed UK seafarers. Central to this issue is the matter of language – as in other safety-critical professions, such as medicine.

That's why the union wants all officers on UK shipping to meet the requirements of a single examination that would give the assurance that applicants have standards of proficiency in the English language, comprehensive knowledge of maritime expertise and of UK law in appropriate areas. And it wants the tests to be administered orally by a qualified marine surveyor – someone who can really judge what people understand and how they communicate.

This kind of test is often deemed inconsistent with the EU's principles of free movement, which bans systematic language testing of job applicants and allows testing only on an individual basis and only in "exceptional circumstances". But Brexit provides the opportunity to introduce it, and with it the principle of "host country conditions" – applicants from abroad should know as much about British shipping as applicants from within Britain.

British waters

Much attention is now being focused on "cabotage", sometimes called coastal trade, and here Nautilus and the RMT are putting forward radical proposals. At least, they are radical in the European Union – in the US they have been part of the law since 1920.

Talking about the need to boost the employment of UK-resident seafarers, Nautilus notes, "After leaving the EU, the UK will not be bound by EU policy and should therefore develop an equivalent of the United States Jones Act in UK waters." The RMT also backs a UK version of the Jones Act, formally known as the US Merchant Marine Act of 1920.

The Jones Act is the kind of law that the British establishment could learn from. That includes its preamble:

"It is necessary for the national defense and for the proper growth of its foreign and domestic commerce that the United States shall have a merchant marine of the best



20 October 2017, Liverpool. RMT protest at the "christening" of the Atlantic Sea – on which there are to be no British seafarers even though the vessel is registered at Liverpool.

'Free movement'?

FREE MOVEMENT of labour from inside and outside the EU has seen employers taking on staff at below even the minimum wage. These include P&O on the North Sea and Irish routes (which the RMT is fighting). And on Scotland's only ro-ro freight link to the Continent, from Rosyth to Zeebrugge, DFDS is employing Lithuanian ratings at below the minimum wage.

All this is legal. Uniquely for a group of workers in Britain, seafarers are excluded from legislation under the national minimum wage, and from equal pay legislation.

Ratings on the Cyprus-flagged ship *MV Daroja*, which operates between Aberdeen and the Orkneys and Shetlands, are paid just €3 an hour, says the RMT, which has been organising demonstrations on the issue in Scotland.

The RMT says migrant workers are paid just £2.40 an hour at Condor Ferries,

and just £2.25 an hour at Streamline working between the Northern Isles.

The RMT is responding through its SOS 2020 campaign. In a notable victory last year it forced Scottish government contractor Serco to pay at least the minimum wage to non-EU nationals employed through a subcontractor on the Seatrack service, who were being paid £3.66 an hour.

Nautilus says promises made during the referendum campaign about restricting the immigration of unskilled workers "must be applied to the shipping industry". It notes, "Shipping companies have increasingly recruited foreign crews to profit from sub-national minimum wage pay rates and this must end." It wants regulatory action "to stop unscrupulous ship owners exploiting foreign seafarers and discriminating against UK seafarers". ■

equipped and most suitable types of vessels sufficient to carry the greater portion of its commerce and serve as a naval or military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency, ultimately to be owned and operated privately by citizens of the United States."

Just imagine that being applied to Britain. It couldn't happen under the EU – but it can when we leave. The act says that

all goods carried by water between US ports must be carried in US-flagged and built ships, crewed by US citizens and permanent residents, and owned by US citizens.

It's a measure of how reactionary policy is in Britain that such legislation would be viewed as close to revolution. But if enacted here, it would transform employment, shipping, wage rates and shipbuilding as well. ■

The EU is standing to one side in the crisis over Catalonia. But the situation is also of its own making...

EU: making pain in Spain



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Barcelona 8 October 2017: demonstration for a united Spain.

FOR MANY DECADES the EU has had a policy of “A Europe of the Regions”, which leaches power away from national governments. EU regional policy provides funds for projects to be enacted by local officials at a regional level, largely bypassing national governments.

This policy is designed to destabilise member nations, the better to impose a pan-European structure. That way, they hope, the nation state will just cease to exist.

The EU has in this way stoked internal disputes inside many of its member countries. When these disputes flare up, as now between the Spanish government and Catalonia, Brussels then sits back and

‘When disputes flare up, Brussels sits back as conflict erupts.’

watches as conflict erupts.

The process was aided by the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009. Among other things it acknowledged explicitly, for the first time, the importance of regional decision making.

Every EU decision has to be passed to the Committee of the Regions for consideration. Every country has representatives there, but to reduce the role of nations the smaller the country, the more members, proportionately, it has.

Fake

Of course, the regionalism is fake: every member of the Committee of the Regions is appointed by central government. It’s a farce, too, because no one takes any notice of it, not in Brussels and still less in Britain.

The real power lies with the Commission and its control over budgets. In 2017, regional spending will account for over a third of the EU total: more than 50 billion euros, doled out through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

Unfortunately for them, some actually

believe the propaganda. In Scotland the SNP thought that it would get help trying to break up Britain. In Catalonia some might have thought the EU would “protect” them from the Spanish state. If so, they were wrong. Their appeals for the EU to intervene have been ignored.

The last thing the European Union wants is a rash of new mini-states. Regionalism, yes. Separatism – that’s another thing. The only kind of nationalism they want is the baying euro-nationalism based around the EU flag.

The EU is understandably wary of creating multiple new nations out of existing ones. Kosovo’s application to join the EU, for example, has long been blocked by among others Spain (no doubt with Catalonia, Andalusia and the Basque Country in mind).

And at the back of everyone’s minds is the awareness that Germany and Italy are less than two centuries old, with strong regional differences.

The EU is fomenting discord. It is the problem, not the solution. Nobody should interfere in matters that are the concern of the Spanish people. ■

Britain could have led the world in fibre broadband. Instead, market shut development down – and are still holding back t

How market madness is

FOR RHETORIC about making the best-connected city in Europe you can't do better than visit the London Mayor's website. But a different story is told by a report on connectivity in London from the London Assembly's Regeneration Committee: "London's success and international competitiveness," it says, "are under threat because of sub-standard digital connectivity."

And it's not just London. In Spain, as the regeneration committee points out, 83 per cent of all its buildings are connected to pure fibre. In Britain, the figure is just 3 per cent or even less. The Committee also notes that in terms of overall connectivity London, ranks in the bottom five British cities, with 73.6 per cent of 4G coverage, and 30th out of 63 cities across the country in terms of high-speed broadband coverage.

Nationally, 1.4 million homes and businesses can't get broadband speed higher than 10 megabits per second (Mbps). Not all of these are in remote rural areas: there are such areas in the City of Westminster.

Essential

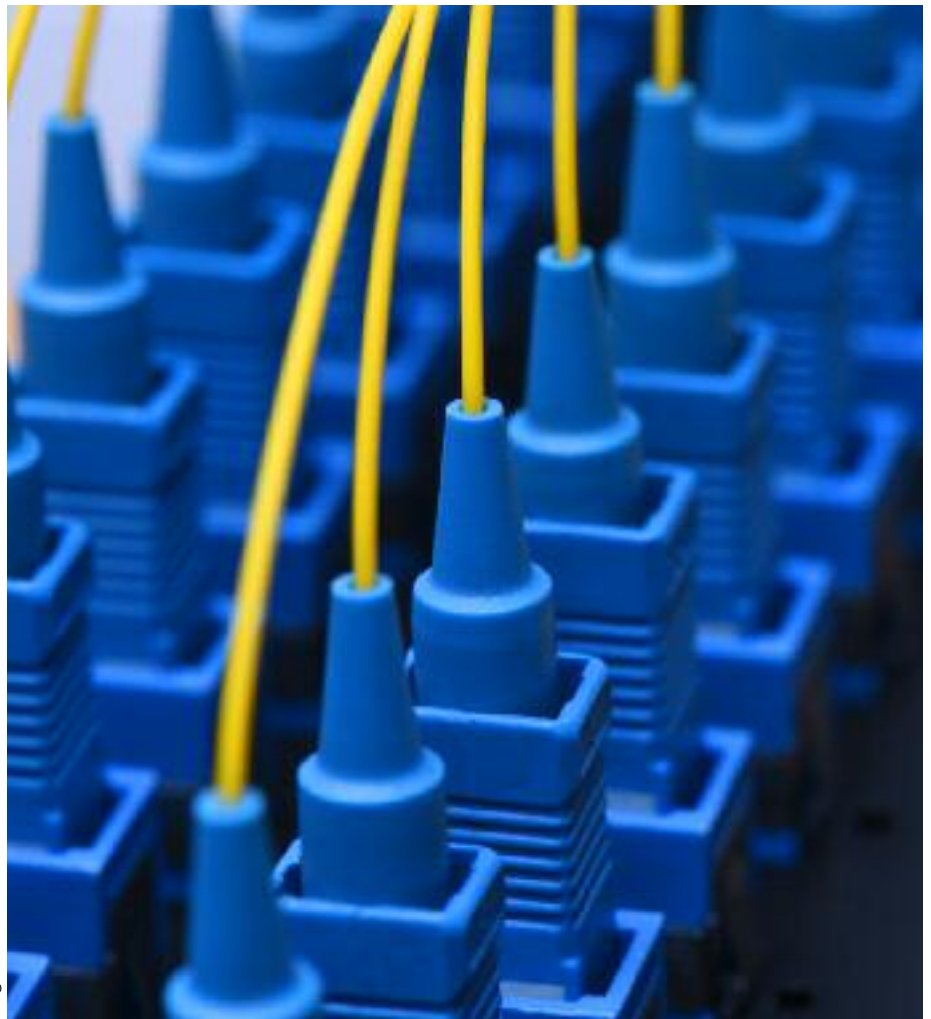
In 2015, nearly 20 per cent of the country's business turnover, £533 billion, took place online. Sales using Electronic Data Interchange were worth £320.1 billion, and £141.7 billion of these were in the manufacturing sector. Fast, functioning broadband is not a luxury: it is essential to industry.

The stifling of our computer and technical industries by capitalism dates back into the last century. In the 1960s the government stopped the possibility of significant British semiconductor production, sponsoring a merger of GEC, AEI and English Electric and ceding the ground to Asia. In 1971 GEC closed down British factories making standard logic chips, the basic microprocessors.

Then it got even worse. Having given up on making chips, the government set about sabotaging the country's tech infrastructure.

Engineers recognised way back in the 1970s that the copper wire which supported existing telephony was not fit for the future. BT, in those days publicly owned, began to plan for fibre connections.

The fibre revolution started. In a six-year programme, Britain installed more fibre per capita than any other nation, and built facto-



Flegere/shutterstock.com

An impossible dream? Fibre optic connectors.

ries to make the necessary cabling and other equipment. The world's first wide area fibre optic network was set up in Hastings in 1990. Even then, BT had worked out how to supply fibre to homes cheaper than copper.

And then it stopped. When Thatcher finally understood what was going on, she crushed it, appalled that so much progress – and power in the future – would be carried out in the name of a nationalised company.

The story sounds like the imaginings of conspiracy theorists, but it has been thoroughly documented by Dr Peter Cochrane, BT's technical director at the time.

BT was told to halt its fibre development. In the name of "competition", so that Japanese and American cable companies

could get in on the act. The two factories BT had built in Birmingham and Ipswich were sold off to Fujitsu and HP, and the assets were shipped out to South East Asia.

Immediately, Britain fell behind. Today, the full fibre cabling which BT was set to

'When Thatcher finally understood what was going on, she crushed it.'

hostility to nationalised industries and blind faith in the
the country's productive forces...

s throttling broadband

achieve two decades ago, remains a dream.

Comparisons with continental Europe, widely used by the government when they talk of targets for broadband availability, don't tell anything like the whole story. Indeed, one expert describes them as pointless. Truly international comparisons, with Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, show a very different picture.

British fibre broadband is mostly FTTC, Fibre To The Cabinet, rather than Fibre To the Home, FTTH (or more widely, including businesses, FTTP, Fibre to The Premises). FTTC provides a fast network for part of any packet's journey. But in most of the country the final leg, from the box in the street to the premises, is still on copper wire, outmoded fifty years ago.

Copper is slow and prone to interference and signal degradation. It's responsible for Britain's lamentably low broadband speeds. And, experts warn, it is freezing Britain out of cloud computing.

The government obscures the reality of the situation by using European Commission definitions of different standards for broadband speed. It defines super-fast broadband (still delivered to the premises by copper-wire) as a speed in excess of 24 Mbps, though Ofcom, the regulator, uses a definition of more than 30 Mbps. When it comes to ultra-fast broadband, the government defines it as speeds in excess of 100 Mbps, while Ofcom uses a standard three times faster, of speeds in excess of 300 Mbps.

In fact, 1.4 million British homes and businesses cannot get anything faster than 10 Mbps. The average fixed line broadband download speed is 16.9 Mbps. Some 45,000 businesses are still using dial-up connections, says the Federation of Small Businesses.

Just 2 per cent of the country can get ultrafast broadband, while 70 per cent of Japan and 60 per cent of South Korea have it. South Korea aims for a 1 Gbps network (1,000 Mbps) by the end of 2017.

A look at the international league tables for average broadband speeds shows that only three countries in the top ten are in the EU. South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore dominate. In the peak speeds table, only one EU member, Sweden, appears in the list, down in tenth place.

'Even when acceptable speeds are available, take-up is low.'

The solutions offered by British governments have been inadequate in the extreme. For people in those areas of the country without broadband speeds of at least 2 Mbps, the Better Broadband Scheme was supposed to bring them online. But this offered a subsidised satellite connection, which could not match the speed of fibre broadband, had issues with latency, and was sensitive to bad weather (a big drawback in Britain). Targets have been set and revised, and dates put back. "The market", which was supposed to solve the problem, has signally failed.

Excluded

Although the areas with the lowest speeds include parts of Britain's major cities – in London and Manchester less than 50 per cent have access to so-called superfast broadband – the government excluded urban areas from the Superfast Programmes, claiming that "commercial competition already exists in these locations". For others, it has been left to "community-led solutions", under which a community has to fund-raise to meet the cost of installing fibre.

Don't worry, say the evangelists of the market. The market will provide. The market will set you free. Except it doesn't.

Even when acceptable speeds might be available, in 89 per cent of the country (if you believe the government's publicity) take-up is low, with only 31 per cent using them. The reasons for this are clear: reliance on the market to solve the problem of connectivity means that access is expensive.

The big broadband companies sell their products to workplaces and homes with confusing contracts and terms and conditions, service is poor and unreliable, speeds slump at peak times when more people go

online, and support is outsourced abroad. Ofcom reports that it takes an average of 13 days for a new broadband service to be installed and working.

There was talk of imposing a Universal Service Obligation on broadband providers, and a watered-down version found its way into the Digital Economy Bill in 2016. But when the House of Lords increased the threshold proposed from 10 Mbps to 30 Mbps, the government struck out the Lords amendment.

The universities could play their part. In the USA, development of large-scale networks was driven by defence – ARPANET, the 1960s precursor of the Internet, was a project of the US Department of Defense. And in Britain, in the 1990s, the universities did take the lead.

Ignoring the artificial division of Britain into England, Scotland and Wales, they built a truly national infrastructure for university finance and administration, the joint academic network (JANET), following up with a high-speed version, Superjanet. If this were to be developed, and put at the disposal of the national economy, universities would have found a role, one far more useful than exploiting their students for fees, promoting vanity-projects overseas, and paying their vice-chancellors grossly inflated salaries.

Unsurprisingly, a great fuss is made about "digital skills" and "digital literacy", as if Britain's backwardness in technology was the fault of the stupid workers. In fact, British technical skills are of a high order, but we need a plan to ensure that those skills are passed on to the next generations, in schools and apprenticeships.

Could there be a better example of capitalist relations of production acting as a brake on the development of the means of production? At present, the responsibility for broadband provision sits with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, a measure of the importance successive governments allocate to it. It is time to transfer the responsibility to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

BT's Chief Executive estimated the cost of FTTP to be around £28 billion. A considerable investment, clearly, but one that would pay for itself in time, unlike the huge sums still leached away to Brussels. ■

Suddenly, politicians seem to be wanting to talk about work. work. Just as long as there's no contradiction between employ

Shh...don't mention the c



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Uber bicycle delivery rider, London

EVERYONE HAS been talking about work. Matthew Taylor's *Good Work: Review of modern working practices*, commissioned by the Prime Minister and published in June, was followed up by the TUC's Great Jobs Agenda and the Mayor of London's Good Work Standards. All this has been set against the debate over the so-called Uber economy, workers' rights (or not) in the workplace and the fairy tale that the EU has secured workers' rights for the last 40 years.

We have been here before. There are over 30 million workers in Britain and we know a lot more about work than any of the above.

The same issues prevail now, under parasitic finance capitalism, as in its earliest days – resistance or exploitation; the fight for wages or the maximising of profits.

The Taylor report is full of platitudes and says very little. Consider its summary: 1) wages – based upon the living wage and benefits, hence ensuring wages remain at the lowest legal minimums – but it's really about fairness. You can be low paid with no future but still be treated with respect and decency. 2) Employment itself – let's ensure we have a healthy and happy workforce. Smile, have a good day while the employer shafts you. 3) Design of work – to maximise productivity with the lowest labour costs. 4) Citizenship – we are no longer workers but citizens and citizenship comes with respect, trust, enabling, and responsibility. 5) Fairness (again) – how business models are allowed to develop and respond to market demands. Fairness to the employer.

In a nutshell: "The most important fac-

tors determining people's experience of work lie in the relationship between those who hire, employ and manage on the one hand, and those whose services they employ on the other."

Marx and Engels

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels were more succinct back in 1848: "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeois and Proletariat." Simply put: those who sell their labour power and those who exploit the labour of others. The class contradiction permeates every aspect of industrial relations and workplace rights – the balance of forces between those who work and those who exploit work.

Low wage work, minimum wage work, gig work, any kind of employers and workers...

class struggle



in Britain compulsory regulation to control hours, the working day, exploitation and so on began in the 14th century not just in the fight against Thatcher in the 1980s.

The Taylor report continues with a plea “for responsible corporate governance”. Over 600 years of fighting for worker’s rights rather mocks the responsible corporate governance myth.

The living wage is defined as a powerful tool to raise the financial baseline of low paid workers. But the living wage plus its benefits element is also acknowledged as the key factor in what is termed “in-work poverty”. Such in-work poverty contributes to over 15 million working days lost due to stress, anxiety or depression.

Re-definitions

What does the report define as the high level indicators of quality for work? 1) wages 2) employment quality 3) education and training 4) working conditions 5) work/life balance 6) consultative participation and collective representation. In practice, the base line is the living wage/national minimum wage. Employment quality is characterised by the ever-growing use of zero hours contracts and repeated re-definition of what the term “worker” means so as to remove minimal employment rights.

The number of those in employment using work time for education and training courses has fallen from 140,000 in 1995 to 20,000 in 2014, and the working conditions of British workers have also plummeted. Work/life balance has taken a big hit in this era of long hours, low wages, and flexibility only in the interests of the employer.

Last of all the Taylor report recognises the need for workers to represent themselves though not just by trade union organisation, but by whatever the employer deems fitting. So we see mere lip service, with “rights” governed by individual employment protections which depend on the legal status of a worker’s employment or contractual arrangements: a minefield, then.

Laughably, the Taylor report acknowledges “that the government must take steps to ensure flexibility does not benefit the employer, at the unreasonable expense of the worker...” This rather contradicts the pleas for responsible corporate governance!

‘A useful starting point would be for the unions to get off their knees.’

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of flexibility is the recognition that employers are consistently avoiding paying their national insurance taxes. Instead of £60 billion of tax being raised by employing workers directly and permanently, employers use self-employment and false employment.

The TUC’s “Great Jobs Agenda” manages, in its mercifully brief five pages, to largely echo the Taylor report on fairness and respect. But one in ten workers – three million of us – are now defined as facing insecurity at work as a result of zero hours contracts and other ruses.

More critical is the fact that real wages are lower in 2017 than in 2008 and expected to decline still further in real terms, by 1.1 per cent over the next 12 months.

The TUC made a feeble attempt to reinvigorate its “Britain still needs a pay rise” campaign with a lobby of Westminster on 17 October. A useful starting point would be for the unions to get off their knees and stop asking the TUC to do what they have failed to do.

Fair?

Also mirroring the Taylor report, the Mayor of London’s Good Work Standard stresses the “new compact” with the employers, supposed to make London a “fairer” place. Like Taylor, the last consideration of the report is the trade unions. The Mayor wants employers that pay the living wage to be rewarded with a reputational boost – by being “ethical employers”.

The challenges for us as workers, and for our trade unions, remain the same as in the days of Marx: breaking out of the wages system, challenging the very reason for the existence of the capitalist mode of production and , asserting our interests as workers for ourselves. ■

From its summary the Taylor report then degenerates into management gobbledegook. Examples of this include “platform-based working”, “workers as dependent contractors”, greater flexibility and of course fairness, how to reduce wage costs by using a latter-day version of piece working. All of which were extensively analysed and criticised 150 years ago in Marx’s *Capital*, Chapter Ten, “The Working Day”.

Marx details the fight by workers for wages, hours, piece rates, defining working time, control over the working day, regulation of the workplace. The trades cited then may have changed to an Uber taxi or Deliveroo cyclist of today but the principle remains the same.

Those who go on about the EU having delivered workers’ rights should reflect that

After Brexit, we must seize the opportunity to roll back private capital to rethink Britain's housing....

They call it a housing m

"WE NEED a revolution, man" – these are the words of an angry resident of the Lancaster West estate to a journalist, following the Grenfell Tower fire in June. Indeed. Well there's no revolution without a plan.

After the vote for independence from the EU we need to develop a national plan for housing – one that does not depend on "the market" in general, and certainly not the EU Single Market with its free movement of labour, and that other vaunted freedom, of capital, which has created such a gulf between London and the regions.

Many assume EU membership is irrelevant to housing, being a domestic issue, but all the basic tenets of the EU impact on our ability to house our people. Leaving means we are free to make a fresh start.

The government says Britain needs a million new homes by 2020, and the housing market must be encouraged to provide them. The implication is that developers must be given free rein, allow building everywhere they want to build. But when we look at the housing "market" all we see is chaos. We certainly don't want more of the same.

Many young people today are self-employed and working in the casual economy, choosing to live as singles and as single parents, stigmatised by mortgage lenders. Home ownership does not even appear on their radar. Renting is the only option, but there is probably nothing they can afford to rent.

What about social housing then? The reality is that over the last 30 years or more, the market has come to subsume social housing. The term "affordable housing" has taken its place; the words trip off the tongue of parliamentarians, who have lost touch with the cost of living. We are in the era of the unaffordable affordable. It's a total mismatch between housing costs and wages

'When we look at the housing "market", all we see is chaos.'

and a bonanza for foreign investors.

The housing market is rife with corruption. House builders like Bovis water down design codes. They rake in money before houses are signed off for quality so that an incredible 98 per cent of buyers report defects and are then bought off with discounts to keep them quiet. To resolve disputes, builders are paid off by their own standard-setting body the National House Building Council. Cosy relationships riddle the construction industry, so standards are not upheld.

Homes are built not for need but as investments. "My home is my pension" is a common refrain. With government incentives such as tax concessions for Airbnb letting, workers are sucked into landlordism – a substitute for work and for a working class fight for pay and conditions including pensions.

Land is banked – hoovered up and drip fed onto the market to maximise profits. Local people and local plans are overridden. There is the scourge of infill. Back gardens and even courtyards are at risk.

Corruption

Councils, who can decide these issues, are also often corrupt. A BBC Report claimed that in 2016 under Section 106 of the new Housing and Planning Act, Kensington and Chelsea had legally accepted a bung from developers of £47.3 million in lieu of affordable housing, and had built only 336 affordable homes since 2011. You may go to the Town Hall, where you are allowed to speak for a maximum of five minutes before a planning committee, which may also have approved flammable cladding.

The Red Tape Initiative is linked to the Policy Exchange think tank which in 2013 called for demolition of all high-rise estates built between the 1950s and 1980s – 360,000 council homes and a million residents. In 2012 it published the paper *Ending Expensive Social Tenancies*, an aim it said could be achieved using receipts from properties which had been sold off, to build "affordable" housing.

Four years later, this same document passed into UK law as Chapter 3, Part 4, of the 2016 Housing and Planning Act, thereby adding legal force to the plan to move from



Ms Jane Campbell/shutterstock.com

19 June 2017, London: Local residents demanding

public to private, and much higher rents.

Conservative housing policies have become infamous after the Grenfell fire. The role played by privatised management and Town Hall corruption and unaccountability have been exposed in the case of Kensington and Chelsea, and recognised as more widespread. And Labour policies for decades have also been to extend the role of the market, withdraw from responsibility for housing, and favour landlords over tenants. Using the excuse of lacking money,

privatisation, the market, and the free movement of labour and

market, but it's just chaos



Justice hold a silent march in the streets that surround Grenfell Tower.

they also enter sweetheart deals with developers. The London mayor has been squeezing out industrial sites that provide much-needed jobs in favour of “affordable” homes, easing requirements for planning permission to allow developers to move in.

Housing policy emanating from successive governments has created an almighty mess. It makes no sense, unless we understand the desperation of capitalism to acquire a new lease of life. EU liberalisation, privatisation, freeing up the market, was the

shot in the arm. Brussels and its court would assume responsibility for things the nation state had previously done. Successive British governments heaved a sigh of relief and washed their hands of any duty of care.

London mayors, Labour and the unions say build more houses, let the population explode, welcome migrants. They too unveil plans for “affordable” homes which even those in relatively well paid jobs find unaffordable – either to rent or to buy. So, still an almighty mess.

After Brexit, we can take control. Where there has been deregulation, regulate. Control construction. It took the fire of 1666 to realise the need for that. So the London Building Acts were drawn up, 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. All this has been thrown away, as demonstrated by Grenfell.

We have to restore housing to its proper use – a place to grow up in, with space for homework. A place to come back to after work and recharge the batteries. Space outside too, for play and recreation. Between the tower blocks – if we must have tower blocks. Some people like them. One in seven families had no access to green space last year.

Derelict

Where there are no longer jobs because industry has gone, houses lie empty and become derelict. There are as many empty homes as homeless people. 279,000 empty homes: 250,000 homeless people. 20,000 more empty than 6 months ago. Local authorities are doing nothing to seize them. Why not use their powers? Excuses abound. A similar situation exists in Scotland and Wales. Empty businesses such as pubs (once the focus of after-work socialising) also go to rack and ruin or are turned into luxury flats.

The whole economy needs to be reorganised post Brexit – for need, not profit. The regeneration of fishing communities that will follow Brexit needs housing. The industrial use of lithium in Cornwall (required for electric cars) – needs housing for local people, not second homes.

We must restore regional and generational balance, end the deprivation and lack of investment in our towns and villages, and renovate good housing outside London. Housing infrastructure and jobs must grow together – and schools, parks, shows, medical centres and transport links. Housing is no good without all the amenities.

The right to buy reduces stock and encourages working class profiteers. And it

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results in different rules for leaseholders. Altogether, it is impossible for councils to control what goes on inside RTB flats, pitting individual against community.

Millions of pounds from RTB are sitting in the Treasury. They must be released for housing needs. Meanwhile, the policy of help-to-buy feeds price inflation using public subsidy. It is used to buy bigger houses – a government survey found 57 per cent of those using help-to-by said they could have afforded a home without it.

Trade unions should focus on housing – a pay increase is necessary to cover its high cost. Social housing, or rented and leasehold housing in the public sector, while now despised and replaced with private so-called “affordable” housing, in fact has a history worth studying.

In the 1940s and 1950s housing moved from tin bath in a tied cottage to spacious

council houses with gardens. There was a fine tradition of model homes, mutuals and the Co-op. There were enough bedrooms for family visits, and families could be self sufficient in vegetables and poultry – part of the proud independent postwar mentality. The working class was assertive, having defended Britain, and forced the new government under Clement Atlee into a show of appreciation.

The 1960s and 1970s saw idealistic urban planning. Yet since the flurry of house building in the immediate aftermath of World War Two standards and supply have been steadily degraded – with some utopian, but ultimately doomed, exceptions. Arms-length management by local authorities (which is no management at all) now means that tenants no longer know who to hold accountable, or even whether a British, French or Dutch firm is supplying the services, collecting the rubbish, fixing the boiler.

Nothing will happen to make a housing

‘Nothing will happen unless the many, not the few, take action.’

revolution unless the many, not the few, take action to make it happen. Let's get trade unions involved, push politicians aside unless they sign up to our working class policy – starting with Brexit. Fight for wages to meet housing costs, above all for a totally new plan for housing. ■

• An article focusing on Grenfell Tower will be published in the next issue. This article is a shortened and edited version of a speech at a CPBML meeting in London in September.

A plan to house the people

- Produce trustworthy statistics to establish real housing demand in relation to existing supply of housing and convertible buildings, and undeveloped brownfield sites in towns and cities.
- Expand the economy through manufacture and trade to support expenditure on housing, prioritising existing buildings, impossible within EU restrictions.
- Private developers have no interest in homes for workers – government must borrow to build them. Leave the single market and reject the EU's Court of Justice rules so that government can borrow.
- Stop selling off the land, plan for its use.
- Build more, better, low-cost local authority and housing-association homes for rent by British workers, such as homes for nurses on NHS land.
- Prioritise building on brownfield sites
- Protect farmland and the countryside from developers
- Control immigration to reduce

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pressure on housing authorities.

- Build for revived industrial and fishing communities.
- Distribute jobs and housing away from London to maximise opportunities for the whole of Britain.
- Upgrade transport and digital – broadband – to attract enterprises out of London.
- Manage and maintain properly the homes we have. No more arms-length management cop-outs.
- Keep people in their homes, with right of return if maintenance works require them to be decanted.
- Regenerate only with the consent of local people, for local people.
- Stop selling off London and our big cities to the highest foreign bidder. Instead tax unoccupied housing to encourage sales and lower price.
- Protect local businesses and workplaces from being demolished by housing developers.
- No to sheds and prefabs for homes. ■

Like health care, social care is a vital service. Both need to work together...

Care crisis deepens

BOTH SOCIAL CARE and health care are in trouble in Britain today. Worse, the problems in each service are damaging the other.

There are also significant differences. Social care is fragmented, even more than the NHS after the creation of trusts. And for the most part social care lacks the core of skilled, professional, organised workers that you find in the health services. The instability, shortage of funding and lack of planning for social care all contribute to a sector where wages are low and dubious employment practices are common.

The challenges faced in supporting adults who need care besides medical services have been evident for a long time. Successive governments have failed to find answers. Each “solution” seems to make things worse.

Against this background, economist Andrew Dilnot chaired a commission in 2010 to address the issues associated with care of the elderly. Their report recommended capping the maximum amount individuals contribute for social care over their lifetime. That would eliminate the catastrophic care costs faced by some people. The state would meet all funding over the capped amount. Dilnot said that limiting people’s liability in this way would help to develop a market for financial products. People would be able to insure themselves against the cost that they were likely to incur.

The commission recommended that the contribution any individual is required to make should be capped at £35,000, excluding general living costs. The asset threshold above which people in residential homes are liable for the full cost of their care should be increased from the then current level of £23,250 to £100,000. They should, however, make a standard contribution to cover their general living costs of between £7,000 and

‘This is a political decision to marginalise the elderly.’



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Each “solution” to social care seems to make things worse

£10,000 a year. Eligibility criteria for services should be set nationally and needs assessments should be “portable” between local authorities to prevent a post-code lottery.

If the Dilnot Commission’s recommendations had been implemented in full at the time, forecasts indicate that no one would have to spend more than 30 per cent of assets to fund their care. Recommended changes to the proposed funding system would have required £1.7 billion in additional public expenditure (0.14 per cent of GDP) for 2010-11 rising to £3.6 billion (0.22 per cent of GDP) by 2025-26 taking account of demographic pressures.

No argument

There is no conceivable financial argument against these proposals being implemented. This is a political decision to marginalise the elderly and their families at a time in their lives of greatest need. The cost of these recommendations as a whole is modest in comparison, for example, to the cost of bailing out banks after the 2007-08 financial crash.

At the time of writing taxpayers have an accumulated non recurrent exposure of £58 billion in respect of the Royal Bank of Scotland alone. And RBS continues to lose on average around £8 billion a year with no end in sight.

The idea of capping social care charges

was not set aside entirely. The Conservative Party manifesto for the 2015 general election addressed social care on those lines. It said it would cap charges for residential social care from April 2016 – at £72,000 for people above state pension age. It also proposed allowing deferred payment agreements, so no one had to sell their home while still alive.

Individual liabilities were to be limited; giving everyone, in their opinion, the peace of mind that they will receive the care they need, protected from unlimited care costs such as those arising from dementia. Other aspects of the Dilnot recommendations were included. The level of personal assets at which people are eligible for state help with residential care costs, irrespective of the cap, was to rise from £23,250 to £118,000.

These proposals were shelved despite being a manifesto commitment. Council leaders approached the Chancellor and Health Secretary asking them to set aside funds to implement these promised changes. Instead they wanted funds to mitigate a crisis in day-to-day services for elderly and disabled people, a direct result of government cuts to local authorities. They argued that it would be deeply damaging to press ahead with an ambitious reform programme if the foundations of the system being reformed could not be sustained.

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Roger Blackwell (CC-BY-SA 2.0)

Protest against cuts to social care, Norfolk, 20 February 2017.

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The social care funding gap in England was £700 million a year by 2015-16. This was projected to rise to £4.3 billion by 2020. Osborne allocated £1.5 billion to councils and announced in his 2015 Autumn Statement that they could also raise an additional 2 per cent in council tax as part of a "social care precept". This was intended to raise £2 billion over several years to support services for the elderly.

No ring-fencing

The money was not ring-fenced. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies there is no evidence that the money was used for the intended purpose. No doubt that's because local authorities have a statutory responsibility to balance their books and to cover

deficits due to cuts in central allocations. On average the local government grant from the Treasury for 2015-16 was cut by 24 per cent.

This farce only made matters worse. The way of paying for social care was not reformed. The immediate crisis in social care was not fixed. The funding shortfall rose.

This has been repeated again for 2017-18. An additional £1 billion was allocated in the March 2017 Budget ostensibly to relieve pressures. But the Association of Directors of Social Services have already warned the elderly and disabled to expect cuts to care services and associated rising charges because they are obliged to make savings of £824 million during the course of the year.

The Conservative Party manifesto in 2017 took a new direction. It sought to align the basis for means-testing across both

domiciliary and residential care.

This is the first time any government has ever proposed that the value of the home you are living in while being cared for should be taken into account alongside other assets and income. They proposed a single capital floor at £100,000 but with no ceiling on care costs. It was asserted that "this powerful combination maximises protection for pensioner households with modest assets, often

'The immediate crisis in social care was not fixed. The funding shortfall rose...'

invested in the family home, while remaining affordable for taxpayers”.

This proposal was said by its advocates to be more equitable, within and across the generations, than the proposals made by Dilnot, which they claimed, mostly benefited a small number of wealthier people. In fact Dilnot protects, to an extent at least, ordinary working people who own their own home from being asset stripped.

This proposal had a decisive influence in the 2017 general election. Unsurprisingly it was withdrawn from the subsequent Queen’s Speech to be replaced by a commitment to consult on the way forward. We need to ensure that this consultation begins as a matter of some urgency.

The crisis in social care has not diminished in any way since 2010. Recently the Care Quality Commission reported on the state of health and adult social care in England. It’s not an encouraging picture.

More than a third of people aged 85 or over have difficulties in daily living. They are therefore most likely to need health and care services. The number of people aged 85 or is forecast to double within the next 20 years. But even now, their care needs are not being met.

Estimates suggest that 1.2 million people in England do not get the help they need. That’s about one in eight of older people and just under a 50 per cent increase since the Dilnot Commission in 2010. It’s entirely predictable that such a shortfall will lead to more serious needs for those people. Besides the increased pressure on care services in future, this will increase demand on the NHS in the short term.

Beds

Care for people leaving hospital is often not available. People remain in hospital unnecessarily, but others need those beds. There has been a sharp increase in discharge delays related to a shortage of adult social care. Between April 2014 and December 2016 days of delayed discharge increased threefold, although there has been a slight improvement since then.

It’s not just those waiting for the beds that suffer from keeping people in hospital longer than necessary. Long stays can affect patient mobility, and increase the risk of

infection. All of which will increase demand on health and care services down the line.

Although demand for social care is increasing, supply is falling. There are around 4,000 fewer nursing home beds in March 2017 compared to two years earlier. That’s about 2 per cent of the total, but with wide variation across the country. In a few areas the fall is as large 20 per cent.

Care homes are closing too; around two a week currently. Around 12,000 beds were lost in this sector last year. Nearly all are commissioned from the private sector, operating on 14 per cent margins. Every pound the taxpayer puts in buys 86 pence worth of care. And 3,500 elderly patients are needlessly stuck in hospital beds. One in three of them wait for more than a month for discharge at an estimated cost to the NHS around £170 million a year.

Turnover

Domiciliary care in people’s homes is no better. Local authority funding has fallen, with tougher rules about who is eligible. There’s a high turnover in the mainly private providers of this care; some have handed contracts back to local authorities.

Vacancy rates are high at around 10 per cent for domiciliary care workers and 7 per cent for the whole sector. In part that’s a consequence of high turnover – around 28 per cent in 2016-17. All of this leads to low quality and inconsistent care. There is no chance that the notorious 15-minute home visits will go while this situation remains.

‘Funding has fallen, with tougher rules about who is eligible.’

It’s not a trivial or isolated problem to change this. The sector has the capacity to provide care for over 450,000 in residential care homes, nursing homes and other facilities in around 16,000 locations. Personal care provides for a further half a million people, mostly domiciliary care in their homes. The sector employs an estimated 1.4 million workers and contributes £42 billion to GDP.

The public sector budget for social care is about £19.7 billion. Age UK estimates the shortfall in current unmet needs is around £4.8 billion a year. Around £2 billion has been allocated from the Better Care Fund, but this money has not, for the most part, resulted in more resources.

Yet change we must. The NHS was founded on the principles that fear of being unable to afford treatment is abhorrent and that the cost of ill-health should be spread across the community. Although under attack, that still holds good and should do so for social care too, as it is intertwined with good health care. The ideas set out by Dilnot would make a good start. ■

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 Thursday 16 November at 6.30 pm with the title “100 Years after the Bolshevik Revolution” (see notice, page 22). A further meeting will take place in February, title 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

There's only one way to avoid financial crashes: break the power of finance capitalism...

How crashes happen

Can we avoid another financial crisis? by Steve Keen, paperback, 140 pages, ISBN 978-1509513734, Polity Press, 2017, £9.99 or less, hardback and Kindle editions available.

THIS BOOK warns us that another financial crisis lies ahead. Steve Keen, Professor of Economics at Kingston University, shows that the causes of the 2008 crash are still operating.

Keen reminds us that mainstream economists have been no use in the past. Nobel Prize winner Robert Lucas said in 2003 that the “central problem of depression prevention has been solved”. There are many other examples, notably the OECD forecast that 2008 would be a bumper year.

Why did economists fail to see the biggest economic event since the Great Depression? Keen argues this was because they ignore the distribution of income.

Economists typically say doubling all prices and all incomes won't change the amount of goods and services in the economy. But it does affect the interest rate: debtors are worse off as the cost of borrowing rises. Creditors are better off as their income goes up. This shift in income distribution changes demand and hence output.

Flaw

Economists tell governments that rising private debt is no problem – a bigger finance sector is good for us all. Keen, by contrast, argues that the financial sector is capitalism's flaw. He examines capitalism's cycles of growth and crisis to show why that is.

When there is economic growth through high investment, employment rises as does the demand for raw materials. This drives up wages and the price of raw materials. Company debt also rises to finance investment in excess of earnings; the cost of servicing that debt increases. The result: more



money to bankers and workers' share of GDP falls. In that way debt leads to greater inequality.

These higher wages, prices and interest costs slash the profits capitalists expected. Investment falls and growth falters. Then falling interest rates and falling wages cannot offset the impact of debt servicing on profits. Profits do not recover; investment ends, depression follows and governments impose austerity – poverty. The EU is as bad as national governments: Keen writes of “the suicidal policies of the eurozone” and of “the Maastricht Treaty-inspired strangulation of Southern Europe today”.

Every economic crisis since 1857 has seen private debt of 150 per cent or more of GDP. In many key countries private debt is now dangerously high. In 2015 private debt was 189 per cent of GDP in the USA and 134 per cent in Britain. The figure was 60 per cent of GDP for Britain in the late 1970s.

Japan's private debt in 2015 was 182 per cent of GDP. Their economic bubble burst in 1990, to be followed by years of stagnation.

In contrast China's economy has seemed to thrive. But its credit-driven boost

has now dropped off and growth has slowed. Private debt in China rose from 120 per cent of GDP in 2008 to 153 per cent in 2015.

Keen argues that we must reduce the level of debt: “If neither market nor indirect government action is likely to reduce private debt sufficiently, the only options are a direct reduction of private debt, or an increase in the money supply that indirectly reduces the debt burden.” He says that governments must write off private debt, as the USA wrote off Germany's debt in the 1950s.

Finance fears

So why isn't this being done? Simply because writing off private debt would hurt the big banks that are owed the money. The City of London and Wall Street would lose out. Finance is far more powerful than it was in the 1950s, and finance does not want debt written off.

But if private debt is not reduced, there will be another financial crisis, possibly worse than the last one. To avoid that we must override finance's veto, breaking finance's overweening power. And only a revolution has the power to do this. ■

“...the suicidal policies of the Eurozone.”

The Russian October Revolution overthrew the rule of exploiters for the first time in history...

1917: a world shaking

THE OCTOBER Revolution in Russia was a shattering event, splintering the façade of bourgeois solidity. The capitalist rulers of the major powers had unleashed the First World War, confident that workers everywhere would tamely go down in mutual slaughter. But in 1917 the working people of Russia set out on a new path, responding to the untiring efforts of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party.

In February 1917 workers and peasants in uniform took over Petrograd, then Russia's capital, refusing to continue the Tsar's war. Russia was hit by widespread commotion and uprising.

This February revolution succeeded: the Tsar abdicated and his government fell. Workers and soldiers' soviets were formed and representatives elected. The new government of the bourgeoisie, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma led by Alexander Kerensky, seemed to hold power. But the soviets had the armed force of the soldiers and sailors and the support of the mass of working people.

A dual power emerged, rare in history. As Lenin put it, "Side by side with the provisional government, the government of the bourgeoisie, there has developed another government, weak and embryonic as yet, but undoubtedly an actually existing and growing government – the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

But the soviets did not press their advantage during February and March. In effect they voluntarily ceded the power already won to the bourgeois government. The Russian people were left to stew in ever worsening conditions. There was no agrarian reform. Hunger and privation stalked the country; profiteering continued. And still the government tried to prosecute the war.

'They were not prepared to stop at the victory of a bourgeois revolution.'



October 1917: Red Guards on patrol near the Smolny, the Bolshevik HQ in Petrograd.

The Bolsheviks were not prepared to stop at the victory of a bourgeois revolution, because it solved none of the major problems facing the people. But they did not yet know if Russian workers would see things the same way.

On his return to Russia from exile, Lenin drafted his *April Theses* to point a way forward. He said the war remained an imperialist war; it must be ended by the overthrow of capital. The first stage of the revolution put power in the hands of the bourgeoisie. It must advance to the second stage: power in the control of workers and poor peasants.

Lenin said no support should be given to the Provisional Government. The Bolshevik Party should explain to workers the error in tactics of supporting the bourgeois government. A bourgeois parliamentary republic will not suffice, only a Soviet government of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies would fulfil their needs.

The Bolshevik Party held its first legal open party conference within Russia. It approved the April Theses and Lenin's call for a period of "prolonged, patient explanation" to win over workers' minds. It recognised that the only way to end the war was to drop revolutionary "defencism" – and not accept rule by the bourgeois government.

The October Revolution produced two of the best calls to action ever: "Peace, Bread

and Land" and "All Power to the Soviets", appealing to millions desperate for real power to resolve their problems.

Workers and peasants had no interest in the world war being waged for rulers' interests. The only way to address escalating social problems was to create a government of deputies from workers' and peasants' soviets to enact radical measures serving their interests.

Power

The period of "patient explanation" spanned the next six months. "All Power to the Soviets" became the prevailing slogan of the Bolsheviks. The aim was to destroy the apparatus of the bourgeois state, not to tolerate it. For this to happen, people's thinking had to change on key matters. Otherwise the crucial moment would be missed.

Events swung backwards and forwards over these months. The government hurled tens of thousands more to their deaths fighting the war. Proletarian militias organised as factory squads were developed and armed, particularly in Moscow and Petrograd. In July a huge demonstration in Petrograd calling for a transfer of power to the soviets was answered by force.

Lenin went into exile to avoid arrest. He

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spent much of August and September producing his book, *State and Revolution*. This deals with questions of state power, including the achievements and mistakes of the Paris Commune (1870-71).

Gradually, the mood in Russia changed over the summer months as the war continued needlessly and economic disruption spread. Voices were increasingly heard raising the question of control over industry. Which class should be in charge? In agriculture, calls grew for the confiscation of land, livestock and implements.

In August a Bolshevik Party Congress called for preparations to be made for the transfer of power to the working class and peasantry. But at the end of August General Kornilov organised elements to prepare a military dictatorship. This was only thwarted by successful revolutionary propaganda among his troops and by the wrecking activities of militant railway workers.

During August and September the capitalist owners of industry attempted to undermine the growing strength of their workers by shutting parts of industry and engaging in speculation that led to financial collapse and currency depreciation. Workers were paid wages in “falling roubles” – money that simply melted away in their hands. The government used armed force against peasants and backed the big landlords.

In response Lenin and the Bolsheviks proposed an economic programme stating that advance in Russia was impossible with-

out advancing towards socialism. The economic situation could only improve after a revolution. The rule of the proletariat organised in soviets had to replace the supremacy of the bourgeoisie. Production and distribution must be systematically regulated with the nationalisation and centralisation of banking and large enterprises.

In September and October there was a huge upswing in revolutionary strike action across the country. This began and was strongest in factories with Bolshevik leadership. Demands arose for the transfer of power to the soviets. The Bolsheviks were the leading force in most of the workers' soviets. Morale in the army was disintegrating; Bolshevik ideas were coming to the fore in both army and navy.

Uprising

On 10 October 1917 (Old Style, see note), the Bolsheviks' Central Committee agreed that “an armed uprising is inevitable, and that the time for it is fully ripe”. At this vital moment, Lenin made sure that everyone remembered the crucial lessons of the Paris Commune and Irish Easter Rising. Strategic buildings, communications, banks, railways, the fleet and so on all needed to be secured for the people by armed detachments of workers.

The revolt in Petrograd was bloodless for the most part. Red Guards, revolutionary workers, soldiers and sailors led by Bolsheviks took over major government facilities with little opposition. They launched a successful assault on the Winter Palace,



June 1917: Bolshevik soldiers in Petrograd demonstrate against the Kerensky government's continuation of the war.

seat of the Provisional Government, on the night of 25/26 October.

The revolutionary insurrection was timed to hand state power to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which began on 25 October. The congress consisted of 650 elected delegates; 390 were Bolshevik. Nearly a hundred were Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who also supported the overthrow of the Kerensky Government.

When the fall of the Winter Palace was



CPBML/Workers

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“100 years after the Bolshevik Revolution”

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In 1917 the workers and peasants of Russia changed the course of history. A century on, the ideas and thought that it inspired are still changing the world. Come and discuss. All welcome.

'Imperialism was unable to inflict defeat on the fledgling state.'

announced, the congress adopted a decree transferring power to the soviets, ratifying the actions of the revolution. The following day, it elected a Council of People's Commissars as the basis of a new soviet government and passed the decrees on peace and land. Banks were nationalised and control of the factories was given to the soviets. Wages were fixed at higher rates than during the war and a shorter, eight-hour, working day was introduced. All foreign debts were repudiated and the land and assets of the Russian Orthodox Church were expropriated.

The October Revolution transformed the Russian state from bourgeois parliamentarian to socialist. It stands out because of the leading role played by the Russian working class in the seizure of power, its consolidation and defence. Though large parts of tsarist Russia were feudal and peasant based, there were substantial concentrations of powerful industry with a politicised working class.

Brushing aside the Provisional Government was a popular move and the only course of action able to address their needs and survival. For the first time ever a working class had forced the withdrawal of its country from an ongoing war

A coalition of anti-Bolshevik, anti-revolutionary groups including invading armies from the western Allies attempted to unseat the new government in the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1922; they failed. Imperialism was unable to inflict defeat on the fledgling state: the Soviet Union repelled its external enemies.

• **Note:** dates used throughout are the Julian calendar (Old Style), at the time 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar adopted in Britain in 1752 and by the Soviet Union in February 1918. ■

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?

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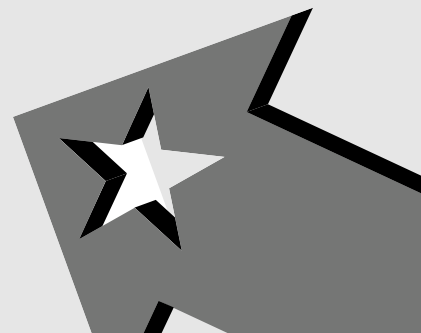
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Call that a campaign?

'No one who calls on the TUC to do their fighting for them seriously expects a result.'

BLINK AND you would have missed it. The TUC's campaign on public sector pay kicked off on 17 October with a desultory lobby of parliament. A few hundred – many of them paid officials under instruction – rallied in Parliament Square, a turnout that not even the TUC felt worthy of a press release (which is saying something).

In fact, you didn't have to blink to miss it. You had to work really hard to notice it at all. Despite the urgings of public sector union HQs, virtually no members turned up.

That's not because workers in public services aren't interested in pay. What worker isn't? It's because even those interested in fighting for pay – a quite different thing – know that lobbying parliament is a waste of time.

The word "campaign" entered the English language about 400 years ago. Based on a French word for "open country", it described a series of military activities. So Napoleon had a campaign in Russia, Wellington in Spain. In most unions, and supremely in the TUC, it now means a series of pointless activities based around banners, balloons, mugs, T-shirts and begging letters (sorry, petitions).

So, another TUC farce, the result of another farcical series of events. It begins with a few unions that cannot organise a fight. In their weakness, they put a motion to the TUC's annual conference calling for a "campaign". The vote is unanimous. The campaign begins, with a slogan like "Britain needs a pay rise".

Nothing comes of it, of course. Then a repeat campaign comes, with a really imaginative twist to the slogan, like "Britain still needs a pay rise". Then all is quietly forgotten and a different "campaign" starts.

But nobody complains, because no one who calls on the TUC to do their fighting for them seriously expects a result.

The most active campaign in the trade union movement at the moment is probably that waged by the rail unions to keep guards on trains. And it certainly didn't start with a motion to the TUC (though TUC support was

enlisted once the battle was engaged).

The tragedy is that a proper pay campaign in the public sector is desperately needed, one that takes to heart the Oxford English Dictionary's primary definition of a campaign, "...operations intended to achieve a goal...or involving a specific type of fighting".

On the railways, workers are fighting a protracted struggle, always with a goal in mind, and doing so in a guerrilla way. That means fighting on your ground, where you are strong. It means not picking a fight unless you believe you can win it.

Workers in the public sector who want more money but have signally failed to get it will have to learn from those who have been successful, like the rail workers. They need to sit down, work out where they are strong, and engage the enemy there.

Instead of complaining about having to get 50 per cent of their members to turn out for a strike ballot, unions should start with ballots where they know they can get the turnout – regionally, locally, anywhere where the turnout and the result can be reasonably assured.

Then they should fight in a guerrilla way, hit and run rather than all-out confrontation. Know your enemy's weaknesses, maximise your own strengths. Ensure that control of the struggle is in the hands of local organised workers, not national know-alls. Spread solidarity on the basis of success. Recognise that you don't support a strike by standing on someone else's picket line – you support by taking action at your own place of work.

That kind of campaigning is hard work, and doesn't go down well with armchair generals who prefer grand national ballots where they can stride at the head of a demonstration and pose for the media. Nor with the ultra left, who want campaigns to fail so that they can accuse the "leadership" of betrayal.

But it is the only way out of the gloomy succession of dismal campaigns, lobbies and petitions that have so blighted the labour movement. ■

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