

# WORKERS

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OCTOBER 2014 £1



## AFTER THE VOTE: REBUILD BRITAIN



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# WORKERS



## Hands off Syria!

WE ARE TOLD that we have to attack Syria in order to defeat the Islamic State (IS), a brutal, fundamentalist autocracy.

Yet we have lived with brutal, fundamentalist autocracies in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia, for decades. Britain and the US are closely allied with the Saudi state, which beheaded 19 people in just the first half of August. The peoples of the Middle East will have to deal with their own backward feudal despots, who have funded the Islamic opposition to secular governments in the Middle East.

President Assad's government has been fighting IS, but the British government has given £600 million in "aid" to his opponents, pretending that this went only to the "democratic opposition". In the real world IS has been snapping it up

An attack on Syria would wreck that country,

just as previous US/British attacks have wrecked Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. They make a desert and call it humanitarian intervention.

Cameron has said that there needs to be legal justification for air strikes in Syria. But there is no none. The UN Security Council would not pass a resolution authorising such operations. It's not self-defence – Syria is thousands of miles away from us, and nobody has accused it of planning or carrying out any attack on us. The way to defend ourselves is to protect our own sovereignty, not destroy that of others.

In August 2013, under pressure from their constituents, MPs voted against an attack on Syria, a victory for peace. Now the government is trying again, this time using IS as cover, seeking to overthrow Assad's government. We must stop it again. ■

## A system set up for slavery

THE GOVERNMENT is sponsoring a series of television adverts against slavery in Britain. The domestic servant, the farm hands, the sweat shop labourers, the sex worker etc. The great unsaid, but obvious from the presentations, is that these modern-day slaves are migrant workers.

What is ignored is that the criminals who introduce slavery, people trafficking, feudal employ-

ment practices and worse is now welcomed into Britain. After all, it's good for capitalists, so it must be good for us.

Membership of the Anti-Slavery Society, set up in the 19th century, is growing fastest in Britain in response to abuses here. That's no surprise. The EU's free movement of labour has made Britain a hub for people trafficking in Europe. ■



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## Strike call in NHS England

UNISON MEMBERS in the NHS in England are to be called on to take part in a four-hour strike on 13 October for more pay, following a ballot result showing 68 per cent in favour of strike action and 88 per cent in favour of action short of a strike. The strike will come five days before the TUC's national demonstration in London under the banner of "Britain needs a pay rise".

As *Workers* went to press, members of the Royal College of Midwives were concluding a similar ballot on action over pay, with results due to be announced at the end of September. The Royal College of Nursing has no plans to ballot its members on action (see "TUC and pay – time to grasp the nettle", *Workers* September 2014).

But the Unison ballot raises serious questions about how the union is to continue its fight for pay. For beyond the headline figures on numbers for and against – and not mentioned by Unison in its press release announcing the results – lies a shockingly low ballot turnout. The ballot result was covered in the national press, but without a mention of how many members actually returned their ballot papers, thought not to exceed 16 per cent.

This is information the employers will know, of course, so suppressing the figures in its own publicity just hides the truth from Unison's members. Hardly an ideal platform for launching a struggle against the government, but par for the course for Unison, which similarly refused to let members know the turnout figures from the local government ballot earlier this year.

Undeterred, Unison's regional Service Group Executives met on 19 September and voted for the strike, with apparently only a handful of mainly London-based delegates urging caution. But the questions remain: Why did so few members vote? Why with such a small percentage is a four-hour strike going ahead?

Crucially, where do NHS staff go after the strike to make their voices heard? Everyone within the service deserves a pay increase but staff are clearly not champing at the bit to walk out.

- On 8 September the Society of Radiographers notified NHS trusts and employers across Britain that it would be balloting its more than 17,000 members who work in the public sector, as part of the ongoing pay dispute with the government. It says the ballot became "inevitable" after health secretary Jeremy Hunt refused to ask the independent review body to make a pay recommendation for 2015, condemning radiographers to another year of pay freeze – the fourth in the past five years.

Radiographers used to be a very small group of NHS staff doing X-ray work. But little modern medicine takes place without a radiographer involved. Diagnostic radiographers now also use a range of sophisticated techniques including ultrasound, fluoroscopy, CT and MRI scans, nuclear medicine and angiography. The other half of the profession, the therapeutic radiographers, deliver radiotherapy to patients with cancer. ■

## MALNUTRITION

### Cases soar

FIGURES RELEASED by the Health and Social Care Information Centre show that 6,690 patients were treated for malnutrition in Britain's hospitals in 2013-14, a 20 per cent increase on 2012-13.

So great is the increase that the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity determined to follow US evangelical recruitment methods, has nearly reached its "target" of 420 food banks in Britain.

In 2013-14 it provided emergency food provisions to 913,138 people, over a third of them children. In 2012-13 it fed 346,992 people.

Some 13 million people in Britain are living below the government's official poverty line – nearly 1 in 4 adults. Malnutrition, poverty, Christian evangelism – conditions of life comparable with the worst excesses of Victorian Britain return to confront us. ■

## TURKEY

### Dairy workers fight

THE INTERNATIONAL Union of Food Workers is campaigning in support of members of the Turkish Drink, Food and Allied union, TEKGIDA-Is, fighting for trade union recognition with the Sutas Dairy Company.

For the past two years the workers have resisted sackings, police raids, false criminal charges against stewards, threats to family members, strong-arm tactics, and intimidation. In the latest bid to break the picket line, 13 tonnes of liquid manure were dumped on top of the pickets.

Cameron is talking about further anti-union legislation. It seems like the Turkish employers speak his language. ■

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

## EUROBRIEFS

### The latest from Brussels

#### Germany shrinking

THE GERMAN economy contracted by 0.2 per cent in the second quarter of this year, while the French economy had zero growth. German business newspaper *Handelsblatt* warned, "Germany is no longer a champion: the domestic economy is shrinking and is pulling Europe down with it."

#### From lobbyist to Commissioner

THE EU Commission has given the financial services portfolio to Cameron's friend Lord Hill, a neoliberal former PR lobbyist. This gives the government, and with it the City, a decisive say in how further eurozone integration will affect the single market in financial services across the entire EU. Key court cases are also looming on bankers' bonuses and the ability of London institutions to deal with trades in euros.

#### Migration up

ACCORDING TO new data from the Office for National Statistics, 560,000 people migrated to Britain in the year ending March 2014, up from 492,000 in the previous 12 months. Overall net migration rose to 243,000 from 175,000. EU citizens account for two-thirds of the gross increase; 28,000 Romanian and Bulgarian citizens came in that period compared to 12,000 the year before.

#### EU referendum

OLLI REHN, a Vice-President of the European Parliament and a former European Commissioner, predicted that a vote for Scottish independence would set back an EU referendum here. So now the vote has gone against, do we expect to see any move in Westminster to hold a meaningful referendum and prepare to leave the EU? Not unless the working class presses for it.

#### Commitment claim

AFTER THE Scottish referendum result, European Commission president José Manuel Barroso welcomed the fact that "during the debate over the past years, the Scottish government and the Scottish people have repeatedly reaffirmed their European commitment". So any result was fine as long as the Scots wanted to stay in the EU. ■

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The emergency services are not the government's toys.

## Playing games with safety

LAST MONTH Home Secretary Theresa May told the think tank Reform that the Emergency Services of England and Wales (Police, Fire and Ambulance) needed to be integrated to save money.

This is not the first time that the idea of lumping our emergency services together has arisen. Fire Service chiefs, when under pressure, periodically return to the idea that they could run Fire and Ambulance Services together.

London Mayor Boris Johnson has also jumped onto this particular bandwagon, following a recommendation of the 2011 London Assembly report into "The Future of the London Ambulance Service". This said, "The Mayor should commission a review of shared facilities and joint working between the London Ambulance Service and the London Fire Brigade. The review should aim to generate efficiencies by making specific proposals for shared stations and control rooms."

Unison and the Fire Brigades Union (the main unions involved) saw through this talk for what it really means: cuts, job losses and an attempt to dilute the standards set by the British 999 Services. Much of Britain already has shared facilities, including shared stations. Control rooms are linked to each other for more efficient working. But this is not what May or Johnson mean when they talk of "efficiencies".

May went one step further in her speech to Reform. She spoke about a merger between all three emergency services. "With a still large deficit and a record stock of debt, there will need to be further spending cuts...so in policing in the future, I believe we will need to work towards the integration of all three emergency services." This has serious implications. And the plan would be that the unpopular Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) would lead these mergers.

One PCC has already spoken of his vision for the future. Adam Simmonds (Northamptonshire) wants to see the possibility of just sending one emergency vehicle (incorporating police, fire and ambulance) to the scene of an accident equipped "for all eventualities"! This is Keystone Kops territory. It isn't funny, though, as working people will bear the cost of these measures.

This simplistic talk of a one-stop shop for emergency services betrays a complete ignorance of the history, culture, training and complexities of each of the services. The British emergency services work well together on a daily basis. Day in and day out there is a professionalism and teamwork that can only continue if the 999 operators carry on asking the question: Police, Fire or Ambulance? ■

## ZERO HOURS Sham proposals

THE GOVERNMENT has said it will ban so-called "exclusivity" clauses in zero hours contracts – the clauses that tie a worker to a company even if there is no work available and are rightly regarded as a modern form of serfdom. It will now consult on what measures are required to prevent companies finding ways to

circumvent this ban. In other words it will highlight how to get round the legislation for employers who are looking for loopholes.

The government doesn't want statutory codes to prevent abuses but industry advisory codes of practice. Workers and employers will meet to define sector specific codes. That means that if these sectors are not unionised, or poorly unionised, then codes will be almost non-existent. ■

## PAY

### Chief execs rake it in

THE HIGH PAY Centre think tank has analysed the pay of chief executives of the FTSE 100 companies and found that on average it is now 131 times the average wage of their employees, compared with 41 times in 1998.

Then chief executive pay averaged £1 million a year. It's £5 million now. With an annual "package" of almost £30 million, the

head of advertising firm WPP is paid 780 times as much as the average worker. The chief executive of G4S, beneficiary of much government outsourcing and object of criticism over performance, receives a yearly remuneration of £2 million, 266 times the average pay within the company.

At state-controlled Network Rail some individual bonuses have reached £350,000 while punctuality targets have been missed and poor safety standards at level crossings have resulted in several deaths. ■

## Self-employment on the rise

THE LEVEL of workers categorised as self-employed has reached its highest level in Britain for over 40 years according to the Office for National Statistics – 15 per cent of the workforce, 4.6 million people, are now deemed self-employed, up from 13 per cent at the time of the 2008 financial crash. Most of these jobs are likely to be "off the books" – construction work, taxi drivers, hairdressers and the beauty industry. "Self-employment" is of course nothing of the kind, a contradiction in terms. In practice it means having many employers, rather than one.

The Institute of Public Policy Research has found that self-employment has risen again in the past year, notching up the biggest rise in western Europe. One in seven of the workforce are now classified as self-employed. For many workers such an occupation is not one of choice but of desperation, the result of the slashing of unemployment benefit and other support. Work, if it can be defined as such, comes very cheap, with workers having no choice – take it or starve. The TUC estimates the average earnings of these "self-employed" to be half of those directly employed or in a union-organised workplace.

TUC research has also found that self-employment has comprised almost half of the new jobs created in the last four years and that 40 per cent of them are part time. The government boasts about reducing the numbers of the unemployed and of generating an entrepreneur culture, when the reality is one of low wages, low skills, massive job uncertainty, long hours. ■

## MINING

### Union loan saves pit

HATFIELD COLLIERY in South Yorkshire, one of the three remaining deep British mines, has been handed a lifeline in the shape of a £4 million loan by the National Union of Mineworkers.

The jobs of 440 miners, besides those of many others in the supply chain, were at risk from a gap in production while a new coal face is developed. The loan gives the miners, who collectively bought the pit in 2013, a full 12 months to begin to unlock the many millions of tonnes of coal which remain below the surface.

The new face has, initially, 18 months of production in it, but the loan buys the mine time to secure long-term contracts from the coal-fired power generators.

Here is an opportunity to put right the economic madness of developing clean coal technology at nearby Drax power station while burning imported Russian and Colombian coal.

Britain's capacity to be self-reliant in energy clings on by its fingertips. An analysis of these developments will appear in the next issue of *Workers*.

## BILLIONAIRES

### Join the club

IN 2014 the global billionaires club (up an extra 155 members over the year) contained 2,325 people with combined assets of \$7.29 trillion (£4.46 trillion), according to the findings of a Billionaire Census report from Singaporean research firm Wealth-X and Swiss bank UBS.

Their net worth is almost a 10th of global GDP and higher than the combined market capitalisation of all the companies in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The value of their assets grew by 12 per cent over the preceding year.

There were 571 billionaires in the US, 190 in China and 130 in Britain. Europe remains the region with the highest concentration of billionaires at 775.

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### OCTOBER

Tuesday 14 October, 7.30pm,  
Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall,  
Holborn, London WC1R 4RL  
"Britain not for sale"



CPBML public meeting. Foreign firms and states are buying up our services and industry. That's bad news for Britain. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

Saturday 18 October, 11am until 5pm,  
London

TUC march and rally: "Britain needs a pay rise"



The TUC has chosen pay as the topic for a national demonstration in London. Assemble from 11am at the Embankment before moving on to Hyde Park for rally, speeches. Check [britainneedsapayrise.org](http://britainneedsapayrise.org) for updates.



### Workers on the Web

• Highlights from this and other issues of **WORKERS** can be found on our website, [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk), as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### TTIP and the unions

UNTIL RECENTLY, general awareness of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) has been limited, with knowledge about what it means even less common. The veil of secrecy is being lifted – not, of course, by those negotiating the “agreement” but by the campaigning of trade unions and others such as 38 Degrees and War on Want.

If allowed, TTIP would lead to the privatisation of everything that is public – and dilute standards of health and safety imposed by workers through years of struggle. National governments seeking to renationalise services or utilities would find themselves overruled, barred from interfering in the “right” of corporations to make profits. All is to be enforced by corporate lawyers sitting in secret to decide how much to fine governments through the Investor State Dispute Settlements mechanism.



Anti-TTIP street art, Bristol.

Unions have for too long managed to hold contradictory positions. Many support the EU, and the TUC even endorses the EU's exclusive right to negotiate TTIP on our behalf – while wanting to renationalise that which was previously public.

This year's TUC congress unanimously carried a motion condemning and pledging outright opposition to TTIP. Speakers from Unite, GMB, UCU, HCSA, Unison, Musicians' Union and PCS lined up to warn of the dangers from this trade agreement. Some focused on the threat of total privatisation of the NHS and limited their opposition to demanding the exclusion of the NHS from the agreement. But as the delegate from the UCU eloquently expressed it, motions carried the previous day calling for the renationalisation of utilities and rail can be forgotten unless TTIP is defeated.

That will be a tall order given what we are up against but opposition is growing in the USA and the countries of Europe. Failure to defeat TTIP will mean that the siren voices warning of the future irreversibility of privatisations will be proved correct – for as long as we allow ourselves to be ruled by the EU. ■

# 19 September was a great day, a great spoke and buried the narrow aspiration

## After the vote –



Newly qualified BAE shipbuilder Paul Sweeney speaking at a No rally at BAE Systems yards in Scotstoun on 15 September. He criticised Alex Salmond for ignoring the threat separation posed to the industry. He said he didn't want to compete with shipbuilders in the rest of Britain: “They're my comrades, not my enemies.”

BY A MARGIN of nearly 11 percentage points, Scotland has spoken: we are part of one nation from Land's End to the Shetland Isles. It was, in electoral terms, a landslide, not the whisker some claim it to be.

But there is no disguising that nearly 40 years after a Britain-wide referendum approved entry into what is now the European Union, the very idea of Britain is under siege. The attack is quite clearly coming not just from Brussels but from within our own country. That it failed in the Scottish referendum is a victory indeed.

There was the Scottish National Party, of course, its leader now sniping from the dustbin of history, clamouring for independence while hurling themselves even closer into the death hug of the EU. The likeliest outcome of a win would have been forced entry into the euro, with control of the economy handed over to Brussels.

End Tory rule screamed the ultra left, as if enshrining the rule of the market in perpetuity – which is what separation with EU and euro membership means – were not the very essence of capitalist rule, supported by

Tory, Labour, Liberal and SNP alike.

Then there were Cameron and Miliband, agreeing in the first place to a referendum on the future of Britain that denied a vote to over 90 per cent of its inhabitants with their plans for further fragmentation in the form of “federalism” ready to roll and widely mooted beforehand. They talked of democracy, but where was their mandate?

### Rebuilding

Now that the dust has started to settle, the key task for the working class of this island is the rebuilding of Britain, in every sense. We need a country with real jobs for its people, we need a future for our children, we need infrastructure and we need industry. We welcome the first steps of rebuilding, announced on 19 September: the contracts worth over £200 million going to BAE Systems at their Scotstoun yards on the Clyde in Glasgow.

But above all we need to rebuild the idea of Britain, the concept of a single country, a nation, which will stand against the European Union, NATO and the giant

Victory – a day of unity when the people of Scotland finally  
 end of separatism...

# Rebuild Britain

trans-national corporations for which borders and nations are an obstacle to global domination.

Yes, the turnout was high. All this has been described in glowing terms as a wonderful exercise in democracy. But it has been a strange kind of democracy, one conducted almost entirely on terrain drawn up by Westminster and Holyrood, two sides of the same rotten parliamentary coin.

For a start, only people living in Scotland were allowed to vote. Too late, many in the rest of Britain woke up to the fact that their country, the country they were born into and brought up in, stood to be dismembered – and they weren't even being allowed a say in it.

The CPBML said from the start it should have been a referendum of the whole country, because the future of the whole nation was at stake. But the cosy deal was done, the parliamentary parties signed off on it, and there was no opposition.

## A vote for all

Therein lies a marker for the future: our unions must demand that in the unpleasant event of another referendum on the future of our country, everyone living here should have a say. Perhaps after watching the Scottish referendum campaign unfold the way it did, workers will be more receptive to such thinking.

And then there was the delusion of "fighting" for a better NHS in Scotland, as if anyone needs a separation referendum to start fighting for what they want. A vote to separate is not fighting, it's surrender. Our services will never be safe while we accept the rule of capital, whether its politicians sit in Westminster or Holyrood.

Many unions chose to sit on the fence, as if commenting about their future as

**'Nearly 40 years after entry into the EU, the very idea of Britain is under siege.'**

national unions were some kind of a problem. But not all: GMB, USDAW, Community, Aslef, the NUM, and the CWU were among those in the No camp. Unite, meanwhile, agreed to support neither side, even though it acknowledged, "This is a decision on the future of a nation and its people and everything that entails." When a Unison official spoke up for the Yes side at a fringe meeting at that union's conference, his union simply said that it had no position either way on the referendum debate.

And now we find that while the TUC is organising a march in London with a theme that unites everyone – "Britain needs a pay rise" – the Scottish TUC's event on the same day is for "A Just Scotland". Well, the referendum shows Scots aren't just thinking about Scotland. Sometimes it seems that the higher up the labour movement you look, the more backward the thinking.

## Shallow thinking

And despite the strong result, one clear conclusion is that the level of much of the debate – on both sides – was depressingly shallow. You could hear it in blogs and tweets, in the interviews in the streets.

People talked about how they hated Westminster politics, for example. Well, so do most people in London, but they're not voting to float off the capital as a separate entity. And that's the more serious side of the argument – many were drifting off into misty-eyed romanticism, or looking on it all as some kind of lark.

On the No side, it seemed as if hardly anyone got down to the real argument: that we are one people, based on one working class, with a nation to defend against the European Union and a future to fight for. That's part of the problem with having a campaign led by Scottish Labour in the shape of Alastair Darling.

Thousands of overwhelmingly young Londoners gathered in Trafalgar Square just days before the Scottish referendum to send a message to Scotland not to separate off from the rest of Britain. To judge by their formal office attire they were largely professional workers, part of the belated surge in awareness south of the border of what the break up of the UK would entail.

The event was heartfelt but sentimental,



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**"Heartfelt but sentimental" – the rally in Trafalgar Square on 15 September signalled growing awareness in the South East of the dangers of separation.**

with pop stars and other celebrities exclaiming, "We love you Scotland" and the audience waving diminutive flags. The best of the speeches called for cooperation not competition between Scots and the rest of Britain, and pointed out the selfishness of one section removing itself from the struggle of the whole.

But missing was the industrial trade union voice that could have spelt out the dangers of different parts of Britain squabbling over such issues as oil and energy policy. Worst of all was the attempt by comedian Eddie Izzard to exploit opposition to borders within the UK by calling for an end to all national boundaries. This was a warning of what to expect when it comes to the referendum on the EU.

Nevertheless, those individuals and organisations who worked and argued tirelessly for over two years in the campaign for national unity and for a united working class deserve due recognition.

Our own campaign to secure a No vote

*Continued on page 8*

Continued from page 7

## 'British workers should be calling for independence from the EU and global capitalism.'

began in earnest with the distribution to all delegates at the April 2013 Congress of the STUC of our document "10 Reasons to Oppose the Break Up of Britain". Regular, combative articles such as "Unity is strength. Don't break up Britain" (November 2013) and "Scotland's false Flag" (July 2014) helped counter separatist thought.

When further attacks on Britain come – and come they will – the response will have to be clearer and more founded on reality. This was not a debate about independence, not even one about the sham of independence, but a question of the dismemberment of our country.

### No to devolution!

Put a stop to any further talk of increasing devolutionary powers. That will only give sustenance to the SNP and separatist thought when it should be fully swept aside as a hindrance. The mandate of over 55 per cent, more than 2 million votes, for No in this referendum gives us confidence in enforcing this.

Talk of "federalism" and "regional powers" is actually thinly disguised fragmentation, dismemberment and disempowering of Britain and its working class. We don't want regionalism. We don't want yet another set of highly paid and highly useless politicians

What workers throughout Britain should be calling for is real independence: from the European Union, and from the whims of global capitalism, from the rule of bankers and capital, from wars and NATO.

Bombproof our class and institutions from further fragmentation and put rebuilding on the agenda! ■



The Dalriada Trio, with Jonathan Livingston (violin), Ian Watt (guitar) and composer Eddie McGuire (flute) performs the première of McGuire's *Unity Suite*.

## Celebrating bonds of friendship

A MEMORABLE event was held in Glasgow on Friday 5 September. Named "Concert for Unity: celebrating ancient bonds of friendship through music", it was part of the campaign to keep Britain together by promoting the No vote in the Scottish referendum.

The varied programme included music from across the world, featuring guitar, flute, cello, violin and piano, and the human voice. Fong Liu, originally from eastern China but now living and working in Glasgow, sang traditional ancient Chinese folk songs with wonderful power and delicacy. Jennifer McEwan, a mezzo soprano from the Scottish Opera chorus, sang three songs from her international repertoire including *Bailèro* by Canteloube, and was warmly applauded.

### Theme

The theme of the concert was unmissable in these and two other pieces, with two particularly significant. One was *Unity Suite*, which was given a world premiere by its Scottish composer Eddie McGuire. He introduced it saying that he had decided to write some new music to create something positive to come out of the No campaign, which would live on whatever the decision. The *Suite* blends influences from all over Britain, from Shetland, Dorset, and Northumbria, expressing the

unity of Britain and its creative springs, which must never be divided.

The other new piece, written for the concert, was a song called *Why Build Another Wall?* performed by young Scottish members of the Vote No Borders group, which sponsored the concert. The CD of the song, and the film of the concert, are available from their website [www.votenoborders.co.uk](http://www.votenoborders.co.uk)

McGuire explained that a vote to separate would be likely to have disastrous consequences for the musical arts in Scotland, especially for companies which perform all over Britain such as the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Scottish Opera – a world-renowned gem which has already been partly wound down under the SNP government. He reminded the audience of many Britain-wide cultural organisations, such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, which has set world-class standards in music. He also spoke of the unity and strength of the trade union movement which unites British workers in one cause.

Fiona Gilmore from VoteNoBorders reminded us that the things we British hold in common are far greater than things that divide us. The concert ended with audience and musicians joining together in that celebration of human unity, *Auld Lang Syne*. ■

## Is the US trying to push the EU into war with Russia? It's starting to look like it...

# Russia's not our enemy

THE EU COUNCIL recently chose its new President – Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Tusk doesn't speak a word of either English or French, the lingua franca of the EU, and comes from a country not in the Eurozone. He will chair summits. He was the US candidate for the EU job because he is a hawk on Russia. He's had more bad and ugly things to say about Putin and Russia than just about anybody recently and that's saying something.

The US and EU have worked for years to see their desire to take over Ukraine come to fruition. They wanted Crimea, because of the naval base facilities in Sevastopol, and the Donbas Region most of all, because it's the richest part of Ukraine thanks to its industrial base.

They have shown that they are prepared to sacrifice the lives of thousands of Ukrainians to achieve this objective. But they haven't yet won their goal because of the resistance of the Ukrainian workers in Eastern Ukraine and the chess-playing skills of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

The EU's military wing, NATO, is now stepping up the battle. It desperately wants the naval base at Sevastopol, and it needs Ukraine in NATO. US neoconservatives had long seen control of the Black Sea as vital to US energy security, because whoever controls it controls access to the Middle East and Central Asian oil and gas supplies.

### Sevastopol lease

But NATO's charter is clear that a country cannot be a member if it hosts a foreign military base on its soil. Ukraine had agreed a lease with Russia to man the Sevastopol base until 2017. So Ukraine could not join NATO without renouncing the lease.

The US and the EU thought they had secured Ukraine when they funded, through their NGOs, the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004/5. But their puppets running the country pillaged the place and left it bankrupt without renouncing the lease. In February 2010, Yanukovich was elected President and immediately negotiated an extension of the lease by 25 years to 2042 in exchange for massive Russian subsidies and a 30 per cent reduction in gas prices.

While this deal cost Russia dearly,



Shutterstock.com/Igor Golovniiov

**Kiev, 5 September. Yulia Tymoshenko, the former Ukrainian president jailed in 2011 for abuse of power, announces the creation of a campaigning group seeking a referendum on 26 October to allow the country to become part of NATO.**

some \$4 billion a year, it promoted the integration of certain Russian and Ukrainian industries and it guaranteed that Ukraine wouldn't join NATO until 2042 unless the Ukraine government renounced the new deal. Keeping a Russian presence in Crimea was also seen as a way of reassuring the Russian population of Crimea and the Donbas against the constant threat from extreme Ukrainian nationalists.

The US was furious about the deal and began a campaign of destabilisation in Russia through the NGOs funded by USAID and EU institutions. When it pressed the EU to do something to split Ukraine away from Russia and into the US/EU/NATO camp, the EU complied in 2012 by offering Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia EU Associate Agreements, which it promised would lead to full EU membership.

But apart from having to agree to Eurozone austerity measures and being banned from having trade agreements with other countries, they would have to join NATO. For Ukraine this meant renouncing the deal with Russia, including the Sevastopol lease. In response to these US

pressures Russia declared all those NGOs "Agents of Foreign Powers", Armenia rejected the offer and chose to work with Russia, Georgia and Moldova accepted the proposal and Ukraine hovered.

The US and the EU knew the Russian deal was not sufficient to bale out Ukraine and hinted at a \$17 billion IMF loan and more austerity. By 2013, Ukraine couldn't pay Russia for its gas even with a 30 per cent discount. In late 2013, Yanukovich rejected the EU/NATO deal and said he would seek to strengthen his agreement with Russia. He knew that without the Russian presence in Crimea, ethnic tensions would seriously escalate.

The US and EU now went for the jugular. They launched a campaign demonising Putin and Russia. Through their NGOs inside Ukraine they encouraged and armed the fascist Svoboda Party and the Right Sector Party, calling them "pro democracy activists". And they fomented another "colour revolution", as they had in 2004/5.

It was going swimmingly for them. Their

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

diplomats handed out EU flags to wave in Maidan Square, and they mixed and plotted with the opposition. The US and the EU each had their favourite candidates to take over, as became apparent when a taped phone conversation from Victoria Nulan, US Deputy Secretary of State, was leaked saying, “Yats is the guy and fuck the EU.”

It was indeed Yatsenyuk, the US’s “guy”, who went on to become prime Minister after the coup which saw a compromise brokered by Putin torn up and death threats made against Yanukovich by the now out-of-control fascists. The previous deal with Russia was torn up and Russia withdrew the 30 per cent discount on gas. It was only a matter of days before the Sevastopol lease would be renounced.

Reports came from Ukrainian miners’ and steelworkers’ unions in the Donbas that their members were arming themselves to protect their communities from the new Junta and the fascists, who were well known to all in the East.

Crimea went one step further. The naval base at Sevastopol had been home to the Russian and Soviet Black Sea Fleet since the 18th century. The population was mainly Russian and Crimea had always been Russian until Krushchev “gave” it to Ukraine in 1954. Their Autonomous Parliament voted to rejoin Russia, and a referendum delivered a 97 per cent Yes vote on an 83 per cent turnout.

## Demonisation

Coordinated with Russian legal changes, Crimea, including the naval base, returned to Russia. The western media hysteria whipped up by the US and EU now identified Putin as Hitler and Satan rolled into one. NATO began to make war threats. The US sent two warships into the Black Sea.

In a speech to EU leaders behind closed doors in Brussels David Cameron compared Putin directly to Hitler, saying that Putin must not be appeased. Meanwhile Ed Miliband said, “Prince Charles ‘had a point’ when he compared Vladimir Putin with Adolf Hitler.”

Putin went on Russian TV and made it crystal clear that Russia did not seek any



**Newport, 4 September 2014. Brothers in arms: David Cameron and Ukraine president Petro Poroshenko during a meeting at the NATO summit in Wales.**

territory from Ukraine other than accepting the wish of the Crimean people to return to Russia. The Ukraine fascists responded by burning to death 41 anti-junta protesters in a trade union building in Odessa.

It was to get worse for the US and EU when the Donetsk and Luhansk local parliaments decided to go for a referendum on either independence or more autonomy. Joining Russia was not on the ballot. Similar results were declared.

Obama introduced a national emergency executive order to punish, not the illegal junta, but those who “undermined democratic processes and institutions” by opposing the junta. A presidential election in the parts of Ukraine still controlled by the junta resulted in a win for chocolate billionaire Poroshenko. His first act was to use artillery and aircraft against separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk, killing many civilians.

## ‘Media hysteria whipped up by the US and EU now identified Putin as Hitler and Satan rolled into one.’

Mass defections by his troops not willing to kill their own people followed. Next he imposed EU “austerity” measures and then established close relations with the US and EU. But his army was poorly trained and low in morale. They lost many troops and hundreds fled across the border with Russia, where they were joined by some 200,000 refugees.

The Donbas rebels made huge advances after taking some hits. The mysterious, still unexplained shooting down of flight MH17 was blamed by the US and EU on Russia without the slightest evidence and the venom was ratcheted up against Putin again. Accusations of “1,000 Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine” were made by NATO, again without a shred of evidence.

Meanwhile, Obama’s and Cameron’s nemesis in Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, hosted talks in Minsk between Poroshenko, Putin, the rebel leaders, the EU and Kazakhstan. The EU had become aware that there was a real possibility of it being forced into a war against Russia while Obama had insisted that there would be no US boots on the ground.

Eventually, as winter drew near, with the gas turned off because of failure to pay for it, with the coalmines in eastern Ukraine bombed by his own air force and artillery, and because of the dire military situation, Poroshenko agreed a ceasefire and road map with the rebels, proposed by Putin.

This humiliation led to stronger US sanctions on Russia – which had called for and brokered a ceasefire and negotiations – and on its oil, gas and finance industries. NATO followed with exercises in Ukraine, including British troops.

The EU meekly agreed to follow suit on the sanctions, and the US then pushed successfully for its candidate for the EU Presidency, just as it had in Ukraine. The EU and the Ukraine government then ratified the EU/Ukraine Association, along with a Ukrainian undertaking of more autonomy for the Donbas Region.

The US and the EU did not get what they wanted – Sevastopol and the Donbas. But after spending billions on regime change to secure the Donbas and Crimea, and having demonised Putin and Russia, are they really going to give up now? ■

**Wedded to commercial interests, the European Union has wrecked a deal to help academics worldwide...**

# EU blow to libraries

COPYRIGHT RARELY makes headlines, though it, and the wider field of intellectual property, have both become a lucrative source of income for lawyers. It is the arena for bitter battles as enormous capitalist organisations such as NewsCorp and Disney try to monopolise the publication and transmission of knowledge.

Copyright has also been an issue for trade unions in higher and further education institutions. UCU has had to fight hard to block increasingly corporate university employers who want to seize for themselves the discoveries and innovations made by the people they employ. It also negotiated a post-1992 contract for lecturers which allows staff to retain copyright over the work they produce as part of their scholarly activity.

## Speaking up for science

Librarians have played an important role in copyright discussions, as some of the few people who speak up for those who want to use scientific and scholarly information. In Britain the librarians' professional body is the moving force behind the Libraries and Archives Copyright Alliance, which has campaigned on behalf of those who use copyrighted information: students, academics and researchers. It has been instrumental in having the law extended to allow fair use of copyrighted works online.

Librarians are also active on the world stage, through the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) which, in the face of opposition, managed to secure itself a place at on the Standing Committee on Copyright & Related Rights, part of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). IFLA representatives took part in detailed discussions on exceptions to copyright law, which are the clauses allowing library users to make limited copies of works for private study and other permitted purposes.

The matter came to a head earlier this year at a meeting of the Standing Committee. It seemed to everyone that an international treaty was imminent, and one which would include important clauses on exceptions for text-based work. At 1.30 in the morning, the EU representatives sabotaged the discussions by blocking

Amy Johansson/ Shutterstock.com



**Library professionals around the world have been left angry and frustrated.**

**“It appears the EU came with one goal in mind: to kill the discussion.”**

discussion of exceptions.

The IFLA Deputy General Secretary expressed his frustration in unusually strong terms. He said, “For the past three years, Member States have been looking at draft texts on copyright exceptions for libraries and archives. The EU is now trying to pretend these don’t exist. We’re frustrated, and deeply disappointed. It appears the EU came to WIPO with one goal in mind: to kill the discussion.”

The spokesman for the International Council of Archives was even more forthright. He said of the EU, “It seems to value only internal commercial interests, ignoring the human rights and cultural needs of the rest of the world and its own interests in culture and research.”

Britain’s representative (from the Chartered Institute of Library and

Information Professionals) condemned the sabotage and reminded the world that it had been the EU that spent the five years leading up to the 2013 Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities opposing the proposed copyright exemptions for blind and partially sighted readers.

## Obstacle

The next time an EU apologist waxes lyrical about its work in standardising and harmonising international agreements, remind them of the wrecking role the EU played at WIPO, which will be an obstacle to British scientists, scholars and innovators for years to come.

The EU has recently closed a consultation on copyright law, which will doubtless become legislation in due course. We don’t need it. Copyright evolved in Britain: the first copyright legalisation was one of the laws passed after the Act of Union: the Copyright Act of 1709, also known as the Statute of Anne. Those who create and work with the copyrightable works – scientists, writers, researchers, musicians – can show the way to workable solutions. We have no need of the EU. ■

People who work in health know that low levels of service  
The problem is how to move to 7-day provision while preserving

# Health care professionals



**Theatre staff at St George's, London, voting in a pay ballot. Now they must also face the challenge of 7-day working in the face of government attempts to break national bargaining and replace it with local and regional agreements.**

NHS STAFF are being faced with unceasing pressures to produce greater patient care for less investment. Trusts, NHS managers and the government are beginning a softening up process to increase productivity within the existing pay gradings, overall pay envelope and NHS budgets.

While maintaining the pay freeze until at least 2016 (which in fact is a pay cut because the 1 per cent settlement in 2014 is not consolidated), the Health Secretary of State has asked the Pay Review Body to present its "observations" on the delivery of future healthcare without increasing the wages bill.

Hence out-of-hours payments, unsocial hours payments, high cost area supplements, overtime, shift patterns, recruitment and retention premiums, extension of the core working day, decreased staffing numbers, deskilling of staff and so on – all of these working conditions are up for review.

The difficulty NHS staff face – and are aware of – is that statistics suggest that patients with a life-threatening condition have a significantly lower chance of survival if they are admitted to hospital at, or immediately prior to, the weekend.

## Avoid the weekend

A study published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* in 2012 analysed all admissions – more than 14.2 million – to NHS hospitals in England during 2009/10. It found that patients are 16 per cent more likely to die if they are admitted on a Sunday rather than a Wednesday, and 11 per cent more likely to die if they are admitted on a Saturday.

Despite hospitals never closing and providing a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week service, most of that service consists of a mixture of basic nursing care and emergency-only medical cover. The vast majority of actual

diagnostics are squeezed into a tight time-frame of around 8 to 10 hours a day, Monday to Friday. Clinics invariably run at those times when most workers themselves are working, and out-of-hours GP services are either scarce or non-existent depending on locale.

Most of society carries on seven days a week. But should you be unlucky enough to require admission to hospital on a Friday afternoon the most crucial 48 hours of your admission will be spent in an environment where emergency-only levels of doctors are available. You are not even likely to meet those who will primarily be responsible for your treatment until sometime on Monday.

A growing number of health care professionals accept that the traditional hours worked within NHS establishments, and thus the services that can be provided, do not best meet the needs of the nation. Reports have been commissioned by NHS England into running clinical services seven days a week.

## Unacceptable

The British Medical Association has already stated that the current situation is unacceptable and has signalled that it is willing to work with "all stakeholders to achieve a clear understanding of what working patterns will be required". But it has also made clear that the priority for spending should be on urgent and emergency services, as this is the area of investment which, in its view, can make the most difference to life expectancy.

This view is underpinned by work undertaken by the College of Emergency Medicine's project to see how best to care for people who enter the health care system via emergency departments. The BMA points out that given current financial constraints it does not believe "that the resources could be freed up to deliver routine and elective services seven days a week". That is why it wants any investment targeted at where it can make the most difference.

It is far from clear as to how a move to 7-day working will be funded. Most nurses and health care assistants already work over seven days, as do other clinical, technical and support staff in lesser numbers. A

provision over the weekend put patients' lives in danger.  
 serving wages and conditions...

# Nurses face 7-day challenge

**'It is far from clear as to how a move to 7-day working will be funded.'**

A major concern of nursing unions is that recent trends to employ fewer senior nurses and reduce the ratio of registered nurses to health care assistants may be part of the explanation of mortality rates.

Currently unsocial-hours payments are the norm for all of these workers. History shows that where 7-day working is the norm, employers tend to seek to consolidate these types of payments into basic salaries and wages, usually to the overall detriment of the workforce.

## Nurses needed

Either way, no group of NHS workers can see themselves or their practice as being Monday to Friday only. But any enhancement must entail employing more nurses, and currently there is real practical difficulty in filling nursing vacancies, especially in London where wage rates are so far out of step with housing costs.

The Department of Health's plans to recruit nursing staff from elsewhere in the EU are unravelling fast, with even the European Commission projecting an EU-wide shortage of 590,000 nurses by 2020.

There are now several challenges NHS workers and their trade union and professional bodies face. We cannot justify five-day working when the demands of health provision clearly indicate seven-day working is the required norm. So the following questions need to be addressed:

a) How do we maintain national terms and conditions, Agenda for Change, in the face of a government committed to local/regional bargaining?

b) How do we maintain national terms and conditions in the face of trusts seeking to privatise all their functions and break away from the NHS?

c) How do we improve quality of health-care provision in the face of an ideological attack seeking to destroy the very concept of a "national" NHS?

NHS workers need to initiate the debate within their trade unions and professional bodies to determine a clear strategy and tactics of response. The initiative for handling such change must remain with hospital staff and not with the privateers and enemies of the NHS. ■

## Home care fight

UNISON IS signing up local authorities to a charter for the provision of ethical home care of a high quality. This means getting rid of zero-hours contracts for staff, getting rid of 15-minute slots for carers to see the vulnerable, getting rid of not paying for travel time between visits to people receiving care.

Not paying for travel time is one of the most obnoxious attacks on wages, hours and terms and conditions dreamt up by those who have devised strategies of cutting home care or privatising the service. It is also a cynical attack on older people.

The Department of Health has now admitted that its position "is that the idea of a zero-hours contract is, in most circumstances, incompatible with a model of high quality care...and ministers acknowledge that zero hours contracts are, in many cases, not the best way to provide care to a vulnerable individual." From words to deeds has to be the next step. ■



## CPBML/Workers

### Public Meeting, London

Tuesday 14 October, 7.30 pm

**"Britain not for sale"**

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

Foreign corporations and states are taking over our services and industry. The government lauds this as "inward investment". We call it a state-sponsored looting of our national assets that damages Britain's sovereignty and threatens all our livelihoods. Come and discuss. Everybody welcome.

Students of the British working class should study the history fought in nearly every major struggle in the 1970s and 1980s

# A worker's life in struggle

BOB BLOCKSIDGE was an electrician, life-long trade unionist and communist. Over 100 family members, trade unionists and Party comrades attended his funeral on the Isle of Wight in August.

An organiser to the last few days of his life, he had set out speakers for the funeral from Party, Unite, Trades Union Council and friends. The following is the abridged speech from the Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist speaker:

Bob joined the Party when he was 22 years old in 1968. He spent all his life recruiting and organising among workers as a trade unionist and communist.

His life epitomises Britain's trade union and industrial history. It epitomises also Britain's industrial decline and decay deliberately connived at by politicians of all political parties.

Bob started work for the Westminster Dredging Company based in Liverpool. There they built what was then the largest dredger in the world. When it sank off Australia and the dredger was brought back 12,000 miles to be refitted, because Liverpool's shipyards embodied the best in skill and expertise at that time.

Such skill and expertise is now destroyed: the European Union decided that Liverpool was not needed as a port in their grand scheme. Therefore the Mersey didn't need to be dredged and the Westminster Dredging Company went bust.

Every workplace which had the privilege to employ Bob sacked and blacklisted him because he built workplace organisa-



Trades council banner in one hand, *Workers* in the other: Bob at Tolpuddle, 2010

Workers

tion for the electricians union in its various guises and latterly in Unite. He built joint trade union organisation without sectarianism or divide, a unity based upon principle, honesty and integrity. Those qualities are sadly too often missing amongst sections of our trade union fraternity today.

Students of the British working class should study the history of someone who worked, organised and fought in nearly every major struggle during the 1970s and 1980s on Merseyside: at Dunlop, British Leyland, the Merchant Navy, Fisher Bendix, Turners Asbestos Cement and so on.

Bob was a leader within Liverpool

Trades Council before trotskyite sectarianism and idiocy split the city's labour movement. Michael Edwardes, who oversaw the demise of British Leyland and Britain's coal industry, tested his tactics out on Merseyside with the closure of the British Leyland Speke factory. Bob was at the forefront of the fight against the deliberately created decline on Merseyside. He recognised that the destruction of industry resulted in the destruction of working class organisation.

## Blacklisted

Blacklisted in Liverpool, he ended up on the Isle of Wight. A similar process followed: organise, get workers to take responsibility, get workers to join their union and feel their collective strength, get workers to assert their power. A further round of blacklisting followed: at FBM Marine, the dockyards in Portsmouth, Southampton, Poole and so on.

Bob is like millions of working men and women whose history is not written in school textbooks. There are no monuments to them but they epitomise this nation. They epitomise all the nobility of thought, integrity and humanity workers bring to this world of greed and its dog-eat-dog philosophy of the marketplace. They do not take on these tasks for self-aggrandisement or

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...ory of a man who  
...s on Merseyside...

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**‘Bob’s life epitomises Britain’s trade union and industrial history.’**

false honours but because as a class we must do so to survive with dignity and as human beings.

His instinct, trust and belief in his fellow workers never wavered, nor did his sense of humour. Bob wanted to hold a public meeting for the Party on the island. Laughing, he suggested today’s occasion would be the first: his difficulty was agreeing the time and date of his demise. It was finally agreed: he would chair but not take questions.

He laughed at all those grandiose motions of support passed in meetings before you discover no one is actually behind you as you walk out of the factory gate. Learning to laugh at the tribulations and pitfalls life brings was one of his strengths.

He was always the undefeated one when all others around him were defeated. Bob recognised that basic lessons: unity, organisation, discipline were the bedrock on which we as workers build our ideology in opposing the capitalist world we live in.

Bob talked of a simple lesson learnt when he was a young steward as the basis of teaching the next generation of workers: “Ask a question every day, learn something new and forget nothing”. He always returned to the principles of being immersed in the collective strength of workers, and always having your feet on the ground.

Keep his memory by being in your appropriate trade union; teach your children and grandchildren why the union is so vital. Learn more about the communism which Bob carried in his heart and promoted in every struggle he engaged in. Stand up, as he did, for our rights as British workers and realise we can and must run this country.

*Bob Blocksidge, 7 December 1946 – 15 July 2014* ■

# 6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

**Our country is under attack. Every single institution is in decline. The only growth is in unemployment, poverty and war. There is a crisis – of thought, and of deed. The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist has recently held its 16th Congress, a coming together of the Party to consider the state of Britain and what needs to happen in the future. Here we set out briefly six Calls to Action for the British working class – for a deeper explanation, see [www.workers.org.uk](http://www.workers.org.uk).**

**1: Out of the European Union, enemy to our survival**

The European Union represents the dictatorship of finance capital, foreign domination. The British working class must declare our intention to leave the EU.

**2: No to the breakup of Britain, defend our national sovereignty**

Devolution, and now the threat of separation, are both products of only one thing: de-industrialisation. Any referendum on the break-up of Britain must be held throughout Britain.

**3: Rebuild workplace trade union organisation**

Unions exist as working members in real workplaces or they become something else entirely – something wholly negative. Take responsibility for your own unions.

**4: Fight for pay, vital class battleground**

The fight for pay is central to our survival as a class, and must be central to the agenda of our trade unions.

**5: Regenerate industry, key to an independent future**

The regeneration of industry in Britain is essential to the future of our nation. Our grand-parents, and theirs, knew this. We must now reassert it at the centre of class thinking.

**6: Build the Party**

The task of the Party is singular: to change the ideology of the British working class in order that they make revolution here.

**Interested in these ideas?**

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
- Get a list of our publications by sending an A5 sae to the address below, or by email.
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# What democracy really means

**'When people are asked a genuinely important question they will answer it.'**

NOW THAT the referendum is over, the focus of the media has leapfrogged the coming months and focused on the general election. Nothing else is relevant. No event or attitude can be considered or even discussed without thinking about how it will play come the general election.

Trade unions are peddling the same line. Never mind tomorrow, they say, think about May. Some unions – and many workers too – will use the coming poll as an excuse to avoid acting, a rationalisation of cowardice. Others will see in the election a reason to delay action just so as not to upset the Labour Party and damage its chances.

For those wedded to the parliamentary path, any excuse will do. But the truth is that the election is irrelevant to the working class except as a massive distraction from the real issues for us: work and pay, the EU and immigration, housing, the threat of war, the need to rebuild Britain.

The true meaning of democracy is the rule of the people. There are times when voting helps that, and times when it doesn't. Turnout alone is not an indicator of involvement. The fact that turnout in the European elections earlier this year was a scant 34 per cent didn't mean people were apathetic, just that they hate the EU. And the turnout in Scotland didn't show 84 per cent in love with capitalism's "politics", but that the question really mattered to them.

The turnout levels certainly don't show that parliamentary democracy is back in favour. When people are asked a genuinely important question they will answer it, if they don't have to "elect" someone to do it for them for the next five years. Unlike parliamentary elections, referendums should pose a question that actually matters – which makes a referendum perfect for the issue of British membership of the EU.

The outcome of the Scotland referendum, the rejection of separatism, reflects a vital recognition that unity matters far more than

individual or regional issues. Workers need to build on that victory – and victory it is – by identifying our common concerns and how to fight together, uniting to improve our lives.

The coming general election has nothing to do with improvement for the working class, only better opportunities for exploitation by the capitalist class. Anyone who doubts this should look at the manifestos when they appear. Better still, take off the title pages and try to work out which manifesto comes from which party.

One thing's for sure, though. The Labour manifesto will have streams of verbiage about the minimum wage and the need to raise it, but not a whisper about repealing the repressive legislation that has hamstrung unions and their members every time they have sought to fight for more pay.

Workers have far more in common than what divides them. All workers want to improve their lives, but many seek easy ways out. Preoccupation with voting for political parties is no way out at all. Experience should teach that, but the same old lies are returned to again and again – an avoidance of reality.

The theme for the TUC's march and rally in London on 18 October – "Britain needs a pay rise" – is much better than other recent days of so-called action. But there is more marching than doing these days. It says a lot that a stroll around London at the weekend now counts as "action". You only move forward through struggle. What is needed is not days of action, but workplace organisation to plan action over pay.

The history of Britain over the past half century is that whoever wins a general election, capitalists do better and better, and we do worse and worse. That's not because we are victims but because we avoid responsibility for our own lives. Criticising an employer for exploiting you is like asking a shark not to eat fish. We need to stop criticising and start acting. ■

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