

WORKERS

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TTIP: OPPOSITION MOUNTS

G20 and the drive to war

BRITAIN not for sale

HEALTH: The fight for pay

HOUSING FOCUS

plus News,

Book Reviews

and more

IF YOU WANT TO REBUILD BRITAIN, READ ON

WORKERS

“ Take housing off the market

ESTIMATES PUT the value of Britain's housing stock at more than £5 trillion – that's five thousand billion. Yet the shortage of housing remains a pressing requirement for millions of workers.

The value of social housing (council and housing associations) is not known – but 10 years ago it was estimated at £400 billion. The government is intent on forcing through legislation to make councils sell their stock.

The right to a home and how the housing market works are a challenge to all workers, for their futures, for their families, for their dignity throughout all stages of life.

Market-controlled housing reduces this essential right to survival to one of how bricks and mortar, dead capital, bolster the accounts of banks, building societies, estate agents and speculators.

That's why we have begun 2015 with a major investigation into housing and a call for new thinking around this issue (see pages 17 to 20).

Building more houses is not the solution. The housing crisis can only be solved when housing is removed from the market and when workers define in a more radical manner how over £5 trillion of dead capital can be put to better use for society.

Planning is the first weapon workers need to defeat the anarchy of the market. We need to think through how to deploy resources and investment in an area like housing.

Such deployment is about abolishing homelessness and housing squalor and breaking away from the false notion that private home ownership is some form of superior democracy or society. ■

Cover image Andrew Wyard/www.andrew-wyard.info

A happy new year to all

WELCOME TO the first bimonthly *Workers* – 24 pages in full colour, replacing a 16-page monthly in black and white.

For the politicians and the reformists generally among us, the first part of the year is supposed to be all about the coming election – as if that would change anything. So we hope you'll find this issue

a welcome antidote, grounded in reality. May it kick off your new year on a positive note!

While you are waiting for the next issue, out at the start of March, take a look at our new and regularly updated website, www.cpbml.org.uk. And keep up-to-date by signing up to our fortnightly e-newsletter and our Twitter feed. ■



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

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB.

ISSN 0266-8580

www.cpbml.org.uk

Issue 186, January/February 2015



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Rebuilding Britain



Workers

Parliament: all parties are happy with the idea of slashing public spending.

the false talk about increasing tax on multinationals, the truth is that taxes on wages provide the bulk of public finances. The country is doubly deprived – of the goods and services underemployed workers might provide and of their contribution to the state.

The truth is that the target is to dismantle the state. The proportion of GDP taken up by public spending cannot be reduced to 35 per cent by 2019-20 without eliminating whole areas of government provision or impoverishing workers, or most likely both. Promises to protect schools or the NHS can be broken, and in any case the ruling class plans to open them up to the market.

Ed Miliband has promised to reduce the deficit every year, but not as quickly as Osborne wishes. That is both disingenuous and disarming. It peddles the same line as Osborne about the cause of the slump – but just seeks to wield the axe more slowly. The answer for the British working class is to trust no one but ourselves to ensure a better future. ■

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Osborne attack continues

CHANCELLOR GEORGE Osborne used his Autumn Statement on 3 December to announce spending plans for the life of the next parliament – showing all to clearly his intent to continue the attack on British workers under the banner of reducing the deficit. His rivals at Westminster have said little more than “me too” or “it won’t be as bad if you elect me”.

The repeated lie is that it was state spending that caused the financial crisis of 2007-8. Another is that cutting public spending will somehow put things right. Osborne’s austerity plan so far has caused great damage and done nothing to meet even his declared targets. The gap between government spending and income this year is over £90 billion. Back in 2010 Osborne predicted it would be around £40 billion.

Tax receipts are lower than estimated, as wages stagnate or fall. For all

TELEVISION

Action ballot at ITV

WORKERS AT ITV will start the new year with a strike ballot over pay. Three unions – broadcasting and entertainment union BECTU, the National Union of Journalists and Unite – have all rejected a pay offer of 2 per cent.

The below-inflation pay offer came despite revenues at the company increasing by 8 per cent year-on-year to £1.8 billion in the nine months ending September.

Advertising revenues rose 6 per cent in the first nine months of 2014, and double-figure profit growth is expected next year.

- Local paper group Johnston Press has told its underpaid journalists that they can play free bingo games to supplement their wages – though it has also barred them from receiving any top prizes! ■

ECONOMY

What recovery?

THIS IS what capitalist economic recovery looks like. Our GDP per head is still lower than it was in 2008. At today’s prices, the average weekly wage was £540 in 2008, now it is £480. Real wages have been cut by 10 per cent since 2010. The national debt was £580 billion in 2007, £1.4 trillion now.

The eurozone contracted by 0.7 per cent in 2012, 0.4 per cent in 2013. The EU’s economy is still 2 per cent smaller than it was in 2008.

In 2013, Britain’s trade gap in goods was a record £110 billion. Meanwhile, our annual trade deficit with the EU soared from £28.5 billion in 2010 to £56.5 billion in 2013. ■

The screenshot shows the homepage of the CPBML website. At the top, there's a banner with the party's name. Below it, a large headline reads "MILITANT BUS DRIVERS SPARE NO PAIN IN STRIKING BACK". Underneath, there are several smaller news items with titles like "Councils to seek law to block betting shop clusters", "Law Society withdraws share guidance", and "Pensions Bill". The sidebar on the left is titled "Latest" and lists more news items.

ON THE WEB

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

Swingeing cuts at museums

Year-on-year grant cuts to national museums and libraries around Britain are an attack on literacy and culture as well as leading to hardship for staff...

Outsourced electricians strike

Electricians transferred from Sheffield Council to Amey are fighting to preserve their original terms and conditions...

'Umbrella' exploitation

Construction union UCATT has been demonstrating against the now-widespread practice of employing staff through "umbrella companies", which cost workers dear while saving money for employers...

Biscuit workers fight the bullies

Eight hundred members of the GMB union are preparing for more strike action in the run up to Christmas at the Jacobs Biscuits factory in Aintree, Liverpool. The dispute is over imposed changes to terms and conditions of employment and a management culture of disrespect and bullying...

London: the poverty capital

The Greater London Authority's recent update on poverty in London makes stark reading. Despite being the play bauble of the world's rich, London remains one of the most deprived areas in Britain...

Teacher training cuts

Despite glaring evidence of failure, the government has announced an increase in its programme of school-based teacher training for 2015-16. One result will be a massive switch in funding away from universities... ■

TRANSPORT

Bus drivers go for unity

LONDON'S BUS drivers are balloting on industrial action to force through one agreement covering all bus companies in the capital.

While all tube drivers are covered by the same agreement, privatisation of the bus routes has led to the city's 25,000 bus drivers being covered by 18 different agreements, with widely different rates of pay.

The ballot follows a consultative poll which recorded a 96 per cent vote for action. "Pay on London buses has become a farce," said Unite officer Wayne King. "You have drivers doing the same work, driving the same routes at the same time of day, but being paid different rates."

"Rather than one set of negotiations covering all of London's bus drivers we have 18. It is not only inefficient but it is leading to pay inequality and resentment among the men and women who keep London on the move 24 hours a day." ■

Councils fight betting clusters



Workers

MORE THAN a quarter of all local authorities in England have joined forces to use the government's "localism" legislation to block the clustering of betting shops on high streets that offer unregulated casino-style gambling.

93 local authorities – Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem – have called on ministers to consider reducing the maximum stakes on betting shop gaming machines, (known as fixed-odds betting terminals, FOBTs) from £100 a spin to £2.

The act forces ministers to consider the request. Even if the government rejects the request, it will then have to engage in talks with an appointed go-between, in this case the Local Government Association, to agree a compromise.

The councils claim there is now "significant crime and anti-social behaviour associated with betting shops". Newham Council, which is leading the group, says that in 2013-14 there were 9,308 "customer incidents related to gambling activity in betting shops [which] required police assistance, with an average call out of 179 times per week to bookmakers."

The temptation of high-speed, high-stake casino games in the high street has proved irresistible: there are now about 33,000 FOBTs in Britain – a decade ago there were barely any. Newham also pointed to research showing that the 55 most deprived areas of England have twice as many betting shops as the 115 most affluent localities. ■

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

ANTI-UNION LAWS

Costly advice

WHENEVER THERE is mention of industrial action, legal firms come out to offer advice to employers on the ins and outs of law on balloting. This legislation was put in place during the Thatcher years (but never changed by Labour) to undermine the tactical flexibility of workers characterised by the idea of guerrilla struggle.

Even though the legislation was set up to make life difficult for trade unions to operate a "legal" ballot, most employers also find it hard to understand. And even some lawyers struggle with the law.

One legal firm acknowledged recently that unions know more about operating this legislation than employers – and that unions get it right most of the time. So as well as

advising employers on the nuts and bolts of the legislation, lawyers are also advising on how to use the legislation to attack the unions and workers.

Advice seen by Workers includes testing the unions on what they have done – "even if you know it is correct"; spying and initiating propaganda wars – "find a safe source to pass you union material – try and turn it against them"; and exploiting other workers – "consider using staff on zero hours contracts to undermine the strike".

Employers have always done this, but it's interesting to see it in writing – and from lawyers.

Unions should also keep an eye on situations where public sector employers engage lawyers. Is it a good use of public money to pay lawyers to find ways of tripping unions up when employers should be addressing the dispute in hand? ■



THOUSANDS of students from all over Britain demonstrated in London on 19 November against the fees charged for courses, assembling by University College London and marching to Westminster. Placards called for the return of free university education.

New plan to break up Britain

THE SMITH Commission was set up on 19 September, the day after the Scottish referendum. Despite the “no” result, the brief was to continue the break up of Britain by further devolution.

The Commission was a purely Scottish affair, developing proposals that were neither the subject of the referendum, nor included in any party manifesto. The predictable result announced on 26 November was that the Scottish parliament will become permanent and will be given many more powers to raise tax and to control welfare spending.

Crucially Smith also recommended that the block grant of funding from the UK government will be adjusted, but with no detriment to Scotland. The result was a string of “me-too” claims that English regions should also have more powers and greater funding. And in the Autumn Statement the following week Chancellor Osborne announced a reduced company tax rate for northern Ireland.

These fundamental changes to public finances will affect the whole of Britain. Yet the whole of Britain has not been given a say. It’s time to ask why not. Shamefully, the Scottish TUC called for even greater devolved powers than Smith announced. Grahame Smith, Scottish Trades Union Congress General Secretary said in response to the recommendations: “Whilst there are certainly positive elements in these proposals, we are underwhelmed by the package as a whole which does not meet our aspirations.”

The aspirations of workers across Britain will not be met by dividing our country into ever smaller localised fiefdoms. That would also weaken us in our fight against the EU and the destruction being wrought by the European Single Market, worsening the problems we face – loss of jobs, falling pay, threats to the NHS. To be successful, British workers have to stand together as a whole nation. ■

SHARIA

Guidance withdrawn

THE LAW SOCIETY has withdrawn its guidance on inheritance under sharia law after a widespread and fierce campaign called it a “gross dereliction of duty” and demanded its removal.

The written “practice note” had advised that under sharia law illegitimate children, divorced spouses and non-Muslims could not inherit, and that women were entitled to just half as much as men.

Among others, the Lawyers Secular

Society and the National Secular Society had objected on the grounds that it encouraged discrimination and “legitimised sharia law” in Britain. They pointed out that this was religious, not legal, guidance, and therefore had no place in Law Society advice.

In an open letter published in September, campaigners pointed out that the guidance encouraged legal and state welfare services to accommodate “highly gender discriminatory religions laws that are being increasingly defined by religious fundamentalists in our society”.

The President of the Law Society has apologised for issuing the guidance. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JANUARY

Wednesday 14 January, 7.30 pm.
“One world – divided by class.”

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL
CPBML Public Meeting



We live in a world where workers now constitute the majority. And as workers we face the same enemy. In each country ruled by capital, workers must settle accounts with their own ruling class if the world is to have a future. Come and discuss. All welcome

FEBRUARY

Thursday 26 February, 7.30 pm.
“Oppose the dismantling of Britain.
For a united working class.”

The Sovereign Suite, Cosmopolitan Hotel, Lower Briggate, Leeds LS1 4AE

CPBML Public Meeting



Workers are told things will be better if we split our country into ever smaller units. Then we’re told that we can’t live outside the EU. Neither is right for our class. We need to be united to face the challenges capitalism throws at us and build a future for the whole of Britain. Come and discuss. All welcome.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The EU's mad maths

IT'S BEEN A tough time for new European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, what with all the attention on his stewardship of Luxembourg's tax avoidance for transnational corporations. So what better time to announce a massive investment plan to shift the spotlight away from the embarrassing revelations disclosed in hundreds of leaked documents?

Juncker's plan is for a €315 billion investment surge to attempt to put some life into Europe's ailing economy. Except, of course, that the €315 billion exists only in the commission's PR spin. Look closely: it's the mathematics of the madhouse.

The actual amount being committed by Brussels is €21 billion, to be put into infrastructure projects by the European Investment Bank. Of this, around €5 billion is existing capital held by the European Investment Bank, so there's just €16 billion of "new" money.

Except that it is not new money: €6 billion of it is coming from existing funds aimed mainly at...you've guessed it...boosting economic performance. €2 billion is from "budget margin", or unused funds.

And the remaining €8 billion? That's an IOU in the form of a guarantee of future contributions from existing EU projects – in other words, money that doesn't yet exist.

Conjuring trick

But at this point the conjuring trick has hardly begun. Having turned €2 billion of budget margin into €21 billion, Juncker then proceeded to turn that figure into €315 billion by saying the European Investment Bank would be able to use it to generate €240 billion for long-term investment and €75 billion for small and medium-sized companies.

You'd think that if the European Investment Bank could turn €21 billion into €315 billion, it might have done something similar, somewhat earlier, with the spare €5 billion it already has. But it hasn't. And it's not likely to.

The missing €294 billion is supposed to come from the private sector. That's the same private sector that's currently awash with money but won't spend it unless it thinks it's found a sure-fire winner (like property in London).

The leader of the social democratic bloc in the European Parliament (the self-styled "Party of European Socialists"), Gianni Pittella, hailed Juncker's announcement as a huge step forward. "It's clear we've moved into a new era," he said. Clearly, maths is not his strong point. ■



Ambulance workers picket during the NHS pay walkout on 24 November last year.

Pay: take up the

WHEN HEALTH WORKERS realise that they are facing a continuous reduction in earnings they will have to decide whether to meekly acquiesce or find a way to do what generations of workers before them have done: fight to improve pay.

We warned about this four years ago (*Workers*, June 2011), in an article about NHS pay. If a union doesn't fight for pay it invites questions about its very existence. Pay is what unions are for.

So, finally, after many years, there is a fight for pay. It has been widespread and patchy at the same time. Powerful and ineffective together. But finally workers have taken up this call.

Where do we now stand on the fight for pay? Workers' strength was historically centred in industry, principally the engineering industry. Public service workers, if they fought at all, waited to see what settlements were made at Ford's or Vauxhall and tried to emulate them.

No longer. That field of battle has been deserted since Thatcher's attack on manufacturing knocked the stuffing (and most of the union members) out of engineering.

National battles

So now when people talk of battles over pay, certainly national battles, they have public services in mind. Recently there have

been disputes in higher education – both lecturers and support staff; in local government, manual and non-manual; and in the NHS. Some new trends can be identified, new false fights to be avoided, and new realities to take into account.

One is a new technique for settling disputes. Rather than an old-fashioned arm wrestle over pay, using whatever tactics come to hand, a new choreography is evident. Given that the amounts now being fought over are so minuscule (2 per cent of even a £30,000 salary is only £50 a month) that settlement can be achieved by enough workers striking to save the employer the cost of the claim. Hey presto, both sides can claim a victory!

Three days' strike in higher education for support workers enabled Unison's claim to be pretty much met in full (in fact, the employers probably made money out of a deal the union hailed as a victory).

A similar dance is being played out in

'A settlement based on a few hours' strike just isn't an option.'



Our enemy understands the significance of our struggle for pay, even when we don't...

uniformly awful. Unison, GMB and Unite all regularly record turnouts of around 14 to 20 per cent in ballots, a similar proportion to the returns in unions' national elections. Whatever the issue, whatever the industry, whatever the union, results don't vary much.

It has been rightly argued that a low turnout, especially one "hidden" from members, makes the prosecution of a dispute flawed from the start. But this cannot be our only response.

To begin with, unions operate a form of democratic centralism (indeed, they invented it). Once a result is declared and a decision is taken by the relevant elected body, the bickering must stop. Anything else is a kind of sabotage. From the point of declaration of dispute it is all hands on deck; nothing gets in the way of the fight.

There's hardly been a dispute in history where the number of workers who strike doesn't exceed the number who vote to strike. Members respecting a call to action that they didn't vote for is a welcome glimpse of an understanding of how we must operate in struggle. We contribute to debate, and we vote. After that our elected leadership takes a decision, often having to apply courage and clarity against a murky, cowardly background.

The real turnout

This is what has happened in the current NHS dispute. Unison's turnout in its ballot was 16 per cent, and although not uniform there were workplaces where the number of those on strike far exceeded that. The most important turnout is not in the ballot, it's in the action.

Union leaders have to protect those organisations from adventurism and from overreaching themselves. But sometimes it can seem that "leaders" do not want workers ever to fight. Perhaps cowardice has sunk into the bones so deeply that reasons why a fight should be sidestepped have become excuses why a fight should be avoided at all costs.

A case in point is the Royal College of Nursing, and the Society of Radiographers. The nursing union held a consultative ballot, essentially asking members if they wanted to be asked formally whether or not to strike. They got a majority for striking, though on a miserable 12 per cent turnout –

and promptly decided not to ballot for industrial action.

The radiographers also held a consultative ballot, and had an even worse turnout – 11 per cent. But they were keen to stand alongside the larger battalions and so proceeded to a formal ballot. In that ballot they achieved a turnout not far from 50 per cent, which any large union in today's conditions would have been pleased with.

That figure of 50 per cent was very similar to the ballot result of the Royal College of Midwives, which after 133 years joined the ranks of organised labour in action. Just as the contribution of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists marked the Pensions Strike of 2011, so the midwives' entry to the fray marked the latest pay strikes as special. The proletarianisation of the "professions" continues.

Our enemy understands the significance of our struggle for pay, even when we don't. That can be the only reason for the desperation revealed by sending in members of all three armed services and the Met police to provoke strikers in the London Ambulance Service. It was Cameron's jibe that the 2011 strike was a "damp squib" that led to ambulance workers sticking two fingers up to him, thus bringing the service close to meltdown in that dispute.

Overall, the real turnout in October and November was weak. But not to have fought at all would have been weaker. There are enough pundits, media-mongers and flaccid-brains out there who will attack our attempts to fight our way out of decline. We don't need to add to them with hand-wringing and a lack of suggestions about what to do next from within our own ranks.

Leadership cannot consist in eternally pointing out what cannot be achieved, and what is difficult. In this most parlous of states we must develop new ways to instil confidence while avoiding adventurism, of coming up with new ways to energise members, not demoralise them further.

Leaders of unions must now lead, and not find reasons to hide. Members of unions must now take responsibility; they must vote, strike and think about how to develop new tactics. Caution is one thing, cowardice another. Some issues are so important that they can't be dodged, and pay is one of them.

e fight

local government at the moment. If enough members go on strike enough times a deal will be done, not because of the staggering effect it will have on employers, but because enough cash will have been saved to pay the claim.

In health, though, the situation is a little different, because the struggle is not just over how much money is involved. Here the issues include the integrity of the national pay system (Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt is unilaterally trying to drive a hole through it), and even the existence of the pathetic Pay Review Body. Here a settlement based just on a few hours' strike action isn't an option.

Another aspect of these new disputes is the longer-term effects of Thatcher's anti-union legislation. What became known as guerrilla struggle is now more difficult to organise, and needs more thought.

The element of surprise is harder to achieve. Unions must telegraph the blows they intend to land on the employer from so far away that only a fool would be caught completely unawares.

The very act of balloting is a gift to employers, and one which workers in big national, set-piece disputes still have to find a way to grapple with. With few exceptions – the Fire Brigades Union, for example – turnouts in ballots are almost uniform, and

With its share price plummeting and the City breathing down the neck of the Board, shareholders are more concerned to produce a hefty dividend than to maintain the workforce through a short period.

City pressures hit Britain's aerospace industry

IN NOVEMBER Rolls-Royce announced proposals to reduce its Aerospace Division workforce by 2,600 jobs worldwide over the next 18 months. The company claimed its aim was to improve operational efficiency and reduce costs – in contradiction to a statement made at the same time that the company's order book stands at £70 billion!

In January a decision had been taken to “right size” the defence business. It now seems that the civil side of the business is to be shaken up as well.

With the share price plummeting and the city breathing down the neck of the Board, it is considered more important to ensure that shareholders are paid a hefty dividend than to maintain continuity of the workforce through a short period.

Several major engine programmes have moved from the development phase to the launch and manufacturing phase, significantly reducing the need for engineers involved in the development phase for a time. Coupled with the difficult trading conditions for 2015, the company gave this as a reason for the job cuts.

You'd think that given the size of the order book and the difficulty in employing the right staff, to make these reductions at this time for what would seem to be a brief period of cost reduction is a knee-jerk reaction. And as always it comes at a bad time for some workers.

Job losses

The proposed job losses will impact across engineering, operations management and the support functions of the Aerospace Division, which accounts for about 31,000 across the world. That means about an 8 per cent reduction in the workforce. A significant number of employees – 675 – indicated an interest to leave the company.

Progress in talks between union representatives and the company has resulted in agreement for around 300 jobs to go before Christmas and in the first three months of 2015. Compulsory redundancies have been avoided thus far and would be avoided wherever possible.

Discussions also included analysis of the “do in house” as opposed to the buy strategy, and a review of the sub-contract work. This could contribute to the avoid-

This photograph is reproduced with the permission of Rolls-Royce plc, copyright © Rolls-Royce plc 2013.



The Trent aero engine, made in Derby. Britain has the largest aerospace industry in Europe, employing 100,000 people.

ance of compulsory redundancies.

The question remains: Has Rolls-Royce overreacted to financial considerations and placed itself in a situation where it risks losing skills and experience it should really keep?

The company will also look to reduce costs across other parts of the group including the Land and Sea division. This will involve the marine, nuclear and Rolls-Royce Power Systems businesses, and could also result in job losses.

But the company has stressed that it would continue to recruit apprentices and graduates. It has made much of its investments in production facilities as it moves projects into the production phase, to bring them into the 21st century. One of these is a new £100 million advanced aerospace disc manufacturing facility in Washington, Tyne and Wear.

In a press release it said, “When fully operational in 2016, the 18,000m² facility will have the capacity to manufacture 2,500

**own its board's neck, Rolls-Royce appears more
the skill base on which its profits depend...**

n's aero engine maker



Employing over 100,000 workers – second only to the United States globally.

fan and turbine discs a year. These discs will feature in a wide-range of Trent aero engines including the world's most efficient aero engine the Rolls-Royce Trent XWB. Fan Discs and Turbine Discs are at the heart of the engine, operating in extreme conditions providing the engine's thrust."

In addition, Tony Wood, President of Aerospace, Rolls-Royce said: "Rolls-Royce is committed to investing for future growth in order to deliver for our customers. We invested £687 million in facilities and equip-

ment around the world last year."

Rolls-Royce must demonstrate a continuing commitment to invest in the workforce with the skills needed to run this site. That cannot be conjured up then dispersed periodically.

Publicity

At the official opening of the new plant in June, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Business Secretary Vince Cable arrived to soak up the fine atmosphere among fac-

'Skills cannot be conjured up then dispersed periodically.'

tory staff. Anxious for good publicity, they announced £45 million in joint government and industry funding for research led by Rolls-Royce to develop new technology for low-carbon aircraft engines.

Clegg said: "We should be really proud that the UK is the number one aerospace industry in Europe and a world leader in innovation. The highly skilled workers at the new Rolls-Royce factory are leading the charge for innovative technologies that are made in Britain." Fine words on a fine occasion, but of course the government will do nothing to protect the skilled workforce some of whom are now at risk of dispersal.

In late 2015 another new Rolls-Royce site costing £60 million will open at Birmingham Business Park to supply the fuel control systems for engines. Both these sites are replacements for ageing buildings and will safeguard jobs, but not necessarily create any new ones.

Research

The research will involve top scientists and engineers across the country, including at the University of Birmingham, the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in Sheffield, the Advanced Forming Research Centre in Glasgow, the Manufacturing Technology Centre in Coventry, and the Universities of Nottingham, Oxford and Sheffield.

Aerospace contributes £24 billion to the British economy every year, with hundreds of smaller businesses involved in supplying high-profile firms such as Rolls-Royce, and supports 230,000 jobs across the country. Money wasted propping up the Brussels bureaucracy machine could be used to invest further in the aerospace industry as part of Rebuilding Britain. ■

At first it was just another obscure trade treaty. Then trade need some rethinking. Now they are starting to understand

TTIP: a dagger aimed at



Protest against TTIP outside parliament, November 2014.

Andrew Wyard/andrew-wyard.info

AT LAST, a sea change is taking place in the thinking of the unions on TTIP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership treaty being negotiated between the European Union and the US.

Up until now opposition had largely been to two particularly obnoxious elements, rather than to the treaty as a whole. The first of these is the so-called Investor State Dispute Settlement process (ISDS), which would allow multinationals to sue governments without national legal systems having any say.

The second is the possible impact on the privatisation of the NHS, as TTIP could not only accelerate the break-up of the NHS but also make returning the whole service to public control impossible without repudiating the whole treaty.

But at a meeting at Unite HQ on 1 December under the aegis of the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, two leading

unions – RMT and Unite – announced that they are now pursuing a policy wholly opposed, not only to the issues of ISDS and the NHS, but to every aspect of TTIP, and its sister deal TiSA, the Trade in Services Agreement.

Deregulation

The two unions have recognised that TTIP threatens to demolish all agreements negotiated by trade unions, including collective bargaining on pay, summed up in the phrase “a race to the bottom”.

More than ever, workers are to be pawns in a global corporate game of deregulation and tax avoidance, without the right to be heard in a dispute – least of all in a claim against the British government, since Westminster ceded its powers of negotiation to the European Union, and treats opposition to TTIP with contempt.

Unite Assistant General Secretary Steve

Turner apologised on behalf of his union, especially the automotive sector, for not having realised sooner the significance of a similar trade deal with Canada (CETA), which was ratified in Ottawa on 26 September 2014, and for having been in favour of TTIP.

John Hendy QC revealed that the leaked Canadian agreement with its over 1,000 appendices will be incorporated into TTIP. Attention was drawn to Section IV of CETA with its soothing reference to “fair and equitable treatment” – where capitalists decide what is “fair”.

Unite had mistakenly put its faith in the false promises of the EU Commission regarding growth and jobs, but academic studies (see Box 1) have shown that TTIP would represent a net loss to Britain. Unite was also worried about the cost of ISDS (a minimum of £4 million) based on figures from the Paris-based Organisation for

Unions started realising that their support for TTIP might just how dangerous it is...

Britain's sovereignty

'It is in health where the richest pickings lie.'

Economic Co-operation and Development, the "club" of advanced industrial nations (OECD).

Welcome as its turnaround is, Unite clearly has yet to acknowledge that the real principle at stake is not growth on its own but national sovereignty. Free trade, allowing capitalists to play off national workforces against each other and skip lightly over to the easiest tax regimes, is the opposite of national sovereignty.

The French government has acted to protect its cinematic heritage, but British entertainment union BECTU argues that it is a myth that the cultural sector and intellectual property will be exempt from TTIP. EU Commission reassurances are sounding increasingly hollow.

The fact is that the treaty negotiators are operating a so-called "negative list" of services not open to privatisation: all others are up for grabs and could be automatically privatised. Thanks to the French defending the integrity of their film industry and culture, the audio-visual sector has been excluded – but only from the initial talks.

NHS

Unions hope that the NHS can also be made an exception. But health represents a larger part of global GDP than any single industry such as automobiles or computers. It is in health and care services that the richest pickings lie for greedy corporations. It is hard to imagine them giving up on such a key prize.

In any event, that would still leave education and other services. Higher education and adult training are a particular target.

And ISDS is hardly new. Some investors based in the EU have for some time been claiming the power to take developing countries to court for loss of profits. One example: in 2013 French multinational Veolia began suing for damages after the Egyptian government raised the minimum wage.

And it will be no use governments running to the European Court. Unlike deals under the World Trade Organisation or the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), TTIP would not be subject in any way to rulings from the European Court of Justice. Which begs the question: Does TTIP represent the surrender of the EU to the US?

This deal between the EU and the US is being discussed in secret. Party to it is the ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation, which purports to stand up for workers. At a meeting in London in October organised by the South East Region of the TUC (SERTUC), War on Want speaker John Hilary said that a 30-year ban has been imposed on access to the bi-monthly minutes and that not even MEPs will know exactly what is in the treaty until it is about to be signed.

They will be bounced into agreement, as Washington wants the deal completed by 2015 in time for the US presidential elections the following year. But the cat is already out of the bag (see *Workers*, September and October 2014). Unions across Europe, the US and Canada, as well as broad front organisations such as 38 Degrees and Stop TTIP (founded in Berlin), are campaigning to have TTIP thrown out.

At an increasingly angry meeting on TTIP called by SERTUC in October, a teacher from the Universities and Colleges Union asked why the EU claims the right to represent Britain in matters of trade? Taking their cue, others also raised questions about the EU. East of England MEP Richard Howitt could only sputter about UKIP (which, unlike Labour, opposes the treaty) and could barely respond.

A European Citizens' petition against TTIP collected a million signatures. According to EU law, this should have triggered a compulsory debate in the European parliament, but that didn't happen. This prompted an unusual ally, the Pope, to declare that "democracy" must not be allowed to collapse under the weight of the multinationals. What democracy, we may well ask? The EU entails loss of sovereignty, so is intrinsically undemocratic.

Such is the outcry (when 100,000 wrote in, the server crashed) that negotiations on ISDS have been suspended. Business Secretary Vince Cable feigns sympathy, but he is a willing party pleading with the newly appointed EU president Juncker to retain key elements of the treaty.

TTIP is not about reducing tariff barriers.

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1: The Tufts study

IN OCTOBER last year academics at Tufts, one of the US's premier universities, published a detailed study on the economic effects of TTIP. Its stark conclusions seem to have shaken some unions out of their complacency.

The authors note that the studies used to support TTIP are "not a good basis for policy decisions as they rely heavily on unsuitable economic models".

So instead they looked at TTIP using the United Nations Global Policy model, simulating the treaty's impact on the global economy "in a context of protracted austerity and low growth in the EU and US".

And the impact would be devastat-

ing. After a decade, Britain's net exports would have declined by 0.95 per cent, GDP would have fallen, workers would have lost a total of €4,200 in income, and throughout the EU 600,000 jobs would have been lost. And all accompanied by a huge redistribution of wealth – from workers to capital – of 7 per cent.

On top of this, government income through taxation would decline, and financial instability would increase.

The report is freely available on the web. It should be compulsory reading for all those in trade union research departments, particularly at the TUC, which have been cheerleaders for TTIP and for free trade in general. ■



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Even the treaty's backers acknowledge that. Rather, it is a mandate to maximise the profits of the transnationals. To do this it must erase all the normal regulations on health and safety, labour and environmental standards – what the EU calls “trade irritants”.

Through mechanisms such as “harmonisation” and “mutual recognition of regulations” any rules thought to impede profits will be reduced to levels tolerated in the US, or lower. For example, some 300 substances are banned in the cosmetics industry in Europe, against just 12 in the US.

Banning unions

At the SERTUC meeting a Unison health worker reminded listeners that in many states in the US the meaning of “right to work” has been distorted to encourage the banning of unions. There is a culture of very long hours and little holiday in the USA. Under TTIP this could happen in Britain regardless of union-negotiated agreements.

The British government and the City of London are complicit; the very banks which played poker with our money in 2008 and

‘Why does the EU claim the right to represent Britain in matters of trade?’

which Cameron and Cable have been pretending to rein in, are pressing for the removal of regulation under TTIP. A parallel Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is also under way. The aim is a corporate-run world.

An additional international insight was offered by John Hilary, who suggested TTIP was a shoring up of power in response to a group of nations which included Russia and China. He called TTIP an “economic NATO”. (see also article on G20, page 15).

TTIP represents for us a direct class confrontation with finance capital. In Britain, and across Europe and America, workers are starting to rise to the challenge.

Hands off Britain! No compromise deal! Out of the EU!

2: The extraordinary rendition of Britain

IT IS DELUSIONAL to think that any body other than workers themselves can prevent the extraordinary rendition of Britain that TTIP represents – of our NHS, state education, railways and utilities, our trade associations, our H&S Executive, food safety agencies, of national oversight of pharmaceuticals, of our legal and political system.

Under pressure from unions the TUC changed its position at its 2014 conference from compliance to apparent outright opposition, “whilst continuing to monitor progress and press for improvements”. Its composite motion contains contradictions and loopholes such as this, and defends the EU for negotiating on our behalf.

Despite everything, the TUC has not yet abandoned its defeatist view that Britain is nothing in the world without the EU. As for the European Trade Union

Confederation position, it is risible: welcoming the treaty while trying to negotiate on everything antithetical to it is like dealing with Genghis Khan, where everything is negotiable except the actual putting to the fire and the sword.

We cannot rely on MEPs with their vested interests, nor the Labour Party. All accept the treaty in principle, seduced by the promise of “investment flows” and access to cheap American markets – and anyway in thrall to the idea that “the market” must be allowed to rule.

The 2014 Labour Party conference picked up on the feeble TUC plea for “transparency” and “consultation” on ISDS, insisting that “the principle behind the treaty is to keep or raise standards” and benefit consumers through cheaper goods and services.

Labour’s position is disingenuous if not downright duplicitous: it knows that once TTIP comes before the British parliament there will be no possibility of any meaningful amendment.

The EU remains the elephant in the room. Any querying of the nature of the EU has a disconcerting effect on trade unionists and politicians with a vested interest in it. Composed as it is of governments that have already surrendered their own authority, the EU is the perfect conduit for corporate takeover of nations – finance capitalism’s last desperate bid for survival.

TTIP is a creature of the EU. Our continued membership of it is the cause of our travails. We should get out, build an independent Britain and control our own trade agreements. The alternative is the fascism of corporate control.

If you hand over your national assets, it can be almost impossible to get them back...

Britain – not for sale

Workers



Local? Northern Gas Networks is owned by two Hong Kong companies and the state pension fund of New South Wales, Australia.

OCCUPIED COUNTRIES learn the hard lesson that when you lose something it can be difficult, and often impossible, to get it back later. The Greeks learnt that over the Elgin Marbles, removed from the Parthenon 200 years ago. Lord Elgin did it with the authority of the Ottoman Empire, which was at the time the occupying power in Greece.

Like the Greeks we too have occupying rulers. Like the Greeks we have a ruling class that is negligent with our treasures. And like the Greeks we are in danger of allowing their theft from beneath our noses.

Unlike the Greeks we are not there yet. But the theft comes in many guises and the battle to keep what is ours is relentless.

British capitalism is moribund and weak. Instead of real wealth creation, it substitutes an illusion of growth. Attempts to sell off Britain at any cost are an indication the corruption of British capitalism and also of its terminal decline. It is anxious to squeeze as much profit as it can from what it sees as

Britain's dwindling assets.

British capitalism is divesting itself of its own industrial capital by continually transferring companies into foreign ownership. But it also transforms what was common property into private ownership, with the consequent possibility of foreign sale. This has profound consequences.

Everything must go

British capitalism has put up a large sign saying "Britain for sale: offers welcome. Everything must go." This theft comes with an ideological attack on the idea of holding property in common for the common good.

To do that, assets have to be defined and isolated. Coherent, logical and efficient structures are broken up into disparate

units, each ready to sell. Examples can be seen throughout the public sector and state industries including utilities, transport and local government. And nothing is ruled out from fragmentation and sale in future.

Nowhere better illustrates the current fire sale than the railways. British jobs have been destroyed; conditions of service and pay undermined. Huge subsidies attract foreign owners. Governments, including Labour, have welcomed this as "inward investment". In truth government pays out excessive subsidies and passengers pay ever higher rail fares.

This economic madness is acceptable for the ruling class and its government, since their agenda is to destroy the concept of state industries and their accompanying trade unions.

This ideological attack on an industry which should be run for the common good has not gone smoothly. The industry has not been modernised. Instead it has developed into a get rich quick, short term and underfinanced mishmash of companies with little incentive to invest for the long term.

This article is an edited version of the speech given at a CPBML meeting in London in 2014.

'This economic madness is acceptable for the ruling class.'

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Governments have thrown money at the problem, desperate to sell off these rail franchises to foreign owners. The majority are now foreign owned; more will soon follow. And this is on terms that encourage foreign companies to run British trains at little cost to themselves.

The government's propaganda of liberating ownership from the dead hand of state control is a lie. These foreign companies are for the most part state-owned.

The three rolling stock companies have also come under foreign ownership. Their lack of investment and cynical practices have contributed further to the destruction of British train manufacture.

Overcharged

The age of rolling stock continues to rise. At the same time there is blatant profiteering. A parliamentary inquiry estimated the overcharge to be at least £100 million a year. That's on top of generous profits guaranteed by no risk, long-term contracts.

Unable to wait for these companies to perform their allotted function, the government was forced to come to the rescue by ordering £1.6 billion of new rolling stock for the Thameslink upgrade. But that contract went to the German manufacturer Siemens.

After the outcry at this disregard for British jobs, the Canadian firm Bombardier was awarded the recent £1.6 billion Crossrail contract, keeping production in Britain at Derby. But the cost is three times the amount of the public contribution originally announced.

The transfer of assets abroad facilitates the attack on British workers. It is happening throughout the whole economy and not just rail or other former state industries.

In the last ten years £450 billion of private British companies have been sold into foreign ownership. Britain's lax ownership regulations and tax laws make it attractive for foreign capital wishing to strip assets and make a quick return. The consequential loss of British jobs has been considerable.

Recently Pfizer was thwarted in its attempt to take over Astra Zeneca. The company's workers and their allies

'Capitalist complicity in the sale of Britain is an expression of weakness.'

successfully forced the company to resist. The government would have stood by while the pharmaceutical industry, a true world leader and a beacon of Britain's skills and ingenuity, faced a threat to its existence.

Capitalism is always ambitious to exploit its working class further. As well as taking possession of industries thrust into the open market by compliant governments, it now also seeks to go to the heart of public services and take them into private ownership.

Relinquishing national power has taken a new step with the EU grabbing sole negotiating rights for the trade treaties of member states. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP, see page 10) with the US is aimed at further opening up public services to private companies.

Rallies and action against privatisation of the NHS are focusing on that danger.

Health workers striking over pay were also saying "we have demands that must be met and we will not allow privatisation of the NHS". A fight for pay becomes a fight for the NHS itself.

What does it matter? Is not one capitalist owner much like another?

British capitalists are no patriots. They have connived in sending production and jobs abroad. They have conspired with the EU to destroy our democracy and sovereignty, and colluded with international capital in attacking us, their working class.

Capitalist complicity in the sale of Britain is an expression of their weakness, which workers must exploit. Only the British working class has a vision for Britain that is in our interest and under our control. This vision can be built only by ourselves and not foreign hands.

We will not be like the Greeks, and be negligent of our treasures. We will remember that once lost these treasures may take a long time to return. We will not allow our long-fought-for advances to be stolen from beneath our noses. Let's throw off this occupation by capitalism and say "this is not yours to sell, it is our and our children's heritage, so hard won by our mothers and fathers".

There is no time to lose. Our message is clear: Britain is not for sale. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain's series of London public meetings continues with two further dates on 14 January and 4 March. Both will be held in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL. Other meetings are held around Britain, with one in Leeds on 29 February, at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, Lower Briggate. For meeting details see What's On, page 5, or visit www.cpbml.org.uk/events.

M The Party's annual London May Day rally is always held on May Day itself, regardless of state bank holidays – in 2015, Friday 1 May, in Conway Hall, Holborn.

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

The G20 summit in Australia marked a dangerous point in the drive to war, led by the US–EU axis...

G20: the drive to war

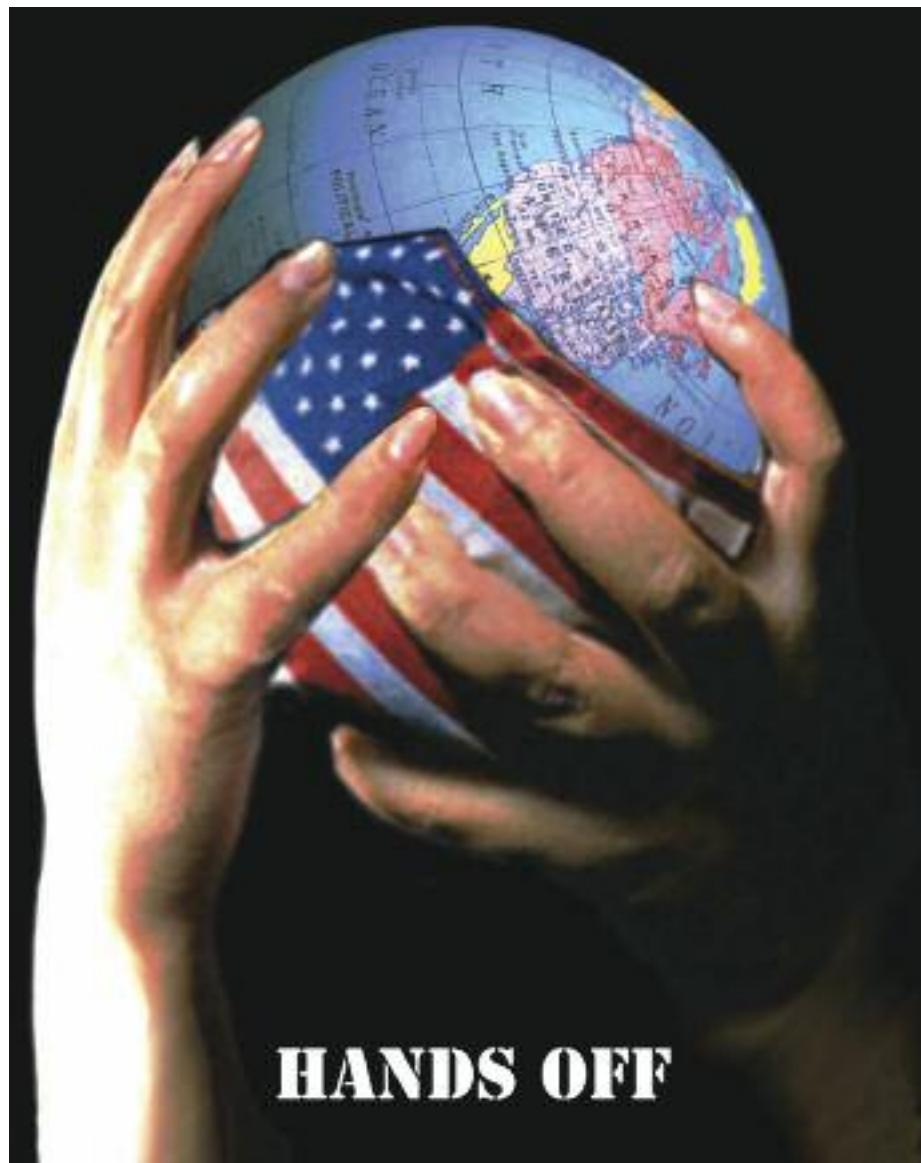


Illustration © Chris Bird

THE G20 SUMMIT in Brisbane, Australia, in November made good TV: Russian President Putin as the naughty boy isolated by the other 19 countries, which took it in turns to call him names, forcing him to leave early. But it wasn't like that at all.

The summit marked a dangerous point in the drive to war by a US-led axis. This includes the EU and its military wing NATO, a now belligerent Canada plus Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Saudis and the Gulf despots.

The leaders of countries representing over 85 per cent of the world economy were supposedly there to discuss economic and financial issues. Instead we witnessed a bunch of political buffoons attempting to bury the stated objective of their meeting by hurling public insults at Putin.

David Cameron told Putin in a "robust" exchange that he was at a crossroads and about to be hit with more sanctions and become more "isolated". Canadian Prime Minister Harper complained he had to shake

'A US Congress resolution effectively calls for regime change in Russia.'

hands with Putin. Meanwhile Australia's Tony Abbott threatened to "shirtfront" Putin. (A fierce body check in Australian Rules football, in case you're wondering.)

This theatre overshadowed the business being done by the US and its allies. Obama, Abbott and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed to "increasing military cooperation and strengthening maritime security" in the Pacific against China.

The Brisbane show also detracted from the BRICS summit in Brazil last July, a meeting of the five members of G20 who did not join in the buffoonery – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. At the suggestion of Brazil, the BRICS group agreed to step up cooperation. In particular they are pushing ahead with the BRICS development bank as an alternative to the International Monetary Fund.

BRICS cooperation

China said that BRICS cooperation would not only boost the global economy but also ensure global peace. "Make trade, not Tomahawks" urged Chinese President Xi. He reminded the group that the 120 member nations of the Non-Aligned Movement – beggars at the G20 table – were paying close attention.

Largely absent from British media coverage is a US Congress resolution, H. Res. 758, passed on 4 December, a couple of weeks after G20. This effectively calls for regime change in Russia. It wants the return of Crimea to Ukraine, Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia, Transnistria to Moldova and so on. It calls on NATO to increase

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preparedness for war and refers to Ukraine as a US ally, despite the country not being a NATO member.

How did we get to this situation and why should we be concerned?

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, the US, EU and NATO assumed they could acquire and control whatever remained of the wreckage of the USSR. Their placeman Boris Yeltsin had his orders: dismantle the structure of the USSR and outlaw the Communist Party.

The plan was that NATO and its political wing, the EU, would then expand eastwards to gobble up all the Eastern European and former Soviet states into the US-EU military alliance. This proved more difficult than they had expected. A number of countries resisted these US-inspired advances, particularly Belarus, Ukraine, most of former Yugoslavia and Russia itself.

New leadership

Within 10 years Yeltsin was gone. A new leadership emerged in Russia determined to reverse this push, though Putin did also try to reach an accommodation, but the EU and NATO wanted to press on to bring more countries into their orbit.

In the first decade of the new century, the EU and NATO along with the US attempted to encircle Russia because of its stubbornness in not recognising a world run by and for the US.

The US thought it was now the sole major power in the world. It tried to force a free trade agreement onto the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean except Cuba. It then invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, threatened Syria and Iran. All the while Britain meekly followed in the footsteps of the US.

The US and EU used foreign-funded NGOs to try to undermine the governments of both Ukraine and Russia. A puppet government was already installed in Georgia on Russia's southern flank.

Inevitably Russia passed a law requiring foreign-funded NGOs working in Russia to register as agents of a foreign power, similar to a law passed in the US. Russia also strengthened ties with Latin America, China,

'The US thought it was now the sole major power in the world.'

Iran and its long-standing ally Syria.

China also felt threatened by the US. Along with Russia it formed the Shanghai Pact, an organisation for economic and military cooperation along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and with a close relationship with Iran.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuba and Venezuela led resistance to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, creating the alternative known today as ALBA. The attempt to impose the free trade agreement failed and only strengthened ties between countries in that region (excluding the USA, Canada and colonial states).

Defeated in Latin America and the Caribbean and losing the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US turned its attention back to Russia. In 2008 the US encouraged Georgia to attack South Ossetia, an area of Georgia that had broken away and which was protected by Russia. This led to a short war, in which Russia defeated the Israeli-trained forces of Georgia.

Stooges

This defeat made the US more determined than ever to go for Ukraine using its EU and NATO stooges. Eventually in early 2014 demonstrators brandishing EU flags, supported by neo-Nazis and armed fascists, took to the streets of the Ukrainian capital Kiev to attack the government. This forced a coup d'état, and the elected president of Ukraine had to flee to Russia.

The US placeman Yatsenuk was made prime minister. His puppet regime broke an agreement with Russia and told them to leave their naval base at Sebastopol in the Crimea. The resistance and opposition that followed represented yet another defeat for the US/EU/NATO. The response was ever-deepening sanctions on Russia enforced by

the encircling powers of the US-led axis.

Russia has been subjected to stringent sanctions for nearly a year, causing great damage to its economy. While refusing to succumb to these pressures, Russia has found alternatives. For example its trade with Iran will now be conducted in rubles, and trade with China will be in both rubles and Chinese yuan instead of US dollars. Russia has also agreed two massive trade deals with China to build pipelines and to sell Russian oil and gas.

The US sees these moves as a major threat to petrodollars and the dollar economies. It has gone to war in the past in similar circumstances. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 took place while that country was considering trading its oil in euros rather than dollars. And in 2011 Libya had proposed a new currency for Africa to reduce trade dependence on the US dollar, the gold dinar to be backed by Libyan oil and gold.

Encirclement

Russia is being encircled just as was the Soviet Union in the days of the Cold War. The US 5th Fleet is deployed in the Persian Gulf with two aircraft carriers, 20 battleships and 100 strike aircraft. Some of the most advanced US warships capable of firing missiles with nuclear warheads are in the Black Sea and 30 NATO warships recently carried out exercises in the Baltic Sea.

Syria and Iraq are now in chaos due to the US-led axis interference. There are US military bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Oman as well as its military complex on the British colony of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. There is a new US military pact with the Philippines. Japan is rearming and along with Australia is cooperating militarily with the US.

Capitalism is experiencing a dire economic situation that shows few signs of lifting, no matter what the G20 politicians say. In this context, warning of the drive to war by the US-led axis is not scaremongering.

Capitalism has nowhere to go. It is in absolute decline. Without a working class response taking responsibility for its own future, war is always a potential outcome. Now, more than ever, it's time for the working class to make a stand against war. ■

“Build more houses” is not the answer to the housing shortage. Here are some alternatives...

How to house Britain

Workers



Estate agents in Yorkshire. Houses, houses everywhere – but speculation has taken over from need.

AFTER AIR, FOOD and water, the most fundamental human requirement is shelter. In Britain in the 21st century and especially so in its capital city London, the provision of housing has become perverted.

Housing is no longer a case of meeting a human need. It has become a case of satisfying the greed of a tiny minority of capitalist speculators who see housing only in terms of the profit that it can make for them. It has become increasingly disconnected from the actual purpose or “use value” of a house as means of shelter.

Like a rapidly spreading cancer, this perversion is now affecting other types of property, after a supposedly “minor” relaxation in a planning regulation allowed the change of use of offices, industrial units and warehouses into housing. A growing number of businesses which provided employment are being turfed out, and this unregulated development is now eroding employment.

Across the health service and local government, land which is held as a public asset is also being identified for “disposal”. The accrued wealth of our forebears who

fought for a health service and the amenities provided by local government – civic society – is being disposed of in the name of finding a bit of cash to keep a service going and the land is handed over to the speculators.

The Housing Minister, Brandon Lewis, even told councils recently that they can ignore the government’s own requirement for them to adopt local plans that set out how they would meet housing need.

The working population cannot afford to buy homes or to pay astronomical rents. According to all the Westminster parties the answer is to build more “affordable” houses but as the prices are not affordable, all this would do is throw yet more petrol on the fire.

The banks aren’t willing to lend on mortgages and “affordability” is not on their agenda. Central banks around the world are supporting property price rises to stave off another crisis in their profits. So the real population of London – the people who live and work here – need to take the matter in hand. But where to start?

Demand 1. Leave the European Union, manage population and house the existing population

London occupies 1,600 square kilometres, less than 1 per cent of the total area of Britain. At mid-2012 it had a population of 8.3 million according to the Office of National Statistics, 13 per cent of the total. These are the official statistics; the actual population could be considerably higher.

The European Union policy of free movement of labour, now subtly renamed free movement of people, means that there can be no accurate prediction of current or future population.

Some of the signs of housing overcrowding are visible, with areas of “beds in sheds” or shanty towns in several parts of London. Other signs are less visible – officially 17.1 per cent of households in London have more than 1.5 people per

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And Johnson is calling us economically illiterate!

IF YOU don't agree that foreign investors should buy up swathes of London you are "economically illiterate", says London Mayor Boris Johnson.

His latest musing comes at the news that a Middle Eastern business group (The Abu Dhabi Financial Group) has snapped up Scotland Yard, the iconic Metropolitan Police Headquarters in central London, for £370 million.

It has been bought, of course, to be transformed into apartments (expensive ones), office space and a hotel. Just what Londoners want!

The investment group, in a nod towards sentimental history, doesn't want the famous rotating New Scotland Yard sign outside the building and is letting the Metropolitan Police take it when they move out. As our features on pages 10 to 16 on TTIP, the G20 and the sale of Britain show, the old signs may soon be all we have left.

Johnson's full quote was there was no economic difference between "having an investor from Abu Dhabi or having the BP pension fund do this. Anyone who thinks otherwise is, I'm afraid, completely economically illiterate."

In the world of free flowing capital without borders there may not be an economic difference. There is, however, a huge political difference. Selling off London public landmarks for foreign investors to make obscene profits, instead of reinvesting in them and utilising them in the interest of Londoners is wrong.

Anyone who thinks otherwise, is, we are afraid, politically illiterate! ■

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bedroom, twice the proportion of England and Wales as a whole.

Given that in some areas of central London such as Mayfair, large swathes of property are not functioning as homes and are unoccupied (except by security guards) the real levels of overcrowding are disguised by any reference to the average.

According to politicians and estate agents, the answer to this population growth is to build more houses. For Savills, the global property company, the answer is to build 50,000 homes a year – the equivalent of 18 Olympic Villages.

But Savills' own research shows that as the income of 70 per cent of London households is less than £50,000 a year, the vast majority of these houses would need to be available at prices far below current market rates.

And since 2008, house builders have focused on the wealthier, credit-worthy buyers. A disproportionate amount of stock is being delivered at the "new prime" levels of between £1 million and £2 million.

A generic call to "build new houses" is a speculators' charter and can solve nothing. Unless we leave the EU, London will become ever more crowded and unable to house the workers needed to serve the city.

Demand 2. No more land sales to non-UK residents

In the year to June 2013 Savills estimate that 70 per cent of new-build properties bought in Central London went to foreign investors, while 30 per cent of the capital's homes "worth" more than £1 million were bought by non-UK residents. The figure to June 2014 is expected to be much higher.

At the moment these non-UK residents do not even pay capital gains tax on profits when they sell. In December 2013 a capital gains tax on future gains made by non-residents who sell residential property in Britain was announced, but this will not apply to properties bought before April 2015. This long run-in period has contributed to the speculator frenzy.



Andrew Wyard/www.andrew-wyard.info

December 2014: Marching against the new owners

But capital gains tax will be not be much of a deterrent to speculators. What is really needed is prohibition of sales to non-UK residents.

Singapore, for example, doesn't allow foreign individuals or foreign companies and societies to purchase vacant land or landed residential property, such as bungalows, terraced houses and semi-detached houses. Much closer to home, Switzerland regulates property and land sales to non-Swiss purchasers very strictly.

We need to legislate to prevent the sale of British land and residential property to overseas buyers. Tiny measures such as tweaking capital gains tax will not alter anything.

Demand 3. Stop council house sales

There are about 400,000 council dwellings in the Greater London area, accommodating around one in eight households and accounting for most of social housing of all kinds. That's high compared with the rest of the country, yet the Smith Institute think tank calculates that 290,000 council homes in London have been lost to the capital



s of the New Era housing estate in Hoxton, East London, who are seeking to evict existing tenants.

since Right to Buy in 1980.

Its housing expert told a London Assembly committee in 2013 that simply replacing the lost council dwellings would, at current rates of investment, take 72 years and cost £45 billion. Yet there are 380,000 people on London's local authority waiting lists, with little chance of this reducing any time soon.

In four years, nationally, the number of homeless households on councils' books has risen by more than a quarter. At the same time council funding for single homeless people has fallen by 26 per cent.

In April 2012, the government increased the maximum cash discount for sale of council houses to £75,000 across England, rising to £100,000 in March 2013 for tenants in London. As evidence has emerged that many of the tenants who have applied to buy council houses in London are on housing benefit, it is increasingly clear that speculators are using tenants as a channel to buy, doing a deal and splitting the difference.

In 2013 the GMB union looked into who owns former council houses and found that 40 per cent are now owned by buy-to-let landlords. The union discovered

that Charles Gow, the son of Thatcher's housing Minister Ian Gow who planned the right to buy scheme, and his wife own 40 properties in just one South London housing estate.

Councils need to be able to reverse this loss in housing stock and build for their own residents. Building more houses without control on speculation will lead to further speculation. But with controls in place councils are in the best position to meet the needs of their residents.

We need to wrest control of the assets we have locally to bring sanity back to housing, planning and land development.

Demand 4. Control rents and fight for pay

More than a quarter of Londoners now rent privately, and the housing charity Shelter has pointed out that it costs on average £900 a year more to rent privately than pay a mortgage for an equivalent property. Those rents are rising at twice the rate of earnings or more.

Insecure short-term tenancies and poor housing are the norm in the private sector with tenants often being summarily evicted

'One-third of MPs (from various parties) are also buy-to-let landlords.'

if they complain about their conditions.

Fully 95 per cent of the government's housing budget is now spent on housing benefits: each year, £9 billion of that goes straight into the pockets of private landlords. One-third of MPs (from various parties) are also buy-to-let landlords so don't look to Westminster for a solution.

To make matters worse, anyone can set themselves up as a letting agent and extract more rent than the landlord is actually charging, and also demand extortionate fees for finding properties.

Taking the lead from Newham, other councils in London, such as Enfield, are now setting up compulsory registers of private landlords as a means of trying to get some control over the anarchy of the private rented sector, with compulsory inspection of rented properties.

The fact that over half of all people who now claim housing benefit are actually in work shows the extent of the attack on wages, while housing costs rocket. Benefit claimants are not the work-shy idlers portrayed in the tabloid press, but working people who need top ups to their wages to pay their rent.

Further attacks on benefits in the form of Universal Credit will widen this gap. But we need to be clear that the answer is a fight for pay, not a "fairer" benefit system.

Once upon a time in relatively recent history there was something called tenants' rights and a cap on rents. Any suggestion from any quarter to put a cap on rent levels is met by threats from landlords to sell their property. In the current climate they

Continued from page 19

probably would – to overseas buyers. This illustrates the importance of putting the demand for a ban on sales to non-UK residents in conjunction with a demand for a cap on rents.

Demand 5. Reinstate regulations to ensure buildings intended for employment purposes retain that designation

It is now eighteen months since a supposedly “temporary” and “minor” relaxation of a planning regulation has allowed offices to become houses. In arguing for the rule change the government predicted that there would be about 190 applications a year across the country.

In a freedom of information request *Planning* magazine has established that in one year, London alone processed over 2,000 applications.

Many of these schemes involve the loss of occupied offices in town centres and significant loss of employment for



Workers on the Web

- Highlights from this and other issues of **WORKERS** can be found on our website, www.cpbml.org.uk, as well as information about the CPBML, its policies, and how to contact us.

Workers



Building new houses won't solve the housing crisis.

Londoners. Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Nottingham, Manchester and Sheffield have received 269 applications in the same period.

Even one application can be devastating to local employment. In the outer London borough of Barnet more than 100 small businesses and charities were given four to six weeks' notice to leave their premises in the 14-storey Premier House – by developers who plan to turn it into 112 flats.

The local Conservative council said councillors had no choice but to approve the conversion because of the new planning rules. They said the council would not otherwise have allowed the eviction of a full office block.

The London Borough of Croydon is facing a similar pressure. Its Director of Planning, Mike Kiely, has reported, “We've had some fairly major occupiers that have told us they are being forced out. These are blue chip companies. They don't want to leave Croydon and we are having to work very hard to keep them in Croydon.”

In August 2014 the government held a “technical consultation on planning” which allows for the extension until 2019 of the “freedom” to turn offices into flats, with the option for “indefinitely”. This time industrial and warehouse sites are included. Most of the proposals to enable changes of use without needing planning consent will be incorporated in secondary planning legislation over the next few months.

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies summed it up: “These proposals are not a change in policy – if they

were we could debate the merits – but are handing the future of our community over to the market to develop as it pleases.”

The situation is untenable. Put simply, current trends in housing and planning deregulation are an attack on society. It is of course leading to homelessness. The number of rough sleepers on the street has doubled since Boris Johnson became mayor, with over half of rough sleepers now being non-UK nationals.

Most homelessness is not so visible. It is not on the street but in hostels and temporary accommodation. London now accounts for 75 per cent of all households in temporary accommodation in England.

‘Many of London’s workforce cannot afford to live in the city.’

But homelessness is not the only problem. As it stands now many of London’s workforce cannot afford to live in the city and have to commute to London at great cost to their personal time and pocket.

The housing crisis is increasingly becoming a crisis of social systems of the city – the systems required for civic society. Ancient civilisations and ancient cities have collapsed in the past. The working class in London and beyond knows what is going on and has a stark choice: fight back or bury their heads in the London clay. ■

This issue, we look at two books: on the foreign-takeover of infrastructure, and the lie of austerity...

Book reviews

A dangerous idea

Austerity: the History of a Dangerous Idea, by Mark Blyth, hardback, 288 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-982830-2, Oxford University Press, 2013, £14.99 or less



THIS BOOK from a professor of international political economy recounts the intellectual and practical history of austerity and judges it a dangerous disaster. The author shows that austerity does not work as advertised. It does not reduce debt and does not promote growth; instead budgets are cut, economies shrink.

Austerity is a fake medicine. Supposedly aimed at cutting the state's budget to promote growth, it produces the very outcomes it is supposed to avoid. In reality it is a deliberate policy of destructive deflation. Blyth charts the intellectual history of liberal economic thinkers from the 17th century onwards leading to this idea.

Blyth examines actual cases of austerity from the 1930s to the present. He points out that austerity is misrepresented as a "sovereign debt crisis" brought on by excessive state spending. In fact the crisis "started with the banks and will end with the banks". Austerity is the price we pay for saving them.

Blyth argues that with the increasing deregulation of financial markets in the 1980s, traditional methods of banking were set aside. Risks in loans did not disappear, they were just pushed elsewhere. By 2007 many banks and financial firms carried a

dangerously high level of debt relative to their assets. It was only a matter of time before poor economic results triggered bank runs and general panic.

This had nothing to do with the state or the public sector; the crisis was generated by the private, financial sector. In truth the crash of 2007-8 increased the debt of states globally by 40 to 50 per cent (an estimated US\$13 trillion) directly as a result of the failures of finance capital.

In summary the author says, "Austerity ... has been disproven time and again, but it just keeps coming." He also notes, "Austerity remains an ideology immune to facts and basic empirical refutation. This is why it remains ... a very dangerous idea."

Capitalists are once again jittery about the potential crashes over which they have no control – lurking in the murky world of capitalism. Workers need ensure governments don't drag us into the long-running farce of bailing out finance capital again. ■

Everything's for sale

Private Island: why Britain now belongs to someone else, by James Meek, paperback, 229 pages, ISBN 978-1-78-168290-6, Verso, 2014, £12.99 or less



NOVELIST AND journalist James Meek outlines how foreign companies have taken over much of our infrastructure through a series of studies – the post, the railways, water, energy, health and housing. He states, "It is not racism that makes the foreign identity of some of the owners of our

privatised infrastructure objectionable. It's the selling of taxation powers to foreign governments over whom we have even less democratic control than our own."

Thatcher is to blame for letting foreign companies seize our national assets. Her aim was "to secure free movement of capital throughout the (European) Community". With that came "free" – or rather "uncontrolled" movement of goods and labour, which the EU imposes on members in the name of free trade. This book details the results.

Railtrack paid its shareholders £3.8 billion in dividends and interest over five years, and then collapsed. The Railtrack fiasco, Meek says, "is a story, too, with wider implications about the kind of country that Britain has become: a country that has lost faith in its ability to design, make and build useful things, a country where the few who do still have that ability are underpaid, unrecognised, and unadmired."

EDF, a French company, now one of the energy big six, owns the nuclear plants that provide a sixth of our electricity. Nuclear power has a seventh of the carbon emissions of gas per watt. But the EU wants one in five of our power stations to close by the 2020s. A Labour energy minister said, "We couldn't buy a French power station, and they could buy ours." The EU's competition authority took the decision on the EDF bid. The EU forbade Britain's competition authority to do so.

Thatcher and her successors not only sold off state businesses, they opened the door for the market to encroach on other state activities. The government skewed the housing market by restricting supply, cutting two-thirds of the grant to housing associations to build. And then it raised prices through Help to Buy, which offers well-off people cheap loans to overbid for overpriced houses.

Artificially increasing demand through the loss of social housing led not to increased supply but to higher prices and rents. House prices tripled between 1997 and 2008. Average private-sector rents across England and Wales increased to a record £770 a month in October 2014. ■

Apart from the odd rhetorical flourish, the Second International be a revolutionary organisation, unlike the First. It left no works

Social democracy's great

IN THE LATE 1880s, calls were made to re-create an international organisation of workers. The first, known as the First International but properly called the International Workingmen's Association, had collapsed in 1876 (see *Workers*, February 2011).

The calls for a new body came largely from American and French workers, and from trade unionists as much as from socialists. But the new organisation, known as the Second International, proved a disappointment. Without Marx's clarity and in the absence of any truly revolutionary party and ideology, it was a concentration of weakness rather than of strength.

Indeed, the Second International's best efforts were its first. The founding 1889 Congress initiated the idea of 1 May as International Workers' Day and promoted a campaign for an eight-hour working day, at the prompting of American trade unionists.

May Day 1890, too, was an impressive event. Great demonstrations for the eight-hour day were held in many countries and there were extensive stoppages of work in France, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia and the United States. But the only immediate success was in the United States, where considerable numbers of workers, especially carpenters, won the eight-hour day.

But then things went downhill, rapidly.

Following the collapse of the First International and after the death of Marx in 1883, Marxism was re-shaped and called social democracy. From the 1880s until the First World War, social democrats held many contradictory positions, ranging from

reformist to revolutionary.

Though some social democrats remained true to the goal of revolution, it was during this period that social democracy inside the Second International came to be dominated by reformers and collaborators with capitalism.

Generally wary of trade unions and of direct action, the Second International quickly evolved into a federation of "socialist" parties that viewed political action as working in the electoral field and building up parliamentary strength by constitutional means. Wherever the electoral franchise was still non-existent or too narrow, they agitated for adult or manhood suffrage, following the approach of the German Social Democrats, Europe's biggest socialist party.

Utopian

Grandiose yet utopian plans for social improvement were argued over repeatedly at congresses, achieving nothing. During these years many assumed socialism was inevitable, achievable in a bourgeois democratic way.

Some, like the German social democrat Karl Kautsky, who later denounced the Russian Revolution, even felt all they had to do was just sit tight and accumulate support on their "Way to Power". English Fabians and Germans who "revised" Marxism both felt there was no precise point at which capitalism ended and socialism began, which would have made the victory of socialism difficult to detect.

In the early years this "socialist" electoral influence was weak, but after 1900 it gained electoral strength in some countries. The German Social Democrats built up a gigantic party machine allegedly for class war, then shrank from using it for this or really any other purpose.

In the end its party leaders regarded themselves as the supreme cause. In 1891 the German SDP adopted the Erfurt Programme, which made clear it would pursue its goals through legal political participation rather than by revolutionary activity.

In 1900 the Second International had declared it would fight against the colonial expansionism of the capitalist powers, but soon German, Belgian, Dutch and other



Workers

The memorial to Rosa Luxemburg on the Landwehrkanal in Berlin. Her body was thrown in the water by counter-revolutionaries. A companion memorial to Karl Liebknecht, murdered by the same group, stands nearby.

"socialists" emerged as forthright defenders of their own respective colonies.

The problem of imperialist war was debated again and again. The Second International resolved that workers could prevent war if they wished to. But when it came to the crunch almost all its members backed their own imperialist governments.

At the Stuttgart Congress in 1907 Lenin from Russia and Rosa Luxemburg, in origin Polish, successfully moved amendments stating that militarism was the chief weapon of class oppression and stressing that social democrats should try to prevent war from breaking out or stop it once begun, and use the crisis created by the war to hasten the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In the event, only the Russian Bolsheviks carried this out.

The inability of the Second International to override workers' loyalties to their beligerent motherlands was brutally exposed by the outbreak of World War in 1914. Overwhelmed by the frenzy and bigotry of hostilities, the social democratic parties tamely followed their respective countries'

'The Second International came to be dominated by reformers and collaborators with capitalism.'

onal never aspired to
orthwhile legacy...

nt failure



ehr Canal, Berlin, at the site where her murdered
tionaries on 15 January 1919. Not far away is a
ed on the same day.

belligerent positions rather than maintain the united front against war. Broken by the war, the Second International disbanded in 1916 as a complete irrelevance.

Full of futile debates, empty phrases, barren and impotent leaders, the Second International produced virtually no useful thought. Everyone was squabbling over phrases, while throwing their real energy into winning elections. Only Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (who with Rosa Luxemburg was later to found the Communist Party of Germany) stand out from the general throng of dead-hands, mediocrity and lack of ambition in the Second International.

So with the gathering menace and drum-beat of war, Rosa Luxemburg's books – such as *Peace Utopias* (1907) and *The Junius Pamphlet* (1915) – are still very much worth a read. And the world can still learn from the shining example of The October Revolution, which took the Soviet Union out of the slaughter of World War One to start socialist construction. ■

Worried about the future of
Britain? Join the CPBML.

6 SIX CALLS TO ACTION

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 held its 16th Congress in November 2012, 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.cpbml.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 threats of separation and regionalism, are all products of only one thing: de-industrialisation.

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.
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The holy freedoms of capitalism

'The greatest backwardness appears when it comes to the free movement of labour. Holy or not, it has become a sacred cow for most unions...'

THE 2014 TUC Congress motion against the EU's proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) free trade treaty, said, "Congress notes that free trade agreements rarely, if ever, benefit working people and are pushed by corporations who use them as a means to maximise profits and further their own interests."

Precisely. That is why the ruling class and the EU push free trade. Perhaps we should stop calling it "free" and call it by its true name, "out of control" trade.

The EU is built on the "free movements" of capital, labour, goods and services, that is, on uncontrolled movements of all four. Capital needs these "freedoms" in order to maximise its profits, and for no other reason. Alexander Stubb, Finland's prime minister, recently called the EU's "free" movement principles "holy".

So where do the organisations of our working class stand on these holy principles? They are starting to understand that the uncontrolled movement of goods and services, "free trade", is not good for workers. It's taken longer than it should have, but the realisation is dawning that the working class has to oppose free trade. Free trade policies stop us rebuilding Britain, and endanger the NHS and our education system.

In what could turn out to be a huge step forward, Unite has acknowledged that it was wrong to support the EU-US trade agreement (see page 10). Other unions should follow, and force the TUC to stop its shameful support for the principle of TTIP.

The free movement of capital allows companies to disinvest at the drop of an interest rate. It also enables capital to hide in tax havens like Luxembourg, the EU's in-house tax haven, run for 15 years by the new European President, Jean-Claude Juncker.

The Labour Party (along with the others) lauds "inward investment", defined as capital flowing into Britain. Never mind that this capital is used to speculate in housing, or to buy up football clubs, or to buy industries and asset-strip them. We don't want inward investment, we want the money made in Britain from our work to stay in Britain and fund proper investment.

The greatest backwardness appears when it comes to the free movement of labour. Holy or not, it has become a sacred cow for most unions. Never mind that this "freedom" encourages the modern slavery of workers moving at the orders of people traffickers, gang masters and cheapskate employers. Or that it means the theft of scarce skilled workers from across the world. (See November's Workers, "Ebola: capitalist health exposed".)

In December, the GMB organised a day of celebration of immigration, oblivious to the fact that the only winners from uncontrolled migration are the employers, who lower wages, boost profits, make employment ever more insecure.

The losers are the countries whose educated workforces are plundered by countries like Britain that no longer need to worry about training their own population – just steal skills from abroad. And of course those in Britain who will not live 12 to a house in order to survive on poverty wages – or who find that all the jobs are advertised in Poland anyway and never come up at Jobcentres (yes, it happens, frequently).

As the capitalist press gloats, the EU is an insurance policy against any government deviating from "austerity" (poverty) policies. So to rebuild our industries, protect our services, draw up our own trade policies and decide our migration policy, we have to leave the EU. ■

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