

# WORKERS

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# UNITE FOR AN INDEPENDENT BRITAIN

**Rail** Test case for Brexit

**NHS** Get real over pay

**Couriers** The hidden cost

**Work** The casual trap

**Devolution** No to division

**Housing** A broken system

**Students** Loan hike

**Fishing** Take control

*plus* News,

Book Review

Historic Notes

and more

# WORKERS



## Push the blockers aside

ON 29 MARCH the government gave formal notice that Britain will depart from the EU once and for all time. Now Article 50 has been invoked and the clock is ticking.

We are throwing off the shackles of the misnamed European Union, which seeks only to dictate and deny sovereignty. By March 2019 we must be out.

It was truly a day to celebrate.

In 1975 the British people did not believe we could run our own affairs. The referendum vote then was by more than 2 to 1 to throw in our lot with the European Economic Community, to ask it to please manage Britain for us (actually, for its own interests).

Last year this woeful decision was finally reversed. On 23 June 2016 we declared our intention to Leave.

The people have shown we want a sovereign Britain. We have declared confidence in ourselves to determine the country's future without any instruction from Brussels or Berlin.

We know that we can and must control our economy, our laws, our borders, and we expect the government to act accordingly. There can be no backsliding, no fudges. Only full independence will do. Push aside any who still wish to block it.

The blockers are fewer and fewer but they are dangerous enemies of the people and the country. They want to hand us back to foreign control.

All who desire a successful Britain must deter-

mine to see this through, engage in the discussion and planning for the future, and act to carry it out. So far some sections have started on that task, most notably the fishermen (see page 6). But the opportunities are there for every area.

There are difficult times ahead – inevitable with such a huge change, although the blockers will blame every problem on Brexit.

The blockers are careful not to mention the serious and fundamental problems we would have if we remained in the EU. Consumer price inflation jumped to 2.3 per cent in February – blame Brexit! Never mind that it was 2.2 per cent in Germany in the same month. The City speculators and those who hang on their every word have a track record of poor prediction. They can't even see what's happening now!

We have faced difficult times before and overcome them. We can do so again if we seize the opportunity we have created.

Workers who wish to see Britain a united and independent nation will need to use any opportunity – including an election – to support the forces which are fighting for this, most important, outcome.

But no victory can be secure unless we the working class act in our own interests and cease to rely on “representatives” to do it for us. At the moment as a class we are still, largely, spectators, alternately grumbling and applauding as events unfold. As we move into the next phase of the battle for Britain's real independence, that must change. ■



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## Contents – May/June 2017

### News Digest

Huge rise in student loan rate, p3; Pay: where the minimum becomes the maximum, p4; Bristol, time to get shipshape, p5; Take control, say skippers, p6

03

### Features

NHS: get real over pay, p7; Why rely on EU healthcare staff?, p8; Rail: a test case for independence, p10; Caught in the casual trap, p12; The hidden price of online shopping, p14; For an undivided Britain, p16; Housing isn't working, p18

07

### End Notes

Book Review: *Clean Brexit* by Liam Halligan and Gerard Lyons, p21; Historic Notes: The struggle for paid holidays, p22

21



Build the  
new Britain

<b>STUDENTS</b>	Huge rise in loan interest
<b>SCOTLAND</b>	Unity concert
<b>MINIMUM WAGE</b>	More like a maximum
<b>HOUSING</b>	Micro-flats
<b>ELECTRIC CARS</b>	New factory in Coventry
<b>BRISTOL</b>	Time to get shipshape
<b>FISHERIES</b>	Take control, say skippers
<b>FANCY THAT</b>	Brexit bloomers
<b>ON THE WEB</b>	More news online
<b>WHAT'S ON</b>	Coming soon

## Huge rise in student loan rate



Students on the march in London, 2014.

A SHARP INCREASE in inflation means millions of students and former students will see a rise in interest rates on tuition and maintenance loans this year. Rates on student loans taken out in England and Wales since 2012 are set at 3 per cent plus the retail prices index (RPI). With March's RPI rising to 3.1 per cent, students will be hit with interest charges of up to 6.1 per cent from September, up from 4.6 per cent: an increase of a third. The rate increase will apply to all students who enrolled at university after 2012,

meaning all current students will be affected by the rate rise.

The 6.1 per cent interest is 24 times the Bank of England base rate, four times the price of a fixed-rate mortgage and twice the cost of a personal loan. It is outrageous to change the terms of the loans after people take them out – no commercial system would be allowed to do it. But this scheme is not really a loan – it's a tax.

Students now in higher education will not pay this rate of interest until after they have graduated, when rates will be linked to their salary. Those who earn more than £41,000 will pay the top 6.1 per cent interest rate while those with salaries between £21,000 and £41,000 will pay on a sliding scale of between 3.1 per cent and 6.1 per cent. Even lower-earning graduates don't get off lightly. If you earn below the minimum repayment threshold of £21,000, your loan will still accrue interest at a rate of 3.1 per cent.

Those who started university between 1998 and 2011 will be paying an interest rate of 1.25 per cent on their loans. That rate will not change in September because it is based on whichever is the lowest out of RPI or the Bank of England base rate (currently 0.25 per cent) plus 1 per cent. But those who started university before 1998 will be charged interest at the RPI figure, meaning their rate will almost double from 1.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent from September. Graduates already face increased costs following the government decision to allow universities to increase tuition fees in line with inflation, meaning annual fees will increase to £9,250 a year from this autumn.

One student affected by the rate rise, quoted in Cambridge student news network *The Tab*, said, "increasing interest rates will simply put current students into insurmountable debt, and in line with other measures ... could deter students from worse-off backgrounds from applying to university, which is quite frankly disgusting." ■

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

## SCOTLAND

### Unity concert

THERE WAS a decisive victory in 2014 for halting the break up of Britain and building the unity of British workers. But the SNP and other separatists – encouraged by the EU – are unrelenting in their quest to undermine this progress and re-run that referendum.

With a third even of their own members voting for Brexit, and facing a £15 billion budget deficit if they left Britain, they know public support for a second independence referendum is falling - now down to less than a third of Scots. Six industrial trade unions maintain their opposition to break-up.

Yet the Scottish Parliament voted to apply to the House of Commons for an order which would convey the necessary legal authority to hold one. In the light of this several organisations have reignited their campaigning for British unity, such as Scotland in Union, A Force for Good and NO to Scottish Independence.

A major part of the separatist Yes campaign in the 2014 referendum was its hijacking of culture for its own ends, forming such bodies as National Collective and Trad for Yes – to the extent that journalists asserted that they could not find an artist who opposed independence.

This was countered in the media, letters to the press – and by organising a Concert for Unity in September 2014. It attracted much attention and a video was spread on the internet. A second referendum may not occur until 2021, if then, but restarting the struggle of ideas early is essential.

This second Concert for Unity – with the participation of the internationally acclaimed soloist Peter Seivewright – will help boost the renewed campaign to finally defeat separatism (for details see What's On, p5). ■

Workers



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The minimum wage has spread throughout industries such as retail and food.

## ON THE WEB

A selection of additional news at [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk)...

### Legal attack on injury claims

The government is changing the rules for compensation for injury.

### 'Solid' RMT action over driver-only trains

RMT members are continuing their campaign of opposition to plans to introduce driver-only-operated trains.

### Who says we're post industrial?

A Westminster meeting showed that after the referendum all kinds of people are re-imagining an industrial Britain.

### Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk) to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's newsletter, delivered to your email inbox.

# Not minimum – maximum

WITH A RISE in the minimum wage coming into effect on 1 April, the Low Pay Commission has published its analysis of the impact of the national minimum wage introduced by the Treasury in 2016. The Commission hails as success that 12.9 per cent of workers in Northern Ireland and 10.8 per cent of workers in the North East are set to get a pay “increase” as opposed to 4.8 per cent in London, 6 per cent in the South East and 7.7 per cent in Scotland.

But what the Commission sees as success the trade union movement should see as reason to hang its head in shame because the national minimum wage is being hailed as the norm rather than the bottom of the wages ladder. Why do those who claim to be organised labour skulk along, cap in hand, like *Oliver Twist*?

The proportion of workers on the minimum wage has risen to 8.5 per cent of the workforce, up from 7.3 per cent in 2016 and 5.6 per cent in 2015. The Commission also indicates that the regionalisation of pay has not changed or improved, with traditional pockets of low pay still remaining – such as Somerset, Devon, Rossendale in the North West, and Boston in East Anglia, where one worker in five is now on the minimum wage.

Half of all minimum wage earners are in retail, hospitality and cleaning. A third of these jobs are in Britain’s apparent boom sector of hairdressing, beauticians, tattoo artists and so on.

All the cries from employers that the national minimum wage would lose jobs have been proved false: jobs are available but at reduced rates of pay. And the schemes to supposedly elevate poverty wages – national living wage, London living wage, the national minimum wage – all use based to hide the extent of poverty at work.

And thousands of workers are receiving even less. The government’s “name and shame” list of employers not paying the national minimum wage lengthens every time it is published. That’s the reality of Britain’s poverty pay, minimum wage economy. ■



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## HOUSING

### Micro-flats

ONE OF the dying acts of the Coalition government was the introduction in England in April 2015 of relaxed planning legislation called “permitted development” which allows, for example, office blocks to be converted to housing without complying with minimum space standards.

This was done by means of a change to a “statutory instrument”, a measure which requires no parliamentary vote. Crucially it also means that no local authority planning permission is required and so dispenses with local control of these decisions.

This has led to the situation in the Conservative-controlled London Borough

of Barnet where a developer is proposing to convert an 11-storey office block currently partly occupied by council staff into 254 flats.

To reach the number of 254 the developer is proposing that nearly all the flats will be below the national minimum standard of 37 square metres with some as small as 16 square metres.

It is probable that many if not most of these flats will be bought as investments and left unoccupied – hence the push to maximise the number of flats.

The government is currently planning for a Great Repeal Bill to deal with former EU legislation but we urgently need a great repeal bill to deal with the various statutory instruments which are having such an adverse effect on housing and employment. ■

• See also feature article, page 18



## ELECTRIC CARS

### New factory in Coventry

THE LONDON TAXI Company is aiming to produce 5,000 electric vehicles a year by 2019 at a new car factory in Coventry, following a £300 million investment by its Chinese owners Geely. The TX5 taxi makes extensive use of aluminium to reduce its weight and increase efficiency.

It's the first new car factory in Britain for more than a decade, making a mockery of projections of doom after the vote to leave the EU. The plant will also make an electric light commercial vehicle – a zero-emissions

white van.

Geely took on London Taxi Company in 2013, when it spent £11 million buying the business – then called Manganese Bronze – out of administration.

Unite regional officer Peter Coulson said: "This a fantastic story of a company that was on its knees in 2013. ... Tribute should also be paid to the dedicated workforce who have worked hard and diligently to contribute to the current success. This is fantastic news in terms of highly skilled jobs for our members and the future creation of employment opportunities. It will be a wonderful boost to the West Midlands economy." ■



Moonlight over Bristol docks.

## Bristol: time to get shipshape

BRISTOL HAS BEEN an important British seaport for more than a thousand years. The city is actually several miles from the sea and stands on the estuary of the River Avon. And its harbour has one of the most variable tidal flows anywhere in the world, with a water level that can vary by more than 30 feet between tides. (The problem was resolved in 1803 with the construction of the Floating Harbour.)

Ships moored there were beached at low tide, so they had to be sturdily built and the goods in their holds needed to be securely tied – hence the origin of the phrase "shipshape and Bristol fashion".

It doesn't take a genius to realise that with independence from the EU in sight, Britain itself is far from shipshape. And Bristol itself is a prime example of this.

It's a city of huge potential. From Brunel to Banksy and before, there is a rich history in every sphere of life on which to draw. Yet the basics of a life fit for living are lacking.

The city's transport system is a running joke, affordable housing likewise. Higher education is being exploited as a milch cow and state education is being wrecked.

And there are diversions such as renaming Colston Hall as a way of denying the city's connections with the slave trade. There is also the farce of the new "metro" mayor election – yet another layer of expensive bureaucracy, though one in which local people will have to be involved because that's where the investment will be.

But there are a lot of positives, too, including a local newspaper, the *Bristol Post*, which gets most things right and is currently championing quality apprenticeships.

"Some see the future of Bristol as a tourist attraction, but it has the potential to be much more than that," a Bristolian told *Workers*. "With aerospace and cutting-edge manufacturing techniques being developed there, and its artistic heritage and activity, the future could be rosy.

"We merely have to accept that it is up to us to make it happen. As long as we know what we want to achieve we will be able to negotiate our way through the ebbs and flows of thought and action and be shipshape to get what we want." ■

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### MAY

##### CPBML May Day Meetings

#### LONDON

Monday 1 May, 7.30pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

#### LEEDS

Monday 1 May, 1pm

Pullman Room, Golden Lion Hotel, Lower Briggate, Leeds LS1 4AE

#### GLASGOW

Monday 1 May, 7pm

Garnethill Room, Renfield Conference Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP

#### "Build the New Britain"

The referendum decision changes everything. We are taking back the levers of power from Brussels, and hold our future in our own hands. We are a country rich in natural resources and above all rich in intellect.

A new era is dawning for Britain. We must grasp it and make sure it serves the interests of an independent country and progress for workers. No one else can tell us what is good for us. Take control!

#### JUNE

Thursday 1 June, 7.30pm

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

#### "For an independent and self-reliant Britain"

##### CPBML Public Meeting

Since Article 50 was invoked it is even clearer that there are only two possible outcomes. Britain must strike out for self-reliance, real independence, real sovereignty, or be dragged back into the EU's coercive rule.

What does this mean for us? Come and discuss. All welcome.

#### British Piano Music (Concert for Unity II), Peter Seivewright, solo piano

Wednesday 21 June, 7.30pm

Mackintosh Queen's Cross Hall, 870 Garscube Road, Glasgow G20 7EL

Featuring music by composers from England, Scotland and Wales, including John Bull, James MacMillan, Eddie McGuire, Cyril Scott and Peter Thorn. Details at [westendfestival.co.uk](http://westendfestival.co.uk)

## FANCY THAT Brexit bloomers

### JP Morgan U-turn

“So if the UK leaves the EU, we may have no choice but to re-organise our business model here. Brexit could mean fewer JP Morgan jobs in the UK and more jobs in Europe.” (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 2016)

“The head of JP Morgan has admitted he will not move many jobs out of Britain in the next two years as a result of Brexit, in a U-turn on his pre-referendum warning that a vote to leave the European Union could mean as many as 4,000 jobs moving across the Channel.” (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2017)

### Deutsche double-take

“Deutsche Bank is reviewing whether to move chunks of its large British operations to Germany if the UK leaves the EU, underlining the potential fallout in the City of London in the event of ‘Brexit’...The move is seen by rivals in the industry as an early attempt to sway the debate in favour of the UK staying in the EU.” (*Financial Times*, 18 May 2015)

“One of the City’s biggest employers [Deutsche Bank] is demonstrating its confidence in London’s post-Brexit future as a financial centre with a 25-year deal for a new UK headquarters.” (*Sky News*, 23 March 2017)

### Textiles twist

“Mark Hogarth, creative director at luxury textiles company Harris Tweed Hebrides...played down the argument that the plunge in sterling since the vote on June 23 would benefit exports.” (*The Herald Times*, 9 November 2016)

“Lancashire’s textile industry has won an unexpected Brexit boost as one of Britain’s largest providers of workers’ uniforms has brought manufacturing back to the UK...the contract has been transferred to Bolton fabric company Carrington Workwear, whose fabrics go into uniforms for McDonald’s and the British Army.” (*thisismoney.co.uk*, 26 March 2017)

### Plus: Brexit on the web

Want to read more? Visit [cpbml.org.uk/leave](http://cpbml.org.uk/leave) for Brexit news from the CPBML and links to other sources of valuable information.

# Take control, say skippers

FISHERMEN ARE overwhelmingly in favour of Britain taking complete control of its inshore and international waters as it leaves the EU, according to a new survey from Cardiff University produced at the end of April and reported on in detail by Fishing for Leave.

Fishing for Leave, which seeks to represent the views and interests of the grassroots fishing industry, welcomed the report as providing a good evidence base of the views of fishermen. FFL’s director Alan Hastings said, “The findings of this survey graphically illustrate that the majority of the industry want a fresh start”.

*Management of UK fisheries post-Brexit: a fisherman’s perspective* details the university’s findings from a poll of British skippers from around the entire coast of Britain and northern Ireland, with responses from all sectors, from the largest pelagic (open sea) vessels to the smallest inshore boats. Two-thirds want the EU’s hated Common Fisheries Policy completely scrapped and all foreign boats to be excluded from British waters post-Brexit. Fishing communities were hugely supportive of leaving the EU.

56 per cent of respondents want to see a “days at sea” policy replace quotas as a means of regulating the industry and conserving fish stocks. This would limit the number of fishing days per boat rather than the CFP’s wasteful quota system, which forces fishermen to throw back catches which don’t meet the type or amount of fish which are allowed. The rich mixed fish stocks typical in British waters mean it is particularly difficult to predict what will be caught, leading to fleets having to discard perfectly good fish.

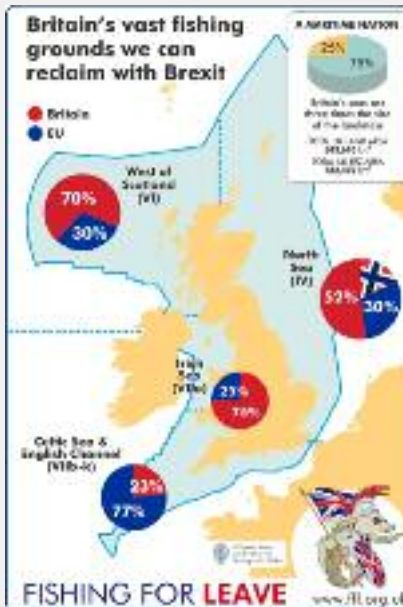


Image courtesy Fishing for Leave

### The extent of the fishing grounds that should return to Britain.

The survey also asked about the social aspects of the fishing industry – hitherto largely ignored in drawing up management policy. Basically, fishermen themselves with all their knowledge and experience have not been asked what they think, as policy has been dominated by economists and marine conservationists. And these took no account of the communities that the fisheries were supporting. In fact they seem to have been deliberately snubbed and run down both by the EU and the British government.

The respondents want to see this remedied, and call for the opportunity of Brexit to enable “a new relationship between fishermen, scientists and the government alongside an improvement in relations between different sectors of the industry”.

Nearly half the skippers said they would encourage family members to be involved in the industry. This shows the strong family, historic and cultural ties in fishing, in spite of the hard and dangerous working conditions. FFL – which organised the Vote Leave flotilla of fishing boats which sailed up the Thames during the referendum campaign – has been worried that Theresa May did not announce Britain’s withdrawal from the London Fisheries Convention at the same time as invoking Article 50 on 29 March. As this also requires two years’ notice of leaving, the omission leaves a dangerous gap which could allow EU boats to continue to fish in British onshore waters.

Already, the Danish government is asserting its “historic rights” dating back to 1400 to fish here. FFL points out that these claims are spurious but herald objections of EU fisheries to losing their fishing rights. Currently 40 per cent of Denmark’s annual catch is from the 200-mile international zone which should revert to British control after Brexit. A third of the take of all European boats is from these waters, and 60 per cent of the fish caught in the British zone is by the EU. The Danish foreign minister said that the issue is crucial for Danish fishing communities. That is for them to deal with – our concern is British communities surveyed in the Cardiff report. Brexit means we can look after our national interests.



## Pay must take centre stage in the fight for the future of the NHS...

# NHS: get real over pay

THE BRITISH PEOPLE are aware that successive governments mean the NHS no good, and allot additional funds to it against their will. Important though pressure from outside the service is, it is pressure from within that is decisive.

But pressure from workers within is most obvious by its absence. Most glaring is the absence of struggle over pay, almost as though the decline in pay levels has no effect on the NHS, and as though that decline is something over which health workers are powerless, an act of God almost.

This must stop. Pay has to take centre stage as the battleground on which the future of the service will be fought out.

The 2010 government on election that it would limit pay "rises" in the NHS to 1 per cent annually. This blatant assault on living standards was mutely accepted - an ominous sign, and one being enacted afresh whenever the Pay Review Body's "independent" findings are released. Guess what! It has now decided that 1 per cent is the right amount to "raise" the pay of health workers.

### Toxic

Two health unions (Unison and RCN) are consulting their members over this. But the truth is that those active in unions, and members themselves, know there will be no fight this year. They also know - though do not acknowledge - that in an increasingly toxic situation members are wondering what their union is for, and union activists are wondering why members are so supine.

Instead of tackling the root of the problem - government policy - members and unions are turning on each other.

A document\* last year from the London NHS Partnership, a body bringing together health unions in the capital with employers, illustrates the scale of the problem.

Between 2010 and 2015 pay in London's NHS went up by 3.8 per cent as transport costs (a 4-zone travel card) rose by 25 per cent, house prices by 37 per cent, and rents by more than 25 per cent.

House prices are now 11.1 times the

\*nhsemployers.org/~media/Employers/Publications/London-life-NHS-workers-infographic.pdf



Workers

Midwives marching for more pay, March 2014.

average NHS salary, compared to 8.4 times five years ago. And rent in London equates to 66 per cent of nurses' pay.

So 21 per cent of NHS workers in London no longer live in the capital, with an average commute of 26 miles a day (up from 22 five years ago). This is set to rise to 30 miles a day in the next five years.

The result is 10,000 nursing vacancies in London, 17 per cent of all posts, predicted to rise to 25 per cent by 2020. Vacancies in other specialisms are also on the rise.

Bizarrely, employers in London appear more concerned about the decline of pay than do workers.

The historic decision for independence made by the British people on 23 June last year means we can train the health professionals we need, and not rely on those plun-

**'Bizarrely, employers in London appear more concerned about the decline in pay.'**

dered from countries who need them even more than we do. This means paying the proper rate rather than relying on workers from countries where the pay is lower and who therefore have lower expectations. The negative effect of this downward pressure has been greatly underestimated.

With wages going up less than inflation every NHS worker is several thousand pounds worse off - 12.3 per cent of earnings on average over the past seven years. Predictions for the RPI for the next four years vary between 3.1 and 3.6 per cent. The government is determined to limit pay "rises" in the NHS to 1 per cent a year, thereby further slashing true salary levels.

A campaign to have a real, not a pretend fight for pay in 2018 must begin now, in 2017. It may be in London, as so often before. Plans are being considered that could lead to local claims being lodged within the national NHS terms and conditions, thereby preserving national bargaining but fighting in a guerrilla, local way, inviting employers to settle, and take themselves out of the firing line.

This highlights employers' ability to pay, and the Alice-in-Wonderland financing system of the current NHS (see page 8). In the meantime, let's resolve that the fight for pay starts now. ■

**Do British workers really not want to work in the NHS? No train, then to live on the wages. And have been reluctant to**

# So why are we relying on

HOW MANY times have you heard it said that “Britain relies on health care staff from the EU”? But no one seems to ask “Why?” You can see why the government won’t ask the question. The bigger puzzle is why workers are ignoring what is in front of their eyes.

In London in particular workers find it hard to afford housing, and staff often live a two-hour journey from their workplace. When this taken with the typical NHS 12-hour shift, it makes for a 16-hour working day. Combining working in health care with family life becomes a major challenge.

Is there a shortage of applicants for NHS professional programmes to become doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, etc? No, there are typically more applicants than places available. In medicine applicants with three A grades at A level may not be successful in finding a place. So what on earth is going on?

## Yo-Yo workforce planning

Since the inception of the NHS workforce planning has been a problem and never under real professional control. The numbers in training has typically been a political issue. This is best illustrated by two recent decisions, one from the previous government under David Cameron and Nick Clegg, and the other a George Osborne Budget decision of November 2015.

The first is having an impact now. The other decision will coincide with our departure from the EU. Unless tackled it will provoke a crisis which will not be a result of leaving the EU but a result of our own home-made poor planning.

The Coalition government took a deci-

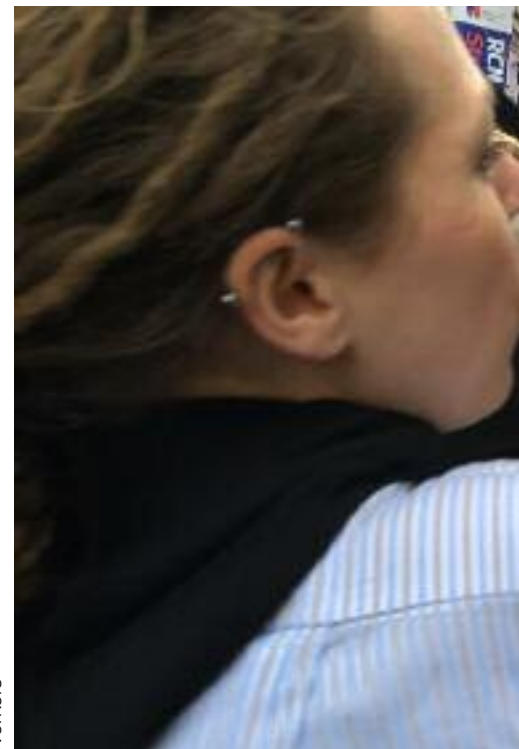
sion to reduce the number of nurse and allied health professional training places across the country in the two years to 2012. In practice, this meant a reduction of 20 per cent of nurse training places in London, for example. Likewise the Scottish Government – despite frequent assertions from the Scottish Nationalist Party of how much more they cared about the NHS – took very similar measures.

There was some limited opposition at the time from NHS unions, and the University College Union (UCU) annual conference passed a resolution condemning the “reduction in the number of places on Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health professional degree programmes at a time of rising health need”.

The UCU was particularly concerned because the cut led to widespread redundancy of health care lecturers. No one even knows exactly how many experienced healthcare lecturers were “lost” during this two-year period as no one – neither the NHS, nor the universities, nor trade unions counted the redundancies.

So the student intakes of 2011 and 2012 were reduced, and the full impact of this was felt as the smaller cohorts qualified in 2014 and 2015.

This is the period when the NHS really began to rely on EU nurses and therapists to plug the gap. A most unsatisfactory solution, because often these EU staff had a high turnover – they left when they realised how expensive housing was in places like London. Others live in very overcrowded conditions and some even “flip flop” which entails working opposite 12 hour shifts and



Workers

**Marching over bursaries, January 2016. First they c**

using the same bed.

The 2010 cut in training places was a cynical political move to “make savings” by allowing other European countries to pay to train staff and then entice them to Britain.

This move was facilitated by the EU Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (MRPQ) – see box below. Many NHS trusts conducted big recruitment drives in Spain and Portugal. Although these recruitment drives were

## With the single market, why train at all?

THE EU MUTUAL Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive – or MRPQ – is a fundamental component of the Single Market. It allows professionals to have their qualifications, obtained in one member state, recognised in another. This allows them to be employed anywhere within the EU’s single market irrespective of where they were trained.

The UK government’s response to the

EU review of MRPQ was published in September 2011. And it’s no accident that this coincided with the cut in funding to nursing and allied health training places.

“The modernization of the Professional Qualifications Directive comes at a crucial time in the economies of the EU,” begins the opening paragraph of the response, before getting down to business:

“Decreasing public budgets and diffi-

cult economic circumstances cast new light on systems which originate from past decades, and create urgency to ensure that these systems do not hinder economic growth.” No surprise, then, that it goes on: “We therefore welcome the review of the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC), as one of the European Commission’s 12 levers to boost growth in the single market.” ■



o, they want to, but they struggle first to find the money to  
o fight for pay...

# on EU healthcare staff?



but the degree places, then they imported EU nurses and therapists – then they stopped the bursaries.

expensive and unethical, they did work out cheaper for the Treasury in the short term.

The other workforce decision which is currently “working its way through the system” is the abolition of bursaries and imposition of full tuition fees for nursing and allied health professional courses. From this coming September all students of these health care professions will be paying full student loans and finish with an average debt of over £50,000.

This decision was not made by the Department of Health. It was made by the Treasury as part of George Osborne’s November 2015 budget. The same George Osborne now earns £650,000 for working four days a month for US firm Blackrock investments which – surprise, surprise – has taken over part of the student loan book.

The impact of decision to abolish bursaries and impose full tuition fees has been immediate. This February the university admissions service, UCAS, reported a 23 per cent fall in applications to nursing and midwifery courses at English universities.

If not addressed this fall will coincide

with the anticipated peak in numbers for the NHS workforce predicted for 2020.

## What needs to be done?

The good thing about understanding that our “dependence” on EU staff is politically induced is that it points the way to rectifying the situation.

Firstly we need to retain the staff we currently have! The question of pay is central (see article on NHS pay, page 7).

Secondly we need an emergency measure to address the dips in application to nursing and allied health care courses. Many applicants for September 2017 have been recruited on the basis of paying the student loan, and changes to this process midyear will be difficult.

But all NHS employers need to consider a recruitment and retention strategy which could include paying off the loan of those students who commit to working in the NHS after they qualify in 2020.

An announcement of this nature even at this stage of the recruitment cycle could see a rush of applications. It only needs one

**‘Self-evidently the number of training places needs to be increased.’**

NHS trust to make the offer and the process could be under way. In the longer term the decision to make health care staff pay for their education on a loans basis must be reversed to make NHS careers attractive. After our decision to leave the EU it is a changed situation and all policy, including NHS workforce policy, can be revisited.

Thirdly and self-evidently the number of training places needs to be increased. This would prove to be far less expensive than some politicians might imagine if we addressed the question of pay and retention of staff. One experienced NHS practitioner can be as productive as two newly qualified staff, and newly qualified staff are far more likely to remain in the professions if they feel supported by an experienced team.

At the moment we have a very curious picture in relation to training places. One early decision of Theresa May’s government was to expand UK medical school places from September 2018. The government plans to fund up to 1,500 additional student places through medical school each year.

But if this expansion goes hand in hand with a slump in nursing and allied health profession applications we would see a rise in one profession coinciding with a decline in others!

Every patient knows that modern health-care entails smooth working of the whole multi-professional team. Recent announcements about training more doctors to conduct delicate surgery to remove the clots associated with stroke, for example, will need similarly skilled technical and nursing teams in operating departments.

So to answer the question of “why the reliance on EU Staff?”, the problem is home-made – and fortunately there are home-made solutions in the three steps outlined above. ■

**Building the new Britain means building new railways, making the network in the way we decide, for the benefit of the people.**

# Rail: a test case for independence



Workers

**High-speed trains at the Gare du Nord in Paris. The EU wants to extend the dominance of foreign-built and owned trains – but Brexit will give us the opportunity to ensure that the trains and the track for Britain's new high-speed developments are sourced in Britain.**

THE EUROPEAN Union currently stands in the way of reunifying Britain's railways and placing them back in British public ownership.

Brexit should let us do it. It will free Britain's railways from EU rules that underpin the requirement to separate train operations from the running of the infrastructure, and the requirement to break up and fragment rail networks as part of an agenda of "liberalisation" and privatisation.

But depending on the nature of the ultimate Brexit deal, it could also provide further and more immediate opportunities for ending the dominance in the provision of Britain's passenger train services by foreign, largely European state-owned companies.

Brexit should also save Britain from the EU's infamous Fourth Rail Package, approved in April 2016, which if implemented in Britain would impose even more privatisation and fragmentation on our railways. This should be the Brexit effect – but with the EU requiring the package to be

implemented by 2019, whether or not it is indeed implemented in full or in part will depend on the speed of Brexit and the final agreement to leave the EU.

The Fourth Rail Package includes requirements to amend interoperability and safety directives, and a regulation expanding the role of the EU Agency for Railways so that it can take over from national safety authorities the issuing of safety certification of railway companies. It will also monitor the work of national safety authorities and supervise the application of national rules.

## Control

The EU created the "TEN-T" plans for exerting strategic control over national transport networks including rail back in 2001. Linked to that and driven by the desire for much greater privatisation and competition across Europe, the EU Agency for Railways also drafted Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs).

Long before last year's referendum vote

to leave the EU, Transport for London (TfL) argued for greater localisation of standards away from major strategic routes in order to reduce the cost of compliance with regulations and standards that are inappropriate to particular routes. It commented: "Unfortunately the Fourth Rail Package appears to move in the opposite direction".

Peter Hendy, when he was TfL Commissioner, successfully managed to resist these EU TSI rules when decisions were made about the building of the Crossrail tunnels under London. These would have otherwise required much larger tunnels and other infrastructure enhancements to allow bigger European-sized trains to be able to operate through them. He said he was "not anticipating many German freight trains through Tottenham Court Road and it would be a massive waste of money".

But Network Rail has been forced to enhance existing rail routes that Crossrail trains will use at either end of TfL's tunnels in line with the TSIs, at huge additional cost.

making the equipment here in Britain, and running the rail  
e.

# dependence

**‘British railways were part of the coordination of standards with European railways long before the EU.’**

And this has applied to all its other enhancements. It is little wonder that the cost of electrifying the Great Western line from London to Bristol and South Wales has been so great.

Network Rail also recently built a new small platform at Doncaster station that is likely to be used by old “Pacer” and other trains for years from now, and is never going to see a train from Europe – but it was built to EU TSIs at massive additional cost.

So there are certainly huge savings to be made by ending this farcical and dogmatic application of mindless EU rules.

British railways have been part of the coordination of standards with European railways for many years, long before Britain joined the then Common Market, what is now the EU. Before the opening of the Channel Tunnel, rail vehicles were conveyed across the Channel by train ferries, and so had to be compatible with French, Belgian and other rail systems.

Britain will continue to trade with Europe and passenger and freight trains will continue to run through the Channel Tunnel, so coordination will continue. Britain’s rail industry standards body RSSB has said that Britain should not lose a significant influence with other organisations developing rail standards. RSSB’s involvement in these organisations is through the British Standards Institute, which has separate agreements with these bodies not dependent on EU membership.

Brexit means that Britain will no longer have to gain approval on key areas of safety management from the EU Agency for Railways. Many of Britain’s rail industry senior managers seem to be keen to exploit

the freedoms from EU interference in safety matters that Brexit will provide. They see Britain’s rail safety management systems as superior to those of Europe, and point to the much better safety record of Britain’s railways as evidence for that.

Exploiting the favourable climate created by the EU, another European state-owned rail company, Italy’s FS or Trenitalia, has now taken over a British passenger rail franchise. It has bought C2C, the company that runs trains from London to Southend.

## Subsidising Rome

The takeover highlights once again the fact that these foreign state companies see Britain as a milch cow, allowing them to make profits that they can then invest in their home railways. So Britain’s taxpayers are now effectively subsidising rail service enhancements in Rome and Naples!

Not wishing to miss out, Spanish company RENFE has joined Virgin and Stagecoach to bid for the new West Coast main line franchise which will be initial operator of passenger trains on HS2.

Chinese company MTR, having already bagged the Crossrail franchise, has now joined with First Group to prise South West Trains from Stagecoach, and will take over in August. This winning bid has raised eyebrows as it commits the company to withdrawing from service 150 new train carriages after just two years, when some of those carriages are still being built!

It is apparently cheaper for the new fran-

chise holder to order new trains than operate the ones that have been ordered by the current operator. The discarded trains are unlikely to find use elsewhere – passengers in other parts of the country that travel on old trains that are not planned to be replaced anytime soon will rightly see this as a scandalous waste of public money.

These latest developments mean that foreign government-owned companies are now involved in running almost three-quarters of Britain’s passenger franchises.

Britain voted to leave the EU in order to take control of our own affairs, including our railways. The ending of EU rules will save taxpayers money, and it will remove the barriers to reuniting train operations with rail infrastructure management under public ownership.

But we need to go way beyond that! Brexit must mean the immediate expulsion of mainly European state-owned operators that are nothing but parasites, sucking taxpayers’ money away from Britain.

With the recent passing of the Act of Parliament authorising construction of HS2, we need to ensure that the huge amounts of steel that will be needed in the building of the new railway are made here in Britain. That must also apply to Crossrail 2, a new railway under London that must be authorised because it is desperately needed to keep the capital moving. And we must insist that the new HS2 trains, and the new trains for the existing network, are manufactured here in Britain. ■

## Meet the Party

**The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of London public meetings in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL, continues with the Party’s annual May Day Rally on 1 May with the title “Build the new Britain” (see notice, page 19). This year there are also CPBML May Day meetings in Glasgow and Leeds – see page 20 for details.**

**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](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk)**



**Self-employment was a nice wheeze to falsify the real state of the economy and created a £3.5+ billion black hole in Treasury planning**

# Caught in the casual trap

TO OVERCOME the 2007-8 banking crisis and subsequent unemployment, and to cut official government unemployment figures, the government created more opportunities for the false status of self-employment, encouraging its growth, which continues today. Self-employment now accounts for nearly 5 million workers, 15.1 per cent of the workforce in Britain.

Much self-employment is forced on people. Despite all the hype about the “gig” and the “Uber” economy, many self-employed earn less than the minimum wage, work longer hours and are caught between the ever-changing definitions of worker, employee, self-employed and so on. The TUC has now added the category of “insecure” worker due to casualisation and zero-hours contracts. People talk about “precarious” employment, as if there’s any other kind under capitalism.

## Low wages

The much-vaunted freedom of self-employment, zero-hours contracts and casualisation really hides staggering levels of low wages, low hours, uncertainty, insecurity for millions, and exhausted workers – as our in-depth investigation into couriers shows (see page 14).

Legal challenges on whether self-employed employees are really workers are gaining traction in employment tribunals. While this does not present a collective resolution to employment issues, it at least means the self-employed can now earn the statutory minimum wage and take holidays, as well as maternity and paternity leave – if of course they can afford such respite from the very nature of their self-employment.

The attempt to regulate taxi companies such as Uber in London by insisting drivers pass written English examinations is a step forward. Unfortunately it reflects the fact that we have to hide behind obscure legislative approaches rather than workers’ rights based on trade union organisation.

The Greater London Assembly Economy Committee issued a statement in February examining workers’ rights after Britain’s exit from the EU. While reluctantly accepting that British workers’ rights predated the so-called benefits of EU workers’ rights, it only calls for legislative protection



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**Self-employment tax form: millions more are now filling these in.**

of workers. Nowhere in the document does it call for trade union organisation, collective protection or trade union recognition.

It may be a clever wheeze to introduce a written English test to prevent the tens of thousands of Uber drivers roaming the streets of London, but it sidesteps Uber’s attack on the unionised Black Cab drivers – members of Unite, RMT and the Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association – which it has done in cahoots with government policy.

Likewise it sidesteps the discussion that needs to be had about why a written English

examination is required – perhaps because migration, especially of illegal migrants, is so essential to the Uber model?

Why all the furore about the government raising national insurance and tax on the self-employed? It has very little to do with the pious opposition bleating about u-turns of policy. What is more likely is that HMRC recognises that the illegal black economy of the so-called self-employed is creating a £3.5+ billion black hole in the Treasury’s financial planning.

The HMRC estimates that 30 per cent of self-employed businesses understate or falsify their tax returns, which implies that the black hole is greater even than was thought.

Similarly the supply of agency workers, another lauded “workers’ right” handed down by the EU and applauded by the trade unions as a beacon of equity and fairness, is now being shown for what it is: a monstrous tax evasion scheme. Workers are routinely registered with agencies that in turn are registered in the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and so on. These agencies provide

**‘The supply of agency workers is now shown as a monstrous tax evasion scheme.’**

# ... But it's spiralled out of control ... But it's workers who suffer the most...

significant tranches of "self-employed" social workers, teachers, nurses and other staff – who are really employed in permanent posts that are only masquerading as temporary employment.

These agency workers are about to be hit with HMRC regulations which will change their tax status. The permanent posts covered by temporary employment will be exposed alongside the huge staff shortages hidden in critical areas of public services.

And what of the "insecure" worker? Traditionally restaurant and catering (pub) staff have fitted into this category, which now contains over 259,000 of these workers, a rise of 128 per cent since 2011. Education workers in the same category now number around 82,000, up 42 per cent, together with 66,000 social care staff up 133 per cent, all in the same period. Added to this are the 5 million self-employed.

## No rights

These insecure workers have no control over their wages or wage fluctuation as they are not permanently and regularly employed and have no employment rights or stability. The TUC estimates that 3 million workers fall into the insecure category.

No area of employment is free of insecure workers – arts and entertainment, personal services (hairdressing, beauty salon, fitness instructors), scientific and technical (photography and translation), domestic staff, film and video, transport workers (taxi drivers, lorry drivers, couriers), building services, manufacturing (shoes, luxury goods, clothing, textiles), social care, hotels, security, travel. The list goes on.

Last year, the government set up the Taylor Review to report on work in the 21st century. Like the Factory Commission reports of the 19th century and similar industrialists' philanthropic reports over the decades (see Lord Leverhulme's scathing analysis of the low-wage, long-hour economy from the 1910-20 period), we return to the basic contradictions of capitalism: hours worked, wages paid, profits produced.

Simple class divisions will always out. There are those who work and those who exploit, no matter how often capitalism is rebranded or repackaged. ■

## Gagged and bound: the fine print of a casual contract

TO UNDERSTAND the challenges casual or zero hours workers face, look at these extracts from the standard casual worker contract issued by ISS Mediclean/ISS Facility Services, the world's largest outsourcing company, at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Trust, Woolwich, London.

The company states:

1. *Your work will be on a casual basis as and when required....*

2. *The Company is not obliged to offer you work, at any time or in any capacity.*

3. *You agree that your legal status when carrying out work for the Company... is that of a casual worker. By agreeing to the terms of the letter you agree that you will not be, nor will you become, an employee of the Company.*

4. *You will be offered assignments to any role...you may be assigned to any of its departments....*

5. *....you will be remunerated at the prevailing hourly rate...you will be paid only for the hours you have actually worked....*

6. *Any assignment may be terminated by the Company supplying you with two hours notice of termination.*

7. *The Company has no obligation to provide you with work....*

8. *...not to divulge any information to any third party concerning your work, patients and / or clients....*

9. *As you are a worker, you are entitled to a pro-rated equivalent of a full time worker's paid holiday (24 days for a full time worker)...under the Working Time Regulations 1998. Your stated entitlement is inclusive of public holidays.*

10. *As you have no normal working hours, a week's entitlement for the purpose of calculating your entitlement to paid holidays will be determined by taking your average number of hours worked per week in the thirteen week period prior to your*

*taking any holiday.*

11. *You will not be entitled to carry over unused holidays....*

12. *You have no entitlement to any contractual sick pay."*

A worker under EU and UK employment law has limited if very few employment rights compared with an employee who has contractual and statutory rights.

Casualisation of work robs the worker of employment continuity and stability. It reduces every hour paid to the minimum.

There's no overtime, travel time, or enhanced rates. Every hour is a negotiation, and workers are robbed of holidays – casuals by definition will struggle to complete 13 consecutive weeks of employment

Casual workers are also robbed of sick pay other than statutory sick pay. And they are gagged from revealing malpractice by the company.

ISS deny employing zero hours casual workers. Such workers ISS define as expressing their 'freedom' to enjoy a work-life balance which suits their personal circumstances. Any casual worker stepping out of line is refused employment. Cynical casual workers describe themselves as 'the enforced self-employed'.

The numbers of workers employed on zero hours contracts rose to just below 1,000,000 at the end of 2016, nearly 25 per cent up on 2015. It is not only the high profile Sports Direct, Uber and social care scandals we should be looking at, but also the penetration of the same practices into hospitals, nursing homes, as well as higher education institutes' catering, security, cleaning, portering, delivery and services, to name just a few.

In 2016 New Zealand outlawed zero-hours contracts. Britain should follow this small country and abolish the re-emerged 19th-century tyranny of casualisation. ■

While the online shopping giants get spectacularly rich, the contracts and long hours for minimal pay. *Workers* has been

# The hidden price of online



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It could be anywhere in Europe (this depot is in the Czech Republic): shipping containers outside an Amazon depot. But at what price?

MOST OF US are not strangers to shopping online, in fact as of last year the majority of us (51 per cent) do most of our shopping online – this is according to an annual survey carried out by ComScore. Yet many of us do so without even thinking about the working conditions of those whose job it is to ensure we receive our online purchases.

The UK's largest delivery giant is Hermes Group. It has recently hit the headlines as it has emerged that some staff are not paid even the minimum wage. Hermes Group indirectly employs around 10,000 couriers in Britain alone – not bad for a German-based company. These couriers deliver to our homes 200 million parcels every year for well known companies such as Next Directory, eBay, ASOS, John Lewis and Topshop.

Yet its 10,000 couriers in Britain are not technically employed by the giant. They are in fact self-employed.

Hermes Group has depots based all over the UK, with each one covering an area divided into what's known as a 'round'.

Rounds are within the area that the depot covers, with each one allocated to a courier. Every morning the couriers have to go to the depot to collect their parcels for the day for the round they cover. This takes them on average an hour and a half every morning.

Although paid their wages by Hermes Group they have to declare their own tax. The couriers use their own vehicles and pay their own parking and petrol. Of course they are able to "claim" this back when completing their annual tax returns but they have to have the money upfront. Given that the couriers are paid an average of 55p to 65p per parcel, financing their work upfront can cause them financial strain.

## No guarantees

In some cases couriers have managed to negotiate 75p per parcel if they have what they class as a difficult round – one with no parking, where the likelihood of getting a parking ticket is quite high. There is of course couriers are not guarantee to receive a worthwhile number of parcels each day. It

can be anything between 30 and 100, depending on the area or round.

It takes a courier, assuming a trouble-free round with no parking issues, customers at home etc, approximately 20 minutes to deliver 5 parcels. At the end of the working day they are unable to take undelivered parcels back to the depots as they are closed, so they have to store them in their own homes until the next morning.

Hermes Group managers argue that a courier can deliver 100 parcels in 3 hours and at 55p per parcel – that's £18 per hour. But they conveniently don't deduct the cost of petrol or parking and they also don't take into account that most areas where couriers work have little or no parking.

Some couriers report they have to pay to park in a local shopping centre and then carry on foot as many parcels as they can manage. This might mean a 15-minute walk and several trips before the deliveries are completed. The management also don't take into account the hour-and-a-half needed every morning to sort through the parcels.



the workers who deliver to your home face zero hours  
 when investigating the hidden world of the couriers...

# Line shopping

As the 10,000 couriers are self-employed they are entitled to zero annual leave and zero sick pay. They are expected to work from Monday to Saturday each week, and every other Sunday. Most depots expect couriers to work Bank Holidays for no extra pay.

Only in depots where couriers have stuck together and refused to do this have Bank Holidays been classified as non working days. If staff wish to have a day off or are sick or want to take a holiday they are responsible for getting another courier to cover their round. If they fail to do so rounds are given to someone else and they then become unemployed.

Couriers based in an East London depot told *Workers* that while pay is an issue they are more concerned that they are not able to take leave of any kind.

One woman said that her 7-year-old daughter was struck down with norovirus and unable to attend school. With no friends or family to help she contacted the depot manager to explain that she had to take the day off but would do double the work the following day. She was told that wasn't acceptable: she would need to bring her daughter to work – or her round would be given to someone else permanently.

In another case in the same depot a courier who has worked for Hermes Group for 9 years with never a day off attended the birth of her granddaughter – only to return to work to find her round had been given away.

Then a week later she was contacted and asked to come back because they hadn't been able to find anyone else to take on the round permanently.

It's not just Hermes Group that treats its staff badly. Other well known delivery giants are in on it too. DPD, also German-based, ships around 2 million parcels a day for the same kind of companies served by Hermes Group. It supplies some workers with company vehicles – but staff are expected to pay £500 per month to hire them. Some staff at DPD are employed and others self-employed, as with Hermes couriers.

## No time for breaks

DPD staff are expected to work 5 days a week with weekends optional. Sounds good? Well, the hours are Monday to Friday 8am till 8pm, with most drivers unable to find the time to take breaks during the day. A driver based in an Essex depot reported that he has to walk around delivering parcels during what should be his break in order to finish the deliveries, and this isn't a one-off : it's an everyday occurrence.

If the "self-employed" DPD staff want a day off they, like Hermes Group staff are expected to find their own cover. For each day they can't do this they are fined £150. DPD also make all staff attend compulsory training, for which they charge them £25.

We live in an era where apparently we should be grateful for having a job. It seems that job security and decent working condi-

**'If the "self-employed" staff want a day off, they are expected to find their own cover.'**

tions have become a luxury. A report into Hermes Group, published in September 2016 and led by Labour MP Frank Field, found that staff are illegally classed as self-employed. The campaign against Hermes Group is being led by the GMB union, following an investigation by the *Guardian*.

The possible legal proceedings come after a similar claim was brought successfully against app-based taxi company Uber. Employment judges ruled that self-employed drivers should be classed as workers and therefore have the right to the national living wage, paid holiday and sick pay. Uber is appealing. The Hermes case is understood to be at an early stage and a claim has yet to be formally lodged with the tribunal.

At the end of March the GMB launched legal proceedings against delivery firm UK Express, which is used by Amazon. In the same week, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos became the world's second richest man after the company's shares rose. ■



## CPBML/Workers Public Meeting, London

Thursday 1 June, 7.30 pm

**“For an independent and self-reliant Britain”**

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

Since Article 50 was invoked it is even clearer that there are only two possible outcomes. Britain must strike out for self-reliance, real independence, real sovereignty, or be dragged back into the EU's coercive rule. What does this mean for us? Come and discuss. All welcome.

**Internal devolution divides the people of Britain. Like mem unless we act. The current undemocratic engineering goin**

# For an undivided Britain

PROPOSERS OF devolution within Britain and surrender of sovereignty to the EU tend to go hand in hand. Tony Blair infamously said “We are the insurgents now”, referring to the cohort of “remainers”, striving to overturn the decision of the British people to leave the EU. One of the people he signed up as part of his campaign to save Britain from itself was soon to be ex-Conservative MP George Osborne.

This was no coincidence. As Chancellor, Osborne was a key architect of plans to fragment and divide Britain. He was also, of course, a leading advocate for the EU. He acts in the interests of big business, large corporations and the filthy rich.

A divided Britain is less likely to restrict their quest to maximise profit at the expense of people. Blair and Osborne make natural bedfellows. Each is contemptuous of ordinary people. Each champions “the market” and “free trade”. Both have been ruthless in imposing what they deem to be best – whether the rest of us want it or not.

The people of Greater Manchester did not ask for devolution. Nor have the people of other regions and cities been demanding “self-rule” and the inevitable extra tiers of politicians. When given the opportunity, people in England have voted against devolution. In 2010 Conservative MP Eric Pickles said, “We should recognise that the case for elected regional government was over-

**‘All 2.8 million residents of Greater Manchester were invited to say whether they agreed or disagreed. A grand total of 169 individuals chose to respond.’**



Shahid Khan/shutterstock.com

**Salford Quays, Greater Manchester, home of the “Media City”. Manchester doesn’t need dev**

whelmingly rejected by the people in the 2004 North East Referendum.” (He was abolishing Regional Development Agencies at the time.)

Devolution was imposed on Greater Manchester. There was no vote, no referendum, no consultation, no parliamentary debate or other form of democratic scrutiny. Osborne held secret discussions with local politicians and then announced devolution as a fait accompli. Even the Parliamentary Select Committee for Communities and Local Government has expressed concerns about the manner in which devolution has been imposed.

“We have been struck by the lack of discussion and consultation with the public in areas which have proposed, negotiated and agreed devolution deals ... For devolution to take root and fulfil its aims, it needs to involve and engage the people it is designed to benefit. There has been a consistent and significant lack of public consultation,

engagement and communication at all stages of the deal-making process.”

Parliament did pass an act last year rubber stamping deals already made about creating Combined Authorities (the cosy name for this carve up) – including Sheffield, West Yorkshire and Cornwall, and making it easier for others to follow suit. There were fine words about “transparency”, but no way for voters to resist these deals. There was no effective challenge or opposition to the new law and certainly no billionaire rushed forward to fund an appeal to the High Court!

## Embarrassed

Perhaps because local politicians were finally embarrassed about the undemocratic nature of devolution, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (created for the purposes of devolution) carried out an on-line consultation on DevoManc between March and May 2016. This was late in the day, to say the least. They’d already agreed to

# Membership of the European Union it will poison our future going on in Manchester shows why it needs to be fought...



**Devolution, and the people never asked for more tiers of politicians.**

devolution and in April 2016 £6 billion of health and social care funding was devolved to the GMCA.

Nevertheless, all 2.8 million residents of Greater Manchester were invited to say whether they agreed or disagreed with the devolution of powers from central to local government. A grand total of 169 individuals chose to respond. Many people are either baffled by the whole thing or dismiss it as a con trick. "We'll be told we have to do more for less" is a common response.

Greater Manchester is made up of 10 local authorities or councils – Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan. As with elsewhere in Britain, each council has had funding severely reduced; devolution does not change this.

For example, Bury's central government funding has been cut by around 40 per cent since 2010, £65 million in the last six years. In December 2016 the leader of Bury

Council said, "We estimate that Bury Council will have to make cuts of £32 million over the next three years in order to set a legal, balanced, and sustainable budget."

His statement concluded, without explaining how the GMCA would bring benefits, "Devolution presents a significant opportunity, with considerable powers and responsibilities devolved to the Greater Manchester region through an elected mayor. Bury Council plays an active role in all GM-wide activity, and the combined capacity of Greater Manchester will be critical to delivering efficiencies for councils and partner organisations. We will look to take advantage of the best that Greater Manchester devolution has to offer as it develops, while ensuring that Bury retains its local character."

It is little surprise that people are cynical about devolution. Yet it rolls on and with it the increased dismantling of Britain and of our ability to provide a national system of

health care and other public services. It also paves the way for large private companies to further cherry pick the services from which they can profit.

Devolution isn't going to go away of its own accord. The number of devolution proposals is growing. Local politicians for the most part have adopted a "me too" attitude, not wanting to be left out. And it's not just England – one group in Scotland is now calling for Holyrood's powers to be further devolved!

The election of a new mayor for Greater Manchester takes place in May 2017. Responsibility has already been devolved to the GMCA for a huge sweep of services: health and social care; transport; police and fire services; housing and planning; business and investment; skills and employment; energy and the environment.

## Take responsibility

So what do we do? For a start the workers of Britain need to take responsibility and to challenge the future that devolution will bring. Otherwise our country will be reshaped in the image of Blair and Osborne.

The Royal College of Nursing is determined to take responsibility for the area in which they work. They have accepted that DevoManc is happening and are calling on nurses to get involved in all opportunities thrown up by DevoManc to redesign health and social care services.

There is progress. The People's Plan ([peoplesplangm.org.uk](http://peoplesplangm.org.uk)), a loose organisation of individuals and groups concerned about the lack of democracy involved in the democratic process, is calling on Greater Manchester residents to get involved in the debate about what we want for the region.

We need a united and independent Britain – not a disintegrated country where we squabble among each other for resources.

There are allies within and outside of Greater Manchester. Some of them may be surprising. Theresa May has spoken of a broader "proper" industrial strategy, nationwide, rather than a regional focus solely on the north. And the green paper on industrial strategy published in January was the first positive step on that topic from government for many years. ■



Across large parts of Britain houses and flats are not even being built to be homes – just investments...

# Housing isn't working

HOUSING IN BRITAIN is broken. It has come to be regarded as property for investment, from which huge profits can be made by taking advantage of the acute rise in demand for it in some of our biggest cities. Even some workers have become involved, buying property instead of fighting for a pension. Speculative investment by British and overseas buyers, along with uncontrolled migration, has driven up prices so high that most workers cannot afford to rent or buy a home in several of our big cities.

But housing is extremely important for the quality of life, health, and even survival. It must be restored to its proper use, not as an investment but as a place to live, to raise a family, and relax after a day's work. We must have enough space in our housing for individuals to live in harmony without overcrowding, clean air to breathe around it, space for children to play, schools, health centres, and green places to take recreation.

London is already badly overcrowded, polluted and lacking sufficient amenities like health services. Every year it's getting worse. Yet every scrap of land is being eyed up by

developers, especially every green scrap. Local authorities are allowing the hated tower blocks to rise again, except this time much closer to each other, and with smaller units. Often made with cheap materials, they provide few amenities for families with children. In Barnet (NW London) a large office block is being converted into 254 flats with less than the national minimum standard of 37 square metres, some as little as 16 square metres.

## City 'luxury'

In central parts of several big cities the developers build luxury living spaces for sale to overseas investors, blighting the landscape with empty towers. (See box on Manchester, below.) Central and local governments if in doubt go for development, even on marshland, because developers offer them a deal they can't refuse and claim they will provide "needed" housing. In fact the flats are just sold off to the highest bidder, often advertised overseas.

Meanwhile houses lie empty in the north of England, Scotland, Wales and also in the

**'There are at least as many empty homes as homeless people.'**

Midlands and southwest England in places where people would like to live, staying where their roots are, but there are few jobs. Many are falling to ruin, others disproportionately house old people, while the young leave for London and the Southeast, or a few other big cities, to find work.

And in rural areas, developers are still looking to take farming land and chunks of forest, woods and moors to build houses rather than use brown field sites, which are more expensive to clear and prepare for new buildings.

Where there is opposition to this relentless urbanisation, the mantra of "social housing" is used, though no one is quite sure what that means. It's almost as if the policy were designed to keep young people from moving into the towns.

There are at least as many empty homes as there are homeless people, so we should make more rational use of what we have. Shelter says that in 2017 there are 279,000 long-term privately owned empty homes in England, and last year it estimated there were 250,000 homeless people.

There are 34,000 long-term private sector empty homes in Scotland. The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership aims to get these empty homes back into use – yet progress is very slow, since there is no connection with employment opportunities.

## Powerless

There are also many buildings such as hotels, pubs and shops, particularly in the small towns, which local councils seem powerless to compulsorily purchase from destructive property owners who let good buildings lie empty and go to rack and ruin

## Manchester: flats, flats, flats



Alastair Wallace/shutterstock.com

**Beetham Tower, Manchester. A two-bedroom flat is on sale for £495,000.**

MANCHESTER IS now top of the table for growth in house prices, having increased by 8.8 per cent in the year ending February. Portsmouth came next at 8.1 per cent, followed by Bristol at 8 per cent, Glasgow at 7.7 per cent and Birmingham at 7.4 per cent.

A recent development in central Manchester, at Number One Cambridge Street, has 282 flats, and 93.9 per cent of them have been bought by overseas buyers, mostly from Asia and the Middle East. 18 nationalities are represented, and only two of the homes have British occupants.

Most of the foreign-owned flats are empty. This has happened despite the promise by CS Development to aim for owner-occupiers and renters as well as investors. They now simply say they cannot be sure who the end buyers will be. Well, that's the free unregulated market in housing for you! ■



**New housing in Tottenham Hale, London. Prices start at £249,995 for a one-bedroom studio flat. A two-bedroom flat is rented for £1,625 a month but it would be grim for children, with only a tiny playground surrounded by concrete. This development, over a brown field site, is now planned to extend over Tottenham Marshes. Haringey Council rejected the plan to build up to 505 homes there including a 21-storey tower, over concerns that it would be too tall and adversely impact green belt land. London Mayor Sadiq Khan has intervened and plans to push through the development in some form upon the marshland.**

until they become health and safety hazards. This should be treated as a criminal offence.

Young people brought up in the big cities are unable to pay the housing costs, so they have to move out, facing a long expensive commute. Those who need and want to move from one part of the country to another cannot because of the monstrous disparity in house prices and rents between different areas. Free movement of capital within Britain, both by developers and employers, has created a great divide between the Southeast and the other regions of the country, and between the biggest cities and the rest.

Any solution to the housing crisis and overcrowding in the cities must involve planning and regulation of the entire economy in the interests of workers. We need to bring jobs to the rest of the country so that workers can live there and invest in the existing and new housing stock. We must reconnect London and Southeast England with the rest

of the country, take down the Great Wall of expensive housing.

### **Brexit opportunity**

This will take time, but Brexit gives us an opportunity to refocus, to look at what we as workers need and how we can get there. Brexit will also help the housing situation as fewer workers from elsewhere will be crammed into a small country – and we won't be leaving swathes of other countries denuded of their populations and of their skilled workers. Good for everyone, then.

Urgent action is also needed, but not action that further degrades the environment in the cities and in rural areas.

Clearly the control of our borders is the first and most urgent requirement. Secondly, rich foreigners must not be allowed to continue buying up London and other big cities. Those who have already bought must be encouraged to sell by taxing unoccupied housing. Let them rent, as in other European

cities. Prices should start to fall when unlimited migration from the EU stops and overseas buyers are excluded from the market.

Most workers in large cities cannot now afford to pay the greatly inflated prices. We need more low-cost housing for rent. This usually has to be financed and managed by local councils and housing associations.

But crowded high-rise developments, and those on green spaces, have to be fought and prevented. Conversion of workplaces into housing is another problem area. It is profitable, but we need local workplaces as well as housing. Workplaces should not be priced out of the market, and planning law should be used to protect them.

It is right to strip tax breaks from buy-to-let landlords, who snap up the cheapest property and often do not maintain it. "Right to Buy" at a discount decreases the number of affordable homes for rent, profiting those

*Continued on page 20*

*Continued from page 19*

who re-sell to make a profit. "Help to buy" is public subsidy feeding price inflation.

The political parties have created this mess and have no long-term solutions, only the short-term fix of building more densely and quickly in the already-congested areas where demand is highest.

These fixes concentrate those who are the very poorest and most dependent on benefits in the rental housing that local authorities control, condemning it to rapid degradation. And all the time, housing benefit subsidises huge rents from the public purse, encouraging greedy landlords.

**Vested interests**

There are huge and powerful vested interests who will oppose any attempt to break up the regime that is lining their pockets. The banks are and have been lending money for overinflated mortgages, and borrowers fear being caught in negative equity. There are the buy-to-let landlords, the developers, and those who see their property as their pension.

So many have been gambling that the property bubble will continue growing. In fact it is unsustainable. London and other big cities will become so ugly, foul, filthy and

**'Big cities will become so ugly, foul and overcrowded that no one will pay the ridiculous prices asked for.'**

overcrowded that no one will be willing to pay the ridiculous prices asked for housing there, whether rented or owned.

It doesn't have to be this way. Regulation of housing and rent controls would be a good start towards tackling problems. Having won the chance to change our country by voting for Brexit, we should start discussing with our fellow workers how to renovate the good housing we have outside the biggest cities and create the necessary opportunities for employment there so it could be used.

Good housing should be considered part of a necessary infrastructure for

employment. Inevitably this would need state intervention. But what kind? We don't want to return to postwar policies for housing such as New Towns and demolition of older houses to make way for tower blocks. Nor should employers be given grants to set up factories in areas outside the Southeast, free later to take the money and run.

**Ideas**

We have to get involved and not leave it to politicians. In every industry and sector of the economy workers and employers should be able to come up with better ideas. Trade unions should get involved in housing issues, and demand more pay to cover the high cost of housing in cities. That would bring employers to consider relocating to areas where their workers could live more cheaply (and comfortably).

With new ways of working some people have been able to do it – mostly as individuals, but some forming "cottage industries". Why not whole enterprises? Existing enterprises in the uncrowded areas could work out what they need to thrive and grow there, demand better infrastructure including better housing for their workforces. This would be so much better than continuing to overdevelop London and other big cities at the expense of the rest of the country. ■



**Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist**

**MAY DAY MEETINGS 2017**

**BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN**

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**The referendum decision changes everything. We are taking back the levers of power from Brussels, and hold our future in our own hands. We are a country rich in natural resources and above all rich in intellect. A new era is dawning for Britain. We must grasp it and make sure it serves the interests of an independent country and progress for workers.**

**No one else can tell us what is good for us. Take control!**



As negotiations on Brexit begin, a new pamphlet cuts through the hard/soft waffle that dominates the media...

# Keep it clean



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*Clean Brexit*, by Liam Halligan and Gerard Lyons, 52 pages, Policy Exchange, 16 January 2017, downloadable for free from [policyexchange.org.uk](http://policyexchange.org.uk).

THIS SHORT pamphlet explains some of the ways Britain can make a success of our newly achieved independence. Forget hard, forget soft, they say: just make it clean.

“There is much talk of ‘Hard Brexit’ versus ‘Soft Brexit’. These labels do little to clarify the issues involved - and may be misleading,” the authors write. “The terms ‘Clean Brexit’ and ‘Messy Brexit’ are more accurate and, in our view, the Government should declare now that it prefers a Clean Brexit.”

**‘Under a “Clean Brexit” we quickly regain control of EU contributions, legal jurisdiction and border controls.’**

The pamphlet’s authors may not be household names, but they are heavyweights in their field. Liam Halligan has held research posts at the IMF and the LSE, been Political Correspondent of the *Financial Times*, and Economics Correspondent of Channel Four News. Gerard Lyons is a financial markets expert with 27 years’ experience in the City. He was also Chief Economic Adviser to then-London mayor Boris Johnson.

## Commercial sense

It is not true, the writers argue, that we must have a string of trade deals in place before the Article 50 window closes or our trade will collapse. Businesses trade across borders because it makes commercial sense.

Trade deals can help keep barriers as low as possible but most trade in the world, not least that between the three biggest blocs – the US, EU and China – is conducted outside free trade agreements.

Halligan and Lyons state that tariffs under WTO rules with “Most-Favoured Nation” status are relatively low and falling. Trade under WTO rules, outside the EU or other free trade agreements, applies to over half our current trade. This is the fastest-growing part of our trade and is in surplus.

Countries including China, Japan, Australia and the US all have access to EU member countries’ markets by meeting EU regulatory standards for specific goods. That does not force the citizens of those countries to accept EU-derived laws and regulations, make annual contributions or accept free movement of labour.

On the other hand, the pamphlet makes clear, negotiating access to either the Single Market or the Customs Union would involve compromises over both sovereignty and migration.

Even if such a deal could be reached, it would then need to be agreed by every one of the 27 EU governments, by every one of their parliaments, by a number of other regional legislatures and by the European Parliament. That would be a long, long road into a complete dead-end.

## Control

Under a “Clean Brexit” the authors argue, we leave the Single Market and Customs Union. We quickly regain control of EU contributions, legal jurisdiction and border controls.

We voted against open borders between Britain and the EU. We should control migration, which has suppressed wages in many areas and put pressure on public services and housing. Migration adds to benefit costs and deters firms from investing in their staff.

The authors also provide convincing evidence to counter some of the hysteria coming from universities. Outside the EU we can continue to collaborate in science, they show.

The Unesco science report *Towards 2030* notes that countries with systems of managed immigration, like Canada and Australia, recruit a higher percentage of overseas researchers than we do within the EU. We could still contribute to the European Research Council and be involved in Horizon 2020, whose slogan is “open to the world”. And by leaving the EU we will escape the EU’s precautionary approach, which inhibits innovation.

This thoroughly researched and referenced pamphlet is well worth reading by anyone with an interest in Brexit – all the more so as it is downloadable for free. ■

**Until the latter part of the 19th century, paid holidays hardly existed for workers in Britain. So how and when were they won? (A clip from the film *When Did We Start?*)**

# The struggle for paid holidays

UNTIL THE late 19th century holidays were only for the seriously wealthy. The cost of holidays was too high for most working people and families.

From the 1870s some clerks and skilled workers began to get a week's paid annual holiday. By 1914 that had spread to clerks in the larger industrial and commercial concerns, bank and insurance workers, and administrative staff.

And holidays with pay for manual workers were not completely unknown. As early as 1840, the South Metropolitan Gas Company had agreed wages on Good Friday and Christmas Day and a week's holiday pay from 1860 for workers with constant employment.

By the 1890s firms such as Brunner Mond, Lever Brothers and the Gas Light and Coke Company had followed suit, along with establishments such as the London and North Western Railway Company and the Royal Dockyards. Some private firms had paid holidays too, though it was not unusual for leave to be deducted if workers fell sick or lost time during the year.

Positive development before 1914 depended on the trade union movement. In 1897 the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants gained a paid holiday of one week's duration (after five years of service) for all passenger guards, brakesmen and signalmen.

The end of the war in 1918 saw an extension of paid holiday agreements. The Trade Boards Act of 1918 allowed holiday-with-pay settlements, while National Joint Industrial Councils established in certain industries at the end of the war could deal with the rules relating to holiday arrangements and respond to the case for paid holidays put forward by labour representatives.

By 1920 the official bodies in the flour-milling industry, tramways, the soap-and-candle trade, and paint and varnish manu-

facture had introduced a holiday with pay, usually of one week's duration. By the start of the 1920s formal holiday agreements covered around a million workers in trades ranging at the national level from the railway service, public undertakings and the printing industry to co-operative societies, hairdressers and theatres at the local level.

Pressure from the grass roots secured a national Hours and Holidays Agreement from the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation in 1919 – a week's holiday with pay after one year's service – and covered nearly all workers in the industry. Important agreements were signed in the railway sector and boot and shoe manufacturing.

## Momentum

The post-war boom broke in the spring of 1920 and by 1921 Britain was in an economic depression. Yet in spite of these unfavourable conditions, the momentum of the 1919-20 period continued. By 1922 agreements covered about 1.5 million manual workers, though this figure did not increase dramatically until the 1930s. In 1927 the TGWU union decided paid holidays would be "in all the future negotiations with employers".

By 1930 a number of unions had made claims for paid holidays and won clauses in their collective agreements. In 1928, the engineering union began formal talks with the national employers' federation on the demand for paid holidays, though the employers tried to delay making any general decision. In August 1929, nearly 100,000 workers in state-owned industrial establishments got one week's holiday pay.

Industrial action was also used. In 1930 a holiday-with-pay scheme began in the clothing trade between the Tailors and Garment Workers' Union and three employers' federations. Despite this, companies like Burton failed to introduce a scheme. In 1933 at Prices factory a lightning strike of 4,000 employees won them their holiday pay; and at the Schneider clothing factories in London, 1,000 women struck in a dispute over holiday gratuity.

Between 1918 and 1933 the trade unions' holiday-with-pay campaign energised their own members, presented a case to employers and the state, influenced the



Photochrom print of the Promenade and Tower, London, 1900.

climate of opinion and won acceptance for the idea that a holiday without wages was really no holiday at all.

With the economy recovering from about 1933, the industrial and political environment was more receptive to holidays with pay. Amid a prospering aircraft industry, the formation of the National Aircraft Shop Stewards' Council in 1935 led to demands for statutory holidays with pay.

Towards the end of 1934 a grass-roots movement developed in South-East London representing the workers of two large electrical engineering firms, Siemens Brothers and Johnson & Phillips, calling for paid holidays. The shop committees at these two firms took the lead, with joint mass meetings and leaflet distribution in May 1935.

## Enthusiastic

Finally the Cable Makers' Association announced one week's paid holiday for 20,000 cable workers. And the shop stewards committee at engineering firm Napiers in Acton, London, placed the demand before enthusiastic mass meetings of members, leading to the successful imposition of an overtime ban calling for 14 days' holiday with pay.

Eventually, the Engineering Joint Trades Movement and the Employers' Federation signed an agreement granting one week's

**'By the 1920s formal holiday agreements covered around a million workers.'**

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# Holidays



Blackpool, in the 1890s, taken from South Pier.

holiday with pay, reflecting the vast number of union applications made in all parts of the country.

Most working people came to receive a paid holiday in the form of collective agreements. By April 1937 there were at least 175 individual agreements on the files of the Transport and General Workers' Union and overall 7.75 million manual and non-manual workers out of a total working population of 18.5 million were in receipt of holiday pay.

In 1938 the introduction of the Holidays with Pay Act enabled trade boards, agricultural-wages committees and road-haulage central wages boards to provide paid holidays when fixing rates of wages. But the Act was a weak piece of legislation and only applied to a potential workforce of two million – insignificant compared with the growth of collective agreements.

By 1939 the number of workers getting paid for their annual holiday had risen to about 11 million. This was not the end of the story, as further gains were made during the course of the Second World War, so that by 1945 about 10 million manual workers were in receipt of remunerative holidays. The principle of holidays with pay had been firmly established. ■

• A fuller version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

# NO ADVANCE WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
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# No, we're not living longer

**'Workers retiring now will have had a relatively longer exposure to economic decline during their working lifetime.'**

THE PHRASE "we are all living longer" has been a well rehearsed slogan to justify an endless attack on state and occupational pension entitlement. But for the third year running the Continuous Mortality Investigation (CMI) has shown that as of March 2017 British mortality rates have increased, and that previous trends are in reverse.

Various explanations for the reversals have been given: the figures are a statistical blip, or down to recent NHS spending cuts and austerity. But it's no blip, and the worsening trend is likely to be the result of more than just simply post-2007 cuts.

The CMI's mortality data show that the average life expectancy of a man currently aged 65 is now 22.2 years, down from 22.8 years since 2013. For a woman the figure is 24.1 years, down from 25.1 years in 2013.

These figures are significant. Projections during early 2000 anticipated that 65-year-olds retiring at around 2017 would live at least 3 to 4 years longer than the current figures are now showing. Upon the release of the latest CMI figures around £28 billion was wiped from the inflated deficits of Britain's private sector final salary schemes.

Really it all comes down to this: workers retiring now will have had a relatively longer exposure to economic decline during their working lifetime than those who retired say 15 or more years ago. In other words, recent retirees will on average have had a greater exposure to the debilitating effects of redundancy, mass unemployment dressed up as part time work, constant attacks on living standards, right through to eating chemically saturated cheap processed food which is an integral part of low wages. So it is hardly surprising that mortality rates are now rising on a like-for-like basis compared with projections made from the mid-1990s through to the early 2000s.

But the news did not stop the Independent State Pension Review from declaring at the

beginning of April that to reflect "increasing life expectancy" the state pension age should rise to age 68 sooner than previously planned.

This would effectively mean a retirement age of 68 from year 2037 onwards, instead of from 2046. So any worker born after 1969 would now have to work an additional three years before receiving a State Pension.

Not to be outdone, the Government Actuary's Department called for the state pension age to rise to age 70 for those retiring after year 2054, on the assumption that workers would spend 32 per cent of their adult life in retirement. It's a proposal that would push back retirement for those currently aged 33 to a retirement age last seen just before the First World War in 1914.

The authors of the State Pension Review said their proposals would "provide a greater measure of intergenerational fairness". Forget for a moment that these clowns have no idea what this country will be like in 5 years, let alone in 20 years. One thing is for certain: the longer older workers have to continue working, the harder it will be for younger British workers to move up the jobs ladder.

When given the opportunity, properly trained young British workers are obviously going to be more productive than older workers forced to hang on working, or trying to find work, beyond a civilised retirement age. The fact that more than 1 million are now working beyond age 65 may partly explain why Britain has a declining productivity rate, comically called "the Productivity Puzzle".

In many companies and organisations a large part of the current skilled workforce is due to retire during the next 5 to 10 years. So it is self-evident that we need immediate transitional planning rather than employers continuing to pretend that they have a skills shortage requiring the import of foreign labour. Instead, employers should be investing in training our young workers here. Now *that's* planning! ■

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