

WORKERS

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THE THRESHOLD OF FREEDOM...



...BUT DON'T LEAVE IT TO OTHERS: SPEAK UP NOW!

WATER Private failure

FISH Defra's white flag

UNION RIGHTS EU assault

EU Federalists rule

HOMES End the crisis

FE Golden opportunity

LIBRARIES Plan for a future

plus News, Book

SHIPPING Selling the flag

Reviews, Historic Notes

RAIL Foreign grip tightens

and more

WORKERS



Take real control

BRITAIN STANDS at a crossroads. Either we leave the European Union on 31 October, or an anti-democratic majority in parliament will find some way to force through their objective of unilaterally cancelling out the votes of 17.4 million people in the June 2016 referendum.

The aim of the wreckers is clear: to use parliament against the people. They must be stopped.

They say the vote for Brexit was all about bringing control and sovereignty back to parliament. Wrong. It was about bringing these things back to Britain. Only the people are sovereign.

As *Workers* goes to press, it still looks unlikely that the anti-democrats will be able to realise their dream. But never underestimate the lengths to which a desperate Establishment will be prepared to go. And they are, indeed, desperate.

Only extreme pressure could have led to Ken Clarke – a has-been NHS-wrecker – being touted as leader of a “government of national unity”. Only utter desperation has forced Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who understand party interest but clearly not the national interest, to even think of working together.

And as the deadline approaches, the desperation, the plotting, the construction of a coup against democracy will only get more feverish.

Meanwhile there is still a chance that the EU, seeing its bluff called, will try some fiddle with the backstop, most likely some empty form of words, to

get their and Theresa May’s disgraceful Withdrawal Agreement through (see “Rotten to the core” on page 8 of this issue).

But whatever happens, or doesn’t happen, in one crucial respect the challenge before the people of Britain has not changed. And that challenge is to get involved, take responsibility. Stop sitting on the sidelines watching politicians carving up democracy. Above all, never think that we can sit back and leave it to the politicians to do the right thing.

That challenge must be taken up now. The greater the involvement, the greater the noise, the anger, the pressure, the more likely it is that we will have Brexit (and a clean Brexit at that). Silence now will only give heart to the extreme Remain rump.

Equally, the greater the involvement, the better placed we will be after Brexit to secure the independence of action that Britain will need to survive and prosper.

Despite the delusions of some, the people did not vote to leave the EU only to place ourselves under the domination of the US. We don’t want to escape the EU-inspired shackles of TTIP in order to bind them round our own wrists.

The British people want control. Control over our economy, our finances and taxation, our borders, our own standards on food, health, the environment and animal welfare.

But it’s not enough to want control. It will have to be seized. ■



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Workers

The East Midlands franchise: a new look in August...along with new, Dutch, owners.

Foreign grip on rail tightens

THE FOREIGN grip on Britain’s passenger rail services tightened still further. Dutch national rail subsidiary Abellio took over the East Midlands franchise from 18 August, and the West Coast franchise was awarded jointly to the Italian state railway Trenitalia along with First Group. Nearly 80 per cent of Britain’s rail operations will soon be in foreign hands. Seemingly, any state can run our railways other than the British state.

Meanwhile, there are growing fears in the government that up to six franchises (South Western, Transpennine Express, Northern, Southeastern, CrossCountry and c2c) are in serious financial trouble and could soon hand back the keys – which would mean a quarter of the train network would have to be nationalised on an interim basis at least.

And the future of Bombardier’s Derby train factory is again in doubt. It is the only plant in Britain where trains are built from scratch rather than assembled from parts manufactured elsewhere. It seems that foreign firms are also tightening their grip on train manufacturing.

After months of negotiations over the future of Merseyrail guards, rail union RMT has now gone back to the picket lines, announcing a series of new strike days. A similar dispute rumbles on in South Western Railway. And in the new East Midlands Railway company, guards are striking in a longstanding dispute over fair pay. The victories achieved in many other franchise operators will no doubt inspire those still in dispute.

With the Williams Rail Review thought set to recommend breaking up and possibly privatising Network Rail, and a government-inspired threat to the funding of rail pensions continuing, the industry seems to be in for more turmoil ahead. And rail workers need to ignore the siren calls of those that would divide unions at this crucial time. ■

ECONOMY

Wages on the up – just

WAGE GROWTH in the UK rose to 3.6 per cent in the year to May 2019, the highest growth rate since 2008, according to Office for National Statistics figures. Wages have been outpacing inflation since March 2018, though not by much.

A record high of 32.75 million people were in employment up to the end of May, while 1.29 million were out of work – a huge number, but the lowest since at least 1992.

“Regular pay is growing at its fastest for nearly 11 years in cash terms, and its quickest for over three years after taking account of inflation,” said ONS labour market statistician Matt Hughes.

In other words, in the three years since we voted for Brexit the predicted economic disaster has completely failed to materialise. But wages have been suppressed for so long that a serious, organised fight for pay is essential. ■

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

HEATHROW

Recognition victory

“AMBASSADORS” at Heathrow Airport have won union recognition. Around 435 of the staff, who provide assistance to passengers arriving at and leaving the airport, are covered by the agreement with the Unite union.

Meanwhile, planned action over pay at the airport by 4,000 security, airside and other personnel has been suspended to allow a ballot on a new pay offer. ■

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



ON THE WEB

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

Class sizes on the rise

New figures from the Department for Education show that class sizes in England's secondary schools have risen by the equivalent of one extra pupil per class in just two years.

BiFab workers protest at EDF in Edinburgh

With their jobs under threat after contracts were sent abroad, workers from the BiFab construction yards in Fife protested at the head office of the energy giant EDF in Edinburgh.

Open financial war between EU and Switzerland

Finance is the weapon as the EU tries to force the country to sign a new agreement covering all aspects of its relations with the Switzerland.

Brexit: The death of ideology and the start of a polite revolution?

Reader's letter: Three years on we still seem to be tied to the shackles of a dying supra-national organisation.

Poland trying to reverse impact of migration

The Polish government wants graduates to return to Poland. More than half a million have left over the past 20 years.

Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit cpbml.org.uk to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox. The sign-up form is at the top of every website page – an email address is all that's required.



Friday 26 July: workers march out of the factory marking the final closure of the "Caley" rail works in Springburn, Glasgow. The main banner is clearly aimed at the SNP administration.

SNP leaves the Caley to rot

WORKERS FROM North Glasgow's famous "Caley" railyard have left their workplace for what looks to be the last time. The yard is a proud local and national industrial asset that has been operating since the 1850s, but has been threatened with closure since the current owner, Gemini Rail Services, announced its intention to wind up the yard in December of last year.

Over 200 skilled jobs will be lost as a result of the closure of the yard, which is located in one of Glasgow's most deprived areas.

In his speech to a large crowd containing many members of the local community, Unite officer Pat McIlvogue condemned the SNP leadership at Holyrood for their lack of interest in bringing the yard into public ownership, which brought loud applause from the crowd.

This event further exposes the falsehood that the separatist SNP is a party that represents the interests of the working class, and shows the shape of things to come in the event that the nationalists pull Scotland out of the United Kingdom. ■

EU

Federalists appointed

URSULA VON der Leyen, the outgoing German defence minister, has been appointed the new European Commission President, a choice confirmed after she won the votes of 52 per cent of the members of the European Parliament.

She is a virulent enemy of Brexit... although no one is expecting her to say that 52 per cent of the vote is not enough and that the MEPs didn't really know what they were voting for.

After three days of talks held in secret, 28 politicians nominated the Christian Democrat as part of an overall appointments package.

A fanatical supporter of a United States of Europe and ardent advocate of a European Army – aims dishonestly dismissed as fanciful by the Remain campaign in Britain's 2016 referendum – her appointment brings these long-planned cornerstones of the nightmare that is the EU one step closer.

Under the deal, EU leaders appointed

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel as the new President of the European Council and the Italian MEP David Sassoli as the new President of the European Parliament.

EU leaders have also put forward France's Christine Lagarde as head of the European Central Bank – a woman found guilty of criminal negligence by France's Court of Justice of the Republic. ■

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



AGRICULTURE

Irish farmers protest

IRISH BEEF farmers are holding a series of protests calling on their government and the EU for support. Their concerns are an EU trade deal and the impact of Brexit when beef prices are already falling.

The new deal with Mercosur – a trade bloc whose members are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay – took 20 years to negotiate. It reduces tariffs on many goods

including agricultural products and automobile parts. Farmers say cheap imports will undercut European produce.

At the end of July the Irish Farmers' Association held a demonstration at the EU Food and Veterinary Offices in County Meath. They specifically wanted to highlight the current import of substandard South American beef products and called for a ban on them. ■

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



Fishing for Leave flotilla in Newcastle, 15 March 2019.

Fishermen reject Defra panic

IN A MEMO accidentally leaked to the BBC in August the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) stated that government is uncertain whether it will be able to enforce our fishing rights once we leave the EU.

If we leave without a withdrawal agreement – a deal – Britain will immediately drop out of the hated Common Fisheries Policy, which has done so much harm to our fishing industry by allowing EU fishing fleets to plunder the rich waters around Britain's coasts. Under international law the UK would become an independent coastal state after Brexit, able to exert full control over our waters.

Now Defra appears to say that we lack the resources to do exactly that. It bemoans the fact that it currently has only 12 vessels to force the exclusion of foreign fishing vessels.

This leak comes after threats from French officials and fishermen to ignore the UK departure from the CFP and to continue to fish illegally. Already last August, the "scallop wars" saw fights between French and British fishing boats in the English Channel in waters off Normandy. Boats collided and stones were thrown.

Commenting on the BBC about the intention to continue fishing here post-Brexit, one French fisherman admitted that he sympathised with British fishermen for voting to Leave. They hate the CFP too.

Campaigning organisation Fishing for Leave expressed outrage at Defra's "defeatist assessment". In practice any illegal fishing would centre on the border zone that runs from between the Dogger Bank in the middle of the North Sea all the way round to between the UK and the Republic of Ireland off Anglesey, about 1200 nautical miles.

FFL points out that with existing British monitoring vessels, modern radar, spotter patrol planes, and the help of the Royal Navy, there is no reason why the job can't be done. Especially as all ships from countries party to the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission must by law be fitted with satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems. Impounding boats, and with heavy fines for release, would be quite a deterrent.

There could be strictly limited short-term annual access agreements for some foreign fishing vessels, says FFL, but only on the basis of reciprocal and equal value mutual interest.

So why is Defra so gloomy about the prospects for enforcement? The history of betrayal of British fishing rings alarm bells. Is Defra looking for an excuse to be soft on the EU? ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

OCTOBER

Monday 14 October, 7.30pm

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

CPBML public meeting: "Next steps in Britain's fight for freedom"

This meeting, two weeks before Britain's latest planned departure from the EU, will be an ideal opportunity to discuss the struggle to come. All welcome.

Thursday 24 October, 7.30pm

Upstairs, Britons Protection, 50 Great Bridgewater Street, M1 5LE

CPBML public meeting: "British independence: essential for our future"

Without real independence, Britain will always be at the mercy of the forces of globalisation. Come and discuss. All welcome.

MOTORS

Electric investment

AT THE START of July Jaguar Land Rover announced a huge investment to build electric cars in Britain. The investment will be centred around the Coventry car maker's plant in Castle Bromwich, the home of Jaguar, but other plants will also benefit.

The first new all-electric model will be a new Jaguar XJ saloon, traditionally the Jaguar marque's flagship model. Other electric models will follow, including an electric version of the smaller XE saloon and a large new SUV code-named the J-Pace. This is a welcome boost for industry in the face of falling sales, caused by the decline of diesel, falling demand in China, and government cuts in support.

For its first all-electric car, the I-Pace, launched last year, the company chose a contract manufacturer in Graz, Austria, to produce it.

Unite's assistant general secretary for manufacturing, Steve Turner, said the announcement was "testament to the skill and hard work of Unite members and shop stewards."

Despite promises to back electric car production, the government scrapped a £2,500 grant for plug-in hybrids last October and cut the maximum available for battery-powered cars by £1,000. ■

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

If capitalism could charge for the air we breathe, we'd be nose for it. And why not? They've already managed it with

The failure of privatised



Image by Sam72/shutterstock.com.

WATER IS not just essential to human life. Along with power and people it is one of the essential foundations of industry. It should never have become a plaything for profit.

The privatisation of water must rank as one of the biggest scandals of the past three decades. Ordered by the Thatcher government, it left England and Wales with the only fully privatised water and sewerage services in the world, an experiment for which we have paid dearly.

Even worse, it resulted in a devolved and regionalised structure that makes proper national planning for Britain impossible. The English water companies are all pri-

vatized. In Wales privatisation led eventually to the creation of a non-profit provider. In Scotland water remained in public hands.

By 2015, regulator Ofwat reported that the average household bill for water and sewerage in the privatised areas had reached £396 a year – an increase since privatisation of 40 per cent in real terms. For comparison, the real-terms cost of water in Scotland has fallen by 6 per cent.

Debt

All the English and Welsh regional water companies were privatised in stock market flotations, with all their debts kindly written off by the government. Debt-free, they raked in large profits. Some moved into other industries.

In Wales, the Welsh Water Authority moved into tourism and fishing, then took over electricity provider Swalec to become a “multi-utility”, renaming itself Hyder (ironically, the Welsh word for “confidence”).

A mere 12 years after privatisation, Hyder was taken over by Western Power Distribution, which sold its water interests for £1 (that’s 100 pence) along with an astounding £1.85 billion of Hyder debt. The resulting company, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (also known as DCWW), was established in 2001 as a non-profit with no shareholders.

Hyder was not the only privatised company to accumulate debt while doling out dividends. Debt and dividends have been a continuing feature of water companies in England. Thirty years after debt-free privatisation, they have accumulated debts of £51 billion while handing out dividends of £56 billion.

Big business

Across Europe, water is already a megabusiness. When the European Commission was forced by public revolts to take water out of its “concessions” directive (see Box, right), AquaFed – “the international federation of private water operators” – reacted with outrage.

Estimating that there are around 12,000 “public-private partnerships” within the EU, AquaFed pointed out, “This number exceeds by far the number of PPP contracts in other sectors and might be close to half the total number of ‘concessions’ contracts across the European Union that are potentially subject to the future directive.” Clearly, there’s a lot of money in water.

Leaks

Meanwhile, with privatisation here, much of Britain’s water is, literally, leaking away. As the GMB union pointed out when news emerged of the first hosepipe ban of the summer – in the North West, from the start of August – a little over 3 billion litres of treated water disappears in England and Wales each day.

In the North West, where 7 million households are affected, 439.2 million litres leak every day from the pipelines of operator United Utilities. (The figures come from the Consumer Council for Water, the water watchdog for England and Wales.)

Southern Water is also seeking water restrictions, including hosepipe bans, because of low levels in the rivers Test and Itchen.

‘Labour’s “vision” is dangerously short-sighted...’

paying through the water...

water

But some people are doing well out of all this. In June, the GMB revealed that the nine heads of England's privatised water companies received payments of £11 million between them in 2018 alone.

Pressure has been building up for years. In response, the Labour Party is calling for the nationalisation of the water companies – something it failed to propose during its 13 years in government from 1997 to 2010. Last year it published a document entitled *Clear Water*, and subtitled “Labour’s vision for a modern and transparent publicly owned water system”.

So far, so good. The nationalisation of water would be immensely popular. Opinion polls consistently suggest majority support for it. Even one commissioned by the water companies found more in favour than against, and that poll appeared to have been designed to encourage positive thoughts about water companies before asking about nationalisation.

Regionalisation

But read deeper into *Clear Water* and Labour’s “vision” is revealed as dangerously short-sighted. It talks about nationalisation but remains committed to regionalisation, maintaining the regional structure of water authorities (along, implicitly, with devolution in Scotland and Wales). Nowhere is there any attempt to build a truly national water infrastructure.

As bad, the new regional water companies will have their financial management based on Transport for London – whose stewardship of the capital’s transport system has led to high fares and repeated attacks on trade union organisation.

Yet the need for a national rather than regional water infrastructure is pressing. Indeed, earlier this year the government’s own National Infrastructure Commission spelled out some of what is needed in a report calling for radical action.

“Few of us ever question if water will flow when we turn on our taps,” the report said, “and yet without further action there is roughly a 1 in 4 chance over the next 30 years that large numbers of households will have their water supply cut off for an extended period because of a severe drought.” ■

DG EMPL, European Commission (CC BY-ND 2.0)



Michel Barnier, conservative French politician and darling of the Remain press, photographed in 2014 when he was European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services – and pushed for water privatisation.

EU revisits privatisation

THE EUROPEAN Union has long had its eye on the vast water industry across Europe. Its first open attempt to force water privatisation came in the 2006 Services in the Internal Market Directive – known as the Bolkestein Directive after the commissioner responsible, Dutch ex-oil company executive Frits Bolkestein.

When that attack was beaten off, the EU came back for more with its proposals for a new Directive on “concessions”, that is, contracts awarded by public bodies. This time the commissioner was Michel Barnier – now the European Commission’s Brexit negotiator and the darling of the Remain press.

Opposition

After huge opposition, most notably in Germany, the final text in 2014 excluded contracts for the provision of drinking water. But here was a sting in the tail: a clause empowering the Commission to conduct a “review” of the effect on the internal market of excluding water.

That review should have been completed in April and reported to the European Council and the European Parliament. Now it is apparently scheduled for October. Perhaps the Commission wants to avoid even more unpopularity while Brexit is ongoing.

The EU found the going easier in Greece, where the “troika” of the

European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund included water privatisation in its list of demands.

In the event, a Greek court ruled that at least 50 per cent plus one of the shares in the two main companies – EYATH in Thessaloniki and EYDAP in Athens – had to stay in public hands. So the Greek government responded by putting 49 per cent (49.7 per cent for EYDAP) of the shares into private hands.

But as an article in 2015 by the Transnational Institute points out, private companies can do very well with that level of control. It tells the story of the sale of 49.9 per cent of Berlin’s water company BWB in 1999. “Despite minority ownership, the private companies controlled management and were guaranteed high profits through secret contracts,” it wrote.

In 2013 Berlin took its water back into municipal ownership, though it is still run as a profit-oriented company.

The EU also imposed water charges on Ireland as part of that country’s bailout. Before 2014, water was provided out of general taxation, but the EU insisted on moving to individual household charges. But resistance was so great – with massive demonstrations on the issue – that in April 2017 the government backed down. ■

Yes, the backstop matters. But the Withdrawal Agreement surrender of sovereignty built into every aspect...

May's agreement: four r

Alexandros Michailidis/shutterstock.com.



Off you go: Theresa May ushered off the platform by Jean-Claude Juncker, EU Commission president, in Brussels, November 2018. Photo

On 14 November 2018 the European Commission and the May government published the draft Withdrawal Agreement. As Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker boasted, the EU got “almost everything” it wanted. A staffer for EU Parliament Brexit negotiator Verhofstadt at the Strasbourg parliament crowed, “It took us two years, but we managed – it’s done, on our terms and conditions. We finally turned them into a colony and that was our plan from the first moment.” (BBC4 documentary *Brexit: Behind Closed Doors*.)

The Agreement is not an agreement to leave the EU. It is an agreement to stay in the EU, all 585 pages of it. In part this is secured by the accompanying Political Declaration, which sets out the principles for any future relationship with the EU.

1: The backstop – a chain to bind us forever

The so-called Irish “backstop” would lock us forever into the gathering United States of Europe. As even Tony Blair has acknowl-

edged, the EU would have a veto on our leaving – a one-sided arrangement, virtually unique among international treaties. The Attorney General told the Cabinet that there was no legal escape route and that it would “endure indefinitely”. The backstop would keep us in the EU’s Single Market and in the EU’s Customs Union.

Article 184 of the Agreement requires the UK to negotiate a further long-term agreement with the EU conforming to the Political Declaration. The Declaration has already surrendered all the key matters to be negotiated in future.

It would result in Northern Ireland staying permanently in the EU’s Single Market, creating a border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. It would change Northern Ireland’s status without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, which breaches the Good Friday Agreement.

Article 4 of the Withdrawal Agreement allows the EU to “disapply” any UK law incompatible with the Agreement. So, we could not legislate our way out of it. In sum,

the Agreement would bind us into the EU’s set of laws forever.

But backstop or no, the whole Agreement is a surrender of sovereignty, of independence.

2: No independence without control over the economy

An independent, sovereign country is not told by another how to run its economy or regulate migration, or how to write its financial rules. Yet that is what the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration would enforce.

Boris Johnson told the House of Commons on 26 July, “No country that values its independence and, indeed, its self-respect, could agree to a treaty which signed away our economic independence and self-government as this backstop does.”

But the backstop is not just about Ireland. The whole treaty is a backstop – a Brexit-stop.

As EU negotiator Sabine Weyand told EU ambassadors, the Agreement “requires

and its accompanying Political Declaration have the reasons for No Deal

the customs union as the basis of the future relationship” and the UK and the EU “must align their rules but the EU will retain all the controls.” The EU wants the rules in force during the transition up to December 2020 – its rules – to be the basis of the negotiations for what follows. The Agreement would allow free movement of labour through clauses about mobility.

The Declaration commits us to “an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership across trade and economic cooperation, law enforcement and criminal justice, foreign policy, security and defence and wider areas of cooperation”. (Paragraph 3.) This would be BRINO, Brexit In Name Only, membership in all but name.

It obliges us to “create a free trade area” (Paragraph 22), a “single customs territory” (Paragraph 23), “provisions to enable free movement of capital” (Paragraph 43), “a liberalisation in trade in services well beyond the Parties’ World Trade Organization commitments and building on recent Union [EU] Free Trade Agreements” (Paragraph 29), and “a level playing field for open and fair competition” (Paragraph 17). We would have to accept “a level playing field” on state aid, social policy, the environment, and “relevant tax matters” (Paragraph 79).

The Agreement would also allow the EU to control not just our industries but also farming and fishing. It commits us to negotiations on the Common Fisheries Policy (against all promises to the contrary) so access to our fishing grounds could be traded away, as President Macron confirmed straight after May signed the Agreement. The Political Declaration promises to “establish a new fisheries agreement on, inter alia, access to waters and quota shares” (Paragraph 75).

3: Money – decades of contributions

As well as being locked into the EU, the Agreement would make us pay handsomely for it. For starters, it would make us give the EU at least £39 billion.

Even the House of Lords’ (pro-Remain) EU Financial Affairs Sub-Committee concluded that “Article 50 allows the UK to leave the EU without being liable for outstanding financial obligations under the EU budget.”

Not a penny!

But £39 billion would be just the start. The UK would be liable for our “share” of any financial commitments the EU makes before we leave, with no time limit on our liabilities (Article 143), so we could still be paying the EU for decades. And, indeed, in the case of pensions for UK nationals who worked for the EU, would be paying.

We would also be liable to pay out “in legal cases resulting from the execution of Union programmes and policies” provided that the facts that gave rise to the legal cases began no later than 31 December 2020 (Article 47).

In case of any doubt, the Agreement would allow the European Commission to decide how much we would pay to the EU bodies which the Agreement commits us to be part of. We would be giving the EU a blank cheque.

4: No sovereignty – the ECJ would still rule

A sovereign country makes its own laws. A subservient country has its laws dictated from outside – which is what the Withdrawal Agreement would entail.

Article 4 makes it clear that its provisions are intended to be directly effective in the UK. We would be subject to all EU laws, including new laws on which we would have had no vote or voice, during the transition period, with the possibility of extension until December 2022. And some aspects of EU law would continue to apply for decades.

EU law and the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) would apply in relation to the Separation Issues and the Financial Settlement for an indefinite period after the transition period.

The Agreement would allow the Court to prosecute the British government for any perceived breaches of EU law for up to four years after the end of any transition period, with judgments and fines binding on us. The ECJ is a cornerstone of the EU’s emerging state, and obedience to the ECJ is the cornerstone of the Agreement.

The ECJ would be the sole arbiter of EU citizens’ rights in Britain until 2028 and indefinitely thereafter. This includes their “right” to bring in spouses from outside the EU (a right that UK citizens don’t have) and their “right”

‘A sovereign country makes its own laws...’

to claim child benefit for children living in their home country.

Under Article 5 of the Withdrawal Agreement British agencies and courts would have to have “due regard” to decisions handed down by the ECJ even after any transition. Under Article 168 (Exclusivity) only the ECJ can decide disputes over the interpretation of the Agreement. The Agreement would set up a Joint Committee to handle disputes – and it would have to refer all matters of EU law to the ECJ. Referring trade disputes to any other body, even to the World Trade Organization, is explicitly forbidden.

The Political Declaration spells out the continuing supremacy of EU law over UK law: “Should a dispute raise a question of interpretation of Union law, which may also be indicated by either Party, the arbitration panel should refer the question to the CJEU as the sole arbiter of Union law, for a binding ruling.” (Paragraph 134)

No deal!

May’s deal would have us stay in the customs union and the single market and under the jurisdiction of the ECJ – that is, not really leaving the EU at all. It would trap us in the EU without a voice, without a vote and without an exit. It would make us a permanent dependent province of the EU.

This Agreement brought down the May government. Johnson said he won’t try to revive it. But he has also said that we could stay in the single market and the customs union for another two years.

This government might well try to sell us this deal, possibly without the backstop, as “getting us over the line” on 31 October. But if we don’t leave the EU’s Single Market and its Customs Union, if we don’t keep our money, if we don’t run our own affairs, and if we don’t evict EU law and the EU court, we don’t have Brexit.

It doesn’t just need a backstopectomy, as Johnson put it. It’s rotten to the core. ■

In the last issue, we looked at how workers pay the price of the EU has restricted unions' ability to defend wages and

How the EU attacks the



Workers

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady at a rally in London, 2015: the right message, but many in the labour movement refuse to acknowledge the restrictions of EU law.

IN PRINCIPLE, EU law asserts the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike. Yet these rights fade away when it comes into conflict with the fundamental freedoms of business, enshrined in EU treaties: the rights to provide services, to establish a business, to move labour, to invest (and de-invest) where they want.

Yet in Britain many unions are blithely ignoring the damage the EU is doing to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

It's not as if they haven't been told. In 2016 John Hendy – dubbed “the barrister champion of the trade union movement” by trade journal *The Lawyer* – wrote a detailed article looking at decisions from the European Court of Justice, the EU's Charter

of Fundamental Freedoms, and European Commission reports. He concluded, “The EU has become a disaster for the collective rights of workers and their unions.”

Among the key decisions he mentions was the Viking case – a landmark in the European Court of Justice's support for the interests of the employers.

Viking is a Finnish company which operates a large ferry fleet of eight ships. In autumn 2003, saying it was losing money, it told the Finnish Seamen's Union it wanted to reflag one of its ships to Estonia or Norway to save costs.

The union threatened strike action, backed up by a circular from the International Transport Federation urging

member unions not to negotiate with Viking about reflagging. Viking backed down.

But then, on 1 May 2004, Estonia joined the EU. Soon Viking announced it was reflagging the ship to Estonia. With the circular from the International Transport Federation in force and the Finnish union talking about a strike, Viking went to the High Court in London (where the International Transport Federation is based), claiming that union action violated its rights under EU law to free movement and to establishment (articles 39 and 43 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

The High Court sided with Viking, and issued an injunction restraining union action. The unions appealed, and the Appeal Court referred the case to the European Court of Justice.

At the European Court the unions argued that their action was a promotion of the European Union's social policy (fairness, solidarity, and so on). The European Court sided with Viking. No surprise, perhaps. But the reasons are revealing.

Company rights prevail

First, the court established that the right to strike in pursuance of social policy cannot automatically override the right of companies to set up where they want (Article 43).

Second, the court established that the right to strike can be prohibited not just under national law but also under EU law. So the EU can and will (and does) ban strikes that national legislation would permit.

Third, while not outlawing strikes over free movement in principle, it said that any strike would be illegal if it was actually effective – if “by virtue of its general effect on the holders' rights to freedom of movement [it] is capable of restricting them from exercising their rights, by raising an obstacle that they cannot reasonably circumvent”.

‘Including the right to strike in the Charter allows the EU to interfere...’

of the European Union. In this article, we focus on how conditions...

right to strike

Fourth, it made it clear why free movement and the right to establishment are so important: "...the possibility for a company to relocate to a Member State where its operating costs will be lower is pivotal to the pursuit of effective intra-Community trade".

There you have it: shifting between countries to lower operating costs is central to EU trade, and the law will be brought to bear on anyone who tries to stop it.

Defenders of the European Union make much of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. And, indeed, it does state in Article 28 that workers have the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

But just about every time unions have gone to the EU legal system to uphold those rights, they have been told that the employers' rights are more important.

What these unions are missing is the fact that the very inclusion of collective bargaining and the right to strike in the Charter allow the EU to interfere in these areas that are supposed to be the exclusive competence of national governments.

The point was neatly made by Professor Niamh Nic Shuibhne, University of Edinburgh, in a paper in 2010: "...looking to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights to ascribe 'fundamental' status to the right to strike, as the parties in both cases did here, has an inverse consequence too – because it confirms that such questions do form part of Community law to some extent."

In effect, every time a union goes cap in hand to the EU for a ruling over collective bargaining or the right to strike, it hands over another piece of workers' sovereignty to Brussels.

As the European Ombudsman has made clear (see Box), the EU's legal authority over labour relations is restricted, but it is free to make "recommendations". And the Commission's Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs did just that.

"Employment friendly" policies it is encouraging include: decentralisation of wage setting and collective bargaining; wider scope to opt out of industry-wide agreements at national level; "decreasing bargaining coverage" and "an overall reduction in the wage-setting power of trade unions"; and "performance-related pay", reducing barriers to immigration, and raising retirement age.

Restrict air strikes, says EU

IN JUNE 2017 the European Commission – egged on by the airline companies – issued an official communication and an accompanying staff working document calling for member states to implement restrictions on the right to strike in air traffic control.

These included giving 14 days' notice of industrial action, and requiring anyone taking part in a strike to give 72 hours' individual notice to an employer.

The European Trade Union Confederation went ballistic. "The right to strike is a fundamental right guaranteed by European and international law," said ETUC leader Esther Lynch. "...The European Commission is making a serious error in proposing this restriction of workers' rights," she continued. And the ETUC wrote a formal letter of protest to the Commission.

Now, the ETUC is not a Eurosceptic body. It does not call on workers to campaign against membership of the European Union. But its letter should be compulsory reading for anyone who reckons that the EU is a bastion of workers' rights.

It accuses the Commission of "always coming up with detailed recommendations

like this only to limit and dismantle social rights (like right to strike, collective bargaining, protection in labour market, adequacy of pensions, etc.), and never to promote and reinforce the very same rights."

Meanwhile, the Air Traffic Controllers European Unions Confederation accused the Commission of "acting as a mirror" for the airline employers and said the employers' recommendations had simply been "copy-pasted". Which, of course, is the EU in a nutshell.

When the Commission ignored the ETUC's letter, the European Transport Workers' Federation, along with the air traffic controllers' federation, complained to the European Ombudsman that the Commission was overstepping its powers.

The European Ombudsman ruled entirely in favour of the Commission, accepting its hypocritical claim that it was not trying to restrict the right to strike (which is beyond its competence) but simply urging member states to.

Moreover, said the Ombudsman, the communication and the staff working document were not legally binding, so the Commission hadn't exceeded its power. And in any case, the right to strike, though fundamental, was not "absolute". ■

And the EU has seized the debt crisis as an opportunity to enforce these "recommendations". In Greece, the European institutions used economic blackmail to railroad huge changes in collective bargaining and even in existing collective agreements – reducing the role of trade unions in setting the national minimum wage, removing automatic indexing in line with price increases, and a reduction in the minimum wage itself.

Swiss battle

Swiss unions are currently fighting to stop the EU's attempt to impose an overarching agreement on Switzerland to force it to adopt every EU ruling on the single market.

The agreement would "substantially dismantle" Swiss wage protection and prevent any improvement. They will fight "vigorously" against the proposal – a position confirmed

unanimously at the Swiss Trade Union Confederation's annual congress at the end of November 2018.

In what the Austrian Trade Union Federation called "a black Tuesday for social Europe" the court ruled in favour of Slovenian employers posting staff across the border to work mainly on building sites. Figures from the unions suggest that in the first six months of 2018 almost half the foreign companies posting building workers were undercutting Austrian rates, against around 1 per cent of local companies.

None of this is hidden. All is freely available on the web. Unions know about it. But most choose to ignore it. Is that because the alternative – leaving the EU and fighting for ourselves rather than petitioning Brussels – sounds too much like struggle, too much like hard work? ■

With a new prime minister saying we will leave the EU by 3 education must seize the opportunity to say what is needed

Further education: a vit

SINCE BRITAIN'S vote to leave the European Union over three years ago, the government should have been planning urgently to provide the education, skills and training that the country needs for independence in the 21st century.

Yet further education has been sorely neglected since well before 2016. Governments and employers have consistently disregarded the importance of Britain's history in technological and skills development.

And the era of "austerity" – the massive cuts to public services since 2010 – has affected FE even more acutely than most other education sectors.

The truth is that FE is in crisis, in no fit state to match up to what is needed.

According to the government's Augar review, published in May 2019, English universities received £8 billion from government to support 1.2 million full-time students last year. In the same period further education institutions received just £2.3 billion to support 2.2 million full-time and part-time students over the age of 18.

A report on education spending from the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2018 found that despite greater participation in education by 16- to 18-year-olds since the 1980s, spending per student has dropped dramatically.

On top of this, the universal Educational Maintenance Allowance, designed to keep 16-18 year-olds in education or training, became in 2011/12 a bursary payable only to students in households on very low incomes.

So it's no surprise that the number of "NEETs" – 16- to 24-year-olds not in education, employment or training – was 783,000 in May 2018, 11.2 per cent of the age group. A shocking waste of the potential of youth.

'It is widely recognised that the apprenticeship scheme is open to abuse...'



Pajor Pawel/shutterstock.com

North Hertfordshire College: a fine facade, but the college has seen a fall in apprenticeships and revenue despite being rated as "good" by Ofsted.

And the number of adult learners in FE has slumped by around half, along with a 45 per cent drop in funding. Chances to gain new skills for adults are greatly diminished.

Drops in enrolments to train in key job areas between 2006 and 2016 are revealing: for construction from 98,000 to 62,000; for engineering from 145,000 to 46,000; for health and social care from 692,000 to 219,000.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships accounted for a third of the £2.3 billion government spend in 2017/18. It is widely recognised that the scheme is open to abuse and low-quality placements: young people taken on as "apprentices" only to be replaced by a new student when their funding period runs out; employers using the government funding to subsidise their own already existing apprenticeship schemes. And the number of lower level

apprenticeships on offer dropped by 27 per cent after the imposition of a training levy on larger employers.

England's 200 further education colleges are struggling. The Augar review, headed by a banking expert, detailed the crumbling state of vocational and technical training in the sector. It called for urgent action to reverse the cuts in funding and enrolment, with an immediate injection of £1 billion.

An article in the *Financial Times* in June illustrated the crisis with some case studies, including Croydon and East London.

Encouraged by government, Croydon College in South London took on extra borrowing to expand its buildings, finished in 2011. Since then, the college's income has dropped by a third due to funding cuts, and it has been forced to sell off buildings in order to service its £10 million debt.

Costs have risen and funding to pay for students and staff has decreased sharply.

31 October at the latest, those who work in further education – and to demand it happens...

al area for growth



led a massive shortfall of £5 million in January –

College principal Caireen Mitchell says that with a budget of £25.5 million they will have a deficit of £250,000 this year, which means they are unable to offer additional courses in the evenings – they can't afford to open.

In East London six FE colleges have merged into the New City College to save money, but the college has still had to sell long leases on its Poplar site to commercial developers to stay afloat.

The situation hasn't been helped by a law change this year which makes it easier for banks to seize assets of colleges in debt. And the college has had its government funding for students staying on for a third year of college cut by 17 per cent.

The picture of cuts and decay is not limited to England. The SNP-dominated Scottish parliament cut funding to FE colleges, resulting in a loss of 120,000 student places by 2015. The Welsh government reduced FE funding by £26 million in 2014-

15 alone, on top of cuts of £65 million in previous years.

What about the specialist skills needed for industry? Bridgewater and Taunton College in South West England has tried to plan for the need for future skills in the area by developing specialist courses, with training materials, for Hinkley Point power station nearby. But after several years it has only just started to receive income from the work done.

Such work should be funded by government and the industry if they are serious about developing the sector for Britain's future energy needs. In spite of the strong noises about skills in the government's Industrial Strategy, published over a year ago, it has disappeared without trace.

Some employers such as Rolls Royce (opening its new training centre in East Grinstead) and Dyson (with its own Institute of Technology in Malmesbury) are working to develop the skills they need.

But many employers have been more than ready to complain about skills shortages while showing a marked reluctance to take any responsibility for the training and education of a British workforce themselves. Theirs are among the strident voices calling for the continuation of the ability, granted by the EU, to import skilled workers from abroad.

Brexit

The employers organisation the Confederation of British Industry harps on about what a disaster leaving the EU will be, echoed shamelessly by the Trades Union Congress – which claims to be the voice of British workers.

We see the result of this policy in the dire shortages of medical staff in the NHS. Training for our needs here is a central requirement for an independent future. So much easier to poach workers from abroad, and save the costs of training yourself, especially when the workers often come more cheaply!

With free movement of labour inside the EU and the general failure to control immigration from outside, and the government promoting the rights of employers over the needs of the whole country, it's no wonder that the health of the further education sec-

'Casualisation is central to FE's decline...'

tor has been given low priority.

Strangely, the Universities and College Union (UCU), which organises some FE workers, takes a pro-EU stance, calling for a second referendum – despite the damaging effects of EU rules for its members in FE, and indeed in the universities.

The pay and conditions of higher education workers have declined, but in FE they are appalling. Teachers in FE are paid on average £7,000 a year less than in secondary schools, making it difficult to recruit – especially from skilled professionals like engineers and electricians. How can these skills be passed on to a new generation of professionals?

While people acknowledge the horrors of the "gig" economy – casualisation, zero hours contracts, fragmentation of work, deskilling – they often don't think of it being widespread in FE colleges.

Yet casualisation is central to FE's decline. According to a report by the UCU published in 2017, almost 30 per cent of the workforce in the sector is employed on "insecure or precarious contracts", with two-thirds of them on hourly-paid contracts. In 19 colleges more than half of all staff were on insecure contracts.

The college employers' Association of Colleges shows a woeful failure to recognise that Brexit will be a godsend: the opportunity for colleges to expand. Its website rues the possible removal of the freedom to recruit low-skilled workers from the EU. "We want people in our sector who work for love as well as money," it has the nerve to say.

While UCU supports action by its members like that in Bradford and Nottingham colleges recently, it and the other education unions have not yet welcomed the great opportunities which Brexit brings to reinvigorate the sector, to demand from government the funding and priority FE needs to be given. They should be planning to do so

The need for truly affordable housing is universally acknowledged. Without real control over the economy and migration, will allow Britain

The big opportunity for



Marbury/shutterstock.com

Liverpool: Homeless people finding space outside a branch of the Halifax bank.

THEY CALL it a housing crisis, yet policy-makers fail to act and have persistently ignored the mismatch between the wage packets of ordinary people (and their supposedly wealthy parents) and the actual cost of a home, especially but not only in London.

For some, crisis is already catastrophe. When a rough sleeper was found dead on the threshold of Parliament shortly before last Christmas, there was much breast-beating in the Commons. Yet he was only one of up to 217 people found dossing on Westminster's streets on any single night.

Austerity kills. The deepest cuts in local authority spending have resulted in the high-

est deaths of people "of no fixed abode", according to research from the Labour Party. The worst areas are Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Blackburn, Liverpool, and the four London boroughs of Camden, Westminster, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. The problem is nationwide.

Derisory

In 2018 then housing secretary James Brokenshire proudly announced a derisory £30 million to tackle rough sleeping in England and Wales. Birmingham, for example, with the highest number of homeless deaths, received £405,000 compared with a

cut of over £350 million to the city's budget.

Camden has had the second worst level of cuts – and up to 127 homeless people can be found on its streets in a single night (2017 figures). But for cynicism the Royal

‘Council properties are auctioned off to the highest bidder...’

wledged, yet it is not delivered. Brexit, implemented with
to plan properly to house its people...

homes fit for workers

Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead takes some beating – it tried to fine rough sleepers £100, calling it “homelessness support”.

If people are not actually on the pavement, sofa-surfing, sleeping in cars or in cockroach-infested B&Bs are also on the rise. Council properties are auctioned off to the highest bidder, bypassing local people on the waiting list. Young people forced into unaffordable private rentals face eviction for non-payment.

By 2025, an estimated 40 per cent of Londoners will be renting, increasingly from private landlords. Until recently a landlord could lawfully evict without the tenant having breached their agreement. Landlords also tend to be child-averse. Raising a family, that most basic rite of passage, is prohibited by the diktats of the market.

Wage increases are wiped out as rents rise in line with earnings, eating up a third of the average worker’s monthly pay (over 40 per cent in London). Taxpayer-funded housing benefit, working tax credit, and other forms of compensation for low pay or lack of pension, have become a drain on the economy. One set of workers in effect subsidises the low wages of another set. Only the landlord benefits.

Empty

All London mayors to date and every single government in this century, whether Labour, Conservative or Coalition, have been starry-eyed about the oligarchs, money-launderers, and big-time tax evaders buying up property off-plan, then leaving it empty. Why then was there surprise from the Establishment that so many people living in housing estates voted against the them in the EU referendum?

The new prime minister, and the even newer communities minister Robert Jenrick, must heed the statistics and invest in an immediate programme of council housing. Let’s not hold our breath, though. Housing ministers come and go, and Johnson’s staff are as wedded as Thatcher ever was to home ownership to the exclusion of social housing.

For all the Johnson emergency largesse, no funding has at the time of writing been set aside for housing in the public sector. And no other helpful housing-related

Debt and privatisation

THE ADDISON Act of 1919 had given council housing a national character, funded nationally through the ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Borrowing was at a low rate linked to government gilts to offset risk. HRA debt was pooled with other council debt and interest charged was based on the average across the entire local authority borrowings, not on specific loans.

Meanwhile, lending for capital works was under the control of internal auditors working to the Prudential Code of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, deploying cash from the rest of the council services. Property valuation was based on existing use value rather than on open market auction.

All that ended with the Localism Act of 2011. The traditional HRA model was replaced by a system of self-financing to bring council borrowing in line with international practices, especially those of other EU countries, as argued by the Chartered

Institute of Housing.

A prime aim was the financial convergence of council housing and housing associations. Public was merged with private, prudent planning was replaced with high-interest loans, refinancing and market risk. Housing associations were promoted as more politically astute, financially more agile. Estate agent Savills claimed their success so far made them a model for council housing and ALMOs – arms’ length management organisations.

Councils were deliberately prevented from improving their so-called “sink estates”: borrowing was capped, nor could they realise the profits from right-to-buy, most of which went to the Treasury. Yet they still bore all the responsibility for financial decisions.

Attempts were made, despite tenants’ votes, to transfer stock to housing associations or ALMOs – all done in the name of “modernisation”. But in reality it was anti-democratic privatisation by stealth. ■

announcements have been made, either.

Welcome initiatives would include: that the sell-off of council and housing association properties is to be stopped; that compulsory purchase powers will be used to take empty property into public ownership; that a long-term national strategy for social housing is being developed; and that the false left/right arguments pitting home ownership against renting, private v social housing will be ended.

According to a report (June 2019) by the Greater London Authority, £4.9 billion is needed each year to give Londoners genuinely affordable housing – seven times the £700 million City Hall receives from the annual housing grant. And that is estimated to be lower than the level of government support before the 2008 financial crash.

Clawing back £39 billion from the EU budget through a no-deal Brexit would help with money, but in itself money won’t stop speculation in social housing. With their veneer of philanthropy, housing associations have been a growing market, today worth

£60 billion in the UK. At their inception in the 1980s they were meant simply to supplement local authority housebuilding. They now compete like any developer in a global market place and are being eyed up by other global investors.

Only 50 per cent of the houses they build are designated, deceptively, as affordable. With a further twist of the English language, their “affordable rents” are at up to 80 per cent of local market value, forcing genuinely needy tenants out of the “prime” areas (to use estate agents’ jargon).

Even by the housing associations’ own criteria these policies no longer seem to be working. Renters are voting with their feet and looking elsewhere. Landlords report a drop in Affordable Rent lettings in the period 2017-2019 and their profits have been dropping – most sharply in Scotland.

Workers can take heart from landlords’ discomfiture. London mayor Sadiq Khan has failed to reach targets for new building, so

Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15

he has called on the government for extra powers to cap private rents. Tenants have been demanding this for years.

Developers, buy-to-let landlords and overseas investors have reacted with threats of taking their money elsewhere. With Brexit Britain's new-found confidence, they may not be as indispensable as they think.

London has achieved international notoriety for rip-off rents. A typical one-bed flat costs £1,550 a month.

In Berlin, where locals are complaining at being priced out by migrant labour from across Europe and beyond, the government itself has backed a rent freeze. German ministers warned, "We don't want to end up like London, where even lawyers and doctors

have to live with flatmates."

Berlin has further moved to renationalise privatised property, starting with hundreds of apartments on the grand Karl Marx Allee, once a showpiece for socialist East Berlin. The mayor said: "It...continues to be our intention to buy up apartments wherever we can, so that Berlin can regain control of its property market."

Precisely. In addition, Britain should set up its own lending institutions for housing, to ensure that the wealth created by workers is used for the benefit of workers. Such a policy would be aimed at national independence and self-reliance. But it is a race against time: Britain is digging itself into a deeper well of foreign debt.

To all outward appearances the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

'None of this has happened by accident...'

exempts domestic housing policy from control by the Commission, but there is more than one way to skin a cat.

EU enlargement and free movement have put impossible pressure on supply, and successive governments have colluded to hand over British workers' homes to transnational companies and foreign banks.

In 2018 the cap on borrowing for both councils and housing associations was removed: council housing itself became a fully fledged self-financing business. Hence the sudden flurry of overseas banks – from Australia, Japan, the US, France – jostling to lend to the social sector. In the quest for borrowing facilities leading up to the aborted Brexit date of 29 March 2019, housing association borrowing shot up by two-thirds.

Global operators enriched themselves from quantitative easing following 2008: they are equally unfazed by threats of a "no-deal" Brexit. As if the banking collapse had never happened, borrowing from multiple lenders is back in fashion, based on unsecured revolving credit facilities (ad hoc payment methods similar to using a credit card) from lenders based in many countries.

Global investors

By early August 2019 more global investors, such as Wells Fargo, First Abu Dhabi and Goldman Sachs, showed up to take advantage of the new capital free-for-all in social housing. At least three – Lloyds, Goldman Sachs and the National Australia Bank – have a history of investigation for irregularities. This transition from accountable UK lenders to reliance on dubious international capital flows is putting working class homes at risk.

None of this has happened by accident. Every link in the chain of housing regulation has been forged by design. With Brexit on the horizon, what better time overturn decades of decline and design a plan fit for Britain and its people. ■

CPBML public meetings



London

Monday 14 October, 7.30 pm
"Next steps in Britain's fight for freedom"

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

This meeting, two weeks before the next Brexit deadline, will be an ideal opportunity to discuss the struggle to come. Come and discuss. All welcome. Free entry.



Manchester

Thursday 24 October, 7.30 pm
"British independence: essential for our future"

Upstairs, The Britons Protection, 50 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester M1 5LE

Without real independence, Britain will always be at the mercy of the forces of globalisation. Come and discuss. All welcome. Free entry.

The seized *Stena Impero* is owned by a Swedish company with no British crew. So why the British flag?

No flag of ours

AFTER AN initial bout of sabre-rattling over the seizure of the British-registered *Stena Impero* by Iran, in apparent retaliation for Gibraltar's seizure of an Iranian tanker (now released), things have gone quiet.

Jeremy Hunt, then Foreign Secretary, called the seizure an "act of state piracy", conveniently omitting to mention the seizure of the Iranian supertanker *Grace 1* in Gibraltar 16 days earlier in an inexcusable obeisance to EU sanctions on Syria.

Hunt is no longer Foreign Secretary, so he has few sabres to rattle. And the *Stena Impero*'s owners are clearly trying to calm things down.

But one reason for the return of (relative) calm is that there are no British crew, so interest by the UK media is difficult to sustain in the absence of any real movement on the diplomatic front. And no British owner, either, since *Stena* is owned by the three Swedish children of its founder, Sten Allan Olsson.

But how come a "British" vessel operating in the Gulf is owned by a Swedish company and operated by a crew none of whom are British? Part of the answer lies in Britain's membership of the EU.

Maastricht

After the Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1993, the UK government modified the shipping regulations to allow EU (at the time EC, European Community) nationals established in the UK, and EU-based companies with a place of business in the UK, to register their ships here.

Previous legislation, based on the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854, had specified that only British subjects and companies whose principal place of business was in the UK could register ships as British.

In 1995 the government went a step further, changing regulations that had been in place since 1919 to allow the positions of Master, Chief Officer and Chief Engineer on British-flagged ships to be held by people of any nationality as long they held a UK certificate of competency or equivalent.

These changes, introduced by the Conservative government of John Major, were neither repealed nor challenged in the subsequent 13 years of Labour rule.

The changes were in fact never even



Fars News Agency (CC BY 4.0)

Image released by Iran of seized tanker *Stena Impero*.

debated on the floor of parliament. But their effect has been far-reaching: registering a vessel in the UK allows ship owners to escape virtually any controls over the nationality of seafarers working on it.

Or as the UK Ship Register puts it, "UK has minimal seafarer nationality restrictions giving companies flexibility in whom they employ provided they have a Certification of Competency issued by one of the 49 Administrations, that are accepted by the UK."

These administrations cover most of the world's population – including China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Russia, the United States and Brazil. And, ironically, Iran. Helpfully for the ship owners, UK registration allows "flexible manning levels" for so-called hot (short-term) and cold (longer-term) lay-ups.

So registering a ship in the UK gives ship owners a global choice of seafarers. The 23 crew of the *Stena Impero* demonstrate this: they come from India, the Philippines, Russia, Latvia...anywhere but Britain.

The 1854 act had a provision to deal

'Instead of imperialist fantasies, protect fishing grounds...'

with ships pretending to be British that weren't: "If a person uses the British flag and assumes the British national character on board a ship owned in whole or in part by any persons not qualified to own a British ship, for the purpose of making the ship appear to be a British ship, the ship shall be subject to forfeiture..."

Perhaps that's what the Iranians had been reading when they stopped the Swedish-owned, non-British-crewed *Stena Impero*.

Even more foreign owners

In May this year the UK Ship Register was opened up to even more foreign-owned and -operated ships (as the Register put it, "Outstanding shipowners from across the globe now have access [to the Register].") The 20 extra countries include China, the US, Israel, Japan and Switzerland.

Also last year, the government announced its ambition to double the size of the UK fleet, citing one of the benefits of the British flag as the protection of the Royal Navy. Given that the Navy has been hard pressed even to find a frigate to escort ships in the Gulf, that protection might not be all that impressive.

And rather than indulge in imperialist fantasies of gunboats bringing troublesome regimes to heel, the government will be needing the few warships it has to protect Britain's fishing grounds after Brexit. ■

Our libraries and librarians could contribute considerably to the task?

Put professional librarians

IT'S A GRIM time for public libraries. No fewer than 127 of them closed in the year to March 2018, according to CIPFA, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability – on top of 332 which shut down between 2014 to 2017.

And those branch libraries remaining have had opening hours cut, professional and non-professional staff posts slashed, and many handed from council control to volunteer groups. That's not just anecdotal: a website set up by a concerned librarian, www.publiclibrariesnews.com, has been recording cuts, closures and handovers to volunteers for nearly ten years.

Even the choice of books to stock in public libraries, previously decided by professional librarians, has often been outsourced to library suppliers who provide stock by the yard. The deleterious effects of this have helped the arguments advanced by the enemies of the public provision of information and knowledge: "It's all on Amazon," they say, or "Libraries are redundant in the internet age", and so on.

Public libraries are the backbone of the British network of libraries, but the position is no better elsewhere in the library world. School libraries have been stripped of qualified staff, and are often handed over to teaching assistants to run.

Mergers

Mergers and closures have taken their toll in university and college libraries. Many have abolished specialist posts, librarians with both professional skills and subject knowledge who would work with lecturers in a particular subject to make sure that library resources supported teaching.

Library functions in commercial organisations have often been targeted by the cost-cutters. The national library, the British Library, has not been immune, and government department libraries are in a parlous state, with many hived off to Arm's Length Bodies.

Once the great departments of state, the Treasury or Foreign Office, along with functional departments such as the old Department of Trade and Industry or Defra, were the biggest employers of professional librarians among government departments. Now the biggest employer among govern-

ment organisations is GCHQ.

In the face of this onslaught, it's no surprise that librarian and library workers' trade unions and professional organisations have not fared well. Those public library workers who are trade union members are generally in Unison, but poaching by other big general trade unions has occurred.

Trade union membership is low, far lower than it should be, and inter-union rivalries distract from the urgent task of bringing public library workers back into their unions, and making those unions serve the members once more, not factional interests.

Some of those who remain in union membership have lost their grip on reality and call for incessant, eternal strikes to stop library closures. This dangerous nonsense further weakens the already attenuated state of union organisation in libraries.

Loss of posts

The professional body for librarians, the Chartered Institute for Librarians and Information Professionals (CILIP), formed from a merger of the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists in 2004, has seen a catastrophic decline in membership. This is due mainly to the loss of professional posts, chiefly in public libraries, historically the largest sector of membership. When the new body was created, it had around 25,000 members. It now has less than half that number.

The internal politics of the organisation are marked by a dogged refusal to think about the nature and tasks of a professional body in 21st-century Britain, instead preferring to chase every hare that crosses their path.

The latest fads to occupy the Library Association include "diversity", in the name of which they seem hell-bent on removing the cornerstone of professional qualifications, graduate status; or "critical librarianship", diverting librarians into arguments about whether books whose authors fail political correctness tests should be stocked; or "decolonising libraries"; or whichever new shiny thing is the flavour of the month.

Similarly the lead body for county and borough librarians, known as the Society of Chief Librarians for decades if not longer, fell



Workers

Protest in Westminster during a lobby of parliament

victim to branding consultants and has renamed itself Libraries Connected. It now chases fads, rather than maintaining standards in the libraries that remain.

As for those who use libraries, at national level the Library Campaign has been in continued existence since 1984. At local level, library campaigns, have been formed and worked vigorously to defend their services. The best of these have understood that they are not just campaigning for a building containing books, but a place where the professional skills of librarians can help to solve problems for individuals and towns and cities.

Some have been diverted into accepting the poisoned chalice offered by canny local

to building an independent Britain. Are they up to the ans back in charge



nt, February 2016.

councils of campaigners running libraries themselves, as volunteers. About 500 of Britain's 3,800 libraries are now volunteer-run, often separated from the wider network. Yet evidence suggests that volunteer-run libraries often fail. Initial enthusiasm among volunteers soon fades, they lack the com-

'British public libraries led the world in free services.'

mitment and skills of paid staff, and they are not bound, as members of CILIP are, by any ethical code. One long-standing project is that there should be a national, universal library card, but this is unachievable if volunteer-run branch libraries are removed from the national library system.

British public libraries led the world in free services for every man, woman and child's education and recreation. Our national collections are world-renowned.

There's professional expertise, and a wealth of experience. Librarians in a multitude of institutions led in the adoption of online services from the 1960s onwards, and were quick to pioneer the use of Internet technologies in the 1990s and beyond as

new ways of serving their populations. Public librarians built the Peoples' Network in 1997, to open up the Internet to ordinary people.

Interlending and other networks past librarians made could be revived and repurposed. Librarians in a number of sectors are starting to work with big data, and to understand the impact robotics and artificial intelligence will have – applying the traditional skills of the profession in new areas.

Qualifications

But where will the librarians of the future come from? Some have suggested compromising on the academic rigour of professional education by introducing "lite" paths into the profession, for example for allegedly disadvantaged groups. This does no one any favours, least of all the young people brought into the profession on a second-class pathway.

Once, libraries in London and provincial commercial and industrial centres ran services aimed at their business users. Many provided current awareness and abstracting services for their local users, as well as personalised reference and research services.

Nationally too, the Department of Trade and Industry offered, in Victoria Street in London, the Statistics and Market Intelligence Library (SMILL). Anyone could walk in off the street and consult a world-class collection of statistical and marketing intelligence material, including market research reports, which are notoriously expensive for individuals to buy – a fine example of the benefits of the collective provision of this sort of information. SMILL closed; around the same time, the abolition of the GLC, and with it its world-class research library, was another portent.

Information, data and knowledge are all fundamental to the economic foundation of a flourishing independent Britain, and librarians are the professionals who can organise and mobilise them. What services will our new and existing industries and technologies need? What will the expanded universities and colleges need from libraries and information resources to support students' preparation for working in an independent economy? The library profession must start to think about these questions. ■

For 45 years British farming has been distorted by the EU, there's no shortage of ideas about how to run it after Brexit

The animals are not for

Farmageddon? Brexit and British Agriculture, edited by Caroline Stocks, John Mair and Neil Fowler, paperback, 73 pages, ISBN 978-1080479702, Bite-Sized Books, 2019, £6.99

IF YOU want to know more about farming once we have left the EU, this short book is definitely worth a read. The title has a negative view of Brexit, as do most of the contributions. But that does not do justice to the range of views it contains.

The book was launched in London, with a panel who all view Brexit as a calamity, the day after Boris Johnson became Prime Minister. The nine short chapters come from a range of contributors who are more diverse. These include George Eustice MP, Fergus Ewing MSP, two contributors from the National Farmers Union and a number of other farmers.

Critique

The foreword is by farmer Stephen Carr. He also regularly writes for *Private Eye* under the pseudonym "Bio Waste Spreader". Although he fears life outside the EU, it begins with a damning critique of the EU Common Agricultural Policy:

"Since 2005, the EU has paid out £64 billion a year of taxpayers money to farmers for doing nothing more than occupy their land. To receive this money from the CAP's 'Basic Payment Scheme' farmland 'occupiers' have not been required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or other forms of farm pollution, reverse the decline of flora and fauna on their land, or even produce food."

Most people would expect that farmers producing food should be at the beginning of that list of what they might do for subsidies rather than the end.

'Politicians should be interested in food security, but they rarely are.'



Workers

Livestock auction, Bakewell, Derbyshire, August 2019.

Carr goes on to argue that "Brexit – in enlightened hands – might have been an opportunity for Britain to shape its own coherent, interesting, dynamic food and farming policy". But he despairs of this happening. That's not due to any shortcomings of British farmers but because we have the wrong sort of politicians: he can predict only "potential farm policy anarchy".

His view is that farmers and the farming industry are passive and powerless to change anything. That is at odds with a tradition in British farming of a strong interest in agronomy and innovation. But it is consistent with the wider population's negative view of politicians.

NFU passivity

The same passivity is highlighted by Guy Smith, Deputy President of the NFU. He says in his chapter "...most farmers would rather shut the farm gate on the games and intrigues of the political classes and get on with growing crops and raising livestock". That's not what you'll really find at any livestock market, where there is no shortage of farmers with views.

Smith's chapter is valuable because it covers some of the serious questions that we want to hear about from farmers rather than politicians. These include "Who pays the price for the food we eat? From where should Britain be fed? Public money for public good – but what is a public good?"

Politicians should be interested in food security, but they rarely are. So we should look to farmers, who have the answers to those questions that politicians lack.

The passivity of the farming industry shown in this book contrasts to the approach in the fishing industry. They have been assertive in making their views known about how they want to run their industry post Brexit. These were published in September 2018 in the form of a textbook for politicians entitled *Brexit - Boom or Betrayal for the Next Generation of British Fishermen?* (download free from ffl.org.uk).

There are some positive ideas about the farming industry in this book, but couched as suggestions rather than demands. For instance, it is suggested that Brexit might present an opportunity for increased public procurement and that we could source more

European Union. And
kit...

burning

British food in the public sector.

Huw Thomas of the Welsh NFU says “We always hear of other countries who have found ways to get domestic produce into schools and hospitals, so perhaps it will be an area we can look at again”.

Surely that thought is a demand which should be made now and loudly. And that would be far better than NFU representatives talking about cliff edges and catastrophes on our news bulletins, saying that Welsh lamb will have to be burnt and buried.

Clearly we need a strategy to support our livestock industry. If the result is top quality produce distributed throughout our public sector, that is a positive, practical idea that we can be getting on with now rather than at some future date.

An EU farmer no longer

One intriguing chapter titled “Once a European farmer, but no longer” is written by East Yorkshire farmer Paul Temple. Paul is an example of a person who rarely gets an airing in our media. He is someone who worked for Britain to remain in the EU but is now confidently looking forward to Brexit: his chapter might have been called “Once an EU farmer, but no longer”.

Temple makes a series of points about why he has changed his mind. He begins by saying with reference to the referendum “I accepted the democratic result”. He goes on to point out that the EU has an anti-science and illogical approach. He cites EU pesticide regulation where pesticides are removed from use for our farmers but the EU imports produce from countries who still use them.

Similarly he says the EU’s overly-cautious approach to genetic modification has “denied that science to me and other farmers...and yet millions of tonnes of GM-derived product are imported into Europe each year.”

His suggestion is that post Brexit Britain should produce more food, embrace the new learning about the biology of soil and invest in new farming infrastructure. He sounds too busy to write a book about his plans, but maybe politicians should visit his farm – and he has plenty of ideas to underpin a great documentary programme about the future of farming. ■

WORKERS

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JUST LEAVE!

JOURNAL OF THE CPBML *

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TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

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Workers is the journal of the CPBML, written by workers for workers. No one is employed to write, edit and design it. It is the product of the labour, thought and commitment of Party comrades and friends who see the need to produce an independent, workers, communist magazine in and for Britain in the 21st century.

Every two months Workers covers the issues of the day: measured, analytical, and clear – and deeply committed to the interests of Britain and the British working class.

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After the October Revolution, soldiers from 15 countries in an attempt to destroy the Soviet Union, but it emerged victorious.

1917–1920: the Russian Civil War

THE OCTOBER Revolution of 1917 triumphed decisively in Russia, in rapid fashion and relatively painlessly. That it did so was largely due to soviet power structures which welded together groups of industrial workers in huge factories.

But anti-popular forces were soon conspiring to overturn the new era. Ultimately imperialist meddling in the Russian Revolution saw soldiers from 15 countries invade to combat the revolution.

The First World War was still running during 1917 to 1918. The new government issued a Decree on Peace the day after the soviets took power. That decree was vital in gaining support within Russia for the October Revolution and for the establishment of soviet power.

But throughout 1917-1918 the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary were still fighting on Russian soil on the eastern front.

On 2 December 1917 (15 December New Style) an armistice was signed between Russia and the Central Powers, though it took more months to finalise a peace treaty at the town of Brest-Litovsk. In the negotiations the new revolutionary government recklessly adopted a utopian policy of "Neither War nor Peace" in response to the harsh terms that the Central Powers wanted to impose. These demanded Russia give up Poland, Lithuania and western Latvia.

On 28 January 1918 (10 February New Style) at Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky unilaterally declared that Socialist Russia was ending the war. The German generals then resumed the war rolling eastwards over the empty trenches. Lenin intervened and the government sent a new delegation to Brest-Litovsk to accept the Central Powers' terms and sign a peace treaty.

There was a vast loss of territory, though none of it was in the core area, known as Great Russia. Accepting its position of weakness, the revolution now concentrated on securing what it held. The capital was transferred from Petrograd to Moscow, where it was less exposed to attack.

By spring 1918 the revolution, finding itself too reliant on the unstinting loyalty of the Latvian Riflemen, decided to build a Red Army, now that there were more rebellions and the old army had largely dissolved.

Lenin wrote, "No revolution is worth anything unless it can defend itself."

The revolutionary government created a Red Army with centralised control and Russia was divided into six military districts. In the spring of 1918 the Red Army had 300,000 soldiers. By the end of 1918 its strength had grown to 700,000; in early 1920 it was 3 million; by the end of 1920 roughly 5 million were in the army.

The scale of the enemy incursions meant the days of a volunteer army and elected commanders were put to one side in favour of mass conscription and a system of commanding officers and military commissars working in tandem. Supplying this big army was not a problem as the revolution controlled central Russia, where the arsenals and war material were stored.

Control

The central zone of Russia stayed in Soviet control throughout the Civil War that followed, though counter-revolutionaries (known as Whites) bounced back in the periphery where revolutionary forces were politically weaker and where outside forces chose to intrude.

Red Army commanders did rise from the ranks of workers and peasants, though many former tsarist generals and officers also joined. In 1920 half of all Communist Party members were in the army.

During the world war, Allied Intervention inside Russia had been justified by the British establishment on the need to beat the Central Powers. But Allied victory over Germany in November 1918 did not lead to

'When the war ended, people questioned why British soldiers were still fighting and dying in Russia....'



1919, Siberia: White Army leader Admiral Kolchak and British General Alfred Knox, head of the British Mission.

withdrawal. Instead it increased hostility to soviet power.

When the war ended, significant sections of the British people questioned why British soldiers were still fighting and dying in Russia. A "Hands Off Russia" campaign started in January 1919. Famously, London dockers stopped loading a ship in May 1920 when they discovered it was carrying munitions bound for Poland, widely perceived to be Britain's indirect means of supporting counterrevolution in Russia.

The revolution successfully defended itself and won through for many reasons. Primarily this was because working people were not prepared to give way to the White and imperialist armies. Despite enormous privations they fought on to triumph.

Heartland

The fact that the revolution kept control of the Russian heartland throughout the civil war had a decisive impact. This area had the largest chunk of population of the old empire and was mostly Great Russian in nationality. It contained most of the war industry and the

Invaded Russia in
victorious...

Civil War



... (seated) observing manoeuvres – and behind
...sion to Russia.

leading establishments and stores of the old
army and navy.

Military reorganisation in 1918 and the
creation of new mass armies took advan-
tage of large reserves of manpower, far
greater than were available to the invading
imperialist armies. These Red armies
became a powerful factor by 1919, and an
overriding one by 1920.

The revolutionary state controlled a vast
territory and could give up ground without
being seriously threatened. The White
armies were seen as wanting the restoration
of the old order and upholding the privileges
of the wealthy.

Even after the breakaways forced by the
Brest-Litovsk Treaty, at the end of the civil
war more than four-fifths of the former sub-
jects of the Tsarist empire were citizens of
the Soviet federation – a notable achieve-
ment. The Allies' military support for the
Whites left a legacy of suspicion that lin-
gered for decades in the Soviet Union. ■

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

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Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

As communists, we stand for an independent, united and self-reliant Britain run by the working class – the vast majority of the population. If that's what you want too, then come and join us.

All our members are thinkers, doers and leaders. All are expected to work to advance our class's interests. All must help to develop our understanding of what we need to do and how to do it.

What do we do? Rooted in our workplaces, communities and trade unions, we use every opportunity to encourage our colleagues and friends to embrace the Marxist practice and theory that alone can lead to the revolution that Britain needs. Marx's understanding of capitalism is a powerful tool – the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 explains the crash of 2007/8.

Either we live in an independent Britain deciding our own future or we become slaves to international capital. Leaving the EU is the first, indispensable step in the fight for national independence.

We have no paid employees, no millionaire donors. Everything we do, we do ourselves, collectively. That includes producing *Workers*, our free email newsletter, our website, pamphlets and social media feeds.

We distribute *Workers*, leaflets and pamphlets online and in our workplaces, union meetings, communities, market places, railway stations, football grounds – wherever workers are, that is where we aim to be.

We hold public meetings around Britain, in-depth study groups and less formal discussions. Talking to people, face to face, is where we have the greatest impact and – just as importantly – learn from other workers' experience.

We are not an elite, intellectually superior to our fellow workers. All that distinguishes Party members is this: we accept that only Marxist thinking and the organised work that flows from it can transform the working class and Britain. The real teacher is the fight itself, and in particular the development of ideas and confidence that comes from collective action.

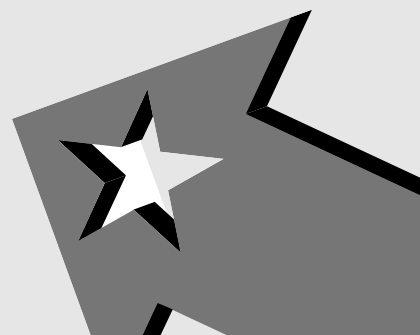
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Why Marxists back Brexit

'Rule from Brussels means handing over the direction of the country to the European Commission, which acts in the interests of transnational companies.'

MARXISTS WANT to live in an independent country for the same reason as everybody else: because no one can be free in a country where the laws are made outside that country.

We don't want our country to be ruled from abroad. Still less should it be run by the European Union, whose fundamental treaties give priority to the so-called four freedoms – the movement of capital, persons (a term that includes companies), goods and services.

Rule from Brussels means handing over the direction of the country to the European Commission, which acts in the interests of the transnational companies. These companies – the instigators of globalisation – are the enemies of independent nations.

The transnationals subordinate everything to one measure: profit. Anything that stands in their way is to be destroyed, especially established wages, conditions and standards of living in countries like Britain. And especially nations.

That's why the EU – backed up by judgements from the European Court of Justice – has given companies a fundamental right to switch countries in search of lower and lower labour costs.

How can we make Britain a better country to live and work in if most of the key decisions are reserved for a foreign government? More particularly, how can Britain transform its transport, energy and industry when EU rules enforce privatisation and limit state investment?

With independence the state can and must implement a vision for Britain and target investment where we need to transform industry, infrastructure and skills.

- Instead of scrapping bursaries and charging fees for student nurses while importing nursing and medical staff from all over the world – especially poorer parts of the EU – we should plan for a skilled NHS workforce.

- Instead of allowing foreign fleets to plunder our fishing grounds, we should plan how to protect and increase the fishing industry – and provide material and financial support now.

- Instead of EU-required transport of live animals, bring in our own humane regulations. Enforce import controls to stop the spread of plant diseases.

- Instead of EU-promoted rail and bus privatisation, take national control to enhance our transport and communications network to sustain an increase in our economy.

- Instead of relying on open-door EU migration while dumping millions of young people into unemployment or minimum wage drudgery, raise their skills in a planned and concerted way. Enlist the young for the future so that Britain will have the skills to succeed – a key foundation for the country to thrive as an independent nation.

- Instead of an EU army and reliance on EU-controlled systems like Galileo, keep our military forces independent and protect our domestic procurement industries.

Politics is changing, and not just in Britain. The great referendum of 2016 is a symptom, not the cause. A new, epic struggle is defining our times, shaping the fight between the two contending classes. It is a new form of national liberation, centred on sovereignty and control over our material and intellectual resources, and it is worldwide.

Waging that war, winning that war, will become a condition of survival for workers in every country.

For working people there is a clear, stark choice. Either we live in an independent Britain deciding our own future, or we become slaves to international capital.

This fight for national independence will not cease when we leave the EU – an indispensable first step. It will never cease while capital exists. ■

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