

Labour Affairs

Incorporating the Labour and Trade Union Review

No. 335 - February 2023

Price £2.00 (€ 3.00)

Is Labour the Natural Party of Local Government?!

When one looks at the current Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and its leadership, it is hard to escape the impression of a collective without principles, interested only in political power and in concealing, as much as possible, what they actually stand for so as not to annoy any powerful interest or to provoke controversy. A good example of this is Keir Starmer's recent speech in London, where he talked about devolving power to localities and regions.

"We will spread control out of Westminster. Devolve new powers over employment support, transport, energy, climate change, housing, culture, childcare provision and how councils run their finances."

Unfortunately, he failed to provide any detail as to what these powers were going to be, nor how councils could access the resources to exercise them. Apart from this:

"But let me be clear – none of this should be taken as code for Labour getting its big government cheque-book out. Of course investment is required – I can see the damage the Tories have done to our public services as plainly as anyone else. But we won't be able to spend our way out of their mess – it's not as simple as that."

In other words, the cupboard will remain bare under Labour.

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On Strikes and Wars

Can British trade unions defend their members' standard of living without taking a position on the war in Ukraine? The standard of living of the British working class has fallen because NATO is engaged in a war against Russia using Ukraine as its proxy army. Do British trade unions support this NATO war against Russia? If so, should they accept the drop in the standard of living of their members that it implies? If not, should they make clear their opposition to NATO's war?

The British trade unions are in a difficult position. The political establishment and its powerful media outlets say that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was an unprovoked attack. Without doubt the vast majority of union members will have accepted that account. If you rely entirely on the mainstream media to form a view of the Ukrainian conflict how could you think otherwise? Indeed, the executive committees of the unions may broadly share the views of their members.

Certainly the various statements put out by the unions suggest as much. For instance Unite the Union put out a statement which included the following:

"UnitethereforedemandstheUKgovernment use all its efforts in the international arena to bring about a cessation of hostilities and

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Throughout Starmer's speech he failed to say anything about the performance of existing Labour local governments, there is no mention for example of job creation in the North East (Labour leader Jamie Driscoll, a member of Momentum). See <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/event/online-event/devolution-and-levelling-jamie-driscoll-mayor-north-tyne>

nor of Greater Manchester's bus fare cap (later emulated on a temporary basis at national level) (leader Andy Burnham, a potential Labour national leader). See <https://tfgm.com/get-on-board>

He could have mentioned the introduction of free prescriptions, free school breakfasts and the abolition of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in Wales (leader Mark Drakeford, a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn). See

<https://labourlist.org/2022/05/welsh-labours-progressive-policy-platform-is-key-to-its-electoral-success/>

He mentioned none of these local and regional successes that Labour, with very constrained resources, has achieved for working people under a Tory national government. This is not surprising; he has good reason to fear effective leadership and radical but practical politics from potential rivals. He did not say how he would help these successful Labour authorities to flourish in partnership with a Labour government beyond issuing vague promises.

Although these Labour councils have achieved much, they can only achieve more if they are supported by central government with appropriate resources. And on this point, Starmer says 'no'. In order to enable councils to improve the lives of their inhabitants some changes need to be made at national level as well and these will cost money. The government needs to introduce legislation to make the franchising of bus services a default option rather than the eventual result of a tortuous and litigious battle with bus companies and then to provide the resources to cap fares and restore routes and frequencies. It needs to alter the articles of governance for

further education colleges so that they cease to compete as businesses and start to act as engines for the development of know-how in their regions. This means putting local authorities in a powerful position on the governing bodies of colleges so that they can co-ordinate provision across their regions. But so that such changes are effective, Labour needs to invest in FE colleges and to ensure that salaries are good enough to attract experts from industry as teachers. Although improvements in transport and vocational education (both for young people and the existing workforce) are necessary conditions for economic revival, they will not be sufficient if, for example, housing and health provision are not attended to as well. Labour's closed chequebook will ensure that nothing much is done.

This journal has argued for some time that providing money for investment is not a problem for a sovereign currency issuing state like the United Kingdom. People have been so cowed by the prevalent 'where will the money come from?' rhetoric that they find it hard to believe that resources for improving their lives could be made available. The national bank account is not the issue, but providing the resources is. People will understand very well that not all change can take place overnight, but they are quite entitled to expect to see some improvement within a couple of years of an incoming Labour government taking office. Improvements in local transport and skills creation could be such an area of improvement, with the promise of more in the medium term. Then they can understand the power of the state to deploy resources in a careful and measured way to improve their lives. If Labour is serious about devolution they could also make it possible for councils to issue investment bonds backed by a government guarantee to support the projects that voters wish to see in their own areas at low interest rates.

We suspect that Starmer is actually afraid of greater local autonomy as this will simply highlight how ineffective he and his PLP are. The 'Take Back Control' rhetoric is a smokescreen that hides the reality.

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No. 335 - February 2023 ISSN 2050-6031
ISSN 0953-3494

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Labour Affairs

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and <https://labouraffairs.com/>

Subscription: £20 for one year (10 issues)

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find a negotiated solution, using all means at its disposal, including sanctions and divestments, but rejecting military escalation and intervention.

To speed up the process of securing that peaceful settlement, Unite demands action from the UK government, including:

Effective and immediate sanctions to be placed on the Russian economy including the seizure of Russian state assets held in the UK.”

It’s good that Unite opposes military escalation and would not support the latest decision of the NATO members to send tanks to Ukraine. But the sanctions that Unite calls for are the main reason that the standard of living of their members has been reduced. It seems somewhat inconsistent to call for a policy of action and to then express outrage at the results of that policy.

Although all the unions condemned the Russian invasion and called for peace talks and a withdrawal of the Russian forces from the Ukrainian lands that they have occupied, there were significant differences between the views of the unions. For instance, the RMT union issued a quite cautiously worded statement.

“RMT condemns the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces and calls for their immediate withdrawal. It is workers and their communities and families who suffer from military conflict and we will do all we can to support humanitarian assistance for displaced people from Ukraine and all those that need it. We welcome refugees seeking to come to the UK.

As trade unionists we oppose war and support peace and cross border solidarity between workers and alongside the global trade union movement we call for a long-lasting negotiated solution through diplomacy and de-militarisation that guarantees security and peace for all in the region.”

Unison’s general secretary was much less cautious when she said *“Let’s make no mistakes, this is an absolute, total war. It’s a totally unjustified attack on an independent, democratic country.”*

It’s interesting that Unison decided to say that the Russian attack was unjustified. Unite and RMT chose to avoid that issue. In contrast the Fire Brigades Union raised the issue of NATO’s role in the war. While also opposing and condemning the Russian invasion, the Fire Brigades Union stated that

“This war is also a proxy conflict between Russia and NATO prompted by NATO expansion into central and Eastern Europe. We oppose this expansion and any intervention in this conflict by NATO forces.”

That is the one reference to NATO that we came across in the initial statements by British unions on the invasion. Yet it is certainly the view of this magazine that it is impossible to understand Russia’s actions without understanding the provocation caused by NATO’s eastward expansion.

The United States has for many years been worried about the revival of Russia under Putin and more specifically about the strong commercial relationship that had been developing between Russia and Germany. This developing commercial relationship would have undermined America’s *raison d’être* in Europe. The US set out to destroy it by expanding NATO

eastwards up to Russia’s borders and provoking the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There is no doubt that the American policy has been very successful. Russia has been provoked into a war with Ukraine that it did not want. But, more important from the US perspective, commercial relations between Russia and Europe have been terminated for at least a generation.

This context has rarely been mentioned by any of the unions fighting to defend their members’ standard of living, yet it is unclear that it will be possible for unions to defend their members’ standard of living if the war continues. The sanctions that Britain and the US and their NATO allies announced against Russia are damaging the European and British working classes much more than they are damaging Russia. But if the unions believe that the Russian attack was unjustified then it is difficult to argue against the sanctions.

Will the unions dare to raise the issue of NATO’s role in this war? It would be a brave move, given the political parties’ and the media’s uncritical support for NATO’s role in this war. But it may be necessary if they are to successfully defend their members’ standard of living.

If they do dare raise the issue of NATO’s role, they should be prepared for the backlash.

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The News Personified—a fresh look at the news

A short daily humorous piece on French state radio ‘France Info’

Every morning, the journalist Marie Dupin takes on the role of a personality, an event, a place or a fact at the heart of the news.

News reports usually leave out historical context, or even any context at all: bare facts are presented as a bolt out of the blue, with no ‘before’, and also no ‘after’: the media don’t follow up, their only aim that of creating a sensation. The obvious example is the war in Ukraine, presented as starting in February 2022 with the Russian invasion, with no mention of what has been happening since 2014 and the Maidan coup.

I am not expecting to hear Marie Dupin impersonating Ukraine to give us the context of the war. Not all historical context is suitable for France Info, but in the case of the train conductors strike in December 2022, Marie Dupin is one of the strikers and explains their case, going back to 1920, and the 2020 legislation.]

Marie Dupin:

“This morning I am in the shoes of a train conductor. My status dates from 1920, but it has been modified several times. For the last two years, like all rail workers, “employment with railwayman status” as it used to be called is a thing of the past. We are now on contract. We have lost our retirement at 57, it is now 62 like everyone else. Lifetime employment and automatic advancement by seniority are also over. But the hard work has not changed: night shifts, more than 30 Sundays worked per year, the obligation to sleep away from home eight days a month, minimum wage salary at the start of the career. The same conditions but without the benefits. No wonder the SNCF is having trouble hiring enough staff to keep the trains running.

Presenter:

And so you are on strike today and all weekend and among the reasons for discontent there is also the opening to competition.

Marie Dupin:

Yes, because we conductors can be transferred overnight to another company, like our colleagues on the PACA line, whose Marseille-Nice line has just been transferred to the operator Transdev. To keep its markets, the SNCF has not hesitated to cut staff: closure of ticket offices, gradual elimination of train dispatchers, you remember the one who used to oversee the departure of trains on the platforms with their whistle.

So who is left, within reach of the public? Well, it’s us, the 10,000 SNCF conductors, sometimes alone in duplex trains with 1,200 often disgruntled passengers, and that’s an understatement. Aggressions against SNCF agents are up by 9% this year, yes we had reasons to make this surprise strike which has nothing to do with a surprise in reality, since our notice was submitted at the beginning of November but if the SNCF management did not communicate earlier on the movement it is because it hoped that it would not be followed.

Presenter:

And it’s just the opposite that’s happening.

Marie Dupin:

Yes, we controllers should be 80% to walk out this weekend. It is not the unions that are at the origin of the movement for once, they organized their strike on December 7th but we want our profession to be better recognized and it starts with an increase at the bottom of our pay slip. That’s why after weeks of exchanges on a Facebook page and a Telegram account we are already more than 3000 members on Facebook and we have created an apolitical collective that doesn’t give a damn about petty union wars. A movement coming from the field, we are field workers ready to lead a hard strike that could last.

Mick Lynch Explains the Rail Strike

Transport Committee meetings 11/1/23. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/12513/pdf/>

The three witnesses are Mick Lynch (RMT), Mick Whelan (ASLEF) and Frank Ward (TSSA). One of the Committee members is the SNP Gavin Newlands, whose later intervention in the House of Commons we quote below.

Extracts.

Question.

[There have been three different ministers for transport and ministers of state for rail so far during the rail dispute. The question to the trade union leaders was: was there a difference in approach between the different teams?]

Mick Lynch: I believe this whole situation—the dispute and all the elements of it—have been conceived in the DFT, going back to when Mr Heaton-Harris was the Rail Minister under Mr Shapps. This is Mr Shapps’s project, if you like. This dispute is his bequest to the rest of us. We all have to deal with it. I believe he is still involved quite heavily. When the documents go round Whitehall, I think there is a steer from the Business Department, and that is fine.

Mr Harper and Mr Merriman are very pleasant to deal with. I think we would all say we have a much better relationship on a one-to-one basis. Dealing with the employers, it is a much better relationship, but I always say it is about product. The template has been set by previous Administrations in the DFT. There is a strong hand of the Treasury on top of all of that, about what is going on. They say to us directly that they cannot move very far on this—the merits of our dispute—because of what it will say about health, education and every other public servant involved with all the issues going on now.

You can tell it is, because we have

made a settlement in ScotRail. We have all made settlements in Transport for Wales. Merseyrail is outside their bounds, and we have a settlement. Tyne and Wear Metro is outside the DFT and there are settlements. London Transport: settlements. Everywhere that the DFT’s hand is not on the tiller we have made settlements in this industry. We have made them in the private sector. As far as I am concerned, we still deal with private engineering companies, even cleaning contractors, bus companies and ferry companies. All sorts of people in transport make settlements with our unions apart from those directly controlled by the DFT.

It is in the contract. The service contract that they have with the Department for Transport gives the Secretary of State ultimate power in the negotiating room, even though he is not there. The entire project is a conception of the DFT.

[On the minimum service level legislation]

Mick Lynch: It tickles me that they will put non-qualified people into signal boxes to break strikes and they will have safety incidents, which they have every time they have a strike, when managers break the rules and break their competency basis, but it is the unions that are endangering safety. It is the attempt to break the strikes that imports more danger than anything else.

It is an infringement of civil liberties. The right to strike is something that any democratic society will have. If they want to run the signalling system on Network Rail during a dispute in the way that they will, they will have to get all the signallers to work. They will command them and conscript them to work. If they were doing that in Putin’s Russia,

in Iran or China it would rightly be condemned. Conscripted workers going to work against their will is an outrage, and that is what this legislation will bring forward—that either we would name them, or the companies would name them. Even the Secretary of State may name individuals who have to go to work on strike days. I do not understand how that is democratic and free in a free society. We will have to challenge it in every way that we can. It will have to be repealed as soon as there is a change in Government.

Gavin Newlands: I have a very brief last question before we move on. If you were to have the Secretary of State or the Rail Minister in front of you, what is the one thing you would need from them to advance this situation?

Mick Whelan: I think we would be consistent in saying that it is only the Government or the Rail Minister who can take the shackles off the employers in the negotiations. I previously reported to you that we were stunned when we found out that our employers had signed a deal with the Government where they could not offer more than 2% in pay. We never even got offered the 2% in the last four years. Constricting free collective bargaining and then indenturing people if they dare to have a voice in it later on is a very difficult direction for any society.

Gavin Newlands: Do any of you differ from that view? **Frank Ward:** No.

Mick Lynch: No, not really.

Frank Ward: The employers need to be free to negotiate. At this moment they are not.

[Question: why are the department for transport hindering the resolution of the dispute?]

Mike Amesbury: Singling out

the DFT—essentially the Secretary of State—if the process is hardwired into the system and the buck lies with them, what is the motivation? What do they need to do to ensure that there is a compromise, a win-win solution and a resolution to this dispute? What steps do they need to take, and why on earth are they driving it? What is your assessment of the motivation?

Mick Lynch: The DFT are not free actors themselves. The Treasury has always run this dispute, whether or not it was Mr Sunak in his previous incarnation. There are spending limits and all the rest of it. They decided to defund the railway by £2 billion, plus £2 billion in London Transport. We have loads of problems over there that have been slightly hidden by the national dispute. The defunding of the railway system in general is at the bottom of this.

I believe there is an attempt to defund a lot of services. That is what is at the heart of all the public sector disputes at the moment. They are not funded properly, and people are not paid properly. People are getting poorer every week. I believe that is a deliberate policy to transfer wealth from working people to people who have already got money. It is all part of a game that is being played in front of us. This is how it plays out in detail. That is their motivation.

Mike Amesbury: Frank?

Frank Ward: I have nothing to add beyond what I said earlier. I think the whole thing has been choreographed in order to allow what happened yesterday, for the Business Secretary to stand up and say, “I’m going to clamp down on trade unions.” That is the motivation.

Mike Amesbury: Does anybody want to add anything?

Mick Whelan: It does appear ideological. I hear stories from the Government about wanting skilled, high-paid workers, and then their activities across all sectors—not just the rail sector—seem to want to challenge vocational people and all the people with skills and keep them down. There was the fact that we had not had a pay rise for four years. We were not seeking a pay rise for the two years of the pandemic; we only went to Mr Heaton-Harris

when inflation started going through the roof and when it hit 5.2%. If our members were demanding a pay rise, not having had one for the previous two years, when inflation was 5.2%, how do they feel when they find inflation going to 14% last year, into massive double digits, and possibly going higher than 14% this year?

How could any trade union sell the idea to anybody they represent that 4% and 4% for every condition that we have ever had—because that is what the current deal does—means a 20% pay cut in real terms for no future and no say about what you can do in the future? I do not understand it.

[...]

Frank Ward: Clearly, if there is uncertainty about the service it will drive people away. There has always been uncertainty about the service in the railway in recent years, for different reasons, but Mr Lynch is right; it is the policies of this Government that are creating that uncertainty. This dispute has been prosecuted by the Department for Transport. They are making this happen. If they took their hands off the tiller as far as the employers were concerned and allowed them to negotiate in good faith, we could find resolutions to this. They will not do that, and the employers cannot negotiate with us in good faith because any attempt on their part to do so will effectively mean that they will not be compensated for the loss of revenue or the fall in profits that they are going to sustain going forward.

It is notable that despite the fact that we have come through covid, with all the emergency arrangements and agreements that were put in place, all the companies that came under that managed to make profits. They managed to pay dividends to their shareholders. They never gave pay increases to their workers. Now we are in a situation where the Government are saying they have to cut back expenditure on the railway. Their answer is, “Let’s get the workers to pay for it.” This is political. This is not industrial.

[Question: has the government not spent money on the railways?]

Jack Brereton: But do you recognise that the Government are putting more money into the railway?

Mick Lynch: The Government are putting money into it. They will probably all have to put money into it. I would ask why they put money into the railway and allow rolling stock companies, train operating companies and Network Rail subcontractors to extract billions of pounds of profit since the 1990s straight into people’s pockets through dividends.

You will do the same with health and all the rest of it eventually, when you get the opportunity. You will fund them, but you will shovel it into the private sector. That is what you have been doing. They made profit every day during the pandemic, and they have made profit on every day of these strikes. They get protected against the loss of revenue, and their bottom line has not been affected. Two of the companies are subject to takeovers by speculators. One of them has been taken over during this dispute. There is loads of money in the railway. It is being made by private sector operators. Get Porterbrook and all of them down here, and ask them what they have done with all the money. You have funded that completely.

[Question on the popularity of the strikes]

Mick Lynch: It depends on which poll you read. I went on “Good Morning Britain” the other day, where Richard Madeley was in attack mode. They did a poll shortly after that and there was 75% support for the RMT, so it depends on which poll you read as to who is winning this.

What was expected in the DFT was that we would have zero support and would be back to work with no strikes by the end of June. Once your friends in the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph* and all those other journals followed me from my house to the station, invaded my children’s Facebook pages and all the rest of it, they thought we would be public enemy No. 1. We are not. I am a more popular person than many of the politicians in this room, unfortunately, for the public.

The fact is that we have a lot of support. It is difficult to get support

during industrial disputes. If you ask the public whether they sympathise with people getting a decent pay rise and the protection of contracts of employment and conditions, they will say yes. It is difficult to keep that support going fully during intense industrial action, but there is broad support for all the people involved in disputes at this time. There is very little support for the people who are opposing the disputes and trying to make people poorer.

Gavin Newlands SNP speaking in the House of Commons 19/1/23:

Cross-border rail services run by Avanti and [TransPennine Express](#) have been shambolic. Last week alone, TransPennine Express could not point to a single day when it ran the emergency timetable it had promised. On two days, Avanti had only one and two trains on time the entire day running out of [Glasgow Central](#). In contrast, publicly-owned [LNER](#) was running a much better service. Is there not a lesson here that the private sector model has failed both workers and passengers and it is time to follow Scotland's lead and bring rail operators under public control?

[...]

[ScotRail](#), which is publicly owned and controlled, pays the highest track access charges of any single rail operator, despite repeated requests to complete rail devolution and transfer control of [Network Rail](#) to Holyrood. Meanwhile, the [Transport Committee](#) heard last week from [Mick Lynch](#), who said:

“When there is a Network Rail strike, they shut Scotland and large parts of Wales. They choose to run the parts that connect to England.”

Does the [Minister](#) agree that Scottish rail passengers get a second-class service in this [UK](#) system? Is it not time that he turned over responsibilities to a Government who have recently settled two rail disputes?

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2023-01-19a.512.3&s=gavin+newlands#g515.4>

Trade Union anti-war conference Saturday 21st January 2023

With ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan and RMT president Alex Gordon

TRADE unionists gathered at central London's Hamilton House today for a conference on strengthening voices for peace in the labour movement.

The World at War — a Trade Union Issue has been called by the Stop the War Coalition following efforts to silence peace campaigners in the Labour Party by leader Sir Keir Starmer and a narrow vote to support increased arms spending by last autumn's Trades Union Congress.

Speakers will include National Education Union joint general secretary Kevin Courtney, ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan, RMT president Alex Gordon, Fire Brigades Union officer Riccardo la Torre and Warren Smith of the Maritime Union of Australia — alongside long-standing champions of the peace movement such as Stop the War's Lindsey German and former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Report from conference:

(extracts)

THE first ever Stop the War Coalition trade union conference held at the week-end looked at how to build a bigger peace movement — and how to reverse the TUC's decision last autumn to support increased arms spending.

Multiple unions are affiliated to Stop the War, and the organisation has significant support on the left — a 2020

survey found it was the most popular campaigning organisation among Labour members.

Labour members' opposition to militarism was also clear in the 2021 Labour conference vote to oppose the Aukus nuclear submarine pact between Britain, the United States and Australia, which guest speaker Warren Smith of the Australian Maritime Union warned was an attempt to ratchet up tension with China and assert Anglo-Saxon military dominance of the Pacific.

But the campaign's vice-chair Andrew Murray pointed out that Saturday's conference was also the first national Stop the War conference that would not be addressed by a single Labour MP.

“If you remember the vast demonstration 20 years ago against the Iraq war, which Stop the War led, that demonstration had the support of nearly every major union in the country — and in many cases the union leaderships had been driven there by their members, rather than necessarily by their own willingness to confront the Labour government,” he said.

[...]

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament chair Kate Hudson stressed the urgency of building a stronger peace movement given the risk of nuclear escalation of the Ukraine war and pacts like Aukus raising the possibility of war with China too, a theme elaborated by China expert Jenny Clegg, who detailed British military co-operation with Japan, which

like Germany is doubling its military spending and has ongoing island disputes with both China and Russia which could spark conflict.

Hudson and Stop the War convener Lindsey German rejected an argument from one attendee from the floor, who said blaming both Nato and Russia for the Ukraine war confused the question, and that Russia should be seen as a victim of US imperialism.

It was important to acknowledge the “humanitarian catastrophe” unleashed by Putin's invasion and the aggressive expansionism of Russia, while also recognising the role of Nato expansion in provoking the war, German stressed.

[...]

“We're not about putting [arms industry workers] on the dole but we don't have to support the products. We need to argue with confidence and not tame what we're arguing for fear of some mythical right-wing reaction from our members — the right-wing reaction will come from employers and the press.”

The conference vowed to organise for a bigger, stronger peace movement in 2023, to win the TUC to an anti-war policy and to mobilise for a demonstration for peace talks on Ukraine to be held in London on February 25.

https://morningstaronline.co.uk/system/files/pdf-editions/M_Star_230123.pdf

Notes on the News

By Gwydion M. Williams

Is Thatcher's Spell Fading?
Starmer and Labour's 'Timid Tendency'
China Badmouthed Over Covid
The Sad Fate of All the Ukraines
Snippets
US Citizens Above the Law?
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Russia Solid
Chinese Protestors as Straw Dogs

Is Thatcher's Spell Fading?

Baby Boomers like me were carefully nurtured by Western states that had lived through the disasters of 1929-1945. Our elites were terrified of a Nazi revival. And feared popular support for the Soviets in the Cold War. So they made sure that the working mainstream were well looked after. Everyone with basic working skills had a job.

We grew up with that, and mistook it for the Natural Order.

Most of us were mistrustful of the state. They wanted to limit us on sex and drugs, though on drugs some of us later decided they were right. And the state was linked in our minds to formalities in clothes and hairstyles: limits that are now almost forgotten.

When Baby Boomers were old enough to start paying income tax, most were wide open to the idea that the Inland Revenue was 'Inland Robbery'. They fell for the false stories of Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Much of the rest of Western Europe followed.

And it was all nonsense. Money flowed to the rich, and the promise of faster growth was never met. The USA and Britain failed to improve, while Continental Western Europe actually slowed.¹

Baby Boomers got their sex and drugs, and increasingly could dress as they pleased. And put definite limits on sex, when they began to think about their own underage kids being seduced. And more and more women dared complain, when they faced demands for the sex-without-love that only a minority of women could be happy with.

Most of the Baby Boomers are guilty of economic selfishness, and unlikely to change. But what of the next generations?

Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, seen content to follow us in our errors. Many joined the Late-

Boomer invention of Punk Rock. They saw the world as hopelessly bad.

Millennials, 1981 to 1996, seem to know better.

"Western conservatives are at risk from generations of voters who are no longer moving to the right as they age...

"By my calculations, members of Britain's 'silent generation', born between 1928 and 1945, were five percentage points less conservative than the national average at age 35, but around five points more conservative by age 70. The 'baby boomer' generation traced the same path, and 'Gen X', born between 1965 and 1980, are now following suit.

"Millennials — born between 1981 and 1996 — started out on the same trajectory, but then something changed...

"Millennials are more economically leftwing than Gen-Xers and boomers were at the same age, and Brexit has alienated a higher share of former Tory backers among this generation than any other. Even before Truss, two-thirds of millennials who had backed the Conservatives before the EU referendum were no longer planning to vote for the party again, and one in four said they now strongly disliked the Tories.

"The data is clear that millennials are not simply going to age into conservatism...

"UK millennials and their 'Gen Z' younger cousins will probably cast more votes than boomers in the next general election. After years of being considered an electoral afterthought, their vote will soon be pivotal. Without drastic changes to both policy and messaging, that could consign conservative parties to an increasingly distant second place."²

They reject a system that has failed them:

"The right has become its own gravedigger for two reasons. First, by building an economic model that promised individual freedom but delivered mass insecurity; and second, by intentionally and repeatedly insulting the social values of the young. British culture fetishes home ownership even while its economic policies make this an increasingly distant dream for younger citizens. Young people have also borne the brunt of austerity, being saddled with university debt and suffering the closure of youth and Sure Start centres. Yet a generation that is more educated than ever but simultaneously deprived of prospects is treated with unadulterated contempt by the right."³

¹ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/the-mixed-economy-won-the-cold-war/>

² <https://www.ft.com/content/c361e372-769e-45cd-a063-f5c0a7767cf4> (pay site)

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/04/right-millennials-vote-snowflakes-conservative>

Starmer and Labour's 'Timid Tendency'

My generation created freedoms that the younger people now take for granted. But we were muddled all along about what freedom was and was not.

Many of us were tricked into doubting that state power was useful for most forms of social justice.

Yet it was always irrational. State power was and is used freely, when it is something that the elite and the Next Nine find useful.⁴ They need law enforcement, and most want gender equality and rights for gays. Economic justice they will let lapse.

They are mostly assured of jobs, food, housing, and medical care. But dislike taxes and regulations about their personal lives.

Any regulation you don't like becomes a wicked attack on Freedom Itself. Other intrusive regulations are fine. The media push this line, directed by the tiny rich minority who own media and choose where they place their adverts.

A majority of voters now want a shift left. But will our Parliamentary Democracy allow it?

A Parliament is a body of privileged individuals. Control of each by their electorate is imperfect, especially since each derives their power from a small region with many competing interests. A vocational parliament might do a better job.

It was also a drastic 19th-century innovation to insist that all adult males should be part of the electorate. And just as drastic to include women, which happened mostly in the 20th century.

Nor is there an inherent reason why a parliament should include an organised opposition. That concept took time to become normalised and accepted in Western Europe. And in the USA, it may be breaking down.

Here, a mass-membership Labour Party fell for the story that Corbyn had ruined them in 2019. It was actually Brexit, and Labour's foolish decision to help a divided Parliament reject all workable solutions. Reject the notion of a second vote, when

⁴ <https://mrgwydion-mwilliams.quora.com/The-Next-Nine-and-the-Damaged-Majority>

it was realised that the terms for exit would be far tougher than most had expected. I did detailed studies showing how it was the specific issue of Brexit that lost seats.⁵ ⁶ But most members were unable to think outside of the story the media pushed. Starmer was able to break his promise to be a more polite version of what Corbyn had offered.

It may be the ruin of Britain.

The rest of the world may gain, because of our ruin. The European Union is already healthier without the need to please British governments with alien ends.

China Badmouthed Over Covid

"Hong Kong public health experts travelled to Beijing in early November to advise Chinese officials about lifting restrictions nationwide, weeks before widespread protests broke out against zero-Covid policies.

"Analysts have questioned whether the anti-lockdown demonstrations late last month were the main catalyst for China's sudden departure from its strict virus elimination policy, which has throttled the world's second-largest economy and confined the country's 1.4bn people with a system of lockdowns, mass testing and contact tracing."⁷

That's from the *Financial Times*, which often lets out awkward facts that working businesspeople need to know.

Did Western advisors encourage protests at a time when they knew concessions were likely? Allowing it to seem like a success, when perhaps it made no difference?

There are also justified Chinese complaints at how they were reported:

"In the three years of pandemic fight, China achieved zero new cases & eliminated the virus many times. But US & Europe dominated global epidemic prevention situation and dragged China down. They have no

⁵ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/editorials-from-labour-affairs/the-brexite-defeat/labours-vote-held-up-in-the-2019-defeat/>

⁶ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/editorials-from-labour-affairs/the-brexite-defeat/labours-lost-seats-causes/>

⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/f08ae17b-bb04-45d8-8437-1c21a3b47a21> (pay site)

right to make irresponsible remarks on China's lifting of lockdowns in the end."⁸

Even *The Guardian*, keen to impose on China the Western system of Opposition Politics that has failed elsewhere, did admit "zero Covid ... had worked relatively well for China in 2020 and 2021".⁹

Given that the rest of the world kept re-infecting China, relaxing the rules may have become inevitable. And was probably carefully discussed.

I've always interpreted President Xi as a faction leader rather than a personal dictator.¹⁰ He might have wanted to relax on Covid earlier than the official change, or he might not want it now. But a Leninist Central Committee can replace its General Secretary, or may keep them powerless. A little-remembered man called Zhang Wentian held the post from 1934 to 1943, and was a place-holder during Mao's rise.¹¹ Edgar Snow almost ignores him in his famous book *Red Star Over China*: I did an article several years back, explaining this as part of a plan hatched with Sun Yat-sen's widow to make Mao the recognised leader of Chinese Communism. But Mao's authority after death could not keep his heir in power. The title had been Chairman under Mao: it was changed back after Mao's heir was shoved aside. And that man too was removed and marginalised, with his death in 1989 sparking the Tiananmen protests. The then General Secretary supported the protests and was accused of encouraging them, but was removed without trouble when the Central Committee wanted him gone.

Whatever the job title, a Leninist leader must get a consensus. Mao went against this with the Cultural Revolution, but after his death it was reversed.

The world's reaction was mean-spirited. Chinese were treated as a

⁸ https://twitter.com/HuXijin_GT/status/1613912237672132613

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/30/confusion-zero-covid-unrest-china>

¹⁰ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/post-liberalism/chinese-politics-working-well/>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhang_Wentian

danger to the rest of the world, in defiance of what politicians were told by almost all their own experts.^{12 13}

Reports also repeated the false story that Mao caused avoidable deaths when he put China on the path to its present prosperity. What really happened in 1959-1961 was that Mao's very successful system got over-enthusiastic. A system that had given China death rates close to rich countries, and in the so-called famine it merely reverted briefly to death rates typical for the 1960s for other poor countries.¹⁴

Overall, Mao grew the Chinese economy faster than the USA or Britain in that era. Faster than most of the developing world, India included.¹⁵

China also sits contentedly within a world consensus that is happy with the probability of Russia successfully preserving Russian rights in chunks of East Ukraine and South Ukraine. Regions that voted for parties that rejected the Orange Revolution between 2014 and 2019. Parties which have now been banned.¹⁶

The Global South mostly lumps it with India's creation of Bangladesh, or Turkey's creation of Northern Cyprus. The main difference is that the former West Pakistan accepted its military defeat, whereas Greece still holds out and Northern Cyprus is not in the UN.

The Sad Fate of All the Ukraines

The Moscow-based Tsars had a point when they called themselves rulers of 'all the Russias'. A Rus or Ruthenian identity emerged out of the mix of Slavonic tribes who expanded from some unknown homeland in Eastern Europe.¹⁷

Peoples speaking Slavonic languages

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/1/3/australia-covid-tests-for-china-overruled-health-advice>

¹³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/21/is-bias-not-science-behind-covid-19-curbs-on-china-travellers>

¹⁴ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/42-china/china-three-bitter-years-1959-to-1961/>

¹⁵ <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/recent-issues/2019-11-magazine/2019-11/>

¹⁶ <https://mrgwydion-mwilliams.quora.com/Pro-Russian-Ukrainians-Ignored-by-the-West>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Slavs

flourished when the Roman Empire declined. Sometimes as conquerors, and sometimes as a majority who absorbed their rulers into their culture.

Embarrassingly for all Ruthenians, their version of Slavonic identity was shaped by Norse who founded trade routes from Scandinavia down to the Black Sea. Traded with the rich East Roman Empire centred on Byzantium:

"The scholarly consensus holds that they were originally Norsemen, mainly originating from present-day Sweden, who settled and ruled along the river-routes between the Baltic and the Black Seas from around the 8th to 11th centuries AD. In the 9th century, they formed the state of Kievan Rus', where the ruling Norsemen along with local Finnic tribes gradually assimilated into the East Slavic population, with Old East Slavic becoming the common spoken language."¹⁸

Several separate Rus or Ruthenian identities emerged, some under foreign rule. Kiev itself was conquered by Lithuanians. It became part of a Commonwealth in which Poles and Lithuanians were superior, Jews were middling, and Ruthenians at the bottom. And was later conquered by the Tsars, who however insulted those Ruthenians by calling them Little Russians.

Note also that 'Kiev' was until 2022 the standard English name for a city that has several names for its different populations. Most of the West has shifted to saying Kyiv, a West Ukrainian pronunciation. I will not follow until Kiev's rulers stop trying to impose a viciously anti-Russian culture on people who feel more Russian than Ukrainian, if forced to choose.

Anti-Russian culture was spreading, well before Putin recognised the 2014 secession by the elected regional government of Crimea. A key moment was 2010, when the failed leader of the first Orange Revolution chose to celebrate Stepan Bandera as an official Hero of Ukraine.¹⁹ The man began and ended

the war fighting for Hitler, while also

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rus%27_people

¹⁹ <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Ukraine-Punished-For-Rejecting-US-Values-in-2010>

becoming a Third Force when Hitler rejected his claim to have created an independent Ukrainian government. It was a gross provocation, and those same people were back and stronger in 2014.

Ukraine never had a very solid identity. Electoral maps show a strong anti-Russian majority in the West, which the Tsars never ruled. A definite pro-Russian majority in the south and east, which were lands taken from the Ottoman Empire by the Tsars. Lands settled by a mix of Russians and Ukrainians. And a muddle in the middle: people who voted for Zelensky as an alternative to a candidate standing for strong anti-Russian policies.²⁰ But in the run-up to the Russian invasion, Zelensky dropped any talk of compromise with the pro-Russian majority in the Donbass. Wobbled in the invasion itself. But he is now committed to a total reconquest, Crimea included.

It is not a government that the rest of Europe should be backing:

"Ukraine is no flourishing democracy. It is an impoverished, corrupt, one-party state with extensive censorship, where opposition newspapers and political parties have been shut down. Before the war, far right Ukrainian nationalist groups like the Azov Brigade were soundly condemned by the U.S. Congress. Kiev's determined campaign against the Russian language is analogous to the Canadian government trying to ban French in Quebec. Ukrainian shells have killed hundreds of civilians in the Donbas and there are emerging reports of Ukrainian war crimes. The truly moral course of action would be to end this war with negotiations rather than prolong the suffering the Ukrainian people in a conflict they are unlikely to win without risking American lives."²¹

But the media have successfully confused the matter.

Russia's unjust hegemony from 1944 to 1989 has nothing to do with the right of Russians left behind in Ukraine when it became anti-Russian.

²⁰ <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Ukraine-Mariupol-and-the-War-for-the-Oblasts>

²¹ <https://www.newsweek.com/lessons-us-civil-war-show-why-ukraine-cant-win-opinion-1764992>

But far too many people confuse the two. They suppose that Putin wants to take back the non-Russian territory that the Soviet Union once held.

Both India and the Islamic World have decided that the G7 /NATO power-block is a long-term threat, being both dishonest and incompetent. Seeking to keep a hegemony based on inequality.

Snippets

US Citizens Above the Law?

"US citizen Anne Sacoolas is given an eight month prison sentence suspended for 12 months for causing the death of teenage motorcyclist Harry Dunn in 2019...

"The 45-year-old, who was also banned from driving in the UK, was sentenced via video link from the US in a televised hearing at the Old Bailey...

"The case caused a diplomatic row between the US and British governments - Sacoolas left the UK claiming diplomatic immunity and the US refused to extradite her...

"US treated Dunn family with utter disdain', Harry's friend says."²²

It is a sign of how bizarre US culture has become. Outsiders are not to be trusted, not even Britons.

Britons have been more sensible:

"The family of Harry Dunn are to press for the inquest into his death to recommend that US personnel at American military bases in Britain should be required to be properly trained in road safety."²³

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Qatargate – Backwash From the Ukraine War?

There were many rumours of corruption, when Qatar became a World Cup host.

I never really looked into it. But I did notice that much of the Global South liked it.

"Proximity and ease of access have allowed fans who can't afford travel to the West to finally live their dreams.

"It's the first time that four teams from Asia and Africa have made it to

²² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/63748369>

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/10/harry-dunn-family-to-press-for-road-safety-training-call-at-inquest>

the knockout stage of the FIFA World Cup."²⁴

Morocco came 4th, after a play-off.

The Global South also feels comfortable with Russia and China asserting themselves. Do not like the current US and European Union attempt to undermine them.

It may not be an accident that European politicians are suddenly in trouble over bribes that Qatar allegedly gave them."²⁵

Did someone decide that it would be convenient to give helpful tips, with the football over?

*

Russia Solid

The liberal-left 'Social Europe' includes a dismayed report of Russians treating the Ukraine War as something essential:

"Russian soldiers' mothers are not demonstrating the strong opposition they have in previous conflicts...

"One of Russia's best-known and most-respected civil society organisations, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSMR) and its network of committees, provided a focal point for opposition to Moscow's unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, particularly by defending the rights of conscripted soldiers...

"No longer 'a coherent and unified force', it has evolved into a loose network of organisations. Some committees express strong support for traditional values, patriotism and the military, while others campaign for progressive human rights and against militarism."²⁶

Most West Europeans are shocked by events like the residential building hit by a Russian missile. But whose fault was it?

"Russia blames Ukraine for deadly Dnepr missile blast...

"A Russian missile that targeted an energy infrastructural facility was downed by Ukrainian air defenses.' Since this air-defense system 'was

²⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/6/its-a-home-world-cup-for-asian-and-african-football-fans>

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/13/eu-vice-president-eva-kaili-faces-stripped-role-amid-qatar-corruption-scandal>

²⁶ <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-ukraine-war-and-russian-soldiers-mothers>

positioned in a residential quarter contrary to the norms of international humanitarian law... the missile fell onto a residential building.'"²⁷

Remarkably, one of Kiev's officials said the same. And then denied it, apologised, and resigned."^{28 29}

Europe's fearless 'investigative reporters' show a remarkable lack of interest in such matters.

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Chinese Protestors as Straw Dogs

I earlier mentioned that there were protests about the Covid limits in China. Which may have been encouraged by Western advisors, when the decision was likely to happen anyway.

But organising using Smart Phones is not smart at all, when you face an efficient government:

"He wore a balaclava and goggles to cover his face. When it seemed that plainclothes police officers were following him, he ducked into the bushes and changed into a new jacket. He lost his tail. That night, when Mr. Zhang, who is in his 20s, returned home without being arrested, he thought he was in the clear.

"But the police called the next day. They knew he had been out because they were able to detect that his phone had been in the area of the protests, they told him. Twenty minutes later, even though he had not told them where he lived, three officers knocked at his door.

"Similar stories are being told by protesters across China this week."³⁰

If someone encouraged them, did they not know this might happen?

Or did they not care? Did they see protestors as Straw Dogs, not to be cared about when their use was over?"³¹

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Old newsnotes at the magazine websites. I also write regular blogs - <https://www.quora.com/q/mrgwydionmwilliams>

²⁷ <https://swentr.site/russia/570047-russia-ukraine-dnepr-missile/>

²⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/live-blog/2023/1/17/ukraine-live-russia-shells-settlements-near-bakhmut-donetsk> 30m ago(09:24 GMT)

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64304310>

³⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/business/china-protests-surveillance.html> (pay site)

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straw_dog

Blue Labour - Strong On Theory, Weak In Practice

Review: Maurice Glasman: *Blue Labour - the Politics of the Common Good*,
Cambridge, Polity Press, 2022.

By Peter Brooke

HOPEFUL BEGINNINGS

Back in 2011 it looked as if Maurice Glasman could become highly influential in the Labour Party. Ed Miliband had become leader in 2010 and, casting around for a cause to distinguish himself from New Labour, it looked as if Glasman's 'Blue Labour' could fit the bill. The basic idea of Blue Labour was that Labour had lost contact with its supposed constituency - 'labour', the working class. The colour 'blue' evoked sadness at this fact, the blue as opposed to white collar associated with manual labour, and also an innate conservatism attributed to the working class in terms of elementary moral and social values. Blue Labour values stability, a settled place to live and work, craft knowledge and ability, in contrast to the values of Blair and Mandelson associated with flexibility, adaptability and a disregard for a settled place to live and work. Glasman uses the terms, taken from Yuri Slevkine's *The Jewish Century* - 'Apollonian' to characterise the first of these, and 'Mercurian' to characterise the second.¹

Within the Parliamentary Labour Party, the MP who came closest to Blue Labour was Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham. In an interview given in 2008, as the Great Financial Crash was unfolding, Cruddas outlined the problem as he saw it:

'Why is the issue of class politics so contaminated now? The answer lies back in the intellectual moves made by Blair - particularly the debates around

the knowledge economy - which assumed that the working class was withering away. As Blair transformed Labour into New Labour he legitimised the change by importing an intellectual framework that described old labour as being in empirical decline. The working class was no longer of relevance as a political and economic category ...

'I'm arguing that we anchor the experiences of different groups in a materialist politics. That is not necessarily reductive. It allows you to contextualise materially the shared experience of different people. The approach we have at the moment is a semiotic game of emphasising difference, be it through symbols of race or of religious difference. It's unable to understand or navigate its way through the politics of migration and demography. For the last ten years New Labour has used patterns of migration as a twenty-first century incomes policy, holding down the wages in semi-skilled and unskilled work. Now the government is reaping the consequences. And they can't deal with it by regulating the labour market because they've set themselves against this approach. Instead they have retreated into an identity politics which includes a simplistic idea of a white working class that is illiberal, intolerant and degenerate. Without a materialist politics one is unable to transcend the things that break people apart - one cannot find the shared experiences that bridge cultural, religious and racial differences ...

'I do think there was a deeper philosophical movement in New Labour that was worked through during the long period

of opposition. You can trace it through an arc beginning with the 1983 Manifesto, then the defeat in 1987, up to the supply side socialism of 1992, with Brown as the architect. Then there is the radicalism of Blair from 1994 onwards. Throughout this period there is a systematic withdrawal of the state. Post-1983 the negatives are defined as trade unionism, 'tax and spend', and the politics of nationalisation. I think there was a grouping of right-wing Labour figures who saw that, generationally, the only way to gain power was to confront these polling negatives. Initially this was done with reference to a body of ideas that were quite brazenly used as justification for short-term political moves in pursuit of electoral purposes.

'The intellectual work of New Labour intensified from 1994 on, when a number of intellectuals, for example [Anthony] Giddens and [Charlie] Leadbeater, rose to the challenge and codified the political retreat. The genius of Blair when he became party leader was his ability to tell a story that legitimised all the political retreats since 1979 - "there is a rupture occurring in terms of industrial organisation caused by new technology and globalisation. Only I can understand it with reference to the knowledge economy'." The intellectual work helped to mobilise and organise the electoral cohorts that mattered in terms of gaining political power. It also wrote off the working class and other groups who had no political traction. It used a sociology that assumed they had no empirical significance in the future. It was

¹ Yuri Slevkine: *The Jewish Century*, Princeton University Press, 2004. Slevkine argues that 'Mercurian' virtues traditionally ascribed to Jews, have become universally dominant in the twentieth century.

a brilliant political movement to gain and retain political power.'

But:

*'The world was not like their stylised construction of it. The central contradiction of the knowledge economy thesis and the higher education debate is the belief that there is a massive expansion in the demand for graduates. If there isn't this demand and you're equipping people with this utilitarian way to tap into something that doesn't exist, they end up doing jobs for which they're overqualified. You've got generational immobility in the jobs market and in housing.'*²

The interview was conducted by Jonathan Rutherford, at the time editor of *Soundings*, who himself was soon to become a major spokesman for Blue Labour. In 2009, with Labour still in power coping with the Great Financial Crisis, Cruddas and Rutherford wrote (in an article entitled 'The time has come for a new socialism'):

'The recession has dealt a serious blow to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. It was the sale of council housing that helped to secure its popular support. In the name of a property-owning democracy, the modest economic interests of individuals were aligned with the profit-seeking of financialised capitalism. It was a new kind of popular compact between the market and the individual.'

'A similar compact between the business elite and shareholder value created a tiny super-rich elite – and became the unquestioned business model of the era. Its values of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism legitimised market-based welfare and pension reform, the drive to a flexible labour market and the

transfer of risk from the state and business to the individual. New Labour entered government in 1997 having accommodated itself to the neo-liberal orthodoxy and with plans to deepen and extend its compact.'

'Growth in the UK depended on this compact. It was driven by mass consumption which required consumers buying cheap credit. The housing market turned homes into assets for leveraging ever-increasing levels of borrowing. The credit economy created an indentured form of consumption as it laid claim to great tranches of future earnings. The lives of millions were integrated into the financial markets as their personal and mortgage-backed debt became the economic raw material for global capital. This commodification of society engineered a massive transfer of wealth to the rich.'

*'The neo-liberal model of capitalism generated unprecedented affluence for many. But it corroded the civic culture of democracy. Commodification and huge inequalities helped create a social recession with widespread mental illness, systemic levels of loneliness, growing numbers of psychologically damaged children, and an increase in eating disorders, obesity, drug addiction and alcoholism. It created monopoly forms of capitalism and an increasingly authoritarian, technocratic and centralising state. A ruling class accrued a dangerous amount of power and became a financial law unto itself. The gulf between the political elites and the population widened as economic restructuring destroyed traditional working-class cultures and communities.'*³

But in 2011 this had become 'Labour must fashion a new patriotism':

'Labour in government contributed to the problem. It championed a flexible labour market that undermined people's jobs and wages. Its belief in globalisation blinded it to its destructive force. It celebrated a form of capitalist modernisation that became nihilistic. It abandoned people to the market.'

'Globalisation has devastated people's ways of life. People fear the loss of their culture and their identity, which provide their lives with meaning. Who are we? Where do we belong? A disorientated culture like our own throws up these questions but it cannot answer them. People are left to cope with uncertainty.'

'Labour recoils from the visceral politics of loss and belonging. It has been deaf to the pain. It fears people's bigotry and xenophobia and has been contemptuous of those nostalgic for a past that they imagine was better. But Labour has to make the journey through the loss, the rage against newcomers, the fear of strangers, and the nostalgia for an old way of life. We have supported a multiculturalism that hides the pain of this reality. It has been a practice of avoiding our differences. It has been permission to pass each other on opposite sides of the road.'

*'We are an immigrant nation. There is no going back and we must find ways of living together and creating a new vision of England. We demand that migrants must be like us. But who actually are we? They must share our British values. But what are they? Newcomers must answer correctly the citizens test. But could we?'*⁴

Exactly the questions that encouraged me to initiate a website under the title 'British values'.⁵

² 'A new politics of class - Interview with Jon Cruddas MP', *Soundings*, No.38, Spring 2008.

³ Jon Cruddas and Jonathan Rutherford: 'The time has come for a new socialism', *The Independent*, 1st April, 2009.

⁴ Jon Cruddas and Jonathan Rutherford: 'Labour must fashion a new patriotism', *The Guardian*, 1st July, 2011.

⁵ <http://www.british-values.com/>

AN EARLY DEFEAT

Glasman coined the term 'Blue Labour' and launched the movement (if that is what it was) in 2009. He seems to have been on good terms with both the Milibands and soon after becoming leader, in November 2010, Ed Miliband secured him, somewhat to his surprise, a seat in the Lords which he took up - as Baron Glasman of Stoke Newington and of Stamford Hill in the London Borough of Hackney - in February 2011. Everything seemed to be going well until suddenly it all came to a crashing halt. Glasman explains why in a recent interview in *The Guardian*:

'Glasman remembers, with a shudder, the day he realised his career as the man the papers liked to describe as Miliband's "guru" had come to an abrupt end. "My wife, Catherine, brought all the newspapers into the bedroom and said simply: 'Fucking hell!' I was on the front cover of the Telegraph, the Mail and not in a good way. I put the covers over my head and stayed in bed all day." The catalyst for the disastrous coverage (the Daily Mail called him "the voice of reason") was an interview Glasman gave to the Fabian Review, a party organ, in which he rejected the principle of the free movement of labour within the European Union. ... To compound matters, Glasman further suggested that Labour should attempt to listen to and win over English Defence League (EDL) supporters – remarks also seized upon with delight by the rightwing press. This was at a time when Nigel Farage's Ukip was on the rise and the polarising political storms that were to take Britain all the way to Brexit – which Glasman later campaigned for – had begun to blow.

*'After Glasman later criticised Miliband himself in the New Statesman as having "no strategy, no narrative and little energy", the former deputy prime minister, John Prescott, spoke for many Labour members when he tweeted: "Glasman. You know sod all about politics, economic policy, Labour or solidarity. Bugger off and go 'organise' some communities."*⁶

6 Julian Coman: 'Maurice Glasman,

There's a certain irony in Glasman's apparently promising political career being trashed by accusations of being anti-immigrant. Prior to Blue Labour he had been deeply involved in the 'London Citizens' movement, originated in 1996 and concerned with the people at the bottom of the economic pile - non-unionised workers, cleaners, caterers, security guards etc, many if not most of whom were immigrants. London Citizens campaigned for acceptance of the principle of the Living Wage and also for an amnesty for undocumented immigrants. It worked in conjunction with faith groups, including Muslim and Hindu organisations. Glasman himself, from a lower middle class Conservative Jewish background, was deeply influenced by Catholic Social teaching and worked closely advocating an immigrant amnesty with the Catholic organisation 'Strangers into Citizens'. But he did recognise that there was a limit to the immigration Britain could sustain and that immigration and the cheaper labour it supplied was being used to undercut workers' bargaining power. That there were reasons for the bitterness and hostility this was creating.

The 2022 Guardian article continues: 'As much of the party turned on him, Glasman essentially took Prescott's aggressive advice. "I basically didn't talk to any media for about three years. I went quiet."' Which implies a certain weakness. 'Blue Labour' never amounted to very much in organisational terms. If one regarded its ideas with sympathy it was difficult to know what to do about it. There was a website which included occasional articles usually by Jonathan Rutherford. And yet, the ideas, as outlined in Glasman's recent book are strong.

TRADITIONS - BRITISH AND GERMAN

Glasman begins with an account of what he sees as the Labour tradition, distinguishing it from the European Marxist or Social Democratic tradition. It was a movement that, rooted in class, nonetheless saw itself as national, a means by which the nation in its religious, political and

architect of Blue Labour: "Labour needs to be itself again", *The Guardian*, 25th September, 2022.

even class divisions could be united. It was not in principle anti-capitalist but it insisted that the capitalist system entailed mutual responsibilities. Drawing on the 'Apollonian' - 'Mercurian' distinction he says: 'The Tories in the nineteenth century became the dominant political forum by adopting the clothes of the Apollonians [Conservatism] while implementing the policies of the Mercurians [economic liberalism].' Blue Labour aims at reinstating, against the Mercurian diversion of the Blair years, the basic Apollonian character of the working class. Hence the opposition to the free movement of people and commodities through space required by 'global capitalism' - 'Globalism eliminates the possibility of politics to challenge this order, but maintains the state structure to enforce it.'

'For Labour, the obdurate persistence of the working class haunts its politics like an ancestral ghost.'

In 1996 Glasman published *Unnecessary Suffering*⁷, largely a study of the post war German economy based on a thesis he had written while at the European University Institute in Florence. In *Blue Labour* he says:

'One might say that the tragedy of contemporary European politics is that Germany remains misunderstood as exclusively fiscally conservative when this is only one aspect of its economic system. It is also characterized by a vocational economy in which self-organized institutions preserve and renew the traditions of a particular craft and regulate labour market entry; by regional banks that are constrained to lend within their region; by the significant representation of the workforce in the corporate governance of firms; and by the co-determination of pensions by capital and labour ...

'It is one of the great tragedies of European history that it did not become the basis of the political economy of the European Union, which chose globalization rather than the internationalism that

7 Maurice Glasman: *Unnecessary suffering - managing market Utopia*, London, Verso, 1996.

inspired it. Instead, Germany's model has been weakened and is at odds with the prevailing model of the EU.'

He attributes the German success largely to the initiative of Ernest Bevin as British Foreign Secretary overseeing the remodelling of Germany, calling it 'the greatest example of Labour statecraft in action, renewing and democratizing ancient institutions, reconciling estranged interests, nurturing labour power and its representation in the governance of industry, upholding liberty at the level of the state and democracy within the economy' but he complains that Bevin failed to do the same in Britain because of the strength of the top-down tradition exemplified by the Fabians. He may exaggerate Bevin's role as against the continued influence of Germany's own 'ancient institutions' but in *Unnecessary Suffering* he does elaborate on the specifically German contribution. The Term 'unnecessary suffering' derives (if I've understood him aright - p.37) from the 'Catholic critique of capitalism' developed in the nineteenth century by Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler of Mainz. The book appeals at length to Catholic social teaching (it is also concerned with the initial strength of the ideas associated with 'Solidarity' in Poland - and their subsequent defeat at the hands of the neo-liberal EU). In particular it stresses, as do the Catholic writers the importance of 'vocation', 'vocational education' and the formation of 'vocational groups'. All part of 'the dignity of labour' - title of a book by Criddas who also appeals to his own Irish Catholic political formation.

THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR

As with the passage from Cruddas quoted earlier Glasman is highly critical of the Labour emphasis on the 'knowledge economy':

'As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, for example, predicted in a 2006 speech that there would only be 600,000 low-skilled jobs by 2020.⁸ In fact, the number of

⁸ There is a confusion here which comes from Brown. The Leitch Review predicted that there would be 600,000 people without qualifications. The estimates for unskilled work were far higher, in the millions (figures from the UKCES 2010 - *Ambition 2020*: World class skills and jobs for the UK.

cleaners, cooks, security guards and builders has grown since that time. A consensus developed that what was emerging was a 'knowledge economy', where the knowledge in question was general, abstract and transferrable. This then grew into the idea of the 'creative economy', in which the mobile, the literate and the 'creative' were the basis of productivity growth and prosperity and state policy were based on increasing their number. The channelling of national resources into higher education was paralleled by the collapse of the apprenticeship system, which fell from 250,000 apprentices in 1973 to 50,000 in 2016. There are, in contrast, 2.54 million undergraduates. The key moment in the humiliation of vocation as an educational practice was the transformation of the polytechnics into universities in 1992.'

In a larger historical perspective he attributes this to the nineteenth century when 'The distinction made in the 1830s between a profession and a vocation was decisive in the degradation of vocation as a practice.'

As part of the restoration of the dignity of the vocations Glasman proposes that the long sought reform of the second chamber of Britain's legislature should be based on representation of the different vocational groups, as the House of Commons is representative of the regions:

'The Lords, in contrast, as a chamber which amends and advises, should represent vocational democracy, where people are elected from their working lives. There should be people elected from their sector, whether that be electrical or academic, medical or administrative. Doctors should elect a peer, as should nurses and cleaners. It would give an incentive to the organization of carers, builders and cleaners, who would elect a representative from within their vocation. Central to the Ancient Constitution is the idea of the balance of interests rather than the separation of the powers ... The

London), so it followed that there would be many people in the Labour Force who were overqualified, confirming Cruddas's point about the overproduction of graduates. These and related points have been developed in articles published in *Labour Affairs*.

vocational chamber would revise and amend legislation as it does now on the basis of the judgement of people who actually know what they are talking about and who are recognized as experts in their field by their peers through democratic election.'

BANKS OF ENGLAND

But the main target of Glasman's ire is now, as it has always been, the city and the emphasis British politics has placed on the financial as opposed to the manufacturing sector. He starts the book with a conversation he had with his mother: 'My Mum left school at 13 to work in a factory so she could support her four younger sisters and her ill father, who died a few months before I was born ... We watched Gordon Brown saying that it was the "destiny of labour to save the global banking system" and my Mum's eyes met mine and then she shook her head and closed her eyes.' We have become used of late to the distinction drawn in 'geopolitical' theory between sea-based and the land-based economies, with Britain as the archetypal representative of the sea and, perhaps, Russia as the archetypal representative of the land; but Glasman represents it as a conflict of interest within the polity, in this case the British polity:

'the British financial services sector, in practice, comprises two distinct systems: a global eco-system, centred on the City of London, and a local eco-system. This is not surprising. The City of London, founded by the Romans, was part of their extended maritime trade system incorporating Ostia, Piraeus and Marseilles, and was open to the sea, but they built the largest city wall in Europe to protect it from domestic pressures. From Roman times, there were two distinct economic systems: the territorial and the maritime. The domestic economy was strictly regulated; maritime trade was adventurously mercantile. The distinction between the formal and the substantive economy or the territorial and maritime economy was a central tenet of classical statecraft. Ports were placed at a distance from cities, for the sea was a place not only of tempestuous threat and piracy but also of tremendous wealth and speculation. The returns from the

domestic territorial economy were always lower than those built around long-distance voyages and insurance. The basis of the British Empire was the City of London as the hub of an oceanic maritime economy every bit as much as the Roman Empire was built around the port of Ostia and the control of the Mediterranean. The distinctiveness of maritime trade is that it was based on commodification, in which everything, from people to precious stones, had a price. In the domestic economy, neither nature nor human beings were commodities and the rates of return on investment were thus constrained. In this, the necessities of life were secured without an exclusive reliance on the price system through a range of local and national measures.'

He sees the development of capitalism since the 1970s in terms of the maritime or globalist financial interest penetrating and colonising the territorial or domestic financial interest, symbolised by the history of the Northern Counties Permanent Building Society:

'It demutualized in 1997 and became simply Northern Rock, which sponsored Newcastle United Football Club and became the fifth biggest lender in the British market. A mutually owned institution which had partnered its region in good times and bad for 147 years, which had weathered four serious depressions and emerged stronger from each, could not last through New Labour's period in government. It was nationalized in 2008 and Newcastle United came to be sponsored by Wonga, a company that began its lending at 4,000% at a time when the banks were borrowing at less than 3%. The club is now sponsored by a Chinese betting company. It is understood locally as dispossession and disinheritance.'

In this context Glasman recommends the formation of what he calls the 'Banks of England' (the book is very English oriented, there is little if any mention of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland). These 'would be constrained by charter to only invest within the area within which they are established.' A model for this is provided by the system of regional banks in Germany and Germany also provides a model

for the reform he would like to see in corporate governance. Glasman makes no mention of the Bullock Report of 1977 but he does strongly support its main argument - the need for worker representation on the boards of major industries. He evokes the very opposite approach adopted by New Labour:

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

'In New Labour's Corporate Governance Act of 2006, for the first time in British history, shareholder primacy was hard-wired into a company's statutory purpose.' As a consequence 'the maintenance of share price and its definition of assets and liabilities means that research and innovation are liabilities and intangible, and have no value in the model. In other words, the shareholder model has constrained investment.'

'The resilience of German industry was based upon two fundamental differences with Britain, both relating to corporate governance. The first was that in Germany each stakeholder interest – capital, labour and management – had access to the same information about the state of the firm and the sector and could negotiate a common response. The German High Court ruled in 1982 that co-determination took priority over the claims of shareholders as it was a matter of "public good" and this overruled the civil law concerning the ownership of capital by joint stock companies. This would have been a plausible outcome in British law if the principal/agent problem generated by establishing limited liability had not been resolved through share price alone ... In Germany, the governance and strategy of the firm became a matter of negotiation, as the workforce and their representatives gained a knowledge of economic performance and a practical role in the management of the economy. The workforce had interests in the flourishing of the firm and an internal expertise in the work of the firm and they carried risk, in terms of losing their livelihood if the company failed. The sacrifices asked of workers were balanced by their participation in the process of production as an institutional partner.'

In summary, *Blue Labour* is proposing 'three institutional changes – the establishment of vocational

colleges and an apprenticeship system for labour market entry; the endowment of the Banks of England; and changes in the corporate governance so there is a balance of interests within the firm' arguing that these 'would challenge the domination of capital while resisting state domination and control.' It's about as good a political programme as one could want. Though on foreign affairs - Glasman sees China as 'the principal threat to our democracy' - the book leaves something to be desired and we may well wonder why the 'movement' has proved so feeble in terms of practical politics.

Cruddas, in the interview with which this article began, stressed his own distance from the left wing Labour Campaign Group. But the Campaign Group, weak in the Parliamentary Labour Party, had a strong constituency in the membership and ex-membership which provided a base for Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Blue Labour may have a better sense of the nature and needs of the working class and it has a good understanding of the process by which the Labour Party has been rendered alien to the working class over the past forty or fifty years. It remains to be seen if it could provide a useful political framework for the current wave of union militancy.

'London citizens' however was an effective campaigning group that cut across, and beyond, party divisions. There is a division - call it 'Apollonian' and 'Mercurian' - that passes through the society as a whole and does not correspond to the party division. It passed through both the Brexit (Britain protecting itself against the world; Britain opening out to the world) and anti-Brexit (Europe as a closed market with a Social Democratic tradition; Europe as an open market based on neo-liberal economic theory) camps. It may be that Blue Labour should drop the emphasis on Labour, the hopes specific to the Labour Party, and attempt the sort of appeal Keynes was able to make in the nineteen thirties to the widest possible range of those peculiar people who take an interest in politics, those who know in their bones that our society is faced with near fatal problems that only politics can solve.

Working Conditions: the case of the Müller drivers

By Eamon Dyas

Members of the Unite Trade Union are currently picketing supermarkets in London to highlight an industrial dispute that has received little coverage in the media although it touches on a subject that is becoming a growing concern for workers generally – the erosion of working conditions. Some of the members of Unite who are employed at the Mullers' Foods factory in Stonehouse in Gloucestershire as delivery drivers were among those picketing the Waitrose supermarket in Greenwich, London, on Thursday, 5 January. I spoke to one of the pickets to inquire about the issues involved and what it was they hoped to achieve. He emphasized that they were not in dispute with Waitrose and did not wish to prevent customers using the store. What they wanted was to make customers of the supermarket aware of the basis of the current dispute.

The basis of that dispute as explained to me is that the management at Muller has arbitrarily broken a long-standing agreement whereby the drivers were not compelled to work every weekend in order that they could spend some weekend time with their families. Muller has torn up that agreement and is now demanding that the drivers work to shift rotas that involve them working every weekend despite the fact that this dramatically encroaches on the time they can spend with their families.

Waitrose is an important retail outlet for Muller dairy products and, in common with other larger food retailers, has a business association with Mullers through an invoice discounting arrangement. But that wasn't the only reason why the store was chosen to be picketed. More importantly was the fact that Waitrose was an employee-owned company that espouses family friendly policies for its

own employees (partners) and as this stands in marked contrast with what is currently happening at Muller they hoped that the management of the Waitrose/John Lewis Partnership could be convinced by their customers to put pressure on Muller to abandon its current policy and revert to the previous agreement that had been negotiated in good faith and which allowed the drivers to have some weekend time with their families.

For more information on this campaign and to sign the petition go to: <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/stop-muller-from-driving-families-apart?share=47c8d297-e6e7-4014-bbb5-e4e546a102ed>

This is a statement from the Unite Muller drivers:

Muller changing conditions of service.

The people responsible for running your Stonehouse Factory in Gloucestershire, UK, have broken a collective agreement on working time arrangements made with staff. This act of bad faith is having serious and negative consequences for the lives of your employees and their families.

In the UK we expect workers to be treated fairly and for agreements made in good faith to be adhered to.

Muller is a very profitable company. There is no need for your company to: Break collective agreements, undermine workers' wellbeing and disrupt workers' family lives, all for the sake of a little extra on the bottom line.

We, the undersigned, call on you to intervene personally and instruct a course correction from your UK management team to ensure:

- That workers are not driven away from their families and,
- That previously agreed working patterns are returned to

immediately

Why is this important?

What is the dispute about with Muller?

Muller has **BROKEN AN AGREEMENT** it made with workers at the Stonehouse factory in Gloucestershire and is now forcing them to work weekends every week and spend time away from their families.

Muller continues to make bumper profits whilst the driver workforce at Muller have seen their family and personal lives ripped apart by the company who have imposed these new rotas.

Can Muller change the rota system back?

Yes, Muller is an extremely wealthy company that can fully afford to keep the roster system as it was. Previously workers always worked certain weekends on a rotating basis meaning they could also have some weekends off, however the new imposed rotas see the company forcing workers to drive every weekend instead of being able to see their families.

Who is gaining from the bumper-profits whilst workers are driven away from their families at weekends?

The Muller family, primarily Theo Muller, owns the vast majority of shares in the Muller Group. According to Forbes, Theo Muller has a net worth of \$4.8 billion and is currently the 601st richest person in the world. His net worth has grown dramatically over the last decade and has almost doubled from \$2.7 billion in 2013!

What does Unite want from Muller?

- A stop to workers being driven away from their families
- A return to the previously agreed shift pattern

Muller and rail disputes: a comment by Feargus ORaghallaigh

There is an aspect to this story/dispute that has been left unmentioned and I wonder why.

It is that Muller is a German-owned milk processor. It is highly successful, concentrating on the consumer/value-added end of the business - short shelf-life chilled FMCG (yogurts and such things). Its big hit product was/is the 'Muller corner' product.

My question is this (in three parts):

A. Would Muller get away with/be allowed to do this in its home territory (Germany) or anywhere else in the EU?;

B. Would it have contemplated this course and dispute if the UK was still in the EU?; and

C. Why is this dimension not raised by the union/campaigners?

The campaign flyer mentions Theo Muller and the Muller family and a big business. It does not contextualise the situation and the issues it poses with reference to Brexit. And nor does it put it in a domestic (British) political context, that of the Tory government's attempt to create an anti-union climate in the country through creating and fomenting a series of very large-scale industrial disputes and strikes, again with strong Brexit smells in the air.

As for the rail disputes, there are broadly similar questions that are not being voiced as far as one can see; and there are additional questions and facts never raised (again as far as one can see). It is for example being suggested that the 'train operating companies' want to settle but somehow are being held back by the British government. How? What actually is the present structure of railways in Britain? On a quick and casual trawl I have found six

governments involved through publicly owned rail companies in their home territories:

the Dutch government.

the German government.

the government of Hong Kong (!!!!!) through (MTR Corp).

the Italian government.

the British government itself (through DOHL); and

the Scottish government (ScotRail and the only territory/market not in dispute)

the French government. Keolis is the SNCF front in the UK.

There is another twist to it all: the train companies (the TOCs) do not actually own their trains - the engines and carriages. They are owned by financial institutions through rolling stock companies known as ROSCOs. The rolling stock is leased to the

TOCs.

Somehow the government has managed to insert itself as a negotiating spoiler in the bargaining (I suspect through its ownership of Network Rail and DOHL). Lynch, Whelan and others are playing a blinder with their strikes and on the popular front but to my mind the populace have not really got an understanding of the (mind-bendingly lunatic) current collapsed-structure of the system - and are not being given any such understanding (not least by the Labour Party).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%BCller_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%BCller_(company))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_companies_operating_trains_in_the_United_Kingdom

THE COLONIAL MINDSET

Oh dear, I wish I could remember who said it

but it had to do with someone killing 25 Taliban from a helicopter gunship, or was it a scam.

US soldier Manning reported such a hit. and was sent to the torture of a silent cell.

The 25 killer was cleaning the world of those his ilk had created, the armed churl,

and who would eventually send them to hell.

Don't kill Saddam and then complain about ISIS.

Don't oppress the NI Catholic and not expect payback.

Don't arm Ukraine and moan about the economy wrecked.

Don't taunt China and then call it their crisis.

Don't make the human race dispensable.

Don't... But you will, you who are reprehensible.

Wilson John Haire. 12th January, 2023.

Ukrainian refugees and the “small boat” asylum seekers

By Eamon Dyas

By the end of July 2022, the U.K. government had estimated that 104,000 Ukrainian refugees had arrived in the UK in the previous 5 months. [See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100000-ukrainians-welcomed-to-safety-in-the-uk>]

By the 24th of August 2022 data compiled by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford showed that over 115,200 Ukrainian refugees were officially living in the UK. [See: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/qa-the-uk-and-the-ukraine-refugee-situation/>]

By the end of September, according to *The Telegraph* that figure had risen to 134,200 Ukrainian refugees being accommodated in the UK. [See: 134,200 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the UK – now what?, *The Telegraph*, 11 October, 2022].

Then in an article published in the *Guardian* on 21 January 2023 it gave a figure of “more than 150,000 Ukrainians who came to the UK under the sponsorship scheme or to stay with relatives”. [See: “Ukrainian families vent frustration at struggle to find own homes in UK”, the *Guardian*, 21 January, 2023].

So, just to put this into perspective. In the ten months since the UK began officially accommodating Ukrainians fleeing in early March 2022 these Ukrainians have been processed at the average rate of over 13,600 a month and cleared for residence in the UK by the Home Office.

Aside from a few minor glitches the UK Government seemed to have no problem in accommodating this significant influx of people arriving in the country over a very short period of time.

Now, let us compare this with those seeking asylum in the UK from other parts of the world. There are currently more than 100,000 asylum claims outstanding in the UK. Which is to say, that over 100,000 non-Ukrainian asylum seekers are awaiting processing by the Home Office. However, these are not asylum seekers that are about to have their claim heard at the rate provided by the Home Office for the Ukrainians. Unlike the Ukrainian asylum seekers many of these are currently waiting to have their application processed from

periods of between one and two years with 96% of asylum claims from 2021 still remaining unresolved.

So, in terms of the speed in which asylum seekers are processed by the UK Home Office there is obviously a system of apartheid in operation that favours those from Ukraine. But the situation is far more inequitable than that. On 4 March, 2022, within days of the start of the Russian Special Military Operation and before it could have known what actual impact that operation would have on the citizens of Ukraine the UK Government initiated a scheme that quickly became three schemes designed to provide facilities to make it easier for Ukrainians to transit to the UK. Visa Processing Centres (VPCs) were established in Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and France to enable Ukrainians to quickly gain the required permission to travel to the UK by plane or any other means of transport where they had the right to live, work, or study and where they had immediate access to social welfare and health benefits. The Government made it even easier for Ukrainians to pass the entry requirement by stipulating that an international passport or any official document verifying the applicant's identity was not even a requirement for a visa. According to the official UK Government website “It is not mandatory to provide these documents, but it may help support your application if you are able to.” [See section under “Prove your identity” at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa>]. In other words, the speed and level to which the official application requirements were eased was unprecedented in comparison to the treatment of other groups of people fleeing a conflict area.

Then there was the manner in which the Government sponsored (and itself provided) homes for these refugees in many cases before they even arrived in the UK. Thousands of British people opened their homes out of feelings of sympathy engendered by the skewed reporting of the conflict by the media which based its reporting on the false claim that the whole of Ukraine was being invaded by Russian troops. Although there are undoubtedly many who experienced displacement as a result of having lived in conflict areas

of country the vast mass of the area of Ukraine remained at this time free of the conflict. Therefore, the extent to which those provided with visas were genuinely displaced persons or simply those who understandably took advantage of the British Government's offer in order to seek a better life remains unknown.

There is of course, a difference between the normal procedure by which asylum seekers are processed for the right to remain permanently in the UK and the unique procedures established for Ukrainian refugees. The Ukrainians who have been accommodated in the UK through the three Government schemes are only provided with visas that enable them to remain in the UK for three years. But what happens after that is unclear. As the Migration Observatory says: “For all three schemes, it is not clear whether visa holders will be able to extend their stay beyond three years, or whether the visa will ever provide a pathway to settlement (permanent residence).” In fact, judging by much of what is reported on the lives of those Ukrainians currently living in the UK, it seems to be an assumption on the part of many that they will continue to remain in the UK longer than their currently allotted time. In that regard it is difficult to see how the majority of the 150,000 currently in the UK under these schemes, could be forcibly sent home, at the expiry of their permitted stay. Such a prospect becomes increasingly impractical in view of the way in which Britain and the rest of NATO continue to encourage the Ukrainian Government to persist with the war on Russia and with it the further destruction of the country until large areas of it become uninhabitable. And even if such a prospect was realistic who would want to return to a country where their future has been made untenable through the long-term instability of the region that the NATO war on Russia has generated?

But to get back to the relative treatment of asylum seekers other than the Ukrainian version by the UK Government. This is something that was further amplified by the disgraceful conditions revealed at the Dover processing centre in early 2022. After the firebombing of a separate processing centre the inhabitants were

moved to the Manston Asylum Centre, also in Dover. The Manston facility is an old military base that was converted into a migrant processing centre in February 2022 (note that date) with facilities that were designed to house between 1,000 and 1,600 immigrants whose claim for asylum was meant to be processed within 24 hours. This processing was not necessarily one which at the end of it resulted in a decision to grant or deny asylum but merely to establish basic facts about the person applying. In those cases where an asylum claim is denied such people (usually those with a criminal record in their home country) are moved to immigration detention centres while they await removal from the U.K. But in the majority of cases the applicant is moved to temporary accommodation in guest houses or hotels while their claim is subjected to further investigation. The object was to complete this initial process within 24 hours and thus free up the space for the next batch of arrivals at the Manston processing centre. The Home Office claims that this cycle of arrival, checking and dispatch within 24 hours (or maybe they conceded, a bit longer), was operating quite satisfactorily for the larger part of this year. While that may or may not be true, it seems that by the end of October the Manston facility was housing around 4,000 so obviously the situation had been deteriorating for some time before then. This extreme overcrowding meant that the 4,000 people living there were having to tolerate conditions that included inadequate hot water, unsatisfactory food provision and filthy toilet conditions for those who were now having to stay there for periods long beyond the original planned-for 24 hour period. In fact, David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, has highlighted one case where an Afghan family had been held at the facility for 32 days (see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-63456015>). Needless to say, these conditions led to many incidents of mental and physical ill health including an outbreak of diphtheria and one death.

Because of the reported conditions at the Manston Asylum Centre the Public and Commercial Services Union and the charity Detention Action brought a legal challenge against the Home Office and on 22 November 2022 the Government announced it had closed the facility. More details of the conditions experienced by inmates and

their treatment at the centre later came to light. These included the case of a young woman who complained that she had been forced to sleep on the floor in filthy and degrading conditions for 21 days near men who were strangers to her, a family with young children forced to sleep on flattened cardboard boxes with toilets overflowing with excrement and a lack of washing facilities and no clean clothes as well as several complaints of physical violence by security staff against inmates. [See: “Calls for public inquiry into abuses at Manston asylum centre in Kent”, the *Guardian*, 4 January, 2023]. It also emerged that 100 asylum seekers who had been held at Manston for more than the 24-hour limit had brought unlawful detention charges against the Home Office. It looks like the Home Office has since the exposure of the conditions at Manston quietly changed the rules for other facilities meant to serve a similar purpose. Under this change, from 5 January 2023 it became lawful to hold people for 96 hours rather than the previous 24 hours.

The thing about the Manston Asylum Centre was that it was designed to house a specific type of asylum seeker – those that arrived in the UK in small boats. This is something that represents a relatively new phenomenon in Britain among asylum seekers and appears to be an indirect outcome of Brexit. Previously, while the UK was part of the EU, it was easier for those seeking entry to the UK to use the regular ferry services (usually from France or Belgium) but after Brexit the process was tightened to the extent that those seeking entry were compelled in an increasing number of instances to use whatever form of transport was available and this was usually small boats.

These small boat people are now considered the lowest class of asylum seeker at the same time as those from Ukraine are treated as a better and more deserving type of asylum seeker. The mindset associated with this categorisation is revealed in the double standards applied to them by our politicians. Addressing the House of Commons on the issue of the UK’s asylum system on 13 December 2022, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak claimed that the problem related to people who came in the small boats had come to the UK having from “relatively safe countries or travelled through safe countries”. The implication being that there was no real reason why these

people should have left their homeland in the first place or that, having decided to travel, could have decided to seek asylum in another safe country that they had travelled through. That may or may not be the case. The issue here is not the relative legitimacy of these people’s motivation. The issue is the double standards that this implies when it comes to the Ukrainian version of the asylum seeker. As already indicated, if this standard of legitimacy was applied to the Ukrainians from March 2022 onwards many would have been found to have emanated from areas of Ukraine that were untouched by the war and all of them would have travelled through other intervening safe countries before they reached the UK. Likewise, Sunak claimed that the small-boat category of asylum seeker was in many cases “co-ordinated by ruthless, organised criminals”. Again, to what extent have similar corrupt agencies in Ukraine been involved in exploiting the European systems established to facilitate the Ukrainian asylum seekers? We simply do not know because it has not been politically acceptable to question anything to do with the way in which these facilities have been established and how they have been exploited but given the extent to which Ukraine has been tainted by corruption for many years such corrupt practices cannot be ruled out.

The Government has given the figure for the number of asylum seekers arriving on UK shores in small boats in 2022 as 45,756. This means that the facilities established by the Home Office to process this particular type of asylum seeker were incapable of processing just under 46,000 such claims in a year. Hence the problems at Manston. Compare this failure with the achievement of the same Home Office in successfully processing around 150,000 Ukrainians between March and December 2022. There are calls for a public inquiry into the scandal at Manston but the possibility of such an inquiry revealing that the reasons for the failure at Manston was a direct result of the diversion of Home Office resources to the processing of Ukrainian applications might mean that such an inquiry, if it is to take place at all, would in all probability not operate to a remit that made that conclusion possible.

Rail Dispute: Who's in Charge?

By Peter Whitelegg

The revised offer (19/1/23) lauded by much of the media is nothing more than a charter for the complete dismemberment of anything approaching decent employment conditions. With no pay rise in many cases for 4 years, and inflation running above 10%, the current offer of 5% for the current year and 4% for 2023 goes nowhere near addressing the devaluation of earnings over the past 4 years. But as the leadership of the RMT has said on numerous occasions this is not solely about money.

I have covered the details of the changes required by the government in a previous article. The current offer does not materially change any of the demands made by the government.

The RDG will require all staff to have "flexible" working contracts combined with no "home" station. This will inevitably enable the employer to turn every employee into casual labour but with a permanent (of sorts) contract. One week you will be working 20hrs in one location the next 46 hours in a completely different location.

New annual leave and sick entitlements will be imposed, it is clear these will not be an improvement on the current terms. All booking offices to be closed and the staff "repurposed". This will inevitably lead to the removal of many services and products the traveling public require. It is clear the RDG want to significantly reduce the working conditions for rail workers.

A core claim by the RDG is that the concessions in working conditions is essential to an improved rail service. As far as I recall that's always been the claim by the privatised rail companies during industrial disputes. It's the existence of archaic working conditions that are standing in the way of a better rail service, according to them. If the unions concede on conditions, it will lead to an improved service. But the long-promised improvements never arrive. It has proved to be a false equation.

Indeed, profitability is at the heart of the current crisis.

Prior to covid the franchise model was essentially collapsing. The Tocs (Train Operating Companies) were finding it increasingly difficult to make any money. Much of the rail network had reached full capacity and with a chronic lack of investment over many years. Under the franchising model companies bid for the right to run rail services on certain routes. Provided they maintained payments to the treasury and operated within the specifications of the franchise arrangements, Rail companies were free to negotiate and settle with the unions.

What is generally not understood within this arrangement is the rail infrastructure has, for the most part, been retained by the state. Ownership of the core rail infrastructure has not changed ownership even under the franchise model. Essentially it has been a rentier model. This is the case more so now under the new management contracts.

Post covid all Tocs were placed on management contracts. No bidding process. The current crop of operators, regardless of their performance, were simply rewarded with new contracts. All Tocs are now run on a management fee basis. This means the rail companies take none of the revenue risk. The risk is now taken by the tax payer. If there is a fall in passenger numbers for whatever reason, the rail companies will still receive the contracted fees, but any revenue short fall will ultimately be met by you and me, the tax payer. A licence to print money.

Over the duration of the current rail industrial action, there has been considerable discussion on who, ultimately, the rail unions are negotiating with. Who has the final say on any settlement and who sets the framework within which talks take place.

Mick Lynch, General Secretary of the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Union) has stated on numerous occasions it is the government, in particular, the Secretary of State for Transport, who is responsible as the contract

holder for deciding the terms of any resolution.

Both the current and previous Secretary of State for Transport have asserted that it is for the employers to negotiate any settlement to the dispute. Mark Harper, the current SoS has said "On the specifics about detail, detailed negotiations are taking place between employers and trade unions. It is not the Government's role to micromanage the detail of the reform".

The Department for Transport has also stated that:

"It's extremely misleading to suggest the Transport Secretary should get involved in these negotiations."

The trade unions are not saying the government should get involved in the dispute, they are insisting they are already involved, deeply involved.

The rail companies have a duty to inform the SoS, within 3 weeks of any communication, written or verbal, from a trade union concerning any "In-Scope" matters. In -Scope matters include pretty much everything that a union might want to negotiate on:

- (a) pay negotiation strategies;
- (b) changes to any remuneration strategy, pension arrangements or staff benefits;
- (c) any proposed restructuring or redundancy plans;
- (d) any proposed changes affecting Business Employees...which either Party reasonable believes is likely to give rise to material industrial relations risks (including a risk of Industrial Action).
- (e) any proposed variations to terms and conditions of employment of any Business Employee... ..
- (h) any negotiation or consultation strategies regarding any of the matters at (a) to (g) above.

If the rail operator fails to fulfil their obligations within the mandate, then any cost will be borne by the rail operator rather than the DfT.

Michael Ford QC comments:

"The broad intention and practical

effect of this is to prevent any discussions or negotiations with unions about any changes to workers' pay, pension, benefits or terms and conditions, or about any proposed redundancies or termination benefits, unless and until a "Mandate" has been agreed with the SoS. Once the Mandate in relation to those matters is agreed with the SoS, the Operator must act in accordance with it."

Clearly the government, and in particular the Secretary of State, have the final say in any settlement as well as setting the agenda for the rail industry as a whole. The government cannot maintain the position that this is just a simple industrial dispute between the employers and the union. The contracts with the rail companies explicitly state that all decisions concerning the direction the rail industry takes is theirs, that is, the government's, to take. At the core of this dispute is a political agenda by the current government that seeks to permanently reduce, not just the wages of rail workers, but to drive a coach and horses through their terms and conditions. Only by doing this can the government guarantee the excessive profits of unaccountable rail companies.

The Revised Offer

19th January 2023

TO ALL TRAIN OPERATING
COMPANY GENERAL GRADES
MEMBERS (excluding Drivers)

Dear Colleague,

DEFEND JOBS, PAY &
CONDITIONS – TRAIN
OPERATING COMPANIES_

RMT has today received a set of revised proposals from the Rail Delivery Group, which acts on behalf of the 14 Train Operating Companies in our current dispute over Jobs, Conditions and Pay.

The proposals include detailed documentation covering a range of issues that affect all of our grade groups at these companies and will require serious and careful consideration. The proposals on pay and job security are directly conditional on cost savings and alterations to contractual terms, entitlements, and working practices. RMT has not agreed to this set of proposals or any of the elements within them.

Your National Executive Committee will be considering the matter this afternoon and I will write to you again directly after the NEC has made a decision and given me instructions.

The main elements of the proposals are as follows:

Station Ticket Offices: All to be closed or "re-purposed", subject to the statutory public consultation process, which RMT does not support.

Creation of a new Multi-Skilled Station Grade: station retailing and other grades to be aligned and migrated to new grading and competence structure with some

salary protections. There will be a new salary structure for new entrants.

On-Board Train Crew Roles: the proposal to introduce Driver Only Operation has been withdrawn. However, companies have stated they could separately make proposals on train crewing through their own companies, separate to this dispute.

Train Crew Codes of Practice: the companies have devised detailed codes of practice covering training, diagramming and rostering to be implemented in pursuit of efficiency.

7-Day Railway: a Sunday Commitment Protocol is proposed which will make Sunday working mandatory when rostered, if cover cannot be provided.

Catering: all catering services to be reviewed on the basis of affordability and value for the companies.

Fleet Engineering: proposed implementation of new technology and process.

Training and Briefing: new practices and technology for safety critical and other training.

Terms & Conditions: there are various other proposals on contractual terms and entitlements, including:

Flexible Working Contracts for new starters

New Technology / Equipment to be adopted without additional payment

Station Groups – with staff covering a cluster of stations rather than a home station

Attendance Management – industry-wide principles based on ACAS guidelines

Stood Off Arrangements to be reviewed

Annual Leave Entitlements – new industry-wide entitlements; all staff to have Christmas Day and Boxing Day deducted from general entitlement

Sick Pay to be redefined with more stages but with existing entitlement for those with 5+ years service_

Company Health Appointments / Medicals etc will normally be during shift working time

Review of former BR Conditions of Service: a joint review of those retained conditions, to align with modern working practices

Voluntary Severance Scheme: a Voluntary Severance Scheme which will see circa 800 jobs removed, in addition to approximately 800 already removed from the TOCs on the previous round of VSS.

It is a condition of the proposals (with the exception of ticket office closures) that all of the above must be accepted and implemented in order for the following to be offered:

Job Security: No compulsory redundancies before 31st December 2024_

Pay:

A 5% increase or £1750, whichever is the greater, effective from the respective 2022 anniversary date

A 4% increase, effective from the respective 2023 anniversary date_

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynch

General Secretary

Meanwhile in the private sector...

We are told there is no money for Public Service workers but at the same time, workers and their unions in the private sector are winning substantial pay increases. Three recent examples are set out below:

Tanker drivers gain huge rise after walkout threat

LOGISTICS workers were celebrating yesterday after their threat to go on strike led to them winning a “huge pay victory” worth close to 40 per cent for some staff.

About 150 Unite members employed by Wincanton to deliver fuel to Valero petrol stations nationwide showed “complete unity” by voting for walkouts, which will not now take place, the transport union said.

As part of the deal, tier- one tanker drivers will receive an inflation-busting wage rise of 20.7 per cent, while those on tier-two contracts will see their pay skyrocket by 37.1 per cent.

The package is designed to “reduce the differential between the two groups of workers,” Unite noted.

General secretary Sharon Graham said: “This pay increase further underlines how Unite’s commitment to the jobs, pay and conditions of its members is paying substantial financial dividends.”

National officer Tony Devlin added that the out- come “further demonstrates that Unite’s strategy in the downstream oil distribution sector is delivering while the union continues to ensure that all tanker drivers receive a fair pay increase.”

Rolls Royce workers win inflation busting wage rise

ABOUT 1,200 workers at Goodwood’s iconic Rolls- Royce factory have won the “largest single pay deal in the history of the plant,” Unite hailed yesterday.

The inflation-busting package, worth 17.6 per cent, will see staff at the site in West Sussex pocket an extra £3,205 a year alongside a one-off payment of £2,000, the union said.

General secretary Sharon Graham praised the “top notch pay deal,” saying: “Rolls- Royce Motor Cars are famous and iconic because of the workers’ craft and expertise.

“For years the workers had been underpaid and undervalued but that’s changing — the union has won the best pay deal since the site opened.

“This is a testament to the organising efforts of Unite reps at Goodwood and it’s also proof that our union’s laser sighted focus on jobs, pay and conditions

is winning for workers.”

Staff at the plant, who had overwhelmingly voted to go on strike during the dispute, build some of the world’s most expensive luxury cars, including the Ghost, Wraith and Cullinan.

The Rolls-Royce brand is owned by BMW, which reported total sales of an eye-watering £13.5 billion in the first half of this year.

The union’s regional co- ordinating officer Scott Kemp noted that the site’s employees have been paid the “worst in the premium end of the industry for years.

“Goodwood is the so- called ‘house of luxury’ and it’s high time workers had their well-earned share of that reflected in their pay and conditions.”

A company spokesperson said it is “pleased that Unite supported and recommended a positive pay deal,” saying: “Negotiations were cordial and constructive throughout.”

https://morningstaronline.co.uk/system/files/pdf-editions/M_Star_171222.pdf

Outsourced council staff win huge pay boost

Morning Star 24/1/23

STRIKING parking attendants and CCTV operators in west London have won a vastly improved pay deal worth

up to 19.7 per cent, the Unite union said yesterday.

The workers, employed by Serco in the boroughs of Ealing and Brent, began a two-week strike on January 18, as did those in Hounslow.

Unite members in the latter borough now stand alone in the action and will continue to strike until the end of the month unless bosses deliver a fair pay deal, the union said.

The outsourcing giant reported its latest profits as £303.9 million.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “It was clear from the start that Serco could pay workers more money in Ealing and Brent.

“It took strike action to bring the employer to the negotiating table to agree fair pay.

“What remains outstanding is that Serco and council bosses in Hounslow are still refusing address the scandal of low pay.”

Unite acting national officer Clare Keogh added: “Council workers in Hounslow continue to face real financial hardship.

“If the money can be found in Brent and Ealing, then Hounslow must come out of the cold and pay workers a decent rate.”

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with that concession at the time being also dressed up with the promise that such arrangements at the time would lead to some alleviation of the conditions experienced by the London travelling public. Similarly, the radical drop or complete removal of station staff that had previously been demanded. Again, that was something that was heralded at the time as a key that would open the lock to a better service and again there was no such tangible gain for the public. In fact, quite the opposite.

All this shows that the current repetition of the same claim should be treated with a high level of scepticism by the travelling public. After all these years and all these rounds of concessions on working conditions by the trade unions, experience has shown that a dilution in these working conditions does not equate with an improved level of service. What it does equate to is better margins on the books of the private rail companies. In the face of all this, the fact that the RDG continues to make the claim that more driver-only trains will lead to better services shows that they are aware of the falsity of that claim and are cynically using it to conceal what is simply another means by which they can improve their profitability while at the same time eroding the bedrock on which trade unions continue to have a claim on worker loyalty – the legacy of their role in creating improvements in working conditions.

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The BBC account, “Train drivers offered pay rise in bid to end strikes”, is at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-64191654>

Working conditions: the case of the railways

By Eamon Dyas

In its report on the recent pay offer to the railway workers, the BBC acts as the public relations department of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) in the way it frames the offer.

Not only is the 4% on offer miserly in itself but it is made conditional on the rail unions accepting the wholesale erosion of existing working conditions. This tendency on the part of employers to make pay offers conditional on the acceptance of an erosion of long-held working conditions has been a feature of industrial relations negotiations for many years now. We have yet to witness an instance when employers offer improved working conditions as part of such negotiations. Improvements in working conditions are almost exclusively the result of trade union actions and campaigns.

Successful trade union actions that result in improvements in pay and conditions act as an example and provide a benchmark for the wider workforce and trade unions have traditionally viewed negotiations leading to such improvements in that context. A win for one is a win for all and as such these kind of concessions are instinctively resisted by employers. Employers also know that, faced with a determined and organised workforce, they usually have to make concessions to bring industrial actions to a close – at least they would if left to their own devices which because of government interference does not appear to be the case in the current rail dispute. However, all things being equal that is usually the case. And what is also usually the case is that employers would prefer to concede on pay than on conditions. Because of this, negotiations normally take place against a backdrop of an employer strategy that seeks to concentrate on what may prove attractive to the individual employee in terms of pay but also involves a dissolution of conditions.

In this way the attraction of an individual worker's improved take-home pay is couched in a surrounding package that not only ensures that the

improved pay offer pays for itself (or at least goes a long way in paying for itself) but erodes the legacy of the collective concept of the worker as expressed in the trade union's capacity to generate improvement in the shared working conditions of employees. This is undoubtedly a component of what is behind the thinking of the government and the RDG in the manner in which it lays out the working conditions concessions it demands as part of the miserly 4% pay offer. See for example the demand that the unions agree to "part-time and flexible working" – an arrangement by which workers would be expected to come to their own arrangements for working patterns separate from the work-rosters previously agreed through the collective input of the trade unions.

But, of course this is not how it is presented by the media. The reality is that modern corporate employers view industrial disputes not only as a temporary problem but also as an opportunity to impose new (and to them, more profitable) working conditions on the workforce – Murdoch's handling of the 1986 print workers dispute was an early and dramatic example of this thinking. Large employers can afford to think this way because they are not exclusively reliant on the income that is generated from a single business entity but rather have access to different revenue streams or because they have the backing of the Government, or both. However, unlike Murdoch and the print workers dispute, the private sector companies that operate the railways are supposed to be supplying a public service and as such they have to explain themselves not only to their shareholders but to the travelling public. It is here that the media performs an important role.

The culpability of both the Government and the RDG in the creation of the current discomfort experienced by the rail traveling public needs to be disguised as something that somehow is in their

long-term interest. Pain now, gain later. In that regard the travelling public need to be kept "informed" of why the employers are acting as they are and why, in acting as they are, they are acting in the travelling public's long-term interest. By now, almost thirty years since the railways began to be de-nationalised, the abject failure of that experiment has well and truly become obvious in the majority of the travelling public which makes it criminally obscene that Labour is not pushing for a complete re-nationalisation of this essential service. But the extent of that failure cannot be admitted and so there continues to be the need to hold out the prospect of an improvement within the current set-up.

It is in that context that the RDG and all the other business cohorts that operate the rail system and generate their profits from it make the claim that it is the existence of archaic working conditions that is standing in the way of a better rail service. If only the unions concede on working conditions it will lead to an improved service. But the spurious nature of that equation between the dissolution of rail employee's working conditions and an improved service has, like the promise held out by the privatisation of the network nearly thirty years ago, been entirely discredited by experience. How many rounds of industrial negotiations in the rail industry since the time it was taken out of public ownership has resulted in some working conditions concession or other on the part of the unions and yet it resulted in no or little improvement. An example is my own service, South-East Rail, but it applies to one extent or another to all the commuter-serving rail companies. They all operate to a fare structure that is among the most expensive in Europe and they have all become a byword for unreliable services everywhere in the London region. Yet all of them, as far as I know, operate driver-only trains and have done so for many, many years

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