

The Plebs News

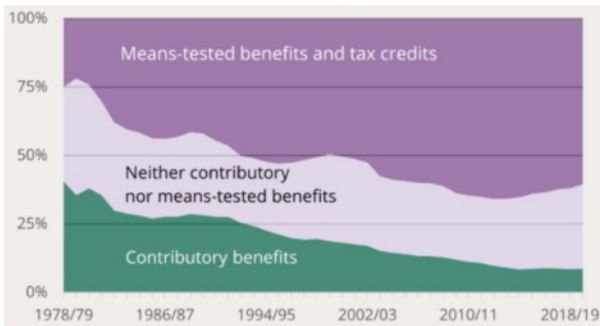
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The Universal Welfare State - v Means Testing

Taxing the Winter Fuel Payment is preferable to a return to memories of the 1930's



Two things that cause the most controversy and debate in modern politics, tax and benefits, are rarely out of the headlines. The decision to cut the Winter Fuel Allowance from millions of pensioners and to restrict it to means testing has been to the forefront of the end of the new Labour Government's "honeymoon". During the election, and now leading to the Spending Review, tax is also being debated with austerity appearing to be the answer to both.

The term "means testing" still carries the memories of the horrific use of the term in 1930's Britain and it was this that so angered Beveridge, the original author of the Welfare State Report. In his report, Beveridge says that the means-test is offered 'only on terms which make men unwilling to have recourse to it', and they 'penalise what people have come to regard as the duty and pleasure of thrift, of putting pennies away for a rainy day'.

Throughout the report, he is clear that the minimum benefits he proposes 'should be given as of right and without means-test, so that individuals may build freely upon it', and that 'no means-test of any kind can be applied to the benefits of the scheme'. For many of today's pensioners the stigma still means that up to 750,000 are unwilling or unable to claim the additional Pensions Credit to which they are entitled. It also sets up an arbitrary line between the deserving and the undeserving setting up an impossible access to fairness.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies report on benefits shows that means testing of benefits has been a feature of the neo liberal age of the UK system and is now no longer the political dividing line of old between Labour and the rest. The result is divisive in an already divisive political landscape. The tax element also comes into play with some arguing that why should they be taxed if access to benefits is restricted. We end up with a system of bureaucratic, stigmatised and divisive system.

If there is a shortage of Government finance then surely a universal system with everything subjected to a tax system and benefit system universally applied is a sound political way forward to unify opinion and to save on a stigmatising and bureaucratic system. And probably cheaper in the long run.

On this subject, and many more, our politicians will have to realise that in a complex society the health and well being of the individual cannot be separated from the health and well being of the nation. This was the lesson of the post war generation and the likes of Beveridge, Bevan and Attlee. It is a sound principle and can be a unifying one at a time of divisive politics willing citizens to pay what is due in return for the protection that collective provision bring.

Against Means-Testing; OR, I Agree with Tony Benn (on this issue)

Edrith <https://www.edrith.co.uk/p/against-means-testing-or-i-agree-with-tony-benn>

Means testing(1) is everywhere these days. It's in maintenance grants and child benefit, job-seeker's allowance and housing benefit and much more. Sometimes it seems that almost every new policy proposal involves means-testing. So how did it get to this stage, when means-testing should be anathema to both left and right wing?

For those on the left, opposition to means testing has its very roots in the Labour party. Attlee's government swept to power in 1945 after campaigning to abolish what seems to be generally referred to as 'the hated means test': Tony Benn writes that, "The welfare state, then still in its early days, was based on the total rejection of the hated means test..."

It is easy to see why. Means-testing, despite being nominally progressive, creates division and resentment within society, ranging from the simple example of the bullying of a child on free school meals to the more complex development of narratives about 'strivers' and 'scroungers'. Furthermore, it fundamentally undermines support for government services and welfare provision. What are the public services in the UK that enjoy the most popular support, the ones that politicians underfund at their political peril? They are, almost without exception, universal ones: the NHS, the state pension and school education. Contrast this with the public attitude towards most means-tested or conditional benefits. Means-testing something significantly increases its chance of being cut or abolished.

Recognising that people may reasonably be suspicious of me when I say the left should oppose something, allow me to quote some left-wingers of impeccable credentials. You've had Tony Benn; let's add Nye Bevan, who said that the means-test is "a principle that eats like an acid into the homes of the poor. In the small rooms and around the meagre tables of the poor, hells of personal acrimony and wounded vanity arise." More recently, Frank Fields, the veteran Labour MP for Birkenhead who nominated Jeremy Corbyn for the leadership, has written that "Means tests paralyse self-help, discourage self improvement and tax honesty. Means tests attack the basis of independent citizenship and community cohesion and at the same time incentivise bad behaviour."

This may be one of the few times you hear me say this, but I agree with them all.

From the perspective of the right, the argument against means-testing is simpler but no less cogent. Means-testing is a stealth-tax on the rich, a disincentive for hard work and striving and an unfair penalisation for the fortunate. It encourages profligacy and discourages thrift, rewarding the feckless and punishing the prudent saver. It unfairly hits the 'stretched middle' and 'ordinary working families', those who are not the super-rich but who are nevertheless denied government support. It creates moral hazard, increasing the burden on the state.

I agree with all of this, too.

Perhaps the most damning indictment of means-testing; however, is that it does nothing that could not be done better by straight-forward progressive taxation and redistribution. By all means let's have an honest debate about the level of taxation we want on income and wealth, and the right and the left can disagree here and make their arguments for and against. But surely we can agree that, if we're interested in reducing wealth inequality, then to quote Benn again, we tax people for being rich, not for being educated - or for having children, or for being homeless, or for anything else. We might legitimately disagree on how much we want to tax someone earning £20,000, £50,000 or £250,000 a year, but there's surely no good reason why anyone would want to tax someone on a given salary more simply because they have children or are disabled.

Why is it so popular? The easy answer would be just to blame Tony Blair, but that would be unfair. Whilst its undoubtedly true that he and Brown presided over a great increase in means-testing, it was being used before and has been used afterwards. So why?

A major factor, I suspect, is due to compromise. Sometimes people want to introduce a particular policy, but don't have enough money - maybe they know they can't get a tax rise through - to make it universal, so they bring it in with means testing. Maybe other people want to abolish a policy, so they can cut taxes (or reduce borrowing) but know that they'll be outcry if they abolish it for everyone, so they means test it. Then there are other people who, with a limited amount of money (genuinely) want to help those most in need and means-testing is a way of making it go further. And finally there are people who focus on the trees rather than the forest - or maybe only have responsibility for a particular policy - and so take the view that they're going to make their particular policy 'progressive', because that's a way of helping the poor, ignoring the negative impact it causes on the system as a whole. In other words, a lot of well-meaning aspirations, rather than malice.

And so we end up with means-testing everywhere. And the trouble is, it then becomes so widespread that other policy makers, think tanks, and so on start suggesting it because its the done thing - and even start actively criticising those who oppose it, whether from the right to the left. The whole-sale adoption of means-testing by the establishment is a good example of the way technocratic managerialism masquerades as 'centrism', when in reality it's abandoned the the principles of both right or left.

What can be done? When a policy has become so intertwined in the apparatus of the state, it's hard to reverse it. And it's often doesn't seem the most pressing: as set out above, there are often tempting reasons to accept any individual proposal of means-testing.

But at the least, we could remember the severely negative systemic impacts of means-testing - that's true whether you care more about the arguments from the right or the left, or both. We could stop automatically assuming each new policy proposal should be means-tested, or reaching for means-testing as an easy way to save money, instead seeing it as a last resort to be used only when the benefits really do outweigh the costs. And we could look to slowly restoring universal provision, one service or benefit at a time, until we have once again 'abolished the hated means test'.

(1) A definitional point. By means testing I mean testing eligibility for a certain benefit or government provided service by the wealth or income of the recipient.



Why has the UK's social security system become so means-tested?

Nicholas Timmins (The Institute for Government and The King's Fund)¹

Why indeed has the UK's social security system become so means-tested? After all, it was not designed to operate that way.

2023

Trapped in poverty by our social security system

Tom Pollard- New Economics Foundation

‘They don't even help you anymore, they don't actually do anything.’ Women speak out about their experiences of Jobcentres and social security.

Living Income

The Labour Party last month erupted into a furore over Keir Starmer’s refusal to commit to a change to the current two-child limit on social security. Just weeks later, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced that the number of people who do not have a job due to long-term sickness has risen to another record high.

The need for an adequate, fair and effective social security system has never been more evident. Food bank usage is higher now than during the pandemic and 39% of households are struggling to afford a decent standard of living. As the cost of living crisis has rolled on, the weakest income safety net in 40 years has enabled poverty and destitution to encompass more families than at any point in recent times.

The entrenchment of poverty is disproportionately hitting women. The reasons for this are multiple: women take on the greater portion of caring responsibilities, 57% of cuts to social security and tax credits since 2010 are borne by women, and women’s wages are hammered by the gender pay gap. When paired with ethnicity, disability or age, the likelihood of a woman experiencing poverty is significantly increased.

Since the beginning of the year, we have been exploring these experiences, developing a deeper understanding of the issues women in the north – west of England face as they navigate our social security system. What we found, supported by a growing body of evidence, has revealed that the social security system is locking women and children in deep poverty, preventing access to jobs that pay a living wage and match up with caring responsibilities and skills.

The 16 women we spoke to highlighted that income support is both insufficient and unreliable. Most stated that they experience constant financial strain, making it difficult for them to plan or save money. They were often forced into a cycle of debt:

“You can’t afford to live. So you’re borrowing money all month, and then, when you get paid, you’re paying people back and then borrowing again. So you’re constantly in debt as well.”

35-year-old single mother with one child, receiving universal credit and disability living allowance

Many of the women will skip meals or forego new clothes for themselves in an attempt to shield their children from the harshest realities of poverty. But the meagre social security and wages they have to live on can make these efforts futile, perpetuating a cycle of financial instability that corrodes their mental and physical health:

“My mental health is just shocking constantly. Like, it’s just one thing after another. I’m constantly getting phone calls, letters saying I owe this, I owe that and I’m sitting there like, ‘I don’t know what I’m expected to do if I’m borrowing at the end of the month to buy food for the girls or to buy food for myself.’”

29-year-old woman with two children, receiving universal credit

Unanimously criticised by the women in our research, the two-child limit restricts income support for families with more than two children. Most of the households affected by the policy are already in work and typically include single mothers and Black and minority ethnic (BAME) families from ethnic minorities.

The women in our research feel that the two-child limit removes their self-determination and autonomy over their lives and that of their families. In some instances, it leads to the erosion of women’s bodily autonomy.

The policy can coerce and control women's reproductive choices, pressuring some to terminate pregnancies as a direct consequence:

“Regardless if I work or not work, I should be able to support a new baby, and you can't, you can't at all. It's a horrible world we live in [...] I'd say the benefits system that I was on has made me [end the pregnancy].”

28-year-old woman with two children, receiving universal credit and disability living allowance

Another repeating theme was the two-way link between being locked in poverty and the various barriers to securing good work. For example, several of the women shared that childcare costs are difficult to manage on zero-hour contracts or with fluctuating work incomes.

Some live under the threat of benefit sanctions that they say pressure them to accept any available job regardless of its wage, long-term stability, or suitability in terms of their aspirations, health conditions or caring responsibilities. This pressure was applied by Jobcentre staff made to administer a regime that prioritises enforcing rules over building trusting and productive relationships. This leads to a cycle of unsuitable work that exacerbates mental or physical health problems, leading to people falling out of work and having to re-enrol in the system:

“They don't even help you anymore, they don't actually do anything, I don't know what they're paid for – you find your own jobs. Years ago I was on Jobseekers [Allowance]... And I remember... those job coaches did used to help you, they'd send you jobs. These, now, they don't do anything, they just tell you, ‘You've got to find a job or you get sanctioned.’ That's their job, there's no support.”

Single mother of one in her mid 30s, receiving universal credit and disability living allowance

“If you're going out looking for your job yourself, you're going to pick a better job or one that's more suited for you. But in the Jobcentre, they just tell you to pick as many jobs as possible and apply for them: ‘I don't care what you do, what your skills are, what you're interested in. Just apply for them and hit this quota so that I can sign you off and I've done my bit.’ ... I feel like it's very much a numbers game for them because you have to just apply and apply and apply.”

Woman with one child, receiving universal credit

Taken in combination, the social security safety net that these women rely on erodes their control over their futures. The women we spoke with all want to shape their own lives and find an effective route out of poverty. Instead of a social security system designed to punish, we need policies that support this. But despite an increasing evidence base pointing to their cruelty and ineffectiveness, policies like the two-child limit and benefit sanctions persist.

In their place we're calling for a Living Income: a programme of no-strings support to help people through tough times. The Living Income guarantee a minimum income to make sure everyone can afford life's essentials.

We will explore the experiences of these women in greater detail in an upcoming report.

Today in parliamentary history: hunger marchers occupy House of Commons, 1934.

The dole and the Means Test

- The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 had provided some financial support to workers who became unemployed for up to 39 weeks. This was referred to as 'the dole'.
- When the Depression hit Britain, the dole was cut by 10% and the National Government introduced the Means Test for those unemployed for more than six months.
- People had their houses inspected to check all their possessions and their savings. Families could be forced to sell possessions before they could claim the dole.
- People hated the Means Test and there were many protests against it. In 1932, two people died in clashes with police in Rochdale and Belfast.
- From 1934 onwards, the dole and the Means Test were managed by the Unemployment Assistance Boards (UAB).



In the sharp recession following World War 1, hundreds of thousands of working people were thrown into unemployment, including many who had taken part in strikes and industrial unrest before and during the war. As thousands of soldiers were demobilised from the army, and the war economy was suddenly wound down, struggles over rights to relief, and facilities for the unemployed, broke out all over the UK. Initially organised through local committees of the unemployed, most federated by 1921 into the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (usually known as the NUWM), which was to be the main vehicle for unemployed organising for 20 years.

One of the tactics the NUWM became well-known for was organising national hunger marches. Groups of the unemployed would assemble in different towns and converge in contingents on London, to protest unemployment and the restrictions, rules and hardships those on the dole had to face. Hunger marches took place in 1922, 1927, 1930, 1932, 1934 and alongside the Jarrow Crusade in 1936. Often the marches would last over a month with thousands marching in bitter winter conditions.

The hunger marches drew the public's attention to the plight of areas that the politicians and capitalists wished to ignore. Successive Tory, Labour and National Government prime ministers refused to meet deputations of the hunger marchers.

In 1922, over one million people were unemployed and those out of work were confronted with a 19th century poor relief system. It was in these conditions that the first hunger march took place.

The second hunger march from the South Wales coalfield to London concluded a nine month strike following the 1926 General Strike. The march was supported by miners' leader A.J Cook and by the South Wales Miners Federation but denounced by right wing trade union leaders.

In the midst of the early 1930s Great Depression, unemployment rose to three million with hundreds of thousands even in the 'prosperous, non-distressed' south east and midlands joining the dole queues. Successive governments were determined that as much as possible working people should bear the brunt of the recession, and that as little as possible be spent on benefits to those out of work and their families. Savage regulations imposed on claimants made receiving any benefits a humiliating and vicious process. The 'Not genuinely Seeking Work' clause was used to cut off dole from anyone deemed not to be looking hard enough for work; the Means Test forced people to sell everything they had before receiving benefits and forced the unwaged to undergo humiliating examinations to prove they were virtually destitute before they could get the benefits.

The 1930 hunger march was organised as unemployment was rapidly increasing in the aftermath of the 1929 economic crisis. The bosses made 'rationalisation' agreements with the union leaders that were leading to

speed ups in production and many skilled workers being thrown onto the dole queues. The minority Labour government increased attacks on the unemployed.

Again the march struggled to receive support from the official trade union movement. This was partly due to the right wing in the unions but also was a result of the Communist Party and NUWM leaders' ultra-left policy of denouncing the Labour Party as 'social fascist'. The Labour government ordered that the 1,000 marchers were to be treated as vagrants.

Of all the hunger marches, the 1932 march, which carried a one million strong petition against the means test (to qualify for the dole), was the most brutally treated, facing constant police harassment. Mass uprisings against the means test in Birkenhead and Belfast in 1932 resulted in confrontations with the police and won concessions from local authorities on poor relief.

The betrayal of Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald in joining a national government with the Tories added fuel to the fire. The hunger marchers were met with a police riot in London and the NUWM leadership was jailed. But the march won concessions as benefits were raised.

In 1934 another hunger march against the means test took place, protesting cuts in unemployment benefit, the means test, and demanding decent levels of 'relief'. A women's contingent was also organised and demands for maternity benefit were raised.

When the marchers arrived in London, they and the NUWM leadership pressed for the government to meet them to discuss their demands, or allow them to speak in the House of Commons; the government initially refused. However, Ramsay MacDonald, then prime minister, heading a National (coalition government) suggested they lobby their MPs. The marchers decided to take them at their word, and infiltrated themselves into parliament in small groups on 28th February, singing and chanting.

The next day they returned to Parliament:

"The marchers again went to the House on Thursday 1st March. Three hundred succeeded in getting into the outer lobby and twenty-four into the public gallery. The suddenly a cry rang out from the gallery: "Meet the hunger marchers!" "We refuse to starve in silence!" "Down with the National Government!" The House was startled; police rushed to the spot from which the disturbance had come, and when they attempted to evict the marchers struggles ensued. Members of Parliament, looking up, saw what probably few of them had seen before – uniformed police being used in the public gallery in addition to plain-clothes-men. Suddenly, at the other end of the chamber in the ladies gallery, above the Speaker's chair, a woman was heard shouting, "Don't knock those men about!" She was removed by the police.

When the news reached the central lobby that fighting had broken out in the gallery, the 300 marchers who had succeeded in gaining admission started vigorously singing the "internationale". Police reinforcements were rushed from all parts of the House and fighting took place in the lobby. The marchers were eventually ejected and the police thought that they had put an end to the disturbances, but there were still marchers in various parts of the House, and three times during the evening scenes broke out in the gallery and in the lobby."

London was filled with marchers and their supporters; large demonstrations took place virtually daily, and massive pressure was put on the government. In the end, this had some effect: in the 1934 budget, ten per cent cuts to benefit rates were reversed, which had been one of the main demands of the march.

Some aid was also announced for some of the most distressed areas of the country, and to suspend the brutal assessment of benefit claimants by the Unemployed Assistance Board.

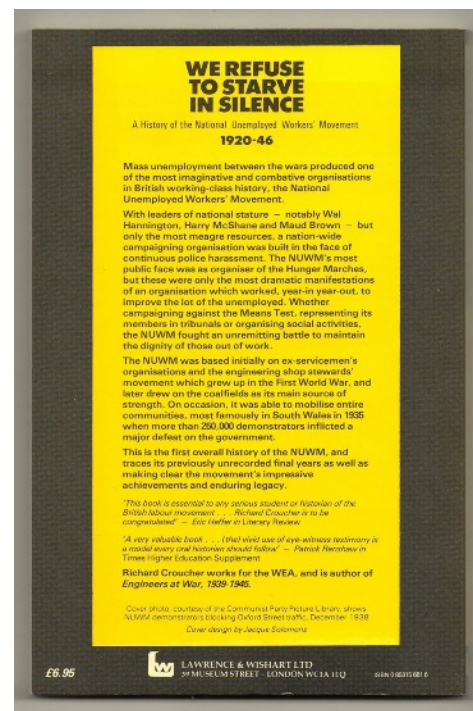
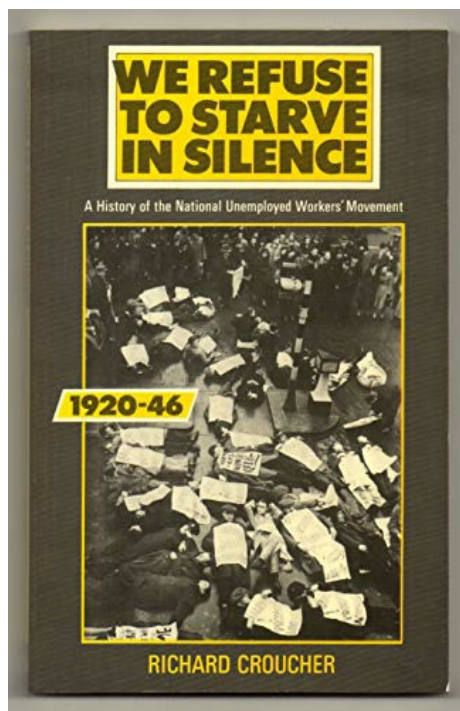
The hunger marches did form part of the pressure that was able to win concessions from successive governments. To some extent, however, analysing the history of the NUWM and the unemployed movement of the 1920s/30s, the hunger marches stand out the most, mobilizing thousands and receiving national

attention. It is true however that the unemployed movement was more effective when its activities were concentrated locally around practical targets, as in the early 1920s. The increased centralisation of the NUWM, its domination by activists from the Communist Party (reflected in its policies) and its narrowing of focus to high profile stunts like the hunger marches, reduced its innovative early impact somewhat.

It has been speculated that the NUWM's most important effects were not necessarily in the benefit rates or regulations altered. Bringing a collective approach to unemployment, getting people together and resisting their individual situation as a movement, counters the atomisation that signing on tends to impose. The solidarity, feeling like you are not alone, is a powerful weapon in the face of despair and hardship. NUWM leaders also said later that they believed that the movements' domination of unemployed politics was a factor in the failure of British fascist groups to seriously recruit the unemployed on a large scale, as happened in Germany and Italy.

Rebel History Calendar

For more on the the unemployed struggles of the 1920s-40s, it's worth reading *Unemployed Struggles 1919-36*, by Wal Hannington, and *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A History of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement*, by Richard Croucher.



2024 Walkley Labour Party still collecting for foodbanks. Many affected by means tested benefits, two child limit and Winter Fuel Payments withdrawal.

The New Deal for Workers – a focus on ‘rights’ but what about power

Labour’s long-awaited Employment Rights Bill does not do nearly enough to remove the restraints on trade unions or to give them the powers they need to make a significant difference to the lives of the millions of workers, write **KEITH EWING** and Lord **JOHN HENDY KC**



THERE is no doubt that the government should be praised for the significant improvement to employment rights set out in the Employment Rights Bill, published on October 10.

However, it must also be said that these proposals, set out in 119 sections over 105 pages and a further 43 pages of Schedules, come nowhere near the transformational proposals which Labour adopted in 2021 and 2022: A New Deal for Working People.

The bitter truth is that what working people (half the total population of Britain — with most of the rest dependent on them) need is not more individual rights, welcome as they may be, but greater power.

Power to have a real say over the pay, terms and conditions on which they work. That means freeing the trade unions from the shackles imposed in six Acts of Parliament by Thatcher’s crew in the 1980s and ’90s.

No-one else will represent workers. And to do that job unions need the power, when necessary, to organise industrial action and compel employers to bargain with them. What is also needed is a framework of laws which support collective bargaining and decent terms and conditions.

The Institute of Employment Rights has been arguing for a radical transformation of the law at work for over thirty years. Its publications were the inspiration for A New Deal.

Let’s take a look at the new Bill.

On trade union rights, there is no repeal of the anti-union legislation of the 1980s and ’90s. A New Deal committed the Labour Party to bringing our law on industrial action into line with the international laws (of the International Labour Organisation and the European Social Charter) which Britain has voluntarily ratified and agreed to be bound by.

Since at least 1989 every review by the international institutions of our laws on industrial action have found that they are non-compliant with the nation’s obligations. But the Bill does nothing to redress this situation and the breaches of international law will continue so long as the legal restraints on trade union action continue. In

particular, the ban on sympathy action, criticised by the ILO since 1989 and, most recently, last year in its report on the P&O Ferries scandal, is untouched by the Bill.

True, the Bill does do away with the ballot thresholds of the Trade Union Act 2016 (so a simple majority vote in favour is restored) and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act is totally repealed. But the New Deal's commitment (repeated just before the election in Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay) to secure workplace balloting has been abandoned. Although notice of industrial action is reduced to seven days, its complex requirements identifying the number of workers, their workplaces and their categories remain, though the New Deal promised to "examine how the requirement to give notice of industrial action should be simplified."

The Bill also retains the equally complex requirements to give notice of having an industrial action ballot (the international bodies have heavily criticised this provision and the complexity of the legislation generally).

The Trade Union Act 2016 which A New Deal (and Labour's Plan) said would be repealed is not repealed in full, though (credit where it's due) many of its provisions are removed (detailed prescription of the contents of the voting paper, picket supervisors, various certification officer powers etc). There is a useful (but qualified to an extent not yet revealed) extension of protections against detriments or dismissal imposed for participating in lawful industrial action.

The central commitment of A New Deal, the rollout of sector-wide collective bargaining in all areas of the economy, has been put on ice except for school support staff in England and adult social care, though paradoxically the Bill is careful to make clear that the outcomes of these processes will not be collective agreements as they are normally understood.

Nevertheless, the procedures for these two sectors are straightforward and it is hard to see why they should not be deployed in respect of other sectors, notably school teachers, agriculture workers (with their particular history of exploitation), gig workers, hospitality and catering, parcel delivery and so on. Indeed, the government could begin by restoring national collective bargaining to its own Civil Service.

Although it is left to the statutory recognition procedure to carry the burden to grow collective bargaining, the procedure is to be only lightly amended and fails to take account of the serious problems exposed by the recent Amazon case. It will be recalled that despite being frustrated by the alleged anti-union activities of the company, GMB managed to secure 49.5 per cent support of workers who voted.

As GMB made clear after the event, the recognition procedure needs radical revision if it is to help trade unions to grow and expand the coverage of collective bargaining. Although it is true that provision is made for trade union access to workplaces for organising purposes, this is a mouse of a measure which adds very little to the existing arrangements.

It is a gross caricature to suggest that the Bill's provisions for trade union access amount to a "right." The Bill provides that a trade union will be able to ask an employer to enter into an access agreement (which they can do already). If the employer refuses, the union can complain to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) which can effectively impose an access arrangement.

However, if the employer refuses to observe an access agreement or fails to comply with an arrangement imposed by the CAC, there is no way by which the employer can be compelled to comply. If it is so minded the union can make another reference to the CAC to have a civil (financial) penalty imposed on the employer but this is payable to the government not the union, which walks away empty handed. It is also clear that the whole process will be open to procedural delays by the employer.

Much of the Bill is thus about individual employment rights, including welcome proposals for day one rights (to be subject, in an as yet undefined way, to a probation period), impenetrable provisions on zero-hours contracts (which will surely need to be simplified), and fire and rehire (which is not totally prohibited).

It will be unfair to dismiss an employee for refusing to accept a contractual variation, but only if the employer is unable to persuade a tribunal that the reason for the dismissal was to "significantly mitigate" the effect of any financial difficulties affecting or likely in the immediate future to affect the business.

Provided the employer consults with the employees affected and with a recognised union, it will be home and dry if these conditions are met. As a result, the workers will be left without a remedy for standing on the terms

of their contract. This falls well short of expectations, and will no doubt be the focus of intense parliamentary scrutiny.

One of the questions no doubt likely to be asked is how these provisions would have constrained a company like P&O Ferries, and what lessons have been learned from the ILO Committee of Freedom of Association report in that case? The latter emphasised the need for greater respect for collective agreements. But there is no obligation in the Bill on a company to comply with collective agreements before fire and rehire.

More generally, there is no power to restrain a company from dismissal without consulting the employees or the union, and the remedy remains one of limited compensation only. It will continue to be possible for an employer to dismiss a unionised workforce, pay the statutorily limited maximum compensation for unfair dismissal (as in the P&O case), and recruit workers at greatly reduced wages, at a level well below those prescribed by a collective agreement.

We acknowledge reports that the new government will require ferry operators to pay the statutory minimum wage. This is no doubt a step forward when compared to subminimum-wage pay for agency supplied crew. But it is also a green light and a licence for an employer seeking to deunionise and a snub to the ILO, which was rightly demanding more.

The ILO report stressed that remedies available to employers for breaches of the law need to be “sufficiently dissuasive.” This could have been achieved by giving power to grant an injunction to restrain wilful law breaking (as proposed in the private member’s Bill on ending fire and rehire), plus the New Deal proposal to remove statutory limitations on compensation. The Bill provides for neither.

So as some have said, the Bill is a bit like a Swiss cheese. There are welcome new employment rights and improvements of existing rights. But it does not do nearly enough to remove the restraints on trade unions or to give them the powers they need to make a significant difference to the lives of the millions of workers who are without a voice at work.

Although the Bill gives the Secretary of State and his enforcement officers enforcement powers in relation to a limited range of specified statutory rights, our labour law continues to be bedevilled by weak and inadequate remedies. While trade unions can be restrained by injunction when they break the law, there are no corresponding remedies to employers when they do the same.

It will remain impossible to restrain employers when, for example, they break the law on redundancy or fire-and-rehire consultation or refuse to reinstate an unfairly dismissed worker. Employers will remain free to choose whether to obey the law, and to buy themselves out of trouble if they decide not to do so. The failure to address this fundamental imbalance of power speaks volumes about the content of the Bill.



Employment Rights
Bill: A step forward
for workers but
stops short of
making work pay

Louise Haigh Is Right, P&O Are Rogue Operators

By Eli Edwards - [Tribune](#)

At 11 am on 17 March 2022, seafarers aboard vessels operated by P&O Ferries were told to attend a pre-recorded Zoom meeting. In the video, a besuited executive of the company announced: ‘I am sorry to inform you that your employment is terminated with immediate effect . . . your final day of employment is today.’ With that, the company had just sacked 786 people to be replaced by a crew of agency workers on short-term contracts to be paid as little as £5.15 an hour, less than a third of the staff they were replacing and almost half the minimum wage at the time, via the exploitation of loopholes in National Minimum Wage legislation as it pertains to international waters.

The rug had been pulled out from underneath everyone, as neither the government nor the appropriate trade unions — RMT and Nautilus — had been notified within the legal parameters, a flagrant breach of the law, and, according to RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch, ‘one of the most shameful acts in the history of British industrial relations.’

Fuelled by the 2022 scandal and its national backlash, Transport Secretary Louise Haigh announced this week that the government’s Employment Rights Bill would close loopholes relating to seafarers, strengthen laws around collective dismissal and provide minimum wage protection for foreign agency workers. On 9 October, as part of the government’s media roll-out of its self-described ‘biggest upgrade to workers’ rights in a generation,’ she referred to the company and its owner, the Dubai-based logistics company DP World — who reported a \$5.1 billion profit margin in 2023 — as ‘rogue operators.’

The description was fair and accurate, and if anything, mild. However, after provoking a negative response from DP World, the government has been quick to throw Haigh under the bus, distancing itself from the popular sentiments of the Transport Secretary. Reassuring the company, which shelved a £1 billion investment in its London Gateway facility following her comments, Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated that the Transport Secretary’s comments did not reflect the government’s view.

Despite grovelling before the corporate giant now, it would be nice if government ministers remembered their sentiments from the time. As Leader of the Opposition in April 2022, Keir Starmer spoke of how the P&O board’s decision to illegally sack 800 members of staff made his ‘blood boil,’ going on to describe the actions as ‘disgusting’ and a ‘complete betrayal of the workforce’ and asking then prime minister Boris Johnson to ‘guarantee that those companies will not get a penny more of taxpayers’ money, or a single tax break, until they reinstate the workforce.’

Jonathan Reynolds, Secretary of State for Business and Trade, has been sent out to defend the company’s image and improve corporate relations by dismissing characterisations of its practices as ‘rogue’ in an interview with the BBC while allaying any fears that the group should face financial losses for its egregious history by stating ‘it’s not the government’s position to boycott them.’ Jonathan Reynolds would do well to remember that he co-signed an Early Day Motion on 24 March 2022, calling on the government ‘to suspend the contracts and licences of DP World and remove them from the government’s Transport Advisory Group.’

Whilst demonstrably in line with what her colleagues had also been saying when the wind was blowing against P&O, Louise Haigh’s comments are clearly popular in the country. By July 2022, one YouGov poll estimated that while 90 percent of the country had heard of P&O Ferries, only 18 percent had a positive view of the operator. Following the board’s decision, P&O’s ‘brand Index score’ — which measures brand health as an aggregate of public perception — plummeted from a score of 13.3 to -34.9 from March to April 2022. Since then, P&O’s score has failed to recover to pre-April 2022 levels. A similar YouGov poll conducted in the fallout of the company’s layoffs demonstrated that 76 percent of adults thought that the P&O boss should resign, with only 5 percent supporting him to remain in post.

Louise Haigh's comments were rather tepid, all things considered. Besides being clearly shameful, P&O's decision was illegal. Under UK law, companies proposing to dismiss as redundant twenty or more members of staff are required to consult the appropriate trade unions, in this case RMT and Nautilus International. That P&O failed to do this was a calculated decision. At the Business and Trade Select Committee, Chief Executive Peter Hebblethwaite — who won the International Trade Union Congress' 'Worst Boss in the World' title in 2022 — claimed that the decision not to abide by their legal obligations on consultation was based on an assessment that the sackings were so egregious that 'no union could possibly accept our proposals.'

The company also failed to notify the relevant authorities or the Secretary of State where its vessels were registered of its intent to carry out a mass redundancy programme within the forty-five-day statutory timescale, causing cross-party shock and anger at the decision. The TUC has highlighted two further legal breaches by P&O regarding the neglect of director duties and unfair dismissal legislation. Neither P&O Ferries nor DP World have faced legal ramifications for their flaunting of the law, a decision the chief executive told a parliamentary Select Committee he would make again.

P&O claimed the decision was necessary to cut costs and save the company's commercial viability. While the pandemic did adversely affect passenger numbers, parent company DP World boasted record profits, with a 52 percent increase to \$721 million in the first half of 2021. The company's supposedly dire finances also did not seem to affect its shareholders, who DP World paid dividends worth over £3 billion in 2023. Nor did it affect P&O's Chief Executive. Just one year after the sacking scandal, Peter Hebblethwaite accepted a £183,000 'performance-based bonus' atop a £325,000 salary in April 2023. At the same time, P&O was the direct beneficiary of millions of pounds in government support. Throughout the pandemic, the company had received an estimated £11 million in taxpayer funding through the government's furlough scheme. This was brazen hypocrisy by a company that felt its industrial relationship with the country was integral enough to claim support from its job retention scheme, yet apparently not enough to abide by its laws.

After P&O illegally sacked its workforce, the company explained to MPs that it had calculated that the profits it set to gain from breaking the law would outweigh any punishment they might receive — and they have been proven right. Company directors and executives escaped prosecution, the threat of an 'unlimited fine' never materialised, and now, politicians who previously castigated the company are defending it from public criticism. Far from being punished for its behaviour, and without reinstating a single worker, DP World stands to profit greatly from the government's controversial freeports.

While the new legislation makes it unlikely that the P&O scandal of 2022 will reoccur, Labour politicians especially should remember the disgraceful decisions made on 17 March. A rich company registering record profits, able and willing to provide millions in shareholder dividends and at least hundreds of thousands in senior management bonuses, flouted the law on several fronts — and claimed they would do it again — in order to cut costs by slashing wages and worsening terms and conditions. The decision, illegally administered and unpunished, caused almost 800 people to become immediately unemployed, cutting off their income streams in the thick of a cost of living crisis within a pandemic-ravaged national economy, all amidst soaring private profits. It would be easy to think of another adjective for P&O Ferries and DP World, but almost impossible to think of one milder than 'rogue'.

The New Popular Front is Ready to Govern'

The Morning Star publishes the open letter to the French people from New Popular Front prime ministerial candidate Lucie Castets and leaders of its component parties, to inform British readers of the left's case for government in France

LAST July, you mobilised massively at the polls to refuse the arrival of the extreme right in power and to break with the policies pursued for seven years. We thank you for this.

And since then? Nothing. The President of the Republic is procrastinating rather than drawing the consequences of these elections. How long are we going to continue as if nothing had happened at the beginning of the summer?

You have placed the New Popular Front at the top of the poll, without giving anyone an absolute majority. This result puts obligations on us all, and first and foremost obliges the one who caused it.

Unfair and imposed policies

The inaction of the President of the Republic is serious and harmful. Because it highlights his desire to prolong the last seven years of unjust and authoritarian policies. Because it gives the impression that the vote would serve no purpose, that all this would be nothing more than a game of institutional chess.

We are measuring the extent of the distrust expressed today throughout the country, by you, citizens, leaders of unions, businesses, associations, collectives, local elected officials. Through renunciations, decisions imposed against the will of the people, such as the pension reform, many of you no longer believe in politics.

These feelings fuel the rise of the extreme right that we have fought and will continue to fight.

The choice of the next government will have very concrete consequences on the daily lives of each and every one, depending on whether it continues the austerity “cure” or decides to reinvest in our public services. Parents need to know if we will give ourselves the means to put a teacher in front of their child, and to straighten out the public school system; employees need to know when their salary will be revalued, after several years of inflation; residents need to know if their housing can be thermally renovated and if adaptation to climate change will be accelerated; patients need to know if they will be admitted to the emergency room if necessary and if the hospital will have the means to operate; our children need to know if we will offer them a habitable planet where they can grow and flourish.

Necessary break

On all these issues, a break with past policies is necessary. It has been demanded by voters. This is what a New Popular Front government will undertake from the first hours of its nomination.

To the voters who have massively mobilised around the New Popular Front, we say: we are committed to building a fairer, more united society according to each person’s ability to contribute, in which work will be better paid, hardship better recognised, public services rehabilitated and to implementing immediately the ecological shift that is essential for our common future. A society in which everyone can have a dignified life.

To the voters who did not vote for us, on the right or the far right, as well as to those who did not vote at all, we say: yes, we want to break with the logic of one camp against another and will work together to build the future of the country and finance public services.

We are convinced that we will be able to improve the lives of French women and men in a concrete and rapid manner, and that the absence of an absolute majority will not prevent us from doing so. Who will refuse the increase in purchasing power that we are proposing with the revaluation of salaries and the remuneration of civil servants?

Who will accept seeing the catastrophic situation of public hospitals continue with emergency services closed in the middle of summer? Who will resign themselves to a new school year where so many teachers will be missing in front of our children in primary, secondary and high schools? On all these key issues, parliamentarians will report their votes and citizens will be witnesses.

A new way of governing

We are aware of this: we must invent a new way of governing under the Fifth Republic. Parliament must, in a transparent manner, regain control of its calendar and calmly discuss the projects and Bills that will be submitted to it. Social partners must be listened to and respected. New forms of association of field actors, local elected officials, associations and all those who bring our democracy to life on a daily basis must be imagined.

We will also bring French diplomacy to the service of peace because we cannot accept that disputes are settled by force in Europe and in the world. We will thus work to thwart Vladimir Putin's war of aggression, defend the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people and work towards a return to peace.

We will act to obtain an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the hostages. And since the President of the Republic himself had stated that the recognition of the state of Palestine was not a "taboo for France," we will act for its immediate recognition, alongside the state of Israel, on the basis of UN resolutions to move towards a just and lasting peace.

Finally, we will bring civil peace to New Caledonia by returning to the reform of the electoral body and reopening a process of discussion, in the spirit of the Noumea and Matignon agreements.

We are convinced that France can still embody the values of justice, freedom and openness that have made its history. Hate speech damages it and does not resemble it.

You spoke out two months ago, now it is high time to take action: as in all parliamentary democracies, the coalition that comes out on top must be able to form a government, seek agreements within parliament and get to work.

We've been working on it all summer. We're ready.

Lucie Castets, candidate of the New Popular Front as Prime Minister

Manuel Bompard, co-ordinator of France Insoumise

Olivier Faure, first secretary of the Socialist Party

Fabien Roussel, national secretary of the French Communist Party

Marine Tondelier, national secretary of the Ecologists

‘Turn to the right’: What Macron’s choice of Barnier as PM means for France

Sophie Stuber- Al Jazeera



Photo- FMT CC4.0

Paris, France – French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday appointed Michel Barnier, a right-wing politician who has been part of administrations since 1978, as the country’s new prime minister, after seven weeks without a premier in office.

Macron’s announcement comes after weeks of deadlock following the parliamentary snap elections in July. But the nomination of a conservative politician has angered many French voters.

The left-wing New Popular Front coalition won the most seats (193) in the snap election for the National Assembly. Barnier’s party, the Republicans, came in fourth, and many on the left feel betrayed by Macron’s decision to pick the veteran politician as PM.

“The left is disappointed because the right essentially suffered huge losses, but Macron still selected a conservative prime minister,” Baptiste Colin, a 29-year-old theatre producer from Lyon who voted for the left-wing coalition in July, told Al Jazeera. “We misread the results in the legislative elections.

“We thought the left won, but it is not the left who gets to represent the prime minister.”

None of France’s political parties or coalitions came close to earning an absolute majority of the 289 seats needed to pass legislation without obstacles. Following the results of the legislative elections, Macron could not choose a prime minister from his own party when its coalition, Ensemble, came in second and only received 20 percent of the vote, according to Philippe Marliere, professor of French and European politics at University College London.

“Having lost the snap election, Macron couldn’t possibly pick someone from his own party – that would have gone against the results of the election,” Marliere told Al Jazeera. “It’s a compromise choice, apparently, but it means that Macron will cohabitate with a conservative prime minister.”

Usually, the prime minister comes from a party that fared better in the legislative elections.

“Barnier comes from the fourth block in terms of electoral strength: the number of MPs. This is unusual, the prime minister should normally come from a more dominant block,” Marliere said.

Macron’s choice of prime minister appears to be moving his cabinet further to the right than under the previous prime minister, Gabriel Attal. In 1982, Barnier voted against ending a French law discriminating against same-sex couples. Previously, same-sex relations had been illegal for underaged people. As a 2022 presidential candidate, Barnier proposed banning non-European immigration for three to five years.

“Barnier is not a centrist. He’s always been part of the Conservative Party,” Marliere said. “Macron could have gone for more moderate figures.”

Why did Macron pick Barnier?

After the fractured mandate delivered by French voters, Macron had two options, said Marliere.

“One was to invite the left, who came out on top, to choose someone. But Macron dismissed this early on, saying that everyone else would censure a candidate on the left,” Marliere said. In effect, a left-led cabinet would be defeated in a vote of confidence in parliament. “He gave an excuse of institutional stability,” Marliere said of Macron.

In choosing Barnier, Macron picked someone whom at least the far-right National Rally (RN) would not censure. With Barnier, Macron could then build a coalition with parties on the right to govern.

Barnier is also known as an expert negotiator, which may have helped drive Macron’s choice. He spent years as a European Union commissioner and served as the bloc’s main Brexit negotiator from 2016 to 2021.

Barnier has “the task of forming a unity government to serve the country and the French people,” Macron’s government said in a statement. “This appointment comes after an unprecedented cycle of consultations during which, in line with his constitutional duty, the president sought to ensure that the prime minister and the government would be as stable as possible.”

Barnier, 73, will be the oldest prime minister in modern French history. He was first elected to parliament 46 years ago and has occupied several positions in right-wing cabinets, including being in charge of the environment, European affairs, foreign affairs and agriculture. He has not been involved in French domestic politics recently, although he did unsuccessfully run as a presidential candidate for the Republicans in 2022.

“He’s a staple in French politics. He’s been around long enough that we can criticise things he did in the ’80s, which on one hand doesn’t feel fair, but on the other, that’s the lifecycle of politics,” Diane de Vignemont, a French journalist focused on politics and history, told Al Jazeera.

“He visits Charles de Gaulle’s memorial every year. He’s a hardcore Gaullist, the traditional, conservative,” de Vignemont added.

Colin, the theatre producer, said that although he was not surprised that Macron avoided selecting a left-wing prime minister, he was dismayed that the president did not look to find someone more to the centre of the political spectrum, who might have been acceptable to more voters.

“Macron made no compromises. That’s what is the most disappointing. I wasn’t expecting much, but I am still really disappointed,” Colin said. “He chose to pick someone who the far right would accept, rather than the left.”

Macron rejected the New Popular Front’s proposed candidate for prime minister, Lucie Castets, last July. “It shows the alliance that Macron wants to form since it will be with the far right that he is choosing to govern,” de Vignemont said.

Although Macron’s dissolution of parliament and snap elections were said to be a rejection of the far right, he settled for naming a prime minister who the National Rally would accept.

Marine Le Pen, president of National Rally, said in a statement that she wanted a prime minister who worked for National Rally voters.

“I think Mr Barnier fits this criterion,” she told reporters on Thursday. “On issues of substance, we will wait to see what Mr Barnier’s general policy speech is, how he handles the compromises that are going to be necessary for the upcoming budget.”

What this means for France

By selecting a prime minister that appeals to the far right, Macron is giving the National Rally a form of credibility and power even after their loss in the parliamentary elections, said analysts.

“It’s a shift. It’s a turn to the right for sure. The far right, which was defeated in July, is now in a position of strength, sort of a kingmaker. Macron’s party and the Republicans do not have enough votes without the RN,” Marliere said. “It’s a big paradox that the party [RN] that was defeated, that came third, is in a position to dictate things.”

For de Vignemont, Barnier represents the opposite of the ideals France recently displayed while under the spotlight for the Paris Olympics.

“It’s a sharp contrast to the France we portrayed during the opening ceremony that was very open, very liberal. We’ve gone from a gay prime minister [Attal] to a very conservative one,” de Vignemont said.

Macron’s delayed nomination marked the longest time in the 66-year history of the Fifth Republic that France went without an active government, following Attal’s resignation on July 16.

After Barnier’s nomination, Colin said he fears that voters will not rally against the far right again as they did for the snap elections.

“On the left, we really insisted that everyone vote and fight against the far right. And it worked so well. But I am worried now that people will say that it was all for nothing. Macron proved them right. I’m worried that next time, people won’t turn out against the far right,” he said.

“The country’s état d’esprit [mood] is that no one seems to care. There is little interest in Macron’s nomination. It feels like Macron is just continuing on and nothing’s changed,” Colin said.

The left has called for protests against Macron in Paris on Saturday.

German AfD win in Thuringia beating the Christian democrats

Germany: Far-right AfD party wins state election for first time - Sky News

Scholz’s SPD edges out far-right AfD in German state election

Ruling left-leaning party wins 31 percent of vote in Brandenburg against anti-immigration AfD’s 29 percent.

The Italian Workers Occupying Against Climate Crisis

By Dave Smith , Tracy Edwards , Shaun Dey - [Tribune](#)



Picture by Valentina Ceccatelli

Last month at its annual Congress, the TUC debated four separate motions on the climate crisis. Of the efforts put to delegates by unions, all called for a ‘just transition’ to ensure that workers in the energy, transport and manufacturing industries are not simply thrown on the dole by the prospect of a decarbonised economy. Appeals to the newly elected Labour government were plentiful.

But absent from every motion was the need for industrial militancy to stop the climate catastrophe and ensure that a just transition does not result in working-class communities being shattered by long-term unemployment. Some in our movement consider this notion pie in the sky. But workers have always taken the lead in defending the environment in the past — and it is essential that they do so again.

In the 1960s and 1970s, mass meetings of Australian construction workers in the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) led to the inspirational ‘green bans’, where workers refused to destroy the environment around them in the pursuit of profit. This stand taken by workers was a seminal moment in labour organising and environmental campaigning, with many areas the union saved now having been granted UNESCO World Heritage status. Just transition advocates also invoke the Lucas Plan, where shop stewards at engineering plants engaged their skilled colleagues in drawing up workplans for socially useful production.

But these struggles, inspiring as they are, took place decades ago, and we are in desperate need of current inspiration. One forceful example that seems to have been missed by most union members — but was mentioned by firefighters’ delegate Jamie Newell at TUC this year — was the GKN automotive engineering plant in Florence, Italy. Faced with mass redundancies and the closure of their factory, workers who manufacture components for BMW, Porsche, Ferrari, and Lamborghini took control of their plant in July 2021.

While this started out as a standard industrial dispute to save jobs, it has since transformed into a worker-led movement for a just transition. Workers pooled their expertise to research carbon-zero, non-extractive forms of production, and to implement a Lucas Plan-style alternative production model; instead of automotive car parts, they have already built prototype cargo bikes, which are being tested by various social movements in Italy, Germany and the Basque Country, with discussions taking place about how these bikes can be fed into networks of mutual aid drivers and those competing with the likes of Amazon.

With the GKN occupation, plant production is based on the needs of the community and in the most sustainable way, in stark contrast to the capitalist model, which is profit-driven and wasteful. Solidarity in the form of mass protests, benefit gigs, and financial donations from the workers’ movement in Florence has kept the workers afloat.

The production of solar panels is also being discussed as part of the GKN alternative plan, but this is reliant on investment — though, incredibly, nearly €1 million has been raised from across Italy to invest in the plant through their popular shareholder scheme. Should they continue to raise more and maintain serious public

momentum, the prospects could include the regional government buying the factory out from previous owners and handing it to workers to run as a cooperative; this would compel the Italian government to provide additional investment, with the factory still operating under workers' control.

Additionally, it also means that trade unions, climate action groups, mutual aid organisations and other social justice organisations can get engaged with it. The potential to link up with thousands of workers and communities internationally — and show the possibility of a good example — could provide fertile ground for other workers to replicate efforts at GKN by taking control of their production, communities and lives.

The GKN occupation has also challenged the political mood in a country governed by the far-right. The occupied GKN factory is now acting as a focal point to support refugees and provide solidarity with anti-fascist campaigns. The political links here have not fallen out of the sky, but have been developing over numerous years through the existence of *Insorgiamo Soms*, a rank-and-file workers' collective active in the factory. As they recently posted on their website, 'this resistance has become a project ... it has given birth to a reindustrialisation plan from below, with the aim of giving back to the territory the jobs that were destroyed, creating a socially integrated factory at the service of the community that defended it, restarting with an ecologically advanced production.'

This insistence on worker's direct action is key to the Florence dispute, with workers organising horizontally — every worker has a say, and no one is above anyone else. There is no full-time trade union official telling workers what the negotiations agenda should be or whether they can take action or not. When we look at the levels of inequality rife in society, it is refreshing to find an example of pulling together without corrupted hierarchical power structures which so often hold workers back.

Yet despite the GKN occupation becoming a militant social movement with mass community support in Florence, and being the talk of the Italian union movement, few people in the British labour movement know anything about it. That is why a GKN occupation British solidarity network has been established, involving union members from rail, education, construction and delivery unions. Our aim is to raise the profile of the GKN occupation. More than 20 activists have already agreed to join a rank-and-file union delegation to Florence for the GKN mass assembly on 13 October.

Additionally, union branches and community activists can support the occupation in many ways: by e-mailing them a message of support, by sharing Reel News videos about the occupation, by buying shares in the popular shareholder scheme, and by electing a delegate or sending a solidarity donation to send low-paid workers to attend the mass assembly in October.

At a time when our movement is considering how it can build alternatives to climate catastrophe and begin to tip the scales of power ever more in our favour, we need examples such as the GKO occupation popularised across the unions and across society as a whole. Fundamentally, this should be done so that the workers can continue their good work, but also because we want to see our own GKO's emerging across Britain. Be part of this historical struggle — and help bring the spirit of Florence back to these shores.

Remembering Paul Foot: A Tireless Campaigner for Justice

Margaret Renn- July 2024

Paul Foot was one of the most influential investigative reporters of his generation.

Remembering Paul Foot: A Tireless Campaigner for Justice

Red flags filled the air as a great crowd of mourners brought Golders Green to a standstill on a sunny summer's day. Paul Foot's family, and a lifetime of friends, comrades and colleagues, made their way through the streets of North London in a long procession, to be greeted by a steel band as they filed into Golders Green crematorium.

Paul Foot's death on 18 July 2004, at the age of sixty-six, made the evening news, the next day's papers, and a joke in *Private Eye*: 'RIP Paul Foot 1937–2004. A Great Journalist. Died in time for press day.'

Obituaries appeared in newspapers across the country – the nationals, weekly and monthly journals and magazines, dozens of local newspapers and international papers alike. The BBC website asked for tributes, which poured in. There were special supplements in *Socialist Review* and *Socialist Lawyer*, as well as in *Private Eye*, which would become a book, *My Friend Footy*, written by Richard Ingrams, Paul's friend for almost his entire life.

Tam Dalyell MP described Paul as 'the staunch friend of lost causes', while Richard Stott, his editor for many years at the *Daily Mirror*, reflected that Paul 'had a rare ability to make our trade feel noble'. The *Economist* described his politics as 'potty' but his journalism 'revelatory'. On the journalists' Fleetstreet Forum website, one posted: 'So, farewell then Footie. I'm sure that crooks and swindlers the length and breadth of the country are breathing a sigh of relief.'

Paul's coffin, a wicker basket draped in a red flag, a Plymouth Argyle scarf and a West Indian cricket rosette, was carried into a venue so small that his family had to issue tickets for those who needed to be inside. Meanwhile, a huge crowd listened to the speeches relayed on loudspeakers in the summer sunshine in the crematorium gardens. 'For god's sake, cheer up', his friend Jim Nichol began. 'That's what Paul would have wanted.' And then, at the request of Paul's young daughter Kate, I'm a Gnu by Flanders and Swann rang out to a sea of smiles, balanced later by a lively rendition of the socialist 'Internationale', sung with great gusto. Many knew the words already, but for safety's sake they were printed on the funeral card.

His son Matt caught the mood with his reference to another song. On the night before he died, Paul, walking with the help of two sticks, had left home with his son Tom, also on crutches, singing, 'Anything you can do, I can do better'.

His three sons, John, Matt and Tom, remembered the father who was always losing his keys and spectacles, but never forgot telephone numbers. Who never lost his passion for life. Who was loving and friendly, until his partner Clare beat him at tennis or golf, when he turned into a furious, sulky child. They finished by reciting one verse each from the ending to Shelley's poem 'The Mask of Anarchy'. There was the odd glitch. No one had thought about who was going to press the button, and the coffin snagged before disappearing from sight. Then, as many as could made their way back to Stoke Newington for a curry in the Abney Hall.

Three months later the Hackney Empire was sold out for a celebration of Paul's life. Clips of old television footage and photos ran between his children's stories about trips to have his hair cut and his delight in eating meringues and Liquorice Allsorts. The comedians he worked with were there to tell old jokes and new, and Dave Spart, the eponymous lefty of *Private Eye* fame, made an appearance, as told by Richard Ingrams.

Some of the people he had campaigned for were also present: the sisters of Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh, two Palestinians locked up for the 1994 bombing of the Israeli embassy in London, which Paul was sure was a miscarriage of justice; Pam Dix, whose brother died in the Lockerbie bombing; Gurpal Viridi, a black policeman drummed out of the force by his racist colleagues; Colin Wallace, who suffered a similar fate from

the British army in Northern Ireland. And the widow of Harry Stanley, shot dead in the street by a Hackney policeman.

Of course there was politics, courtesy of Tony Benn and Eamonn McCann, among others. 'I've never known a man', said McCann, 'who could laugh so much at the absurdity of the system we live under.'

The evening, however, belonged to Michael Foot. Ailing and infirm, he was helped on to the stage, and in a halting voice delivered a love letter to his devoted nephew. 'It's terrible to think of waking up in a world where there's no Paul Foot. It is a very sad thing indeed', he began. With his shaking hands and poor eyesight, Paul's uncle's sadness at the death of his nephew caught at everyone's throat. But Michael, politician and journalist, was a typical Foot, and had no time for a great show of sentiment. 'I owed so much to Paul. We had a few arguments which were still going on right up to the end. And I won't go into who was winning them.'

His chosen theme was a book, a revolutionary leader, and a poem. The first was *The Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James's history of the slave revolt in Haiti, the best book about the history of slavery, Michael explained, and 'one of the greatest books on socialism ever written'. It was a book that Paul had read and reread, and he coveted Michael's first edition: 'He had an eye on my books, you know.' The leader was Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black Jacobin and leader of the Haitian slaves. And the poem was Wordsworth's homage to Toussaint, written to his fallen hero, and read by Michael in memory of his fallen nephew:

Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live and take comfort! Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies.
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee;
'That's what we think about Paul', Michael interjected.
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; Thou hast great allies:
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

Paul Foot

