The Plebs News

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Housing: Only Council Housing will end this crisis.

4.4 million

In the 35 years following the end of the Second World War, local authorities and housing associations built 4.4 million social homes

94,140 homes

In 1980, 94,140 social homes were built. But by 1983, supply had halved to just 44,240 new social homes

7,528 homes

In 2021/22, just 7,528 new social homes were delivered – nowhere near enough for the 1.1 million people on the waiting list

At a recent national event attended by labour activists and academics a group of us sat having lunch discussing the day and how we had come to our politics and support for the labour movement. A third of us remarked that the seed of our politics had been planted by the post war housing programme of council housing that saw 4.4 million houses built. All of us talked about the changes brought to our lives in terms of better housing but also how it improved our health, our comfort and raised our hopes for a better future. We also talked about what had gone before, the overcrowding, the damp, the disease as well as the landlordism that maintained our poverty.

Today housing is back in the political limelight after years of neglect and , unfortunately the stories are still the same. The tragedies of Grenfell and the death of Awaab Ashak, killed by exposure to mould in his home has shown that the housing crisis will not solve itself and without action from Government the market has no answer and, indeed is the root cause of the current situation. The events at Grenfell and in Rochdale are only the tip of the icebergand are repeated all over the country in both urban and rural areas. As property has assumed the role of an asset rather than a home the return of landlordism has returned in force. Despite repeated promises to ban Section 21 "no-fault evictions" in the proposed Housing Act and Tory Michael Gove flounders for excuses for their continuation. He needs to look no further than his companions on the Green Benches where at least 13% of MP's are landlords, with others being sheltered by companies. In 2017, 72 landlord MP's voted down proposals for rented housing to be "fit for human habitation". Some Councils have introduced selective licensing to try and improve enforcement of standards but only after jumping through many hurdles. Even then, renewal every five years has seen landlord lobbying and ending as reported in Sheffield recently. The housing crisis has also seen social landlords standards fall as the case of Awaab has shown. Lack of funds, poor management and social stigma has seen many housing associations and Councils looking more like Scrooge landlords than decent housing providers. A recent leaflet on my newsagent counter from "ambulance chasing " Lawyers offering to help sue local housing providers was a sign of the times.

Even the great "home owner democracy" dream has gone sour with even the idea of owning a home beyond the reach of a huge slice of the population and even those who do succeed see up to 50% of their income go in mortgage costs. The same percentage of income also goes from private renters to landlord. Both not only damage the housing provision as exorbitant housing costs suck life out of the overall economy.

Such is the scale of the crisis that the Labour Campaign for Council Housing recently published an open letter to the leadership claiming that only a return to Council house building will solve the housing crisis and the Housing Ombudsman called for a Royal Commission on Housing 140 years after the first Commission led to the Housing of the Working Classes Act in 1890 that started the public housing provision and the post war competition between all parties to provide decent housing.

The Slum Housing Scandal

By Glyn Robbins- Tribune

This week, the government opened new plans intended to protect social housing tenants from unsafe homes to consultation. The plans consist of strict timeframes to which housing association landlords will have to adhere when investigating and repairing hazards, or face court. This proposed legislation is being called Awaab's Law, in reference to the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak after exposure to mould in a housing association flat in 2020.

Many see Awaab's Law as a vital step forward, particularly as the headlines about negligent social landlords multiply. But others have pointed out that more needs to be done to protect the millions who suffer damp and mouldy homes in the private sector — and to fight the housing crisis more broadly, which has been spurred by the sell-off and demolition of good-quality council housing stock and the proliferation of housing association landlords in its place.

Against this backdrop, MPs in the Council Housing All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) are currently investigating the present state and future need for council housing in Britain. The investigation, supported by the Defend Council Housing campaign and a group of academics, is a follow-up to a similar investigation and subsequent report published in 2010. That report found that direct investment in council housing was a far better use of public money than the various forms of privatisation being promoted, at that time, by the New Labour government.

Sadly, the evidence of the APPG in 2010 was largely ignored. Instead, UK governments of all stripes blindly persisted with policies that have deepened and prolonged the housing crisis. We remain trapped in a market fixation that uses public money to subsidise private property developers who have failed to build the homes we need while making huge profits.

In 2013, for example, instead of listening to the APPG on council housing, the coalition government launched the Help to Buy scheme, which had consumed £29 billion by 2023 and made homes even more expensive, according to a House of Lords report. In the context of these false economies and policy failures, we have now arrived at the astonishing point that numerous local authorities face being pushed over the edge of bankruptcy by the financial demands of providing temporary accommodation.

The current inquiry, led by APPG chair Matt Western MP, is now taking evidence from people around the country. These people include council housing tenants and those on waiting lists, as well as politicians, trade unions, campaigners, lobbyists, and policymakers. Some of the most vivid testimony so far came from a meeting in Rochdale, the Lancashire town in which Awaab Ishak lived.

A Country Without Council Housing

Rochdale is a test case for what happens in a place without council housing. In March 2012, its 13,664 council homes were hold to social landlord Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH). RBH embarked on what has become a familiar post-privatisation pattern: planned demolition of former council estates and their replacement with homes for private sale, which, combined with poor service for social tenants, inflated salaries for senior managers, and unaccountability, represented failings horribly exposed in Ishak's death.

Speaking at the Rochdale meeting, Councillor Danny Meredith, Rochdale's executive member for housing, reported waiting list applications doubling in the time since the council housing was sold off, while the supply of social rented homes has halved. Temporary accommodation is now costing the council £2 million a year, its share of the £1.7 billion being spent by English councils. Andy Roache, an RBH tenant, pointed out that nonetheless, there are more empty homes on his estate than the number of families compelled to live in bed and breakfasts.

At the same session, which was organised by Greater Manchester Tenants Union (GMTU), a hospital worker described homeless people coming to A&E to sleep because there's nowhere else to go. His dad, a pensioner on a fixed income, is struggling to pay his rent to a private landlord: it has risen from £450 a month in 2014 to £950 today. A local UNISON rep recalled: 'I was brought up in a council home. We knew, so long as we paid the rent, we could stay there for life. We felt safe and secure. Awaab's death showed what happens when we don't invest in council housing.'

The inquiry is hearing similar stories from all over the country. In the neighbouring town of Middleton, a three-year old was recently hospitalised with breathing problems his mother believes resulted from similar damp and mould conditions to those that killed Awaab Ishak. According to Mark Fraser of GMTU, many homes in the area are 'not fit for habitation'. Instead of addressing this, he says landlord Riverside, supposedly a community benefit organisation, and one in receipt of millions of pounds of public money, are 'building homes for private sale, like any other private developer.'

In Lancaster, meanwhile, the Mainway council estate is threatened under spurious grounds, leading to scores of tenants being removed and empty blocks sold to a private developer for an undisclosed amount. At a campaign meeting organised by the local Tenants and Community Union (TACU), a councillor talked about 'a tsunami of homelessness coming towards us.'

The situation in the South is similar. At the APPG session in Islington, council tenant Molly Doyle said:

'It makes me mad that we've had council housing for such a short period of time, but they're taking it away from us. I live in a beautiful two-bedroom flat and it costs me about £600 per month. That makes so much difference to people's lives. A private landlord is charging three times that amount, for the same kind of home. The money that's being spent on housing is being spent in the wrong way. I'm sick of seeing luxury flats. They're not what we need. It's breaking up communities and families.'

At the latest evidence session in Crawley on 4 January, council leader Michael James described the current housing situation as 'like a sink filling up, but you can't turn off the tap, or pull out the plug.' Temporary accommodation is costing his council £5 million a year.

A Clear Solution

The APPG aims to publish a second report before the next general election and will continue to gather evidence into Spring 2024 — but the testimonies collected so far show just how many people know a decisive change of direction in Britain's housing is desperately needed. As Rochdale UNISON member, Sam O'Brien, put it:

'The wrong people are making decisions about housing. MPs and ministers who don't just have two homes, but sometimes a portfolio. They're seeing housing in a completely different way to how most people see their homes. We don't want multiple homes. We just want one that isn't damp and the rent and service charges are affordable. Housing should be for public good, not a private commodity.'

The APPG's position is the same: that restoring council housing, a public good, to the mainstream is a vital part of a more sustainable and equitable housing policy. Councillor Meredith, who is considering declaring a housing emergency in Rochdale, as Glasgow and Edinburgh councils have, put this solution in simple terms:

'We've got a lot of land here. We could build on it. We don't want private developers doing it. Then we can re-open our housing revenue account and reestablish our housing department. We need to invest in council housing, but [that will take] a big shift.'

This week's public outrage about the Post Office scandal proves how quickly politicians can be moved to enact those big shifts, if they're put under enough pressure. The state of housing in Britain is a scandal worthy of just as much outrage. Before Awaab Ishak's death, we already had decades of evidence that our current approach was failing, inflicting insecurity, ill-health, and misery on millions. It is essential that we make safe, secure homes an election issue in 2024, and beyond that, take our council housing back.

Why the term "affordable housing" is a con

Peter Burke- A Fairer Society

Every politician, from the prime minister to your local council member, wants to be an affordable housing champion. However, despite their good intentions, they've been duped by a system that puts all the power in the hands of developers and investors who have no interest in creating genuinely affordable homes.

The term "affordable housing" is generally used to describe where the cost is 80 per cent of a market value. However, the definition is problematic because it depends on your other expenses, plus the size and makeup of your household.

And most importantly, the location, 80% of £1m? It isn't affordable! This is where the system is constantly against you because developers can't make the numbers work so well in lower-value areas when they have to build and sell for 80% of the market value, so fewer of them choose to.

But what does "affordable housing" mean?

Affordable doesn't necessarily mean cheap. So it comes back to your circumstance. Many people will struggle and often must rely on other forms of assistance, such as credits or payments.

Affordable housing is not low-income housing.

Cheap isn't always public or social, either.

Tax credits are a form of subsidy designed to help low-income households meet their housing needs. But let's be clear: tax credits are not helping the poor.

Instead, tax credit programmes are so that only a tiny portion of the total funds allocated for them go toward subsidising affordable housing for low-income families—the rest goes straight into private industry's pockets as incentives to build.

The system as we know it today arose out of many laws over time, so no one knows exactly where all the pieces come from or how they fit together. This makes any attempt at reform difficult because there are so many moving parts; more importantly, this lack of clarity creates a lot of confusion about what exactly we're trying to fix.

Even if there were an obvious point for reformers to focus on—there would still be questions about whether those organisations should exist or be something else entirely (like another government entity).

The winners in this story are the people who own their homes, and the losers are those who rent. In other words, we're talking about homeowners versus renters. And while not everyone can afford a house, most people over time have done.

However, in the past 30 years, that has slowly turned the other way with the massive increase in land value, making it impossible compared to stagnant wages.

That's why many rent-burdened households today and fewer young people own homes.

Renters who make below £30K per year cannot afford much unless they use a bank of mum and dad.

As policymakers continue searching for solutions to the affordable housing crisis, it's a generation of young people with no security and spiralling costs which continue to suffer. The term has become meaningless because it can mean many things to many different people.

But there is no doubt that families across the UK are struggling with rising rents. It isn't just an issue of semantics—it affects millions of households paying too much money each month for shelter. Affordable housing exists, but it's now taken up by a growing number of people who need it because wages and the cost of living spiral.

But it's not as simple as saying "build more houses!" or "make them cheaper!"

Instead, we need comprehensive solutions that address supply and demand factors impacting housing costs, such as land cost, planning laws and housing choices.

In our opinion, buyers and renters need more choice, that's why we exist, to create Better Places to Live Co-designed by the people who will live in them.

Why not take our 1 minute quiz to see if you need a 'better place to live

https://betterplacestolive.scoreapp.com/

Help to spread the word about Cohousing, Better Places to Live and creating A Fairer Society.Follow, like and share our mission across social media.

Co-housing in Sheffield

Housing Co-ops in Sheffield

Brambles Housing Co-op

Fireside Housing Co-op

Sheffield Student Housing Co-op

Share Instead Housing Co-op

Green Wood Housing Coop

Strap in: The Housing Crisis Is About to Get Even Worse

By Grace Blakeley- Tribune

Every time there's a recession, we're told there might be an upside. An often-cited example is housing, one of the single largest sources of expenditure for any household. It tends to become less expensive — or at least stops getting more expensive — during economic downswings.

This has more to do with the way housing is financed than peoples' demand to have a roof over their heads. In advanced economies, the vast majority of homeowners purchase property using a mortgage. When lending is plentiful and cheap, more people can take out mortgages and the demand for housing increases. But when banks stop lending, or interest rates rise, the inverse is true.

But today, we're facing an unusual combination of negative growth and high inflation that is wreaking havoc on the housing market. The cost-of-living crisis has decimated household finances, and the threat of a global recession means that things aren't likely to get better anytime soon. Banks know this and so are limiting the amount they're lending to reduce their exposure.

Usually in such a situation you'd expect interest rates to be low. Low business confidence means less investment; less investment means higher unemployment, lower consumer spending, and lower business confidence. In this context, cutting interest rates to stimulate lending provides one way to break the downward spiral. If interest rates are low, investment is cheaper — and so are mortgages.

But today, we're facing the kind of stagflationary (stagnation and inflation) crisis last seen in the 1970s. Growth and investment are both low, expectations about the future are dire, and yet interest rates are higher than they've been in years.

With credit both more expensive and less freely available, fewer people are likely to sell up. And potential first-time buyers are likely to wait until the economic situation picks up before trying to apply for a mortgage. Many people are already struggling to pay for the mortgages they do have.

The result will be a levelling-off of house prices across most advanced economies, especially those in which mortgage lending is the highest and where house prices have risen the most in recent years. The UK today meets both of these conditions.

A Vultures' Paradise

Mortgage lending as a percentage of GDP has ranged between 60 and 70 percent in most years since the financial crisis of 2008. And house prices are a shocking 400 percent higher than in 1970, compared to 150 percent for the US and 50 percent for Germany. A correction was long overdue.

Prices have fallen at the fastest rate in a decade, down 1.1 percent from last year. Today, prices are nearly 4 percent lower than they were when prices peaked in August 2022. The reason for this sudden reversal? UK mortgage approvals fell to their lowest levels, pandemic aside, since the Great Recession.

The trend is likely to continue, and some have argued that prices could fall by as much as 30 percent over the course of the next year. Such a significant drop in house prices might be taken as a positive for prospective buyers, but the destruction of wealth that would come alongside such a fall would likely exacerbate the cost-of-living crisis and lengthen the recession.

A housing crash remains unlikely. House prices in the UK will remain significantly higher than in other advanced economies, relative to wages, even after falling over the coming year. But the correction in house prices will create opportunities for those who grew rich on the back of the last several housing bubbles.

While those who rely on mortgage lending to fund their borrowing are feeling the pinch, those who can draw on cash to fund their purchases will actually benefit from this fall in prices. Less constrained by the dynamics of the financial cycle, national and international investors and corporate landlords will be able to snap up plenty of housing on the cheap.

As The Telegraph's economics reporter recently observed, the buy-to-let crisis is providing a 'golden opportunity' for landlords able to buy in cash. 'Rocketing rents and falling house prices', Lawford wrote, 'can create surging profits for for select investors'. This should, by now, be a familiar dynamic.

In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, when house prices fell far more rapidly than today, corporate landlords snapped up real estate all over the world. Investment flowed into 'vulture funds' — so-called because they swoop into depressed markets to purchase cheap assets.

In the US, asset manager Blackstone bought up billions of dollars' worth of property in the wake of the crash, becoming one of the world's largest corporate landlords. One of Blackrock's many subsidiaries, Invitation Homes, became the largest single-family corporate landlord in the US with more than 80,000 rented homes on its books.

Pandemic Profiteers

Unfortunately, the housing crisis only deepened during the pandemic. When it hit, many of the people living in these homes were unceremoniously evicted the moment they fell behind on their rent.

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis found that just four corporate landlords had filed at least 15,000 evictions in the midst of the pandemic lockdown — often using intimidation and illegal tactics to force tenants out and despite an eviction moratorium imposed by Congress.

The committee found that one corporate landlord — Siegel — distributed copies of a court order wrongly suggesting that the evictions moratorium was not being enforced by the courts. A senior executive at the firm sent emails to his colleagues encouraging them to use this strategy to 'bluff people out'.

The subcommittee found that '[p]roperty managers carried out this directive with evident glee, with one writing to an executive and a regional manager that he love[d] getting to say that this means the eviction may happen sooner than expected and seeing the look on their faces'. This particular message was followed by a smiley face emoji. Another Siegal executive suggested that one of his employees call Child Protective Services on a family as a way to expedite their eviction.

Siegel received millions from the US government in emergency assistance during the pandemic: assistance that had been designed to support tenants at risk of eviction.

In Spain, Blackstone purchased 100,000 distressed mortgages from one of the nation's banks — a bank that had been bailed out by the government during the financial crisis. Rules surrounding debt repayments in Spain have always been notoriously strict and borrowers are often saddled with debt even after technically defaulting — unless, of course, you're a bank that can access government cash.

Rather than negotiating with mortgage holders, Blackstone simply evicted tens of thousands of families from their homes. These homes were then rented out in private markets where the company could charge high rents. The company also purchased rent-controlled housing from Spain's local authorities before jacking up rents.

In Ireland, Blackstone and other private equity and asset management firms bought millions of dollars' worth of property in neighbourhoods decimated by the financial crisis before hiking up rents.

The United Nations issued a condemnation of the Irish government for supporting the 'egregious' business model. The UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing wrote in a letter to the Irish government: 'Almost overnight multinational private equity and asset management firms like Blackstone have become the biggest landlords in the world … they have converted homes into financial instruments and investments.'

Housing as 'Just Another Asset'

One of the ways in which these companies were able to access the cash they needed to fund their vulture funds was through Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), which own housing portfolios and can be listed on the stock market. This has, as one academic put it, helped to turn housing into 'just another asset class' as investors are able to invest in REITs just as they do in many other liquid financial assets.

The financialisation of housing has, if anything, deepened since the crisis of 2008, intersecting with other trends such as the digitisation of investment. As Matthew Ponsford and Ruairi Casey wrote in Tribune in 2021, the app Proptee 'allows anyone with, say, five grand to buy shares in a buy-to-let flat in London worth half a million. In return, you receive a slice of its tenants' monthly rent'.

The 24-year-old founder of the app explained that they planned to build 'a stock exchange for properties that lives on your smartphone and combines the high yields and low risk of property investing with the high liquidity of a stock exchange'.

This recession is providing plenty of opportunities for investors to cash in on falling house prices. With interest rates so high, cash is king. And while the cost-of-living crisis is impacting the finances of many families, limiting the income they have available to invest, astonishingly high levels of inequality mean there's always cash somewhere looking for a good investment opportunity.

The billionaires personally taking advantage of property prices collapsing include the Spanish founder of fashion outlet Zara, Amancio Ortega, Spain's richest man. Ortega purchased $2 billion worth of property across the US and the UK as the pandemic impacted commercial and residential property prices.

In the UK, where corporate landlordism has been less prevalent than it has in countries like the US and Ireland, it has been buy-to-let landlords who have benefitted the most from rising house prices since the financial crisis. In 2022, the number of homes available from buy-to-let landlords reached a record high: 8.7 million homes were being rented out through around 2.7 million landlords.

But as it becomes clear that house prices will not crater, big investors will start crowding into the market once again. With a paltry stock of social housing, little regulation of the sector, and no sign of rent controls anytime soon, private rents are likely to stay high for the foreseeable future. And as long as rents remain high, UK housing will remain a potentially profitable investment opportunity.

The Grassroots Fightback

The 400 percent increase in house prices seen since 1970 is unlikely to be repeated. The generation that was able to take advantage of this astonishing boom will keep its capital gains at the expense of younger people looking to get on the housing ladder.

Eventually, this wealth will be passed down to the children — and what was once intergenerational inequality will be converted to bog-standard wealth inequality.

But there is another way. The route to housing justice runs through resistance to the current system, regulation of the private rented sector, and expansion of the provision of social housing. Activists around the world are pursuing each of these avenues, often with significant success.

In the UK, tenants unions have been growing in size and becoming more militant in response to the housing crisis. Groups like ACORN and the London Renters Union have supported tenants dealing with rogue landlords and those at risk of eviction.

They have also mobilised to put pressure on local councils to implement policies that alleviate the housing crisis. And ACORN has teamed up with the campaigning organisation Enough is Enough to link the struggle for affordable housing with protests against the cost-of-living crisis.

Activists have also joined up across borders to protest the extractive business models of asset management firms like Blackstone. In 2015, as Blackstone's vulture funds swooped in to buy up housing across the US and Europe, activists in Spain, Ireland, and the US launched a day of action against the company.

Housing activists are also working alongside policy groups and political parties to push for greater regulation of the private rented sector and for alternative models of housing provision — from an expansion in social housing to housing co-ops and community land trusts.

In Berlin, activists won a significant victory in 2020 when the city's left-wing government introduced a package of rent controls to deal with an affordability crisis in the private rented sector. After a sustained lobbying effort by the country's big corporate landlords, the laws were overturned in 2021 by the country's high court, leaving tenants facing hundreds of euros worth of back payments.

The international financial press launched a coordinated campaign against the proposals and rejoiced when they were repealed. The Economist celebrated that the 'disastrous' rent controls had been overturned, while Bloomberg argued that the proposals had proved to be the 'disaster' that they had feared.

The failure of the rent control bill should give tenants' organisers an indication of the strength of the private housing lobby. But the fact that they were introduced in the first place is an indication of what can be achieved.

Another Housing System Is Possible

In fact, this is precisely why so many groups fought so hard to shut the proposals down — it's critical for those profiting from the current system that those fighting against it feel as though any potential alternatives are impossible or unworkable.

Landlords will complain, as they always do, that greater regulation will simply encourage them to sell up, reducing the available supply of housing and increasing rents further. But this argument is absurd. Are these houses going to disappear once they're sold?

The houses are there — and they're not going anywhere — they're just in the wrong hands. If landlords decide to sell up when greater regulation is introduced, local authorities should be instructed to purchase those houses and rent them out to social tenants at below-market rents. If necessary, the central government could provide the funding to facilitate this policy.

Over the long run, greater housebuilding is of course necessary. But this should not be left to the massive developers who currently dominate the housebuilding market, whose sole aim is to maximise profits to distribute to their shareholders.

Local authority housebuilding is one option. Environmental and housing campaigners have been working together to pressure governments around the world to respond to this recession by investing in green, affordable housing to create jobs, tackle climate breakdown, and solve the housing crisis.

But there are other models too. Community Land Trusts (CLTs) have been springing up all over the world in recent years. CLTs are non-profit organisations set up by members of a community to purchase land that is kept in a trust in perpetuity.

Housing is constructed on the land and either rented to tenants or sold to owners who pay a ground rent on the CLT's land. The land is therefore not sold alongside the house, and any capital gains accruing from rising land values are kept within the CLT.

According to the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), there are currently 263 CLTs across the UK and at least 300 more in development. In Liverpool, a CLT acquired ten properties from the city council before redeveloping the units and winning a Turner Prize for their 'ground-up approach to regeneration, city planning, and developing in opposition to corporate gentrification'.

Co-operatives provide another model of housing provision. Co-op members all buy into the co-op, which grants them access to a property as well as allows them to participate in decision-making processes.

While this model is more common across Europe and parts of the US, it is growing in the UK too. According to Community Led Homes, there are currently 685 housing co-ops in the UK with nearly 70,000 members. Recently, a number of student housing cooperatives have been set up across the UK as part of student-led campaigns against the high rents charged by corporate landlords.

It's critical for local campaigns for housing justice to articulate their demands as part of a wider struggle. Housing co-ops and CLTs can help to fill the huge gaps in provision that have emerged as the housing crisis has worsened, but they can't solve the crisis on their own.

For the human right to adequate housing to be realised, housing has to be decommodified — a part of the housing stock has to be insulated from the market altogether.

For this reason, housing campaigns are one place where nationwide campaigns for social justice meet community organising. The housing crisis provides many people with their first direct experience of the extractive and predatory nature of neoliberal capitalism.

The only sustainable way to better housing is a fundamentally different economic system — and that's why organising for it has such radical potential.

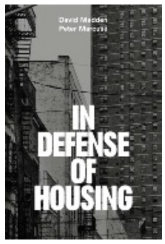
The financialization of housing

In every major city in the world there is a housing crisis. How did this happen and what can we do about it?

The financialisation of housing has become a global catastrophe, leaving millions desperate and homeless. Since the 2008 financial collapse, models of home ownership, originating in the US and UK, are being exported around the world.

Our cities are changing. Around the world, more and more money is being invested in buildings and land. Real estate is now a $217 trillion dollar industry, worth thirty-six times the value of all the gold ever mined and forms sixty percent of global assets,.

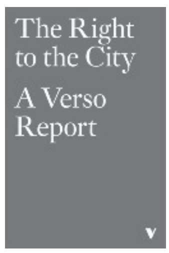
Everyone needs and deserves housing. But today our homes are being transformed into commodities, making the inequalities of the city ever more acute. Profit has become more important than social need. The poor are forced to pay more for worse housing. Communities are faced with the violence of displacement and gentrification. And the benefits of decent housing are only available for those who can afford it.



The book celebrates an era during which dreams of shelter and security for all—not just those who could afford to purchase it—were in large part made a reality, and asks us if we oughtn't to consider reviving that dream before it gets destroyed completely … There couldn't be a better time for this book.

Lynsey Hanley, Guardian

Free E Book from Verso



In 1968, the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre wrote "Le Droit a la Ville" ("The Right to the City"), which has become one of the most essential texts in radical geography and urban studies. It transformed the way we think about urban life and the right to make and remake our cities, and ourselves. Fifty years on, the question of who is the city is for, and why, is more urgent than ever.

Community Energy and the Road to Net Zero for S. Yorkshire

Free event - 16th March 0930-1600

Speakers:

Kate Joseph- CEO Sheffield City Council

Emma Bridge- CEO Community Energy England

- Concerned about our region's future in the face of the climate emergency? Want to build resilience and empower your community?
- This event gives you the chance to help set up local sustainable energy projects that can help us move to net zero.
- · Hear from and question collaborators from successful community energy projects around the country. Choose from ten workshops where you get to find out the practical steps they took to achieve their goals.
- · Meet others from our own community who are keen to get started with some South Yorkshire community energy projects.
- · Browse stalls and exhibitions showcasing organisations that can help, and explaining how you can get involved.

Whether you are:

- · An individual keen to invest your time or resources in a community energy project
- · A group dreaming of bringing renewable energy to your neighbourhood
- · An organization looking to support local sustainability initiatives
- Come along and join with us to create a greener, more resilient future for South Yorkshire.
- You can sign up for Expanding Community Energy in South Yorkshire here.

Workshops on:

Successful projects on

- Wind
- Solar
- Hydro
- Energy Efficiency & Home Retrofit
- Community Finance
- Community Co-ops
- How to organise

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/expanding-community-energy-in-south-yorkshire-tickets-793062600587?aff=oddtdtcreator

E.P. Thompson at 100: The Making of the English Working Class

Av Kim Traynor.:Lisens: CC BY SA 4.0

Conversations in left wing circles often turn to questions regarding what brought people to their political views. E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class will often crop up as text that galvanised both thought and action for many who have made it a lifelong cause. So important was the text that it is merely referred to as "The Making". Not only did it galvanise political action it also revolutionised the way we thought about history, away from Kings and Queens and constitutions towards the a story more based on social history and ordinary lives. His detractors derided it as a "history of losers" , the Luddites and Swing Rioters, weavers and spinners overtaken by industrialisation.

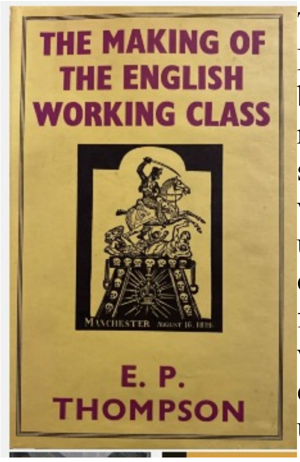
He adopted it as a badge of honour and celebrated the workers and their battles for freedom not only in the workplace, but in speech and print and the identity of the "free Englishman".

A member of the Communist Party until 1956 and later a leading figure in the New Left his life fell into two periods. The Halifax period giving him the formation and the evidence "the Making" and a close relationship with the descendants of the weavers and spinners central to the book. In 1970 he was tempted, some say based on falsehoods, to move to Warwick University to take up the Chair of Social History. He supported student activism at the university but his tenure did not last long and he resigned in 1971 in protest at the commercialisation of the university, prescient of the neoliberal university of today. His primary purpose after that was to focus on his work on nuclear disarmament and he became a leading figure in CND and helped form END (European Nuclear Disarmament.

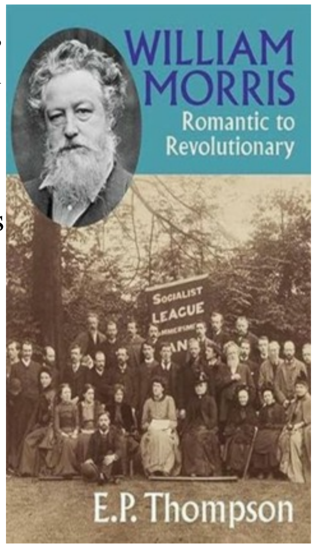
On a Saturday in February I travelled to Halifax, home to Thompson until 1957 and where he taught for the WEA and Leeds extra mural department for over thirty years. Calderdale TUC organised a day school to honour his life and work and to bring together people who knew him and scholars and workers interested in his legacy. The walk from the station almost introduced the day with the town of Halifax itself representing the change in class perspective in the world. The historic Piece Hall, originally the site of the market for textile workers offerings now gentrified with bars and posh shops close to Halifax Market still home to market traders and a very good "greasy spoon" cafe serving great egg and chips alongside nail bars and veg stalls. The day itself was excellent with a strong critique of Thompson as well as a celebration of his work. A range of speakers from Tariq Ali, still lucid and angry despite his age, spoke on both his New Left period and more local speakers on his early life and careeer. Others critiqued his work regarding a lack of a feminist or race perspective and others critiqued his rudeness and argumentative character but all celebrated his work and his passion for action alongside words. Many also spoke of his wife and companion Dorothy who made a not only a great contribution to supporting his work but also produced a huge body of work herself.

Thompson is important not only for his own work but also a member of a group of historians who have narrated the working class and "history from below" Eric Hobsbawn, George Rude, Raphael Samuel, Christopher Hill and Raymond Williams among them.

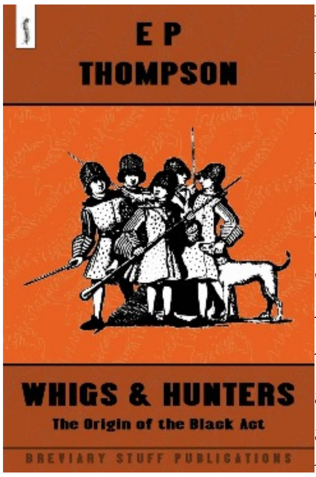
E.P. Thompson and his work



The revolutionary account of working-class culture and ideals, reissued as a Penguin Modern Classic to mark the 50th anniversary of its publicationThis brilliant account of working-class society in its formative years, 1780 to 1832, revolutionized our understanding of English social history. E. P. Thompson shows how the working class took part in its own making and re-creates the whole-life experience of people who suffered loss of status and freedom, who underwent degradation, and who yet created a cultured and political consciousness of great vitality. Offers an account of working-class society in its formative years, 1780 to 1832. This English social history shows how the working class took part in its own making and re-creates the whole-life experience of people who suffered loss of status and freedom, and who underwent degradation.



William Morris-the great 19th century craftsman, architect, designer, poet and writer-remains a monumental figure whose influence resonates powerfully today. As an intellectual (and author of the seminal utopian News From Nowhere), his concern with artistic and human values led him to cross what he called the 'river of fire' and become a committed socialist-committed not to some theoretical formula but to the day by day struggle of working women and men in Britain and to the evolution of his ideas about art, about work and about how life should be lived. Many of his ideas accorded none too well with the reforming tendencies dominant in the Labour movement, nor with those of 'orthodox' Marxism, which has looked elsewhere for inspiration. Both sides have been inclined to venerate Morris rather than to pay attention to what he said. Originally written less than a decade before his groundbreaking The Making of the English Working Class, E.P. Thompson brought to this biography his now trademark historical mastery, passion, wit, and essential sympathy. It remains unsurpassed as the definitive work on this remarkable figure, by the major British historian of the 20th century.



With Whigs and Hunters, the author of The Making of the English Working Class, E. P. Thompson plunged into the murky waters of the early eighteenth century to chart the violently conflicting currents that boiled beneath the apparent calm of the time. The subject is the Black Act, a law of unprecedented savagery passed by Parliament in 1723 to deal with 'wicked and evil-disposed men going armed in disguise'. These men were pillaging the royal forest of deer, conducting a running battle against the forest officers with blackmail, threats and violence. These 'Blacks', however, were men of some substance; their protest (for such it was) took issue with the equally wholsesale plunder of the forest by Whig nominees to the forest offices. And Robert Walpole, still consolidating his power, took an active part in the prosecution of the 'Blacks'. The episode is laden with political and social implications, affording us glimpses of considerable popular discontent, political chicanery, judicial inequity, corrupt ambition and crime.

E.P Thompson and the Sale of Wives Paper

Reader of Thomas Hardy's Mayor of Casteridge will be familiar with the wife sale. Thompson also carried out research into the 19th Century custom of wife sales or self divorce. Wife-selling was recognised as the commoner's only means of escape from marital misery. Wife sales were not recognised in law, but they were widely accepted within the community of ordinary people. Sometimes the crowd would object and it became a trial by mob imposing "fair " justice for man or wife.

What a legendary historian tells us about the contempt for today's working class

Kenan Malik- The Observer

Two Sides of the same coin

The old adage of “ To make the rich work harder you pay them more, to make the poor work harder you pay them less”

Deliveroo reports sales boost while drivers work in ‘Dickensian’ conditions

FOOD delivery giant Deliveroo reported a boost in sales today, while its drivers continue to endure “Dickensian” working conditions.

The takeaway platform reported £1.1 billion in sales for the fourth quarter in Britain and Ireland — a 7 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

Deliveroo’s founder Will Shu said he was “really proud of the team’s execution.”

However Shaf Hussein, the couriers chair of IWGB union, which represents some of the drivers, accused Mr Shu of “pushing his couriers into destitution” while rubbing his hands together at the prospect of higher profits.

He said: “Working poverty is now the reality for an increasing number of riders, whose pay Deliveroo is continually driving down even as the cost of living soars.”

Drivers are paid as little as £2-an-hour, according to a survey by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

James Farrar, director of Worker Info Exchange, which monitors the rights of gig economy workers, highlighted that shareholders had “devoured” a 40 per cent increase in the share price in the last 12 months “while rider pay has fallen through the floor.”

He said: “The secret of the spectacular success of Deliveroo’s business model is the merciless use of AI and automated decision-making systems to exploit some of the most vulnerable workers in Britain today.”

Ben Wray, of The Gig Economy project, said: “Part of the reason why Deliveroo can get away with Dickensian working conditions is because so many of their riders are undocumented migrants without the legal right-to-work, and therefore have very little choice but to accept poverty pay in lieu of an alternative way of attaining an income.

“Deliveroo’s sales growth has been built on the back of impoverished, black market labour, hardly a great British success story.”

morningstaronline.co.uk

British Gas boss admits his humongous £4.5m salary cannot be justified

THE boss of British Gas’s parent company admitted that he “can’t justify” his £4.5 million pay package today.

His humble admission came as thousands of customers struggle to pay their bills.

Chris O’Shea, who runs Centrica, told BBC Breakfast that he “can’t justify a salary of that size.”

Asked why he accepts such high pay, the CEO shirked responsibility and pointed to the presenters interviewing him.

“All of us sitting here on this sofa will make substantially more than £30,000,” he said.

“It’s not for me to set my own pay. It’s not for you to set your own pay.

“When you’ve got people who are struggling — and I look at my mum who’s on the basic state pension — it’s just impossible to justify, so there’s no point in trying to do that.”

Jan Shortt of the National Pensioners Convention called the comments "astounding."

She said it was proof of the need to bring energy into public ownership and "rid the system of not just salaries of this enormous level, but other profits going to shareholders that should, in this climate, be going towards the crippling bills that everyone is seeing land on their doorstep."

British Gas reported a record £969m in profits in the first half of 2023.

Fuel Poverty Action accused regulator Ofgem of allowing British Gas to reap in the "obscene" earnings, pay and bonuses.

"Even British Gas is admitting Ofgem's winter price cap is inflated, just when we need most energy to stay alive" a spokesperson said.

In the interview, Mr O'Shea indicated that if the price cap was reset now, households could see a potential decrease of over £200.

End Fuel Poverty Coalition co-ordinator Simon Francis argued that it is still up to 50 per cent more than what they were before the energy bills crisis began.

He said: "Big salaries, bonuses and dividend payouts characterise the energy industry.

"The firms that run the networks, the market traders who help set the prices, the overseas funds that control our gas grid — all of them are making profit from the misery of UK households."

He urged the government to take action instead of "wasting valuable parliamentary time on a political Oil & Gas Licensing Bill which will do nothing to bring down energy bills or improve energy security."

Morning Star - Elizabeth Short

Friday, January 19, 2024

news Press Release 08 Feb 2024

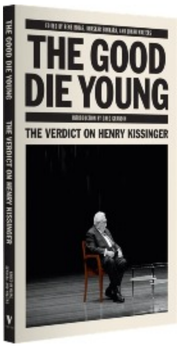
The Australian Senate has today passed world-leading legislation that enforces minimum standards for gig economy and road transport workers. The bill is on track to pass the House on Monday.

The 'Closing the Loopholes' Bill empowers Australia's labour regulator, the Fair Work Commission, to set and enforce safer, fairer minimum standards for transport workers. The reform will go a long way towards stopping exploitative competition, guaranteeing fair pay and conditions for road transport workers, and making Australian roads safer.

The win follows years of sustained campaigning and lobbying by the Transport Workers' Union of Australia (TWU), with TWU National Secretary Michael Kaine declaring: "This reform will save lives, will quell the threat of exploitative gig competition, and will make transport businesses more viable."

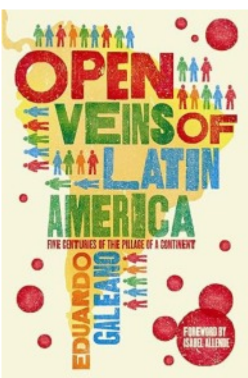
Chile 50 years On: A history of US meddling

A few editions ago we reported on a day school commemorating the overthrow of a socialist government in Chile by the junta of General Pinochet. The dayschool also remembered the refugees that made their way to Sheffield following the coup and subsequently settled and made their lives here alongside the Sheffield Community. Many of the refugees were initially housed by trade unionists and aided in settling by Labour and left political activists. The community is now longstanding and Sheffield has an Esteli Society celebrating those links and friendships. Sheffield even has an Esteli Parade alongside the River Don and it was recently the scene for a tree planting celebrating the shared history. Other more recent events reminded us of the part played in the coup by the US coup and its interference in Chilean events and those of other S. American countries. The recent death of the then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has brought those events back into the spotlight, particularly his instructions to US Government officials" to make the economy scream". The fall of Allende's socialist government in 1973 was not the first intervention in Chilean politics. In 1948 US influence on the liberal government of Gabriel Videla's Liberal government had seen left members of the coalition to be expelled and persecuted. This led to the flight of poet Pablo Neruda to flee Chile across the Andes where he remained in exile.



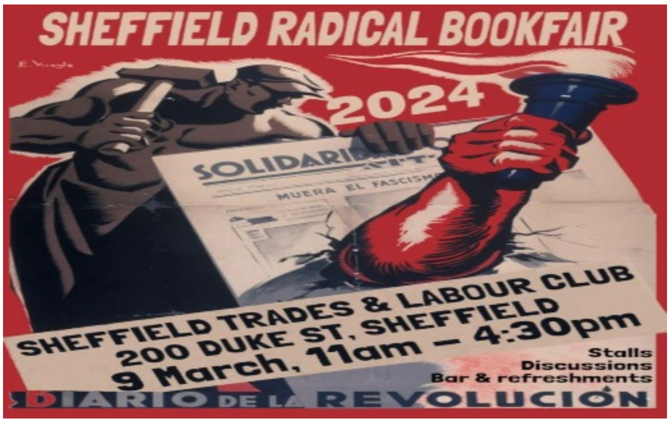
Kissinger is dead but his blood-soaked legacy endures

If the American foreign policy establishment is a grand citadel, Henry Kissinger is the specter haunting its dusty hallways. For half a century, he was an omnipresent figure in war rooms and at press briefings, dutifully shepherding the American empire through successive attempts at expansion. For multiple generations of antiwar activists, Kissinger personified the depravity of the US war machine.



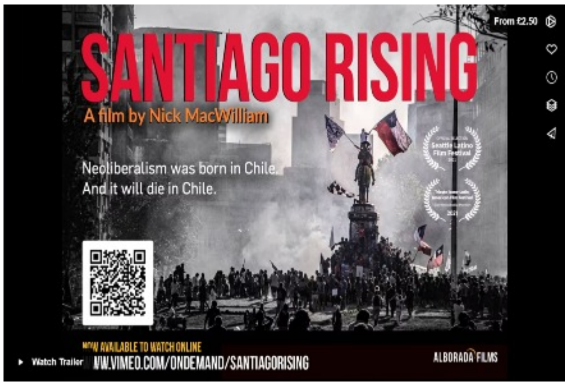
Since its U.S. debut a quarter-century ago, this brilliant text has set a new standard for historical scholarship of Latin America. It is also an outstanding political economy, a social and cultural narrative of the highest quality, and perhaps the finest description of primitive capital accumulation since Marx.

Rather than chronology, geography, or political successions, Eduardo Galeano has organized the various facets of Latin American history according to the patterns of five centuries of exploitation. Thus he is concerned with gold and silver, cacao and cotton, rubber and coffee, fruit, hides and wool, petroleum, iron, nickel, manganese, copper, aluminum ore, nitrates, and tin. These are the veins which he traces through the body of the entire continent, up to the Rio Grande and throughout the Caribbean, and all the way to their open ends where they empty into the coffers of wealth in the United States and Europe.



Loads of stalls are confirmed so far - get in touch if you're interested in having a stall.

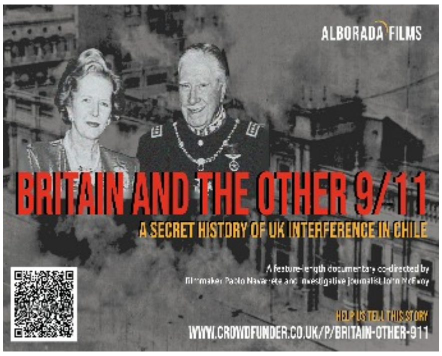
Want to host a talk, a workshop, letter writing session, radical crafts, banner making session, or use the workshop space for a radical sing? Give us a shout ! We have a spare room and spare slots throughout the day.



Santiago Rising takes place on the streets of Chile's capital city in late 2019 as massive protests over economic inequality engulf the country.

Filmed during the weeks after protests began, Santiago Rising meets social movements, protesters and ordinary people in their struggle for equality and human rights.

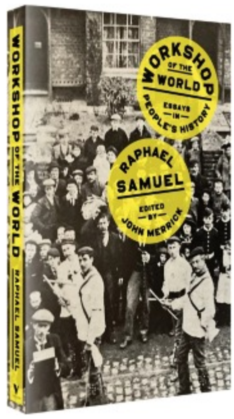
The film charts the build-up to the historic vote, in October 2020, that saw Chileans vote for a new constitution to replace the one imposed during the brutal Pinochet dictatorship.



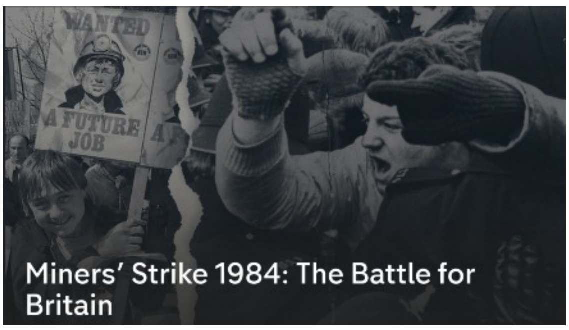
Britain and the Other 9/11 peels back a layer of official secrecy through extensive archival research, Freedom of Information work, and interviews with key actors.

The film makes a number of startling revelations, with new information on MI6 activities in Chile, covert propaganda operations against Allende, secret support for the Pinochet regime, and the Anglo-Chilean machinations which allowed Pinochet to escape justice for crimes against humanity.

'ONE OF THE MOST OUTSTANDING, ORIGINAL INTELLECTUALS OF HIS GENERATION', Stuart Hall, author of The Hard Road to Renewal



The work of the pioneering historian Raphael Samuel opened up new vistas of historical enquiry. He was committed to the idea of people's history, in which he excavated the ordinary lives of those often overlooked or discarded by other writers. This 'unofficial knowledge' transformed what history was, who was allowed to do it, and who it was for.



Forty years after, through the eyes of those directly involved, this powerful series explores the bitterly divisive strike that wounded the soul of the nation

Episode 1 - Community

Episode 2 - Law and Order

Episode 3- Power