The Plebs News

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In last month’s Plebs News we remembered the Chilean coup of 1973 and the part it played in the rise of neoliberal economics around the world. The articles featured the problems that has followed the imposition of the “Washington Consensus” that has driven global economics and globalization and the downside effects on some economies and the economic architecture of the world.

Probably the greatest dissatisfaction of the system has been the domination of the global institutions of the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organisation by the developed nations and particularly the power of the dollar as the global currency of choice. Other anxieties around the domination have been the use of sanctions, intellectual property and unfair trade agreements. Examples include the hoarding of vaccines during the Covid pandemic and the failure to allow the manufacture of many generic medicines battling diseases common in poorer countries..

Author Arundhati Roy, claimed “ The actions of the US government, together with its various satellites barely disguised as “ international institutions” like the World Bank, IMF and WTO, have brought about as their dangerous side products, nationalism, religious fanaticism, fascism and terrorism- which advance hand in hand with the progress of liberal globalisation.”

The developing nations, tired of lack of progress, launched a new grouping to grow their influence on the World Order. This became known as BRICS after its membership of Brazil, Russia, India, China and S. Africa. Although there are differences in the regimes governments they all shared the desire to craft an alternative. The original acronym "BRIC", or "the BRICs", was coined in 2001 by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill to describe fast-growing economies that he predicted would collectively dominate the global economy by 2050.

The BRICS nations encompass about 27% of the world's land surface and 42% of the global population.[a] Brazil, Russia, India, and China are among the world's ten largest countries by population, area, and GDP (PPP), and are considered to be current superpowers, or potential emerging superpowers. All five states are members of the G20, with a combined nominal GDP of US$28 trillion (about 27% of the gross world product), a total GDP (PPP) of around US$57 trillion (33% of global GDP PPP), and an estimated US$4.5 trillion in combined foreign reserves (as of 2018). Bilateral relations among BRICS are conducted mainly on the basis of non-interference, equality, and mutual benefit.

At a recent summit over forty countries had expressed an interest in joining BRICS and six, Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE where admitted as members.

Behind BRICS expansion

By Prabhat Patnaik (Posted Sep 02, 2023) - MR Online

AT the Johannesburg summit of the BRICS countries, it was decided to expand the group beyond its original five, namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, to include six more countries. These are: Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These six it appears were chosen out of a list of twenty-two countries which had been keen to join the BRICS grouping. What is more, government sources in South Africa which currently chairs BRICS have revealed that as many as 40 countries have been interested in joining the group. The question naturally arises: why has BRICS suddenly become so popular?

Many have seen BRICS as an attempt on the part of some large countries, excluded from "the high table" of imperialist countries, to assert themselves and play a more significant role in world affairs, a role in keeping with what they think they deserve. But BRICS is a highly disparate body: Russia and China are permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto powers anyway, with one of them being currently engaged in a war with countries of the "high table" and the other being vilified as their "main enemy"; so the question of their feeling "excluded" simply does not arise. And as for the remaining members, BRICS, as a body, has not played any key role in any world situation since its formation; so, these remaining members too can scarcely be seen as mere aspirants for a bigger role in world affairs (for, had they been, they would have been more pro-active). Likewise, just acquiring greater importance cannot be the motive behind so many countries wanting to join the BRICS.

The problem with this explanation moreover is that it is quite oblivious of the political economy underlying the current world situation which is marked by an economic crisis of world capitalism, a crisis that even conservative and establishment economists are calling a "secular stagnation".

In this situation of crisis, the old international institutions appear singularly inadequate, and the imperialist countries seem quite incapable of modifying them, or altering them, or making new institutional innovations, to cope with the situation. The BRICS appears in this context as an innovation of promise. The popularity of BRICS in other words is a manifestation of the crisis, an expression of lack of confidence in the imperial arrangement that has existed till now, to cope with the crisis. This does not make BRICS an "anti-imperialist" grouping: some countries within it are no doubt anti-imperialist but countries like Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, can by no stretch of imagination be said to be revolting against imperialism by joining BRICS. While not anti-imperialist, they are looking at an alternative arrangement of promise which they think can provide them with crucial support in the days to come.

In the expanded BRICS that exists now there are three distinct kinds of countries (these are not mutually exclusive): countries against which imperialism has imposed unilateral "sanctions" or punitive protectionist measures; oil and natural gas producing countries; and countries that are already experiencing hardships in the midst of the current world crisis or are likely to do so in the coming days. China, Russia and Iran exemplify the first category; Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE exemplify the second; and Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina the third (with Brazil and India being worried about the unfolding crisis and keen on alternative arrangements).

For countries that are subject to unilateral imperialist sanctions that are imposed even without any Security Council clearance, BRICS provides a potential arrangement for by-passing these sanctions. In that sense the inclusion of Iran in BRICS is perhaps more significant than any other measure adopted at the Johannesburg summit. Iran has not only been subjected to severe sanctions, but was the first country that was excluded from having to access to its own foreign exchange reserves held in metropolitan banks, which was in clear contravention of the capitalist rules of the game devised by the imperialist countries themselves. Since then such acts of international "brigandage" have become quite common, with Russia being the latest victim in the wake of the Ukraine war: it too was not allowed to access its own foreign exchange reserves held in foreign banks. Joining BRICS enables these "sanctioned" countries to break out of the vice in which imperialism wishes to trap them.

The oil and natural gas producers find the prices of their products falling because of the world recession and have been trying to shore up these prices by curtailing output in response to reduced demand. This is against the explicit wishes of the United States. Indeed, on one occasion, it had sent several emissaries, including even Biden himself, to Saudi Arabia to request that country to oppose an output cut at the then forthcoming OPEC+ meeting; but this U.S. pressure had not worked. Since then there have been more occasions when OPEC+ has announced output cuts. If the oil producers are to have sufficient autonomy in future to decide on oil output in defiance of U.S. wishes, then a diversification of their relations away from exclusive dependence on the U.S., without necessarily becoming antagonistic towards that country, seems essential. For them, joining BRICS is a means of such diversification.

For the third group of countries, that is, Egypt, Argentina and Ethiopia which have severely ailing economies and Brazil, India and South Africa whose economies, though also ailing, are less severely afflicted, the attraction of BRICS lies elsewhere, namely in the possibility of local-currency trade that by-passes the dollar. Brazil and China have recently entered into such a local-currency trade arrangement, as have India and the UAE; and more such arrangements are likely among BRICS members in the coming days which constitutes a major attraction for joining BRICS.

The relative currency values among countries entering into such arrangements are fixed, and the dollar is not needed either as the unit of account or as the medium of circulation in trade between them. Such arrangements, by effectively enlarging the availability of the circulating medium among these countries, and making such enlargement the outcome of decisions taken by the countries themselves (which can increase their money supplies at will), facilitate trade for them, which is no longer constrained by any dollar shortage.

This however answers only half the problem; what is required in addition is that the balance of trade between such countries should be settled by the surplus country buying goods and services from the deficit country, if not immediately then at least over a period of time. In other words, local-currency trade enlarges the stock of liquidity in the world economy but does not overcome the problem of external debt arising from trade between countries entering into such an arrangement.

When BRICS encourages such bilateral trade arrangements, where balances are also settled not by a build-up of debt of the deficit country but by buying more goods from it, it would have made a significant contribution towards improving the functioning of the world economy; it would then be a real alternative to the imperialist-dominated world economic order.

The new director of the BRICS Bank, Dilma Rousseff, the former president of Brazil, has made it clear that the bank has no intention of giving loans for debt settlement or debt servicing, either to the third world in general or to member countries; it would not reduce the third world's need therefore for going to the IMF for this purpose and suffering from the "austerity" imposed by it. But she is keen on expanding local-currency trade and also on providing infrastructure lending to third world countries, which would go some way in loosening the hold of imperialist-dominated institutions.

There has been much discussion among Left circles in member countries about what exactly BRICS means for imperialism. Some argue that while it is anti-imperialist, it is not anti-capitalist; but even to call it anti-imperialist is a gross over-statement. A grouping with leaders like Modi, MBS (of Saudi Arabia) and Sisi (of Egypt) cannot possibly be called anti-imperialist. What it does however is to weaken, at least to some extent, the monopoly stranglehold of imperialist institutions on the world economy; and that certainly is a positive development. It does not itself constitute a blow against imperialism, but it creates a setting that is more favourable for the working people of the world to strike a blow against imperialism.

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About Prabhat Patnaik

Prabhat Patnaik is an Indian political economist and political commentator. His books include Accumulation and Stability Under Capitalism (1997), The Value of Money (2009), and Re-envisioning Socialism (2011).

Labour Research Department

26 September 2023

Official data backs union claims of profiteering

Also in LRD:

Inflation: why excess profits and high interest rates are to blame

Profiteering and flawed policies are driving inflation, not wage claims. Workplace Report examines the reasons for persistent inflation in the UK — and why raising interest rates is likely to be doing more harm than good.

Two new reports give weight to union claims that it's profiteering that is causing persistent inflation, rather than rising wages.

Since 2021, unions such as the Unite general union have argued that it is corporate greed and "profiteering" that have kept inflation persistently high after the first supply-side shocks to prices caused by the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Now, research from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Bank of England (BoE) appears to give additional credence to that claim.

With the growth rate of regular private sector pay at 8.1% for May to July 2023, the ONS has published a new report comparing wage increases with price increases across different industrial sectors. Its aim is to see what proportion of rising prices have come from a "pass-through" of rising wage costs.

It finds that:

"in manufacturing and some services industries, even after large wage increases between 2019 and June 2023 ... labour costs have largely been stable as a fraction of output, and industry output price growth has appeared to be mainly caused by other factors".

In other words, it is not pay increases causing secondary inflation.

According to the ONS, the rising costs for business of "inputs" such as energy and raw materials peaked in July 2022, but, prices continued to rise rapidly long after that date.

Within manufacturing firms, prices have risen by an average of 32% since 2019, while wages have only risen by an average of 12.9%. Factoring in the rise in input costs, the report shows that, on average, only 11.7% of price increases across the whole sector can be explained by passing pay increases on to customers. In some cases, wages have even fallen while prices have risen.

For example, in the Industrial gases, inorganics and fertilisers sector, there has been a 57% rise in prices, none of which is due to rising wages, as pay went down by 1%. Meanwhile, the initial hike in the cost of producing fertiliser, which is closely linked to the natural gas industry, came as a result of the Ukraine war, prices have remained high despite the fall in the cost of gas.

All wage rises are not equal

In services, the picture is somewhat different. There is a much greater variation in how much rising prices correlate with the passing through of higher wage costs.

Notably, a few traditionally high paying industries have enjoyed eye-watering wage increases over the last four years, without raising their prices much. This suggests that the companies in these industries have been able to absorb rising costs in other ways, most likely through increasing demand.

The market research and polling industry has seen wages rise by 64%, and the legal and accounting industries have also seen wage increases of 49%, way above the increases to the prices they charge.

In contrast, in other industries where labour costs are a higher proportion of overall costs, such as in residential care activities for elderly and disabled people, wage rises of around 33% (much of which are likely to have come from increases to the National Minimum Wage) account for 78% of the 26% increase in prices. However, that still leaves 22% of the price inflation not related to pay at all.

In other service industries which have seen huge price rises, the small impact of wages as a contributing factor may also indicate profiteering is taking place.

For example, the hotels and accommodation industry has hiked its prices by 30%, but their pay rises over the same period only account for 20% of that rise. Likewise, in air transport, only 10% of its 23% price rise came from wages. Warehousing and transportation support services gave workers 2% wage increases in four years but raised prices by 28%.

The ONS report also mentions labour shortages as a contributing factor to both rising wages and prices. In childcare and social work, wages have risen by 25%, perhaps due to well documented shortages in the sector, but prices have risen by much less.

This sector may well have had to take a hit to profits to absorb these extra costs, although there is also growing demand for their services.

Meanwhile, a separate Bank of England report measured the profit margins of a sample of 2,500 businesses to see their relation to price growth. It found that 30% of companies had increased their profit margins during the last year of high inflation, with 19% of those enjoying large gains of over 3%. Moreover, 45% of the sample expect their margins to grow over the next year, with these firms also having "slightly higher expected price growth for the year ahead, suggesting margin rebuilding could make some contribution to inflation persistence".

Taken advantage

While both reports indicate that not all businesses have been gaining, they both show that a core group of already profitable firms have taken advantage of the situation to make even more profit. According to BoE data, the top 10% of profitable businesses have successfully driven their margins to approaching 30%.

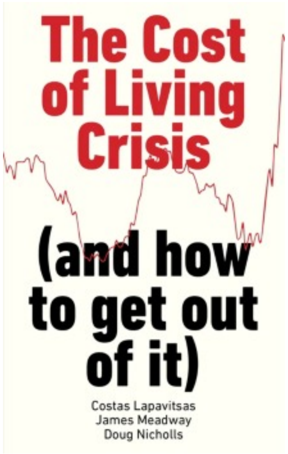
In other words, the data is consistent with Unite's findings that businesses that dominate markets are benefitting from this crisis at the expense of workers.

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary, commented: "Ever since the greedflation crisis began, the Bank of England has been attacking workers' wages while downplaying corporate profiteering.

"Now the central bank's own analysis supports what Unite has argued all along about inflation. Companies are raising prices simply to boost their own profit margins."

The Labour Research Department (LRD) is an independent trade union-based research organisation providing information to support trade union activity and campaigns.

https://www.lrd.org.uk/



The Cost of Living Crisis:(and how to get out of it)

by Costas Lapavitsas, James Meadway and Doug Nicholls

We are living through a cost of living crisis, with interest rate hikes and the prices of everyday consumables and energy bills sky-rocketing. Why is this happening? Sometimes we are told that wages are too high, or that the government has "printed" too much money or that events far away, such as the war in Ukraine, are solely to blame. The plain argument that high prices go together with high profits, falling wages, and weak production is often distorted and hidden by mainstream commentary in the media and elsewhere.

This plain-speaking pamphlet tells it straight: the big businesses dominating production and distribution make huge profits out of high inflation, while working people lose out. It sets out factual evidence to illustrate that the source of record profits is the fall in real wages as inflation rises. A large part of the income of working people is being transferred directly into the profits of big business. The pamphlet shows that the deeper roots of the "cost of living crisis" lie in the very low investment and poor productivity growth for many years. The basic steps to resolving the crisis are simple: prices, especially of essentials, must be brought down, and wages, salaries, benefits, and pensions must be increased.

Reviews

[An] excellent little book.

The authors explain: the profits of the 350 biggest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange are 73 per cent higher than they were in 2019. There is a relentless rise in profits when companies take advantage of rising prices in order to boost their profits.

The authors insist that we cannot leave the essential elements of modern life — notably water, food, energy and transport — to market forces. The working class has to take control, take charge.

Will Podmore, The Morning Star

A small book with a mighty big punch ... Closely argued in clear, accessible language, [The Cost of Living Crisis] demolishes the decades-old lie that wage rises are the source of inflation, and backs that case with hard facts.

Scottish Socialist Voice

Funding the Future

Formerly Tax Research UK

Why we now need above inflation rate pay rises – and why they are not inflationary

Posted on July 12 2023- Richard Murphy

The government and the Bank of England are again calling today for wage restraint to beat inflation - as if the whole cost of beating inflation must fall on wage-earning households and not the companies and banks that are causing it or the wealthy who are gaining.

The Taxing Wealth Report 2024

The Taxing Wealth Report is written by Prof Richard Murphy and is part of Funding the Future Project.

Every politician's guide to paying for it

The Taxing Wealth Report 2024: recommendations to date and their suggested value

Posted on 13 September 2023

The following recommendations have been made so far and will go on to form part of the Taxing Wealth Report 2024:

- Restricting pension tax relief to the basic rate of income tax, which might raise £14.5 billion of additional revenue per annum.
- Abolishing the VAT exemption for financial services within the UK, which might raise £8.7 billion of additional tax revenue per annum.
- Reforming national insurance charges on higher levels of earned income in the UK, which might raise an additional £12.5 billion of tax revenue per annum.
- Aligning capital gains tax and income tax rates in the UK, which might raise more than £12 billion in additional tax a year.
- Abolishing capital gains tax entrepreneur's relief, which might raise approximately £2.2 billion of additional tax a year.
- Recreating an investment income surcharge in the UK tax system, which might raise up to £18 billion of extra tax revenue a year.
- Capping the rate at which tax relief is given on charitable donations under Gift Aid might raise £740 million in tax a year
- Abolishing the VAT exemption for services supplied by private schools might raise £1.6 billion in tax a year
- The Taxing Wealth Report 2024: the UK needs better estimation of its tax gap to prevent the illicit accumulation of wealth. No tax estimate has been made as part of this recommendation.
- The Taxing Wealth Report 2024: capping ISA contributions to £100,000 in a lifetime might raise £100 million in tax a year.
- Reforming the administration of corporation tax in the UK might raise at least £6 billion of tax a year.
- Increasing the corporation tax rate for the UK's largest companies could raise £7 billion in tax annually.
- Reducing the annual exempt amount of capital gains a person might enjoy a year to £1,000 might raise at least £0.4 billion of additional tax
- Charging capital gains tax on the final disposal of a person's main residence might raise £10 billion of tax a year

- The Taxing Wealth Report 2024: abolishing the inheritance tax exemption on some funds retained in pension arrangements at the time of a person's death might raise £1.3 billion a year.
- Taxing Wealth Report 2024: Reforming inheritance tax business property relief might raise £3.2 billion of tax a year

Cumulatively, these recommendations have a total tax-raising potential of £98.2 billion per annum, although it is not necessarily suggested that any government undertake all these proposals simultaneously. The behavioural impact of seeking to do so is not considered when making this estimate, but it is with regard to each estimate in isolation.

All these recommendations can be found explained by visiting the Taxing Wealth Report

Finance for the Future LLP is a partnership between chartered accountant and economic justice campaigner Richard Murphy and environmentalist Colin Hines.

Richard Murphy is Professor of Accounting, Sheffield University Management School as well as the director of Tax Research UK and the Corporate Accountability Network. A biography for him is available here, and his CV is available here.

Colin Hines is the creator and convener of the Green New Deal group.

Together Richard and Colin have worked on the Green New Deal, the promotion of local authority bonds and pension reform, all with the objective of releasing funding for green investment in the UK. Their recent work has concentrated on the uses of green quantitative easing and how the tax incentivised savings of UK resident people can provide the funding required for the Green New Deal.

The Polden Puckham Charitable Foundation and the Marmot Charitable Trust have provided all the funding for this work in recent years.

Recent Posts

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- **We need green quantitative easing to tackle climate change**
- **New money is part of the solution to our problems**
- **A just transition to net zero is easily affordable**
- **If only we'd had green quantitative easing**

'Unions need to broaden our horizons — and become the political leadership in this country'

DOUG NICHOLLS, who is stepping down as GFTU general secretary, talks to Morning Star editor Ben Chacko about the lessons of a lifetime in struggle

Having been general secretary, first at the Community and Youth Workers Union and then at General Federation of Trade Unions, since 1987, you are retiring as Britain's longest-serving general secretary. There have been significant changes in the movement over that time. What do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses?

Unions are now more popular than at any time I have known. The public are behind the pay struggles in ways they never have been before. Remember in 1976 the big unions and TUC called a conference to argue that there should be pay restraint to avoid a spiral of inflation. No-one believes these days that higher wages are to blame for the cost of living crisis.

There's ebb and flow of overt struggle but I'm minded of what one of the leaders of the revolt in 1381 said: "In time of peace, be not all men at war with them that be rich."

The weakness in the movement has been that some think that our role is to manage capitalism a bit better than capitalists can.

While trade unions are defensive organisations and only a few have had a commitment in their rules to struggle for a socialist society, many have resigned themselves to the false view that unions do "industrial" things and the Labour Party does the politics. There's nothing more political than saving jobs and fighting for wages. But we now need to broaden our horizons and become the political leadership of the country.

So while only a few trade unions, 15, out of the hundreds there are, have affiliated to the Labour Party, the general passing the buck has been, out of weakness, not that we can aspire and achieve more for ourselves and run things better than them, but we must pretend clever people elected to Parliament can do it better.

Our strengths reside in the opposite position which is deeply rooted in British working-class history from the 14th-century Lollards onwards. There is a red thread of politics which has broken out loudly at various points like 1381, 1549, 1649, 1834, 1968, 1984 and 2023, successfully achieving major transformation. The best trade unionists I have known are part of this tradition and fought fiercely for the independence of thought and country.

Another great strength remains that we organise on trade lines. If you are a worker in Britain it doesn't matter if you are Muslim or Catholic, you join the union that organises your trade. And we have one trade union centre as a result.

Union density is currently at around 23 per cent nationally. What can we do to rebuild the trade union movement?

A figure that sits alongside this is that we now have less than 20 per cent collective bargaining coverage. 80 per cent of people cannot bargain collectively for their wages, they are at the mercy of the markets and employers.

The unions in my view now have to continue to broaden the scope of industrial struggle. CWU is fighting for the future of a proper integrated, publicly owned postal service, the RMT for a nationalised, safe, efficient rail service, the doctors and nurses and health unions for a properly funded, publicly owned NHS, the teachers for progressive education, the civil servants for a well

organised national infrastructure of government services, prison officers for humane prisons, social workers for integrated social care and so on.

More of this should occur and the movement should go onto the offensive with a range of proposals for each aspect of life. We need plans. Alternative models of social organisation, an articulate vision for the whole country. Inspire, aspire, raise sights high, have ambition, project a vision for the future of our people.It would also help if unions could resist the temptation to pinch each others' members and block great unions from joining the TUC.

The vote to leave the EU, and subsequent successful pressure from many unions to push Labour into an electorally disastrous Remain position, revealed a disconnect between the labour movement and many working-class communities. What do you think caused that disconnect, and do you think the current strike wave is an opportunity to address it?

My first TUC Congress was 1988. Jacques Delors popped along to promise the British trade union movement a bit more adult education, perhaps a bit more health and safety legislation and a few seats round a few inconsequential tables in return for supporting the single European market and derogation of national sovereignty to the unelected EU commissioners.

Largely the labour movement swallowed it, in a catastrophic suspension of our normal scepticism and critical analysis when dealing with employers.

The movement relinquished its most distinctive feature — its self-reliance, its independence, its recognisition that you don't get anything worthwhile without fighting for it.

The fantasy was acute. It said despite the rampage of the neoliberal vandalism that followed, that if we put unelected overseas judges and commissioners in charge of our economy cheek by jowl with the banks, milk and honey will flow.

No other trade union movement I can think of has ever so willingly turned its back on its own country and people and welcomed in strangers to take over the shebang. Instead of recognising that the EU was a like a nursing home for clapped-out capitalist states huddling together for warmth, the trade unions here and many in the EU lauded it as a solution to all our problems.

If Margaret Thatcher can't save us, perhaps Jacques Delors will, many thought. This hollows out the confidence that unions normally have in the power of collective action to actually change things. When facing an apparently insurmountable enemy you can at least vote out of office, you don't sensibly choose another one you can't remove from office.

It was a huge generational mistake running counter in fact to the entire history of the workers' movement here which has been associated with national sovereignty, the universal franchise, and an independent and free trade union movement.

Despite all the huff and puff for years Delors and his successors never unlocked the shackles around British trade unions and never allowed state intervention, manufacturing and public services to flourish. Quite the opposite.

Now, people aren't daft. Hearing so many trade union leaders singing the praises of the obviously undemocratic and destructive EU labyrinth indicated that the unions, to put it politely, had had the stuffing knocked out of them and weren't prepared to fight and organise any more.

This whole fiasco came about after the years of destruction of engineering and our industrial base, the closure of the coal mines so bravely fought against by the miners, the clobberings at Wapping, the incessant anti-union laws and actions, the weakening of the dockers' organisation and so on.

Some have declared that the "working class is back." Is that how you see the current strike wave?

We never went away. We are always there. Action on the streets and strikes are just one part of the story.

The constant unstoppable murmur and organisation of workers is ever present. Our predecessors going way back to the Middle Ages had the image of the sleeping giant waking. After periods of defeat and in the case of previous generations, slaughter, eventually new stirrings arise.

The strike wave is a manifestation of thought of organisation, of a recognition that change must occur not just in the pay packet, but in society and the economy and in every productive, life-enhancing area of our country.

The period of pillage is at an end. Strikes come and go, thought and organisation and a vision of a new social reordering do not. And transformation will come from the joining of the dots of those progressive ideas that demand we take responsibility for the running of our country.

You have been general secretary of the GFTU since 2010, and on its executive long before that. What do you see as the main role and achievements of the federation in that period?

Too many to mention! The international solidarity work has been stupendous, rebuilding links with Vietnamese unions for example, restoring discussion of the history of the labour movement to trade union education, finding new ways of engaging young people in union work, building links with community organisations, transforming the trade union education curriculum, creating a hotel and training centre with the best food, best service, best accommodation; putting economics back into the curriculum, helping new unions form and grow, providing 60 and more practical services to unions to save them money and improve the quality of their organisations, creating a friendly environment for professional groups in union staff teams to network and an informal support structure for general secretaries, and much much more!

Trade unions represent workers in the workplace, but a plethora of voluntary organisations exist to organise them in the community. How can greater links be built between the two?

The GFTU has started to do this and is leading the way. The first national community organisation, the Workers' Education Association, has a seat on our executive and we are working with others to join us in this way.

We have written a major policy paper suggesting ways in which unions and community organisations must work together at a permanent structural level so that the biggest divide in our society that between workplace organisations and neighbourhood and community organisations can be broken down.

The GFTU is open to welcome the affiliation and membership and participation of community organisations. We need to continue this journey with the infrastructure bodies first. We also run a charity and fund it directly ourselves.

We have organised conference to begin this dialogue in earnest and are publishing a book on the subject soon.

Fourteen million people volunteer in community organisations and 850,000 paid workers work them. Community organisations share our values and democratic values and campaign on issues central to our work as unions.

Trade union councils are where much of this work can start at local level and the district committees of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions do a great job also of bridging the gap. Unions like the Professional Footballers Association have long supported community organisations in the clubs.

So it is a question of joining up with each other, not on the latest campaign or picket line, but at executive and membership levels.

Paul Nowak, the TUC leader, has called for a "fundamental economic resettlement," and Labour is promising a "new deal for workers," yet in 2019 the last major political challenge to business as usual was heavily defeated. What changes do Britain's working people need — and how do you see us securing them?

Paul is right. This area of work enabling workers to argue in an informed way for a new political economic settlement should now be the central thrust of the unions.

Raise our vision of a newly ordered Britain looking after all of its people, making things again, ahead in advanced technologies, investing in skills and planning each section of the economy and its labour market and organising it with collective bargaining, treasuring our public services, undoing the chaos of privatisation, controlling prices, returning the Bank of England to public ownership, not relying on private banks for national borrowing.

Above all, reversing the key decision of Thatcher in 1979 to remove controls on the flight of capital out of the country. That opened the Pandora's box. That led to the global speculation replacing wealth-creating manufacturing, that led to the City of London and the banks seizing political control over and above manufacturers and land owners and of course over national government. Truss was a buffoon but it was the City of London that did her in, not us.

But this takes us back to our perennial conundrum as a movement that is just as tenacious today as when I joined my union in 1976. We constantly relapse into relying on everything and everyone except ourselves. We lack the confidence to say we can run things as a working class better than them.

In 1979 we got rid of the Callaghan government. Rather than take the logic forward and take over ourselves, there was the illusion that tweedle-dee Tories could have a go.

Same when the miners rose, rather than get behind them and demand a future in every workplace, the unions thought the EU could help us out. Then the Blair thing, let him have a go, he seems well spoken.

And now? Next time round, fail again a bit better perhaps, or take heart, take courage, take over?

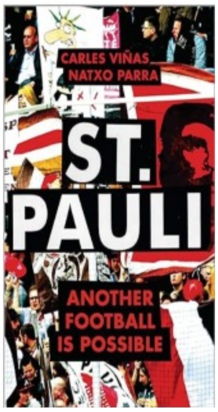
The GFTU operates from its hotel base in Quorn, Leicestershire. Special rates are available for trade union members.

Quorn Grange Hotel

https://www.quorngrangehotel.co.uk/

Another football is possible- Sport , and in particular football, has always been seen as the preserve of the right with fascist thuggery prevailing. But there is also a history of left activism on the terraces and one website and blog celebrates it. https://outsidewrite.co.uk/left-wing-football-clubs/

FC Sankt Pauli (Hamburg GER)



The book cover

FC St. Pauli is a football club unlike any other. Encompassing music, sport and politics, its fans welcome refugees, fight fascists and take a stand against all forms of discrimination. This book goes behind the skull and crossbones emblem to tell the story of a football club rewriting the rulebook. Since the club's beginnings in Hamburg's red-light district, the chants, banners and atmosphere of the stadium have been dictated by the politics of the streets. Promotions are celebrated and relegations commiserated alongside social struggles, workers' protests and resistance to Nazism. In recent years, people have flocked from all over the world to join the Black Bloc in the stands of the Millerntor Stadium and while in the 1980s the club had a small DIY punk following, now there are almost 30,000 in attendance at games with supporters across the world. In a sporting landscape governed by corporate capitalism, driven by revenue and divorced from community, FC St. Pauli demonstrate that another football is possible.

Whitehawk FC- Brighton

Inclusive messaging on the steps at Whitehawk FC -Wikimedia

Nestled in a lee of the South Downs, overlooked by windswept trees standing at awkward angles and the slow-moving silhouettes of dog walkers, is the Enclosed Ground, home of Whitehawk FC. When I first visited in 2017, I was greeted on entry by Half Man Half Biscuit's Joy Division Oven Gloves playing over the PA system, which was a positive sign and a step back from the traditional pre-match crowd-pleasers. Kevin Miller, the club's Vice Chair, Head of Commercial and Marketing, and Matchday PA.

"I suppose the core fan base – the 'Ultras', it's an ironic term – reflect the city as a whole; tolerant, inclusive, and accepting of all," Miller explains. "The club adopted the Ultras' 'footballforall' mantra and a few years ago allowed them to put the inclusive statements on the main stand steps." Miller believes that the non-league set-up enables local clubs to foster a real connection with their fan base as familiar faces gather at each home game, which blurs the lines between club and supporter. This connectivity between club and community became particularly acute during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite being located in the largely affluent south-east of England, the Whitehawk Estate was one of the most deprived areas in the UK as recently as the 1990s. Whitehawk FC set up 'Hawks In The Community' in partnership with local youth centre the Crew Club, running programmes for people of all generations, which is helping to drive positive change in the area.

Whitehawk FC's stance on diversity and inclusion reflects the ethos of Brighton & Hove as home to a large LGBTQ+ community, Miller tells me. In early 2019, the club was approached by broadcaster and diversity champion Dr. Sophie Cook and former Brighton & Hove Albion player Guy Butters with an idea to put together an LGBTQ+ game against an all-star team of ex-Premier League stars. So, during Pride weekend of 2019, the 'Rainbow Rovers' – a team of LGBTQ+ players from around the country – beat a team of ex-pros 5-2. The ex-pro team had included Paul Walsh, Keith Gillespie, Lee Martin and Lee Hendrie. Rainbow Rovers is now amalgamated into the wider Whitehawk FC stable. "Rainbow Rovers shirts have sold around the world, and the club are rightly proud of what we've achieved, and with the full backing of the sports governing body, the Football Supporters Association, Kick it Out, Football v Homophobia, and so many more, we can take the message of tolerance and inclusion around the country," Miller adds.

Excerpt from Outside Write Blog

Celtic (SCO)

Celtic's left-leaning fan base could originate from its historical identity as the club of Scotland's exiled Irish community; hence shows of sympathy for other marginalised peoples. Basque and Palestine flags have been seen at Celtic Park and the famous Green Brigade describes itself as "a broad front of anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-sectarian Celtic supporters". The Green Brigade occupy the North Curve section of Celtic Park and are currently in dispute with the club who are attempting to ban the Palestinian flags during the current Gaza/Palestine conflict.

Liverpool (ENG)

As a city, Liverpool has always been renowned for its activism, particularly during the dockers strike in the 1990s, which even had Robbie Fowler wearing a t-shirt of support.

Bill Shankly was quite open about how he saw the relationship between his politics and his brand of football: "The socialism I believe in is everyone working for each other, everyone having a share of the rewards. It's the way I see football, the way I see life."

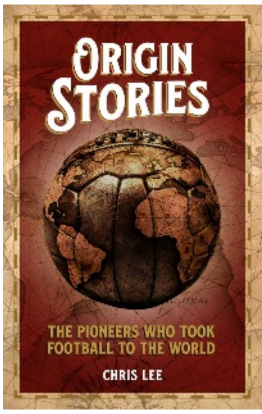
Merseyside neighbours Everton also have a strong left-wing fan base.

Hapoel Tel-Aviv (ISR)

Hapoel started life in the 1920s as part of a sports club affiliated to the trade union movement. Its fans have friendships with anti-fascist supporter groups around the world – for example with the aforementioned Celtic and St Pauli. Of course, the obligatory Ernesto Guevara head appears on club banners.

Left leaning clubs are mainly situated in cities and towns with strong trade union links.The website also notes the association between docks and left wing clubs naming Boca Juniors in S.America and AS Livorno in Italy as examples.

The Defiant charts a century of football-based activism against fascism and the far right - from the 1920s to the present day. Discover the role that footballers, fans, coaches and officials played in the fight against the dictatorships of Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Salazar and authoritarian states in Latin America.



Origin Stories: The Pioneers Who Took Football to the World explores the country-by-country journey of football's global spread and uncovers the people who put down its roots. From playing field to factory floor, from dockyard to favela, the book takes the reader on an odyssey from the very first kick to the first World Cup in 1930. Includes Sheffield FC and its role in the matter.

Photos: Chris Lee - Outside Write

Bohemian FC's Dalymount Park

The famous Robbie Fowler T-Shirt. Still in my wardrobe 25 years later.

From Struggle comes art- Sheffield Picket Lines 2023 Collage