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**Communist Party
of Great Britain
(Marxist-Leninist)**



**Nationalisation
of the railways
will not be
achieved
without a fight!**

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Nationalisation and capitalism

Under capitalism, there are certain industries that, in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, are generally best nationalised, as they need to provide a service that will not be jeopardised in the interests of profitability. This is why railways were nationalised in the first place.

But nationalisation also has its down side as far as capitalism is concerned, since parts of the industry would be extremely lucrative if they were in private hands. When the system is in crisis, and capitalists are desperately looking for profitable opportunities, the clamour of demands to be allowed to pick the cherries off the publicly-owned tree becomes deafening and, to a bourgeois government, irresistible.

Moreover, nationalised industries weld thousands of workers together into a mighty workforce, which is also a mighty *fighting* force able to defend employees' interests. They have the power – in defence of their living standards, and in the interests of safety – to 'hold the country [ie, the bourgeoisie] to ransom' to some extent. This is a state of affairs that the capitalists and their governments, both Tory and Labour, deplore.

Meanwhile, in 1994, under the auspices of the WTO, the powerful imperialists of North America and Europe secured acceptance of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. This committed most countries to opening up their services to free trade, leading to the gradual dismantling of state-owned services in favour of competition for franchises. Possible chaos at home was outweighed in the imperialists' eyes by the billions in profits to be made from service provision around the world. This is why British multinationals are prepared to put up with any inconvenience or expense arising from privatisation at home. And what is good for imperialism is what our governments, Labour or Tory, are bound to deliver.

The cost of the privatised railways

And that is why, although the cost of providing railway services has escalated since privatisation, no government would currently consider renationalisation – even though they have to spend countless billions in subsidies every year, as opposed to the mere £1bn that was paid to the old British Rail.

Before the 2005 general election, Catalyst, a respected left-liberal think-tank, published a 'pre-election briefing' entitled 'The railways in a third term', which estimated that it would save the Treasury some £500m a year to renationalise. After all, one does not need an economics degree to see that if the money generated from running a railway must not only pay for running costs and modernisation, but also provide dividends for shareholders and fat-cat salaries for those running the many private companies involved, it is going to cost more than if the latter two categories did not feature in the equation.

However, the main purpose of privatisation was to give the bourgeoisie the chance to make fat profits from providing a rail service to a largely captive market – and in this it was suc-

cessful. This was never admitted, of course. Instead we were told fairy stories about how profit was going to arise from the greater 'efficiency' of the privatised industry.

But British Rail had already organised the industry in such a way that there was very little scope for its employees to work harder, so there were not many 'efficiency' gains to be made. The bourgeoisie knew that, as did the railway workers. The only ones who didn't know it were the rail passengers who would pick up the bill.

No renationalisation without struggle

So long as the railways are running, albeit inefficiently, the ruling class has no intention of returning them to public ownership. It is making plenty of money, and if its profits are maintained by government subsidies, so much the better! It is naïve, therefore, to imagine that any bourgeois government is going to be persuaded by the undoubted logic of the argument in favour of renationalisation to adopt that policy, much less carry it out. The only way that the industry will be renationalised under capitalism is if the privatised companies fail to deliver a service that meets at least basic requirements.

In fact, since privatisation several companies *have* failed, so that we have seen many name changes on the sides of the railway engines, but every new name merely heralds the arrival of another set of privateers who act in exactly the same way as their predecessors did.

Were the bourgeoisie to change its mind about the desirability of private railways, then a Tory government would be just as likely to renationalise as a Labour one. It is pie in the sky to think that early-day motions and postcards to one's MP are going to knock any government off course. It is unlikely that renationalisation of the railways will ever make it to a Labour party election manifesto, despite an overwhelming majority of delegates to past Labour conferences voting for it.

The way forward

If workers really want the rail service to be renationalised they have to ensure that all transport comes to a grinding halt until such time as their demand is met. At the end of the day, however, we know that even when the railways were publicly owned under capitalism they were starved of funds – with subsidies being kept to a minimum in order to keep corporation taxes low.

Under capitalism, the interests of workers will *always* take second place to the interests of profit. It really is time that this outdated economic system, which subjects the whole of the country's economy to the interests of a handful of billionaires, to the detriment of the vast majority of the population, should be overthrown once and for all. Replacing it with a communist system would ensure that our economy was run for the benefit of the vast majority, and that the former billionaires would be required to work just like everybody else!

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