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



**Defend public
services: fight
capitalism!**

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It is very good that workers should mobilise in defence of public services. To carry our struggle through to success, though, we must learn to translate these defensive skirmishes into an all-out counter-offensive against the system of capitalism itself.

The erosion of the post-war social wage began in the late 1970s and was far advanced long before the overproduction crisis of capitalism was officially recognised, systematically undermining living standards for the mass of ordinary British people.

Every *direct* attack on wages and conditions, whether in the form of job cuts, pay freezes, speed-ups, rostering by diktat or cuts to pension and redundancy schemes, has been made worse by the constant *indirect* downward pressure upon living standards caused by the privatisation of public services, the destruction of council housing, the deterioration of social services, the undermining of public health and education, soaring prices on buses and trains and the disappearance of libraries.

And for increasing numbers of people not 'lucky' enough to be directly exploited by capitalism, there remains the demoralisation of a life eked out under an increasingly punitive benefits regime, under constant suspicion of being a sponger or fraudster.

Birth of the 'welfare state'

The welfare gains won by the working class after the last world war, though imperfect, were substantial. But why *did* the ruling class suddenly decide that universal education and a national health service were, after all, a reasonable expectation of people living in an advanced capitalist country?

There are those who will tell you that this apparent change of heart was proof that Clem Attlee and co's 'Old Labour' was capable of slowly reforming the grasping nastiness of capitalist class rule. And what could be 'civilised' need not be overthrown – a comforting conclusion for opportunists everywhere!

This also leads to the illusion that, by 'returning' Labour to its 'old' roots, we can forget the temporary nightmare of Thatcher and Blair, turn over in our beds and resume the happy dream of gradual social improvement under the guidance of 'left' social democrats like Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell et al.

But the Thatcher-Blair years were not just an unpleasant interlude. Rather, they marked the onset of a deep-running crisis that is still only just beginning; a crisis in which workers' living standards will be pushed ever lower as capitalism does its best to make them pay for the catastrophic failures of its system.

Soviet Union: the threat of a good example

It was in the light of the inspiring revolutionary example set by the USSR, whose socialist system had massively improved workers' lives, and whose Red Army had played by far the greatest role in destroying Nazi fascism, that the British ruling class felt forced to create the welfare state. With Soviet prestige so high, it feared that British workers might also take the revo-

lutionary path unless serious concessions on housing, health care and education were made.

How were these 'welfare state' innovations funded? In part from tax and national insurance deductions, but also to a great extent from the superprofits sweated from Britain's colonies and former colonies – the 'third world'.

So when British workers correctly assert that they have paid national insurance stamps all their lives to pay for the NHS, which is now under attack from the privateers, we should not forget also that migrant workers from the third world, whose home economies have been looted and stunted by long years of imperialist exploitation, have just as much of a claim to decent health care now that their flight from economic backwardness has driven them to these shores.

Properly understood, defence of the NHS is an issue that should unite 'indigenous' and 'migrant' workers alike. However, making sure that such questions are *not* properly understood is the special talent of social democracy (Labour and its hangers-on in the left-wing movement), which capitalism has always been able to rely on for a ready source of racist confusion.

The current 'New' Labour government is not the party's first set of racist warmongers. The very first Labour government in 1924 ordered the aerial bombardment of Iraqi villages and stood for the repression of the national resistance in Afghanistan. So it was no surprise that Attlee's post-war Labour government warmed to its reactionary task, doing its best to suppress liberation struggles in India, Malaya, Korea, and Greece.

From the first, it became clear that the political price British workers were expected to pay for the 'gift' of a welfare state was to be the maintenance of social peace at home and the continued exploitation of the world's peoples and resources by monopoly capitalism abroad. This was the rotten deal that Labour sold to the working class, fatally weakening the ties of international brotherhood and heaping obstacles on the road to real freedom for British workers.

The deal's off: time to open our eyes

With the Soviet Union gone and capitalist crisis biting, our rulers no longer feel compelled to maintain even the pretence of social justice in education, health care and housing.

Now that the deal is off, such achievements as the NHS are revealed always to have been merely *temporary sops* to keep the workers quiet, now slipping through our fingers as capitalism reveals its true face of poverty, war and barbarism.

We cannot defend the welfare state by nostalgia for Old Labour. On the contrary, we must get on with the job of wiping out every last trace of pro-imperialist social democracy in the labour movement, breaking the unions' link with the Labour party and uniting workers behind one common struggle to overthrow capitalism.

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