

## Editorial

# Socially Useful Production

‘Socially useful production’ was conceived, at least in part, as an alternative to military production, by shop stewards campaigning to save jobs at Lucas Industries in Britain in the 1970s. Rolls-Royce had gone bust, unable to fulfil the terms of a ruinous contract to build the RB211 aero engine for the Lockheed Tristar. As a major supplier to Rolls-Royce, Lucas suffered the knock-on effects of bad debts and other depredations to its business. Step forward the Lucas Combine Shop Stewards’ Committee, whose alternative Corporate Plan listed diverse products from hybrid engines to mobile dialysis packs that the company could produce using the wide range of skills possessed by its experienced workforce.

The Lucas Plan has echoed down the decades as a viable alternative, if only the company and some of the trade unions of the day had given it a chance to work. Mike Cooley, engineer and activist, probed the politics of the Lucas Plan in his book *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*, which Spokesman has republished in a new edition with an introduction by Frances O’Grady, General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress (see *Spokesman 131*).

In April 2016, Frances kindly hosted a launch for the book at Congress House in London. Those attending included people from the Greater London Council who worked with Mike Cooley in developing a *London Industrial Strategy*, founded on popular planning and aspects of workers’ control, until Mrs Thatcher abolished the GLC in 1986. Others had been inspired by the example of socially useful production, as embodied in the Lucas Plan and subsequent developments. A new generation is discovering socially useful production for themselves. We publish an edited transcript of the discussion at Congress House and related papers, which resonate with contemporary challenges as, for example, the Labour Party argues for a National Investment Bank with regional counterparts to fund economic development. In the context of Brexit, such challenges become all the more pressing. Will socially useful production inspire a new wave of energy and creativity as Labour develops its proposals for industrial policy and a defence diversification agency?

Frances O’Grady threw down a challenge as the discussion drew to a close. ‘The road of history is littered with failed alternative plans,’ a convenor had recently said to her. So it is that our pursuit of viable alternatives will be critically judged. Socially useful production is a

pertinent issue for our climate changing, automated times, when the future of work is under consideration, in the year that marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the alternative Lucas Plan.

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### **Iraq and Chilcot**

After seven long years, Sir John Chilcot has published his voluminous *Report of the Iraq Inquiry*. Among those who could have given an honest and informed assessment of all this work, and any ‘lessons learned’, was Dr Brian Jones, head of the UK Defence Intelligence Staff’s nuclear, biological and chemical weapons section until January 2003. But this is not to be. Sadly, Dr Jones died in February 2012. In 2010, Chilcot eventually said he would invite written evidence from the former Head of DIS’s WMD section, but Dr Jones was never asked to give oral testimony. His name does not appear in the long list of the Inquiry’s witnesses. Why this omission?

Dr Jones had testified at the Kelly and Butler Inquiries about how he and his analysts at Defence Intelligence had been excluded from seeing ‘Report X’, later repudiated, which ‘sexed up’ the dodgy dossier on *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, of September 2002. Previous issues of *The Spokesman* (110, 114, 115) recount the story, which has its fullest expression in *Failing Intelligence*, Dr Jones’ book, which remains one of the best sources on the unnecessary and illegal war on Iraq. *Iraq Inquiry Digest*, an online commentary which Jones encouraged and contributed to, provides more.

In this issue, we focus on Prime Minister Blair’s messages to President Bush, which reveal the scale of the Prime Minister’s ambition for regime change in Iraq, as a model for new world order. The consequences of that folly plague us all.