Imagine a red bus, funded by politically conscious workers, driving around the country emblazoned with the following slogan on one side. “EVERY WEEK £500 MILLION IS WASTED OR STOLEN FROM THE NHS BECAUSE OF PRIVATISATION. Blame the City of London not Brussels”. And on the other side “IN THE 1930S THEY BUILT SIX TIMES MORE STANDARD HOUSES PER PERSON THAN TODAY. Blame the City of London not Brussels”.

These figures are as shocking as they are true. The worst part is that they remain hidden from sight. We will begin with the NHS. In the first 35 years of the NHS, before Margaret the Terrible started privatising the NHS, 95p in every £1 of tax allocated to the health budget was spent on health care. Only 5p went on administration. Today, due to extensive privatisation and the internal market (Blair did to the NHS what he did to Iraq) that administration figure has risen to between 14p (Commons Select Committee) and 20p (Professor Luys). We will take the average to be 17p, a rise of 12p. In addition, H.M. Treasury has just announced that interest payments by the NHS for PFI (Blair and Browns gift to the NHS) will exceed £10 billion p.a. for the first time in 2017.

The current NHS budget is £116.4 billion of which £101.3 is spent in England. Accordingly, over £19 billion is wasted by the internal market and £10 billion is siphoned off by PFI. This is double the gross contribution by the UK to the EU. Even if Britain left the EU and all its contribution was diverted to the NHS, it would only amount to half the money currently wasted and siphoned off. Yet the BREXIT camp says not a word about this. Nor does the Remain camp. Neither does the BBC. This campaign is really dominated by what is not being said than by what is being said.

Instead BREXIT peddles the lie that leaving the EU will put us in charge of our finances rather than Brussels. So why do they mislead and misdirect workers? They do so because they are all neo-liberals, from Boris to Nigel and all between. It would be interesting to know how many of them have benefited personally from the privatization of the NHS. Yet they pretend to be the friend of the worker, especially those workers who have been led to believe the crisis in the NHS is being caused by a flood of migrants and health tourists.

Next let us move on to housing. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, when unemployment reached 15%, they were building twice as many homes as today and they were 46% bigger. (One of the first things we will have to do after the revolution is to knock these Dinky Toy [ie Wimpey] homes together or down because they are not big enough to live in.) Adjusting for the much bigger population today, they were building three times as many homes in the 1930s and they were twice as big. So in terms of floor space, they were building 6 times more homes. The same is true for Britain’s ugly twin, the USA.

Brussels is not to blame for this. The ‘Big 6 House Builders’ who build 75% of new homes are? These housebuilders have an interest in keeping the supply of new homes short, that way prices keep going up and so do their profits. They also are not interested in building social housing as it is less profitable. Finally, they hang on to their land bank instead of building on it because the price of land keeps going up. These building firms are not owned by Brussels, they are mainly owned by nice English gentlemen and gentlewomen. Instead of calling for Brexit, we should be calling for the nationalization of these builders and for the confiscation without compensation of their land bank.

Instead what or who is blamed for the crisis in the NHS and the lack of homes? The answer from Brexit is: “our ‘shocking lack of border controls’ resulting in an flood of immigrants. Immigrants are accused of stealing our homes and making NHS queues longer. In the case of social housing, only 1% is let to
EU nationals. A number dwarfed by second and third home ownership. Again it would be interesting to know how many of the Brexiteer leaders own second homes.

Whether or not we like it, the trump card being played by the BREXIT camp is immigration controls or the lack of them. Immigrants are being made the scape goat. They may not say it loudly on TV, but in the streets and on the front door that is what they are emphasizing. It is immigration that is the main reason for the two camps ending up neck and neck heading for the polls.

And immigration is resonating not only in the lower ranks of the working class but in the Labour Party as well. The right in the Labour Party, like Kate Howey, are using it attack Jeremy Corbyn. Imagine if Brexit succeeds. Who will that boost? It will boost the right wing in the Labour Party and if they triumph, Labour will compete with UKIP for the same political space. Creatures like Kate Howey, Kinnock’s prodigy, imposed on Lambeth in the 1980s, a privateer to her core, would rather force this outcome, than alert workers to what is really in play.

Of course the financial markets have not had their say in these final days. They are allergic to BREXIT. They know that BREXIT could cause the weakened world economy to catch cold. They will engineer a run on the Pound and a hemorrhaging of capital to intimidate the country. It is likely that the Bank of England will stand aside with its arms folded. The only question that arises is this: Will this amplification of the fear factor trump immigration? The answer is likely. We are not in a revolutionary period yet.

Our continuing political task is to ensure that workers’ anger is directed upwards and not sideways. The former sets the path for class unity while the latter sets the path for class division. This referendum is not merely about deciding on whether to stay in Europe or not, it is about polarization as well. It is about whether or not sections of our class is uniting with sections of the capitalist class. Should this referendum set in motion and fix in place, an alliance between sections of the British working class and that section of the ruling class intent on leaving Europe, this will have consequences long after the referendum is over.

As things stand, and the polls are showing this to be true, increasing numbers of workers are being drawn to the Brexit camp around immigration controls and to a lesser extent, around “reclaiming our democracy” (if one can call first past the post, democracy). The political landscape has already been changed. During the course of the referendum campaign, sections of British society have become more nationalistic and drawn to those organisations espousing it. Not only has this political current been given a voice, it has been consolidated and legitimized.

The SWP and a few unions have made a terrible mistake by calling for Leave. By failing to state that the enemy is within, not in Brussels, and by failing to oppose Leave, they have played into the hands of the BREXIT camp. Should BREXIT succeed, its triumph will be the triumph of reaction, of all that is backward looking, and it will undermine the British working class for years to come. In 1989 the SWP could waltz away from the collapse of the USSR and their opportunistic claim that this was an advance for the working class when the opposite was the case. This time, the results of leaving the EU will be up close and personal, in other words unavoidable. It is unlikely the SWP will survive these conditions.

It is time we built a new workers international, armed with a 21st century programme to combat the centrifugal and destructive forces unleashed by a decaying capitalist system that can no longer provide for the people of this planet nor nourish the planet itself. All around the world, forces are gathering, voicing the same slogan – “beggar thy neighbour”. Instead of our unifying banner being raised, razor wire is being raised cutting off worker from worker. To paraphrase Marx, history is not a one-way
street because history unlike time, can flow backwards too. The penalty for not building a new international, as the storm gathers, is too terrible to contemplate.