

# Class work

**Peter Rowley explains the background to his book *Class Work*, available by googling *Class Work* by Peter Rowley and ordering direct from Amazon. (All royalties go to the Shalom Youth Centre and East Marsh Neighbourhood Centre.) Peter's email is [peterrowley180@gmail.com](mailto:peterrowley180@gmail.com).**

*'This community was built around an industry that doesn't exist any more. Grimsby's problems in 2018 are manifold: skills shortages, long term jobless families, deprivation, drugs, homelessness, empty homes, fly tipping, children in care. The Government's indices of deprivation in 2015 ranked East Marsh as the fourth worst place in the UK for employment, the second for crime and the worst for education and skills. Residents have started East Marsh United, not a football team but a plan to somehow free one of the most acute and toxic combinations of factors anywhere in the UK.'*

*Class Work* examines the lives of school leavers on the East Marsh in the 70s up to the present day. Set within the framework of the ongoing crisis of British capitalism, it shows the transition from an integrated community, taking pride in physical resilience and the ability to endure the harshest of working conditions, to what it has become today.

The seventies witnessed the death throes of the Grimsby Deep Water Fleet. The oil price shock, the withdrawal of fishing grounds, and the politics of decommissioning ships all pointed to the end of fishing's viability and of an entire way of life.

Parallel to these seismic shifts were the policy responses from government. The wrecking ball approach of neo-liberalism, first tentatively under Heath, then full-blooded under Thatcher, destroyed and degraded this community.

This is not, however, how this story ends. The final section looks at those individuals and organisations working every day to improve and revive this community.

Canon John Ellis founded the Shalom Youth Centre next to his church in 1971. An inspirational figure, he has transformed hundreds of lives. He outlined his experiences in Chicago at the Lawndale Community Church and their policy of 'sweating equity'. Quite simply, this involved the purchase of housing in a rundown, crime ridden area with endemic drug problems. Trained construction teams transformed the housing stock and young couples completed the decoration. The domino effect today is a community freed from crime and drugs.

John put me in touch with a newly formed and

dynamic residents association - East Marsh United. Formed in response to the near breakdown in public order in the summer of 2017, they are fighting back in a highly organised and disciplined manner.

Phase One has been their 'broken window strategy'. They are 'cleaning and greening' the area, volunteers are conducting street cleans and planting trees, shrubs and window boxes.

We are now taking steps to challenge the spiral of decline and lack of opportunities. We are conducting a Community Asset Transfer of an abandoned school on the East Marsh. We will establish a Construction Training Centre and a company to refurbish the local housing stock. 18 multi-skilled apprenticeships will be created, all employed by East Marsh United. A community shop, education and social activities are also planned.

For decades the UK has had no industrial strategy. Finance capitalism and the 'knowledge economy' were promoted, whereby our future lay in importing cheaper manufactured products from abroad. Meanwhile, we concentrated on software, the creative sector, financial services, culture and tourism.

What was sold to the public as a new dawn for Britain has led to industrial decay and decimation with too little replacing it. This is not only bad economics; the effects on society and community cohesion have been disastrous.

'Regeneration' is applied to the creation of giant shopping centres, without any apparent irony. A culture of production, of making and selling products, has been replaced by consumerism, increasingly using credit.

The class background of most MPs, and their lack of exposure to production, inevitably leads to an appalling shortfall in the knowledge they would need to create huge leaps in manufacturing productivity and performance.

The East Marsh, and indeed all of the industrial heartlands, cannot afford to wait for the end of austerity or the return of a Corbyn-led Labour Party.

Direct community action is essential to create vital, well paid, skilled employment to revitalise the local economy, community pride and self-worth.