an unauthorised meeting with some factory workers who were represented by a lawyer. That's as near as you get to being impressed by anybody. When they walked in... every single one of them was missing a limb... One of them, out of the six, had a prosthesis - every one of them couldn't afford it - and they told me the story of how they'd been injured by really crazy, avoidable accidents. And then [they were] immediately sacked because the practice in the sweatshop sector is that if you lose a limb in the industrial sector is not to take out insurance for the workers... [Yet] it struck me that these guys were part of probably the 'decisive social force in the 1st century' - that's the Chinese, and latterly the Indian, workers - a billion strong and making history in many senses, economically, culturally even, but not yet politically.

But what of more positive experiences of organisation rather than of impotence in the face of maltreatment? Mason responded: “The developing world is awash with examples of workers organising both in the slums they live in and in the factories they work in. But very few of the struggles among the newly formed workforces of China, India, Latin America and Africa has reached the level yet of some of the historical symbolic acts that I write about [in ‘Live Working and Die Fighting’] – Peterloo, the Lyon uprising of 1831. We're not quite there yet, but the reason I've written the book is I'm absolutely certain that something will happen and I don't want people to be as shocked as they were when, in 1831, the Lyon silk-workers seized the city. It provoked the first Europe-wide panic about class.”

Taylor's second guest on the programme was a research fellow from Sussex University's Institute of Development Studies (an academic form of Mason's book. It has eleven main chapters, all of which begin with one of the form of Mason's book.

It has ten main events, each of which begins with the title of the author's early 21st century journalistic encounters with workers in different corners of the world. Each of these events is juxtaposed with a well-researched retelling of an episode from the history of the European or American working movement. The situation of Chinese sweatshop workers in 2003 leads into an account of the 1819 Peterloo massacre (at St Peter's Fields, Manchester, four years after the battle of Waterloo). Then Indian textile workers in 2005 introduce the story of the 1831 Lyon silk workers' revolt. The third chapter time-travels from Nigerian slum-dwellers in 2005 back to the Paris Commune; and the fourth translates the reader from the struggle of Indian oil workers in 2006 to episodes in the US labour movement history of the 1970s and 1880s. Interviews with Canary Wharf immigrant cleaners, organising for trade union recognition in 2004, head up an account of the heyday of international syndicalism; and Indian car workers Mason encountered a year later are paired with the emergent Chinese workers' movement of the 1920s. The author then turns to Latin American, which he visited at various times between 2003 and 2006, giving an account of the Bolivian neighbourhood risings and comparing them to the events in the Warren G. Harding's 1914. Finally, the experiences of the Argentine working class prompt an account of movements for workers coming to London, France and the USA in the interwar years.

Taylor began by asking Mason which of his recent encounters he most vividly remembered. Mason replied: “In 2004 I was sitting in... a hotel room in China for...”
to the 1980s, the Western labour movement had accomplished the goals it was fighting for in the 19th and early 20th centuries: the Canvey Wharf workers need to know about Wapping and about ‘the New Unionism’, but they don’t. Now that the storms are gathering over globalised capitalism – and it becomes clearer than ever that, if there really is “no alternative”, then there is no human future in view at all – it is surely for those who recognise that we have entered a quite new period to find ways to accomplish in a 21st century way the task Engels set out on in the 1840s, and Mason hints at over a century and a half later.

To recognise the reality of the period – what the Marxist political theorist István Mészáros has defined as the structural, the truly historic, crisis not just of 19th and 20th century industrial capitalism, but of the much longer-lasting capital system itself – is to see that the forms of political organisation apparently appropriate to the 20th century, modelled on an often limited understanding of the 1917 Russian Revolution, are now entirely inappropriate. The protests of the “Seattle brigade” show that the will to fight remains, but perhaps not the theoretical perspectives to take the fight beyond protest. ‘Live Working or Die Fighting’ is not a programmatic statement for new forms of socialist organisation that can meet the needs of the emerging global working-class movement he writes about, but it is certainly relevant to those who want to participate in creating them.

Mason himself contextualises his book, explains how he came to want to write it, in an instructive and moving way; his conclusion is highly personal and the book’s inspirational logic is thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and the book’s inspirational logic thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this house at the time he fathered Paul in 1960, he had bought their home – the first in his family to do so – but it had an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this working-class community until he was 18, meeting no one who was not a trade unionist. He was used to Labour winning every election in the area. He lived through many industrial actions, including two miners’ strikes, the second of which brought down a Tory government, but never saw a political demonstration or the waving of a red flag. The demands he was aware of were for decent working conditions, pensions, health care and public facilities. Recounted memories of the Depression of the 1930s told him more about the meaning of history than any textbook or film, and formed the background to the demand articulated in various ways in the community for “socialism through evolution”. This labour movement as it existed from 1945 to 1989, Mason argues, was very different from that movement needs.

Mason himself contextualises his book, explains how he came to want to write it, in an instructive and moving way; his conclusion is highly personal and the book’s inspirational logic thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and the book’s inspirational logic thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this house at the time he fathered Paul in 1960, he had bought their home – the first in his family to do so – but it had an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this working-class community until he was 18, meeting no one who was not a trade unionist. He was used to Labour winning every election in the area. He lived through many industrial actions, including two miners’ strikes, the second of which brought down a Tory government, but never saw a political demonstration or the waving of a red flag. The demands he was aware of were for decent working conditions, pensions, health care and public facilities. Recounted memories of the Depression of the 1930s told him more about the meaning of history than any textbook or film, and formed the background to the demand articulated in various ways in the community for “socialism through evolution”. This labour movement as it existed from 1945 to 1989, Mason argues, was very different from that movement needs.

Mason himself contextualises his book, explains how he came to want to write it, in an instructive and moving way; his conclusion is highly personal and the book’s inspirational logic thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and the book’s inspirational logic thereby clarified. His father was a truck driver and an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this house at the time he fathered Paul in 1960, he had bought their home – the first in his family to do so – but it had an outside toilet. Paul lived with his parents in this working-class community until he was 18, meeting no one who was not a trade unionist. He was used to Labour winning every election in the area. He lived through many industrial actions, including two miners’ strikes, the second of which brought down a Tory government, but never saw a political demonstration or the waving of a red flag. The demands he was aware of were for decent working conditions, pensions, health care and public facilities. Recounted memories of the Depression of the 1930s told him more about the meaning of history than any textbook or film, and formed the background to the demand articulated in various ways in the community for “socialism through evolution”. This labour movement as it existed from 1945 to 1989, Mason argues, was very different from that movement needs.