

WORKERS

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NO TO DECLINE. GET ORGANISED!

Election Prepare to fight

PO Horizon The scandal

Minerals At Britain's core

Tata 'Bully boys' opposed

Fleet Auxiliary In struggle

Rail Ambition needed

Food Security vital

Inflation The truth

plus Historic Notes,

News and more

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

WORKERS



Prepare for struggle!

WORKERS LOOKING for real change will not find it from the July general election. Whatever result we wake up to, the tasks for our class will still be the same. Workers have nothing to gain from a change of party in government.

The working class is the only force for progress. All it has to do is accept that challenge. And change is needed. Britain needs independence, peace, unity of nation, jobs, industry, food, energy, transport, houses, health, education, culture and more.

We don't need war, division between workers, mass immigration, run down of industry, agriculture and public services, destruction of the natural environment, export of jobs and sale of businesses abroad – or a return to the EU.

All electoral parties support war abroad and oppression of workers at home. All support mass immigration and the break-up of Britain. They talk progress and change, but their policies amount to more of the same. Voting only lends authority to their anti-working class policies.

With nothing to offer, parliamentary politicians resort to distortion and distraction. Trivial issues are elevated over major ones. Debate is constrained and discussion limited. Individualism is all and collective action demonised. Any division is celebrated – except that between workers and capitalists.

Workers may think about a vote against separatism. But the Scottish National Party is mortally wounded, and it is Labour in Wales that wants

more power for devolved assemblies – in England too. We are one British people, with common problems: we need a common response to them.

Parliament does not run the economy, financial markets do. Politicians are powerless to make the changes Britain needs. Once the election has passed, promises will be broken, blamed on the previous government, feckless workers, wicked businesses, Russia, China, the weather – any excuse will do. This is described as “elective dictatorship” – usually by the government’s opponents in parliament. Workers cannot afford to wait five years for another bout of no choice sham hustings, or hope that regional elections offer some prospect of change.

Workers cannot afford to believe that they are also powerless, to mirror the cynicism of their would-be rulers. The working class has a world to win, starting with putting its own house in order.

We know what is needed, in every industry, in every town and city. It's time for a true workers' manifesto – setting out what Britain needs and how to go about it.

Never mind who sits where in Westminster, we need to prepare for struggle! Wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself. It's up to us. ■

• This is an expanded version of the editorial published online shortly after the general election was called.

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Chris Goddard/shutterstock.com



Tata's steelworks at Port Talbot, South Wales.

Tata 'bully boys' opposed

AT THE end of May, Unite, one of three unions representing workers at Tata's Port Talbot site (along with Community and GMB), confirmed that it would begin industrial action from 18 June in protest at Tata's plans to close blast furnaces in there over the next three months. Other steel unions have not yet declared a date for industrial action.

On Thursday 6 June, around 250 workers were brought together in a room at Tata Steel in Port Talbot. The invitation to the meeting said it was to discuss the consultation period with workers and it was described as a "business update".

However, the workers very quickly realised that wouldn't be the case – instead they were told to fill in a "declaration of participation in industrial action" to let management know of their intentions.

Unite members reported that during the meeting, senior management physically blocked the doorways to the room to stop them leaving, as well as blocking the corridors leading outside the plant. Management staff then made sure everybody had filled in the form.

One worker called the behaviour of management "unethical" and said it went against all of Tata Steel's "supposed values", adding that Tata was trying to undermine union membership by asking individuals to sign the form.

Unite has since reported that Tata has agreed to stop any such meetings in the future. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Unite will not stand for these bully-boy practices by Tata. Our reps have put a quick end to this despicable tactic and it will not be tolerated in future." ■

AMAZON

Recognition vote

THE BALLOT process for trade union recognition began at Amazon UK on 19 June. More than 3,000 Amazon workers will now take part in a month-long process which will include a vote at the Coventry fulfilment centre that saw strike action in 2023.

Workplace voting will start on 8 July. The result will be announced on 15 July. If there is a vote of 40 per cent or above in favour of recognition, it will be a historic moment as it would mark the first time that Amazon will have been compelled to recognise a trade union in Britain.

The GMB union first began its campaign for recognition 18 months ago involving a lengthy dispute with Amazon which has seen more than 30 days of strike action. Workers in the city of Coventry with their long history of trade union activity have been at the forefront of that dispute.

This first step towards union recognition is important, as Amazon now has more than 70,000 employees in Britain. ■

FACTS MATTER

At *Workers* we make every effort to check that our stories are accurate, and that we distinguish between fact and opinion.

If you want to check our references for a particular story, look it up online at cpbml.org.uk and follow the embedded links. If we've got something wrong, please let us know!

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 07308 979308 or email workers@cpbml.org.uk



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Rolls-Royce pay fight

Rolls-Royce workers have overwhelmingly rejected the latest pay offer. The company is proving intransigent, and trying to create division among its workforce.

Junior doctors strike before election

The junior doctors' long-running pay dispute is still not resolved. And they returned to strike action ahead of the general election.

Union says no to a ban on oil exploration

The Unite trade union has launched a major campaign against a ban on oil and gas exploration in the North Sea. It says a transition in energy supply should not sacrifice energy security and workers' jobs for net zero targets.

Scotland gears up to finally reject SNP

Britain needs unity, not division, not devolution. In Scotland the multiple failures of the ruling SNP separatists are coming home to roost...

Housing, population and immigration: the facts

There's a whole industry dedicated to 'proving' that importing workers into Britain is an undiluted good...

Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit cpbml.org.uk to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox. The sign-up form is at the top of every website page – an email address is all that's required.

Workers



Luxury flats where Engels once described slums.

Taking Engels' name in vain

ONE OF the most recent developments in Manchester City Centre, Deansgate Square, includes a luxury penthouse flat with an asking price of £2.5 million. The housing developer, Renaker, has christened it the Engels penthouse.

Friedrich Engels lived in the area in the 1840s and witnessed the appalling living conditions of those working at the heart of the industrial revolution but so obviously not benefiting from the wealth they created. His influential work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, was informed by what he witnessed – abject poverty, child labour and overcrowded slum housing.

Manchester City Council predicts that the population of the centre of Manchester will increase by 5,000 a year. There are already more than 15,000 people looking for social housing in the city with families requiring 2 or 3 bedrooomed accommodation waiting, on average, from 1 to 3 years.

The Engels penthouse flat – and others like it – are clearly not aimed at the average Mancunian. Were Engels alive today he might well reflect that workers still have much to do to improve their lives. ■

UNIVERSITIES

Action across the country

MEMBERS OF the University and College Union are taking action across the country in defence of jobs and conditions.

At Aston University, the employer has recently proposed to make 150 professional services staff redundant. Redundancy selection is also taking place in chemistry and maths, and languages staff are in a separate redundancy process.

At Edge Hill University in Lancashire, staff are organising to stop job cuts in the Department of English and Creative Arts. The employer wants to sack 11 out of 29 academic staff, issuing formal redundancy notices in June.

At Goldsmiths, University of London, the employer wants to cut one in six academic jobs. Staff at Goldsmiths are already undertaking a marking boycott and will be striking for two weeks later in June to defeat

the attempt to sack these staff.

University of Lincoln staff have voted to take industrial action over threats to cut over 200 jobs. 80 per cent of members who voted supported industrial action, on a turnout of 55 per cent.

Sheffield Hallam University staff have voted to strike against cuts and attacks on staff members' terms and conditions.

Staff at the University of Sheffield have won a new and more secure contract for graduate teaching assistants. Zero-hour contracts will be replaced by fixed-term, guaranteed-hours contracts, which will enable postgraduate researchers to access full employment rights.

After an intense and sustained campaign, University of Sussex staff have won a new agreement for postgraduate researchers contracted to teach (doctoral tutors). This deal meets all five of their key demands, most notably, a new workload allocation model which will lead to significant pay rises for many members. ■

SOCIAL CARE

Needs fixing

SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS of every hue have failed to deal with social care. The elections hustings have done nothing to suggest any change. The outgoing government party ignores its broken promises, the would-be government is already setting out its excuses.

The ongoing crisis in social care continues. It affects those in need of care and their families, and ties up health service resources. And appalling exploitation of migrant workers in the sector is rampant.

Last November, Unison produced evidence about the treatment of migrant workers by unscrupulous social care employers, highlighting the way that government failure and inaction has led to

the present state of the care system.

Unison general secretary Christina McAnea said, "Only when care workers get decent pay will more people want to work in the sector and the staffing crisis end."

Now we find Labour promising, if elected, to implement a paltry £12 an hour minimum wage for the 1.5 million care workers. This level of pay is insulting. Not much better is the call of the unions representing some care workers, including the GMB, that the minimum wage for them should be £15 an hour – and that still doesn't ensure parity with NHS staff.

Care work requires skill but there has been no pressure on British employers from any government to invest in British care workers as that gives people power. Instead employers and their governments prefer the easy hire and fire of precarious workers from outside the country. ■



Ian Davidson/Alamy Stock Photo

Fleet auxiliary fight escalates

FIVE HUNDRED seafarer members of the RMT employed in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) will escalate their pay dispute with a strike on 25 June, International Seafarers Day, which acknowledges the vital contributions of seafarers worldwide. On 19 May RMT members in the RFA struck across the service in ports and ships as far-flung as Singapore.

RFA members of Nautilus International have also been in struggle, taking action short of a strike since 1 June. In their ballot results announced in April, 79 per cent voted for strike action, and 85 per cent for action short of a strike. The mandate for action lasts until October and the union has promised further action after the election if an incoming government does not offer a solution.

The RFA imposed a one-year pay deal of 4.5 per cent although seafarers have had a real terms pay cut of 36 per cent since 2010. Declines in the value of pay and pensions and unequal leave ratios for four month tours have contributed to a recruitment and retention crisis, adding to the workload of existing staff. An RFA-commissioned pay benchmarking exercise, measuring pay against that in the cruise, ferry, deep sea and workboat sectors, found that RFA pay was lower than the market average for the day rate for every rank the analysts compared.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary provides logistical and operational support to the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, fuel and stores through replenishment at sea, and transports personnel. In the words of the former First Sea Lord, speaking in support of their campaign, "Without the Royal Fleet Auxiliary being manned, the Royal Navy actually grinds to a halt." ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Tuesday 2 July 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Reject the election trap, prepare for struggle!"

Workers looking for change will not find it from the general election. Whatever the result, the tasks for our class will be the same. Workers are the only force for progress: accept that challenge and prepare to fight for it.

Come and discuss.

Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

Wednesday 10 July, 7.30pm

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

In person CPBML Public Meeting

"Why are our public services getting worse?"

Capitalism can't sustain the services that a 21st century civilisation needs. How can we ensure our services serve the people? Come and discuss. All welcome.

Friday 19 July to Sunday 21 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, Tolpuddle, Dorset

The eclectic mix of music, talks, cinema, comedy and theatre is looking forward to another year's festival, culminating in the traditional march to the ancient Martyrs' Tree. Full details from the festival website, tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 1 September, 10.30am

Burston, near Diss, Norfolk

Burston Strike School Rally

Celebrating the longest-running strike in British history, lasting from 1914 to 1939. The strike began when teachers at the village's Church of England school, were sacked after a dispute with the management committee and schoolchildren went on strike in their support. No charge for access. Full details available from burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com

To keep informed about upcoming CPBML meetings, make sure you're signed up to receive our electronic newsletter (see page 4).

**Journey times have to be shortened, new timetables and new
Labour or Conservatives to the planning and investment re**

Britain needs rail – and a

NETWORK RAIL has admitted that passengers and freight companies will not see improvements on the East Coast Main Line any time soon. Yet over £4 billion has been invested by the government in upgrading the route and at least some of its trains.

Network Rail abandoned efforts to introduce a new East Coast timetable last December. Why? Because the route is unable to cope with competing demands from train operators.

Some operators have contractual rights to run trains that they are reluctant to give up. The situation is made worse as new private open-access passenger train operators demand more and more space in the schedules for their services.

Much-needed increases in passenger train frequencies and faster journey times can't be delivered. Yet passenger numbers on the route are climbing rapidly; they have now passed the level reached just before the Covid pandemic.

Where's the plan?

Nearly all stakeholders agree that there should be an end to the current mix of private and public train companies trying to operate in a fragmented rail industry, on routes running at near maximum capacity. But there is little sign of any cogent plan to improve the situation.

The Conservative government at least acknowledged that much better coordination is needed, which is why it proposed the creation of Great British Railways. This would be the essential “single guiding mind” charged with effective coordination of Britain's railways. Typically, the government then did little to bring it about, although it made a manifesto commitment to early legislation to create GBR.

But the Conservatives were clear that their legislation would also force through the changes to the pay, terms and conditions of rail staff – changes which they have been trying to impose over the past couple of years, and which are at the root of the current long-running industrial disputes.

It is not surprising that many rail workers and users have looked to a future Labour government to change the fortunes of their industry. But the lack of ambition evident in Labour's plan to fix Britain's



Workers

NER Azuma (British Rail Class 800) at Leeds Station.

railways, published in April, has left people underwhelmed.

The headlines talked of Labour “renationalising” the railways. The reality is very different. Labour proposes a minimalist strategy: taking back into public ownership those train operating companies that are not already in the public sector when the contract for each one expires. That process may not be complete until 2030 – after the next general election.

Profits

And there is no commitment to deal with the massive profits made by rolling stock leasing companies. They suck large sums of public subsidy out of the system, as train union RMT has often pointed out. RMT's

view is straightforward – the public should buy and own our trains directly, rather than paying extortionate rents to leasing companies.

In a detailed analysis published last year RMT said: “With rolling stock leases now consuming nearly a quarter of the Train Operating Companies' costs base and dividends worth over £200 million flowing out of the industry every year, this is a cost issue that will have to be tackled sooner or later.”

And Labour is also apparently happy to see private open access operators continuing to run services which can only be made profitable by diverting revenue from government-contracted operators.

Open access services don't create

track are needed, but there's no commitment from required...

ambition for its future



extra capacity as some in Labour clearly think. They consume capacity that is better used as part of an integrated, planned service. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch justifiably calls open access operators "parasites".

No commitment

There is no Labour commitment to bringing staff and their work back into public ownership from private infrastructure contractors – nor from private cleaning firms that pay paltry wages while imposing ever greater workloads on their workers.

Britain's railways desperately need investment. Labour shies away from committing to this. Much more electrification is needed. This would reduce emissions,

improve train performance and reliability, and reduce maintenance costs for both rolling stock and track. And modernisation of signalling would increase the capacity of the network to meet increased demand.

The real capacity game changer would be HS2. And there is no Labour commitment to build HS2 in full. Even if the complete project were reinstated tomorrow, it would not be ready before the routes it was designed to relieve are full to bursting. These three routes – East Coast, West Coast and Midland – are also critical to any expansion of freight train numbers.

Bottlenecks

If the newly elected government fails to build the section of HS2 north from Birmingham towards Manchester, capacity will be reduced for freight trains. HS2 passenger services will be forced to join the West Coast line at a point where serious bottlenecks already exist.

The HS2 project is expensive, certainly. But the damage to Britain's economy will be immense if it is not built. The next government will have to deal with the issue – and soon.

Rail unions clearly believe that the creation of Great British Railways is likely to mean a return to national cross-industry collective bargaining, and potentially a convergence of pay, terms and conditions.

The government has been firmly in charge of Network Rail and the passenger train operators for over two years, and disputes remain unresolved. Mostly these have been more about defending hard won conditions rather than pay.

But unions should be clear that a Labour government is unlikely to agree to inflation-matching pay increases. It may also pursue unpalatable changes to conditions before any increases are agreed.

National collective bargaining will not in itself change anything. Rail workers will need to think about how they can exert more control over their industry and defend and advance their interests and the interests of rail users.

Above all, Labour offers no commitment to protect Britain's train manufacturing capacity – vital for the industry.

The Alstom train building factory at

'The new government needs to listen to rail workers and passengers. It's up to workers to make that happen...'

Derby has finally been awarded a contract worth £370 million to build ten new nine-car trains for London's Elizabeth line to add to the existing 70-strong train fleet. These are badly needed as passenger numbers have massively exceeded projections since the line opened fully in late 2022.

Workers at the facility are relieved at the news. The factory had run out of work and there was an imminent threat of closure. Around 1,300 workers faced redundancy, along with up to 12,000 more in the supply chain.

Prospects

But the long-term prospect isn't good. Derby is Britain's only train factory capable of designing, engineering, building and testing new trains. New trains are desperately needed – to replace existing old stock, and new stock for HS2, even in the present truncated version.

Unless further new train orders follow quickly, the threat to jobs and Britain's train building capability will return.

The closure of Alstom's 150-year-old Derby works would see a loss of expertise and experience that would be difficult to replace. Britain would be the only G7 nation unable to design and build trains.

Britain needs a planned and steady programme of train replacement which secures the future for Derby and for Britain's other train building facilities. This should be part of a planned future for all aspects of Britain's railways. The new government needs to listen to rail workers and passengers. It's up to workers to make that happen. ■

**A nation must be able to feed itself. To do so needs both m
demonstrates it is capable of neither...**

Food security – a question



Snowmanradio at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 2.5 via Wikimedia Commons

Bull on an English farm.

BOTH THE Conservative and Labour parties seem to be in competition with each other over who can exacerbate the problem more with net zero and so-called “green” initiatives.

The question of food security was studiously avoided by parliamentary hopefuls, but it is of paramount concern to many people in Britain.

A research report from the House of Commons Library published in April underlined the reality of those concerns.

Titled *Who is experiencing food insecurity in the UK?* the report revealed that the number of people in “food insecure” households rose sharply last year. It stands at 7.2 million out of an estimated total of 28.2 million, compared to 4.7 million the

year before.

The generally accepted definition of food security was established by the United Nations Committee on World Food Security. It is described as the condition where “...all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”

Yes...but

Our own government says it subscribes to this definition, but almost inevitably qualifies this, in the familiar language of environmental compromise, “...in ways that the planet can sustain into the future”.

According to the UN, food security

comprises four distinct elements, all of which must be present: availability; access; utilisation and stability. In other words, people should be able to buy nutritious and healthy food at an affordable price, and should have the means to store and cook it.

But food security is compromised around the world because of poverty – here in Britain too. Quality food can be expensive. Manufacturers and supermarkets all too often substitute cheaper, processed and less nutritious fare.

Governments and food campaigners have launched initiatives which purport to enlighten the public about the benefits of quality food, especially when talking about obesity. Exhortations to patronise local

management and planning. Capitalism increasingly

on of independence

bakeries, cheese shops, delicatessens and so on are irrelevant for many people. The hard truth is that if you can't afford it, you'll make do with something that costs less.

The Trussel Trust, a charity with the most involvement in British food banks, has reported a sharp increase in their usage. Emergency food parcel distribution in the period between April and September 2023 was up by 16 per cent over the previous year. Alarming, around 320,000 people needed to use a food bank for the first time during that period.

Assault

The government can wring its hands about the cost of living, and claim it's out of their control. But their constant assault on workers' buying power – through inflation and debt – are major factors in people's reduced means to buy good food.

Other facets of government policy contribute directly to food insecurity. The most significant is the seemingly relentless drive to take valuable agricultural land out of production.

In July 2023 the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England reported that "...14,500 hectares of such land, which could grow at least 250,000 tonnes of vegetables a year based on typical yields, has been permanently lost to development every year since 2010. Enough to feed the combined populations of Liverpool, Sheffield and Manchester their five a day".

But it's not only housing causing a loss of productive farmland. The proliferation of large-scale solar farms across the rural landscape is a rapidly growing threat.

'It is governmental policy, here and around the world, which poses the real threat to food security...'

Minette Batters, former president of the National Farmers Union, has warned about the uncertain future for dairy and arable farming while wealthy investors are buying up large chunks of the countryside.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* in May she said, "We are a country up for sale. We are selling off land to people who don't pay their taxes here. It does have to change." She cited evidence of tenant farmers evicted to make way for large scale solar schemes. Returns for the land owner are lucrative "...what's not to like [for them]? For everybody else, there's a huge amount not to like. This is the trouble with a solar farm. There will be one beneficiary."

The inevitable consequence of such policies is the rapid growth of imported food. Supply can be unreliable, subject to international markets. And imports are often grown or reared to standards inferior to those applied by British farmers.

Politicians and commentators tend to say that the major issues threatening food security are war, climate change and population growth. Clearly, war and the threat of war have a massive impact. What is happening in Palestine is only the most recent of many situations demonstrating that malnutrition and starvation are a direct consequence of conflict.

Climate

The issue of climate change is less clear cut. Uncritically citing that as the major cause of food insecurity is facile. Its impact is often wrapped up with other factors such as internal conflict, and is not always bad for food production.

Increased risk of flooding is a frequently cited aspect of climate change. Humans have grown crops for 12,000 years – and for a great part of that time, water has been managed. Food grows where there is water – flooding brings fertility.

Partly in response to climate change in the Sahara, ancient Egypt developed irrigation in the Nile valley over 5,000 years ago – using the river's annual floods. That system still feeds millions today.

And in Britain extensive land reclamation has created productive farmland. Vast areas have been drained and managed since Roman times, particularly since the

seventeenth century. This includes the area around the Wash, the former tidal estuaries of the Humber and many other places.

Flooding is still a risk to low-lying farmland – the Vale of Evesham and the Somerset levels have experienced extensive flooding in recent years. But the real culprit – and one that can be changed – is the neglect of flood management and drainage.

The argument that population growth causes food insecurity is a familiar one – "we have too many people to feed". That does not stand up to examination. The application of science and industry to food production has seen the capacity to produce food grow as population grows. It is governmental policy, here and around the world, which poses the real threat to food security.

Protests

But farmers are fighting back. Protests across Europe in many forms demand control of imports, prioritisation of local produce and cuts in food energy taxes. And farmers are pushing back against government policy in other parts of the world where small scale farming is significant, notably India and, most recently, Argentina.

The EU brands such protest as "far right" and worthy only of contempt. Farmers reciprocated in March by spraying manure and setting hay alight during an EU agricultural ministers' meeting in Berlin.

The latest iteration of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, Farm to Fork, sounds benign, but is quite the opposite. It has resulted in free trade deals which lower agricultural regulations, reduce prices for farmers' produce, and concentrate land in the hands of huge agribusiness corporations.

British government policy is no better. The National Farmers Union says that food production should be high on the agenda for the next government. Farmers took their tractors in convoy outside Parliament in March. Their slogan, "No farmers, no food, no future" echoes protests worldwide. ■

• This article is based on a CPBML online discussion meeting held in June 2024.

A country where a quarter of the workforce is not working nearly 9 million people “not actively looking for work”?

Don't accept 'economic inactivity'

ON 11 JUNE, news reports briefly led on the rise in Britain's unemployment rate to 4.4 per cent, up from the previous figure of 4.3 per cent. Less attention was paid to another, much greater figure – those people not working.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) reported that there was also an increase in what is called the “inactivity rate”. In the period from February to April this year 22.3 per cent of working age people were deemed not to be actively looking for work – the highest figure in over a decade.

That's more than a quarter of the working population not in work. The whole working class needs to be talking about this – not least because a third of businesses are short-staffed at least once a week because of sickness and hiring challenges. And almost every service sector cannot find the workers it needs.

Absences

People Management, a human resources professional publication, says that research findings are leading to calls for firms to have a contingency plan to minimise the impact of staff absence. It's a big problem for the British economy. Staff absences reduce productivity and can lead to workers doing more overtime, ending up feeling burnt out.

Marxism explains that the wealth a country needs to prosper can only come from two sources: namely, from our natural resources or from the labour of workers which produces value. Under capitalism



Hazel Platner/Alamy Stock Photo

Job Centre Plus offices, Blyth, Northumberland.

‘Even under socialism it would be impossible for a country to survive with this level of “economic inactivity” ...’

much of that value is expropriated as profit by the capitalist class rather than invested back into the country.

A country where a quarter of the workforce is not working is destined to decline. Even under socialism it would be impossible for a country to survive with this level of “economic inactivity”.

There is an urgent need to understand what is going on. Who are the nearly 9 million people “not actively looking for work”?

The ONS has carried out some research and analysis. Most of the 2.7 million under-25s not actively looking for work are students. That's understandable, but

the figure is rising.

There are 3.5 million over-50s out of the job market – mainly through illness and early retirement. Few of those who retire early said they were interested in returning to work. How much of the illness in this age group is a function of long NHS waiting lists is uncertain, but that figure is rising. It will include, for example, those waiting for simple surgery such as a hernia repair. Not addressing the ill health of this age group creates longer term problems.

Nearly one million people in the 25- to 49-year-old age group are not working because of illness (fairly evenly split

is destined to decline. What is going on? Who are the

'Inactivity', deal with it!



women, do not work because of caring responsibilities. Described as “economically inactive” maybe, but they will be working hard in the domestic sphere. The unavailability of social care and the high cost of child care will be significant factors.

And of those who report to the ONS surveys that they want to return to work, many say that high child care costs will mean that they lose out financially by being in work.

The Co-operative Bank surveyed the most affordable British cities for childcare. It ranked London as the most expensive city, with an average monthly cost of £1,781. Liverpool was the most affordable at £800.

Work is good for you

The Thatcher government ignored the Black Report on health inequalities in 1980. Since then, the public health evidence that being in work is better for physical and mental health has only grown. This is acknowledged on official government health websites. And there is strong evidence that it is difficult to return to work after prolonged periods of inactivity.

The stark fact is this: just the figure of nearly one million 25- to 49-year-olds not working due to illness as a proportion of the “economically inactive” is more than the 672,000 net immigration into Britain in 2023 (some of whom will be dependants and not in the workforce).

This situation is justified by employers

‘Many who want to return to work say that high child care costs mean that they lose out financially by being in work...’

as necessary because of “labour shortages”. But we as a working class know that mass immigration contributes to suppressing wages. The exceptional exploitation of overseas staff in care homes may be an extreme case, but is not an isolated one.

We need to unravel the causes of the illness of over a million adults between 25 and 49 years old. Clearly not all illness in this age group is compatible with participation in the workforce, but most could contribute. There is good evidence that returning to work will improve their physical and mental health.

If the unspoken story is that returning to work weakens the already poor financial position of those million members of our class, then that is a conversation we all need to have too. It is a conversation about pay and control in the workplace. ■

between men and women). It is very early in the life cycle to be too ill to work and represents a great personal loss as well as a societal loss.

This is not short-term illness of young people which would be covered by sick pay. This is long-term illness where the individual is unavailable for work. And the proportion of people of all ages inactive through sickness now stands at 7 per cent – the highest ever.

Caring responsibilities

In the 25- to 49-year-old age bracket, 1.1 million people, about a million of whom are

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 2 July on the tasks for workers after the election. All meeting details are published on What’s On, page 5, in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

As well as our Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with one in London on 10 July on the state of our public services (details on page 5), and informal meetings with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further.

If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 07308 979 308 or send an email to info@cpbml.org.uk

**On foreign matters, as on domestic matters, there is no fr
more pro-NATO, more pro-war, than the other...**

Stop the drive to war! B

THERE'S SO much that Britain needs to change, yet the ruling class has no answers. It would take us for fools with its fantasies – NATO is a force for peace, the USA is a force for good, Ukraine is going to win, a few planes to Rwanda will cut the numbers of migrants entering Britain.

But what is our class doing about all this nonsense? Do we just let the ruling class carry on, hoping things don't get too much worse? Do we really think that Keir Starmer will somehow put things right? When he echoes every move and speech that Rishi Sunak makes, there is no free choice.

Currently, the government, with Labour support, is selling arms to fuel reaction and war. Where's the free choice there?

Choice?

Our defence industry should serve the needs of Britain's defence, not arm foreign armies. Britain is one of the leading donors to Ukraine. The Sunak government has pledged almost £12 billion of our money to Ukraine, with Labour support. Where's the choice?

The ruling class tells us it's an existential war, not just for Ukraine, but for "the West". The recently retired head of the British Army, General Patrick Sanders, said we must make the army "...ready for war in Europe" and went on to call for a "citizen army".

Sunak quickly distanced himself from that idea, but later suggested 18-year-olds be compelled to do either military or community service. Our young people need and want jobs and homes, not conscription.

'Every war is justified now as helping to prevent another world war, while bringing us closer to it...'

Conservative and Labour unite in support of Netanyahu's criminal assault on Gaza, that the International Court of Justice called "plausibly genocidal". Both parties support continued arms sales to the Netanyahu government. Where's our free choice there?

Sunak, with Labour support, gets Britain involved, putting RAF planes into fights on Netanyahu's side. Now the government talks of sending British forces to Gaza, on the pretext of providing aid. How long before these troops get into conflict, first to defend themselves, then to root out terrorists, and so on?

Euphemisms

Empires talk euphemistically of self-defence and reprisal to justify their violence, from Bush's "war on terror" to Putin's "special military operation" to Netanyahu's destruction of Palestine "in self-defence". Every war is justified now as helping to prevent another world war, while bringing us closer to it.

In April the USA added to war fever when it approved a \$95 billion package of military aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. This will expand and prolong the two current wars, inevitably causing the deaths of thousands more people. And it will increase the tensions between the USA and China, adding to the risk of war with China.

Back home, Bolton MP Mark Logan said, "We're MPs not to fix potholes... We're here to protect lives." MPs are certainly not fixing potholes – or anything else that matters to us directly. And it's just arrogant grandstanding to suggest MPs could fix the world's problems instead. Logan stood down as a Conservative MP and announced he would be voting Labour – again no choice.

Production matters; without it Britain will become a parasite nation. Rebuilding industry is possible because we have a skilled, literate, questioning, critical working class.

You can't have an economy, a civilisation, without industry, energy and knowledge. And our problem is that our ruling class seems to want to avoid that reality. It will have to be forced to change course.

The British working class needs and



Abaca Press/Alamy Stock Photo

Plotting war: Prime Minister Sunak and Ukrainian P

deserves energy security. The Labour Party pledges that in government it will decarbonise our electricity supply by 2030. But currently gas-fired power stations supply 38 per cent of our electricity and act as essential back up to wind power.

Power consumption

That change in power supply won't happen in six years, unless there's a radical cut in electricity consumption. And that would mean losing quite a lot of important things: like warm, well-lit homes; transport; energy intensive industry – and holidays.

Instead, Britain needs a thoughtful, realistic approach to decarbonisation in place of net zero dogma, too often taken to mean zero carbon emissions.

Free choice. Labour and Conservative both claim to be

Build a new Britain!



President Zelensky at the "Summit on Peace Ukraine", Lucerne, Switzerland, 16 June 2024.

British workers need and deserve food security too. That means prioritising food production here, supporting Britain's hard-pressed farmers.

We deserve a secure environment free from sewage poured into our rivers and seas, and security of health and education, against unemployment through industry, and against poverty in old age.

Absolute decline

What does capitalism offer? Absolute decline – living standards falling, repression rising, quality of government laughable, endless market failures. And it presides over the failure of regulation, supposedly mitigating the excesses of capitalism but never doing so. The list is long: the Grenfell

Tower tragedy; Thames Water pollution; infected blood transfusions; the unjustifiable Post Office prosecutions; and many more.

Capitalism exploits and destroys our industry, our services, our farms, our energy sources, our environment. Why? Because capitalism pursues profit and the growth of capital at whatever cost to us all.

Once in power, a parliamentary party acts in government as if voters have signed up to everything it then chooses to do, whether in its manifesto or not.

In 1979 prime minister Margaret Thatcher never said she would end exchange controls, but she did it anyway, very quickly. Labour never said in 1997 that it would make the Bank of England inde-

pendent. But it did so, very quickly.

The day after winning a general election is the moment of a prime minister's maximum power. What surprise policy has Keir Starmer got up his sleeve? Push us back into the EU? That is what almost all Labour MPs want and even many Labour Party members.

We do have a free choice. This choice is something other than the no-choice between Labour's embrace of the market and the Conservatives' embrace of the market. Our free choice is to move beyond the illusory freedom to vote for Tweedledum or Tweedledee – or the odd protest vote.

Our interests

Our choice must be to act, in defence of our wages and conditions, act using our trade unions to advance our interests, to assert our needs, to demand our rights.

And workers are acting. We should celebrate the recent victories of so many organised workers, in the health service, on the railways, and in many workplaces across the whole of Britain. When it fights smart, when it fights in a guerrilla way, our working class wins pay victories.

More and more workers oppose the capitalist policies of austerity and industrial sabotage. For what is destroying HS2 and the proposed closing of the blast furnace at Port Talbot if not sabotage of our future? We celebrate those fighting to keep vital industries – steel, agriculture, train building and more.

More and more workers oppose the capitalist policies of under-investment and no-investment, of public spending cuts. And a growing number challenge the destructive, unplanned rush to net zero.

We choose to oppose involvements abroad, to get involved here in fighting for wages and conditions, fighting for industry, fighting for a future – focus on Britain. Fight capitalism here.

Stop the drive to war! Build a new Britain! ■

• This is an edited extract from the speech given at this year's CPBML May Day meeting in Conway Hall London.

The Post Office Horizon scandal has exposed a deep-rooted problem with individuals, it's about the way capitalism works – and what

An almost unbelievable



Sipa US/Alamy Stock Photo

London, 22 May 2024. Former subpostmaster Alan Bates speaking to reporters as the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry continues.

FEW, IF any, of the recent scandals has gripped people like the Post Office Horizon affair. This disgraceful long running affair continues to fascinate and appal.

Thanks to the ongoing public inquiry and the ITV drama *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* broadcast in January, public attention is intense and is likely to remain so for the duration of the inquiry.

As with the Grenfell Tower fire, also subject to an ongoing inquiry, there's a deep-rooted problem. It is not just down to a few craven or wicked individuals, or even just greed. Ultimately it comes down to control – whether workers can exercise power to prevent abuse.

The facts are now well known: a computer system (Horizon) did not work properly. More than 900 sub-postmasters were wrongly prosecuted over several years. Many were jailed or ruined, or both, and

others suffered great distress.

This was, according to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, "...the most widespread miscarriage of justice the CCRC has ever seen and represents the biggest single series of wrongful convictions in British legal history."

Still not righted

And the injustice is not yet righted. A group of subpostmasters took the matter to the civil courts. The Post Office fought every step of the way, but eventually agreed to pay compensation. That led to calls to reopen criminal cases and eventually to the setting up of an independent inquiry, which is currently taking evidence.

A compensation scheme administered by the Post Office has been criticised for slow progress and only a few of the convictions have been overturned. All this is dev-

astating for the people involved and their families.

What is emerging week by week at the inquiry is almost incredible – and ITV had no need to embellish the facts. What seems to have happened is wilful and persistent disregard of evidence about the computer system faults and the obligation to disclose that to defence lawyers.

And what's more, the Post Office persisted in that stance even under public questioning by members of parliament in 2012. An independent report by IT specialists Second Sight in 2015 was dismissed and its findings misrepresented.

Over 500 of the subpostmasters joined together as the Justice For Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA). They took legal action, making a breakthrough with court victories in 2018 and 2019. These exposed the appalling actions of Post

ed problem. It's more than the misbehaviour of
t workers can do about it...

scandal

Office Limited, a publicly owned company, over many years – even extending to obstructive conduct during the court cases.

What's less known is the role that journalists played in uncovering the scandal – which was public over a decade before the inquiry began or the TV drama was made. The magazine *Computer Weekly* broke the story in 2009, and by 2013 it had published over 300 articles about it.

Karl Flinders and his colleagues at the magazine continued for years to explore the issues and explain what was going on. So has journalist Nick Wallis. Originally a BBC Radio Surrey presenter, he made programmes for Radio 4 and *Panorama* about the scandal and wrote for *Private Eye*. He continues to report on the scandal online.

Under threat

But this sort of journalism is under threat. *Computer Weekly* is now a wholly online publication after acquisition by a US digital marketing group in 2011. And the BBC is shifting funding away from local radio stations.

And even the drama that brought this to many people's attention might not be made in future. The programme was widely watched in Britain, but made a loss because it did not have international appeal.

Many workers will ask – didn't the subpostmasters have a union to fight for them? Yes, even though self-employed, they did have a long-established union, the National Federation of Subpostmasters (NFSP). But

it did not stand up for them in any meaningful way. That's what led Alan Bates and others to set up their alliance.

The relationship between the Post Office and NFSP changed over the period that the Horizon prosecutions took place. NFSP lost its status as a registered trade union in 2014 after which it was funded by Post Office Limited.

Scathing

The judgement in the court cases brought by JFSA was scathing. Justice Fraser said, "the NFSP is not remotely independent of the Post Office, nor does it appear to put its members' interests above its own separate commercial interests."

The former NFSP general secretary appeared before the inquiry on 20 June. He persisted in his claim to have been acting in members' interests and denied a lack of independence from the Post Office. He appeared to reject both the words of Justice Fraser and the CCRC findings.

The Communication Workers Union represents those directly employed by the Post Office. It has been steadfast and diligent over many years in its support for the subpostmasters and in exposing the role of NFSP.

The union made a full and detailed submission in March 2020 when the inquiry was announced. Among other things, it called for a new deal for subpostmasters and access to collective bargaining for them. It said that the compensation to be paid should not be allowed to impact on

'Even the drama that brought this to many people's attention might not be made in future...'

the Post Office network as a whole.

Following the Postal Services Act in 2011, a majority of the shares in Royal Mail were floated on the London Stock Exchange in 2013. The government initially retained a 30 per cent stake but sold its remaining shares in 2015, ending 499 years of state ownership. Post Office Limited was constituted with a commercial board, and the Communication Workers Union has been campaigning for years about the number of post offices that have been cut. Post Office Limited's persecution of subpostmasters has made the situation worse.

The persecuted subpostmasters and their families may, finally, have some justice and recompense. But that can't be the end to this many-faceted affair.

The future of the Post Office network may be threatened. And while this is an extreme case, the attitude displayed by the management, its IT contractor and lawyers isn't unique. So workers in the industry and more widely will have to respond. ■



Workers

CPBML public meeting

Wednesday 10 July London, 7.30pm

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

“Why are our public services getting worse?”

Capitalism can't sustain the health service, education, housing, utilities, policing, and more that a 21st century civilisation needs. How can we ensure our services serve the people? All welcome. Free Entry. For details, see What's On, page 5.

**A working class asserting its right to be an independent m
materials critical to energy and advanced manufacturing v**

It's a material world – an



Heidi Stewart/Alamy Stock Photo

Parys Mountain in northeast Anglesey, in the 18th century the largest copper mine in the world. Now mining of copper could resume, along with s

AMONG THE public at large there is little or no debate about extracting the materials needed for twenty-first century technology. What little there is revolves superficially around mining portrayed as an ungodly destruction of the planet.

But copper, iron and carbon from coal to make steel are all essential. And there are more – the government lists 18 highly critical minerals essential for technological progress. Significant ones are cobalt, graphite, lithium, silicon, tin, tungsten, and several rare earth elements.

Without most of these minerals, Britain

cannot develop future technology and the jobs that go with it. We cannot defend ourselves and certainly can't meet targets for decarbonisation by 2050. The minerals are needed for specialist alloys in the aerospace industry, for space technology and advanced robotics, for wind turbines and energy storage, and for the automotive sector.

Batteries for electric vehicles need vast quantities of lithium, graphite, cobalt and nickel, as well as copper for motors and electricity generation. Many rare earths are used in each vehicle, not just in the battery.

And more generally, praseodymium, neodymium and other rare earths are used in magnets, lasers and a wide variety of technologies.

People have always sought a better life through use of the earth's riches. Roman Britons needed lead from the Mendips so their baths wouldn't leak. Bronze and iron were needed for battle. Even before them a network of workshops across Britain forged implements for farming and trade, for the basics of life and survival.

It's no different today. At the centre is the worker, unlocking and controlling

ation, with control over its industry, should make the
 very much its business...

and mining is essential



silver and gold.

nature – not controlled by it.

The once revolutionary idea of using what can be extracted from the earth is heresy to some people. The mention of mining – of any sort, not just coal – attracts criticism. Whether that's an attack on people as inventors, shapers of their environment, or a false equation of industrial growth with capitalism, the reasoning is flawed. This vocal minority not only pit themselves against industry, they deny the importance of national independence and self-reliance. All are interconnected.

Margaret Thatcher, and the EU during

our membership, together downgraded Britain to a service economy. There was to be no more hands-on experience of metals, minerals and mining. The London Metal Exchange in the City was to be the sole focus – a financial system detached from its productive bedrock.

As a result there is minimal investment in the plants and factories needed for processing, refining and recycling materials. Talk of sustainability and a circular economy is meaningless without the industry and technology to enable it.

Outsourcing mining and running down our own industry left Britain entirely dependent on outside sources, primarily China, for critical minerals. We have to turn that around. Ironically, the courts are ruling to limit extraction of the very metals needed to wean the world off fossil fuels.

We need to ask what traditional materials, including fossil fuels, oil, shale, remain critical for the foreseeable future. Which can we produce ourselves? Which do we have to import, and where from?

Inaction

The working class has to do the job. The government has failed to get a grip. The parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee issued a report last year, *A Rock and a Hard Place*, which sharply criticises the government's inaction and lack of direction compared with the USA or China.

In the British context, we have many geological advantages and hundreds of years of mining and metallurgy experience predating the Industrial Revolution.

Britain stands on rock, surrounded by water, and possesses rich reserves. Raw materials such as the high-grade tin, tungsten and copper needed for today's electronic age still exist, sometimes deep underground. Occasionally old mines are being reopened.

We have to consider shale, not only for its oil and gas potential in generating electricity, but also because some shales are enriched with cobalt, nickel, platinum and rare earths. Shale also contains graphite, from which graphene can be extracted.

Graphene was discovered by researchers working at the University of Manchester, now home to the National

'Raw materials for today's electronic age still exist in Britain, sometimes deep underground...'

Graphene Institute. It has the potential to replace plastic, silicon, and to some extent copper. It enables quantum computing and will predictably transform the man-made world. It is 200 times as strong as steel.

Fracking is constantly monitored by the British Geological Survey (BGS) for seismic activity and groundwater quality. The BGS has produced a report for the government about managing risk. The gas can be liquefied and stored efficiently. The BGS has estimated that Britain's total offshore shale gas resources could be between five and ten times the size of the resources available onshore.

The newest development arising from the extraction of shale gas is potentially a breakthrough. It is the heating of cold water pumped underground onto hot rocks, producing a renewable geothermal clean energy source.

Mining means skilled jobs and revival of local economies. High grade Cornish tin ore is beginning to be extracted again. The search for lithium in Cornwall and elsewhere could provide year-round jobs. It is a lighter substitute for nickel-hydrogen batteries in EVs, and needed for the grid-size batteries serving wind and solar energy.

The BGS has mapped out underexplored areas of Britain where critical metals and minerals such as lithium and graphite might be found, which could at least supplement imports, and where less-critical substitutes might mitigate against insecurity of supply.

The International Energy Agency estimated over 300 new land-based mines will be needed worldwide by 2030 for lithium,

Continued on page 18



Continued from page 17

cobalt, nickel and graphite. It takes over a decade from discovery to production, including two years to consult and get permits. Established sites are becoming depleted. Deeper and more difficult extraction is required at new sites.

The government sets out areas to “explore” – it means “think about”, not send out surveyors – as a basis for a strategy. It offers no conclusions, admitting to ignorance of critical materials and to being a latecomer in the global race. There is little sense of where priorities might lie, yet with imperialistic hyperbole it presents Britain as a global leader, and London as the metals centre of the world.

The government is indecisive, talks of “signposts” to finance but no actual financial support. It makes excuses for inaction, and tolerates delays from environmentalist opposition. It leaves Britain dependent and vulnerable on supply chains.

There have been a few positive steps – the government has set up various funding streams such as the Automotive Transformation Fund and the UK Infrastructure Bank which recently invested in Cornish lithium. But it amounts to a sprinkling of money here and there.

Gigafactories for the processing of battery materials are risky enterprises, and bound to fail without long term government commitment to developing an integrated supply chain, as China has done. Britishvolt

‘The government makes excuses for inaction...’

has already gone under.

The US government tries to ban business and research cooperation with China. And whatever the US does, the British government tags along. Having no independent trade policy puts Britain at a competitive disadvantage.

China already has several company footholds in Britain, such as British Steel and wind turbine and battery manufacturer Envision, and in other European countries, including building their gigafactories.

Trade war

The USA would like Britain to join in its trade war, and ultimately real war, against China for resources. We need to stand independent of both the USA and China. But we can learn from China – without hostility – the importance of government backing for industry. Besides, there are mineral deposits closer to home than China. These could reduce or eliminate the need for lengthy supply chains. And there are plenty of new developments.

Last year Europe’s largest known deposit of rare earth ore was found at Kiruna in Sweden. Previously iron ore mining sent rare earths to landfill. Now there’s a clean, safe site for processing.

The same Swedish company also refines a by-product of steel making called ground granulated blast furnace slag. This is used as an alternative to cement to reduce the carbon impact of concrete. Here is self-reliance in practice – efficient processing combined with recycling through retaining blast furnaces – and jobs.

The sea

What does the future hold? Mining under the sea has become a new focus in the search for vital mineral resources. This area of exploration is something entirely new and exciting.

Over 30 licences for mining on the sea floor have been issued by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the intergovernmental body that regulates exploitation of the seabed outside national waters. It has over 160 member states, but the USA typically refuses to join.

A maximum of five licences per state was allowed. The British government would

have known that over two-thirds of the planet consists of ocean and that the sea floor would be likely to yield up mineral riches – nickel, cobalt, copper, manganese, tellurium, almost certainly exceeding land-based reserves. That would meet global needs for the foreseeable future.

The government was fully informed in 2021 by the BGS, National Geographic and Heriot Watt University of the rapidly evolving interest from other states in mining for critical metals contained in polymetallic nodules (potato-like lumps on the Pacific Ocean floor). And in recent years Britain (academia, government and industry) has been actively involved in research into related marine ecosystems.

But environmental groups intend to prevent sea floor mining for critical metals. Last year the government said it supported a moratorium. Unregulated mining has certainly done considerable damage, on land and under the sea. That has to change but a ban isn’t the answer.

The ISA is preparing a mining code, which will include the “common heritage of mankind” principle, adopted by the UN in 1970. But knowledge won from hundreds of years of land-based mining is of little use to deep sea mining. There is not yet even sufficient knowledge on which to base public consultation. All countries and corporations are aware of uncertainty and risk.

Debate

Seabed mining can also bring the benefit of shared scientific knowledge. The drawback for us in Britain is government with faith in the market economy and little or no scientific interest – too craven to encourage debate.

But the working class cannot afford to be uninterested and ignorant about science and its technologies - including mining. We must inform ourselves about what our industries require to produce the things we need to sustain our lives and livelihoods. We must call governments to account and begin to take some control over decisions and developments. ■

• This article is based on the introduction and debate at a CPBML online discussion

The state has tried to meet its needs by printing more and more money. No wonder we have inflation...

Inflation: the truth



Falling inflation doesn't mean that prices are coming down.

MEDIA HEADLINES declare inflation has recently fallen to its lowest level in almost three years. Even though inflation is falling, it doesn't mean that prices are coming down, just that they are rising at a slower pace.

The common narrative is that British inflation is largely attributable to the Ukrainian war starting from February 2022 onwards. That's a distortion of the truth.

Inflationary money printing has been a feature in Britain for over sixteen years, spurred by the political panic since the 2007-2008 financial crisis. But government debt, on which the people of Britain pay interest to financial markets, keeps growing. The latest figures show that the total reached £2.7 trillion by the end of last year, equivalent to over 100 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). And the net borrowing for the quarter ended December 2023 was £40.8 billion, around 6 per cent of GDP.

It's no consolation that other G7 countries are in a worse position. This shows that the economic problems are endemic and rooted in the way capitalism works.

For a prospective Labour government to glibly say that it will "kickstart" growth is no answer. When you look at the detail, it

amounts to more of the same – work with the markets, hope workers will put up with "tough spending rules" and so on. The jargon "We will embrace a new approach to economic management – securonomics" – will fool few for very long.

Smoke and mirrors

All this smoke and mirrors has a long history. Inflation is an old weapon used against workers. This was succinctly outlined by John Maynard Keynes, a prominent early twentieth-century economist. He said, "Whilst workers will usually resist a reduction in money-wages, it is not their practice to withdraw their labour whenever there is a rise in the price of wage-goods."

As to the manipulation of interest rates, Keynes said, "there is no means of securing uniform wage reductions for every class of labour...A change in the quantity of money, on the other hand, is already within the power of most governments.

Keynes ended saying, "Having regard to human nature and our institutions, it can only be a foolish [government] person who would prefer a flexible wages policy to a flexible money policy", including interest rate manipulation against working people.

And that's just how it is playing out in

modern Britain. Interest rates, set by the Bank of England remain high, adding to costs for individuals and businesses.

In 1997 Gordon Brown, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Labour government, gave the Bank of England "operational independence" over monetary policy. And Brown decided to sell off gold reserves to invest in foreign currency.

The fiction was that this would somehow mean the economy was run better – more prudently and subject to "fiscal rules". Events in the years since have exposed this as ineffectual nonsense, revealing the reality that Britain's economy runs to serve financial markets and not the other way round.

War on workers

The honey-coated words used by Keynes show that for British workers, our political and economic war is here in Britain. Facing that challenge means rejecting the ruling class narrative on inflation.

It also means ignoring distractions cultivated by those who want our money and are using it to fund a war that has nothing to do with us – at the same time as goading British workers to get killed. Workers must reject this ruinous thinking. ■

Decarbonising electricity generation may be a good idea, but – and workers are paying the price of massive government s

Electricity and net zero



Just Jus/shutterstock.com

No, the price definitely isn't right. But renewables are making big money for capitalists.

The price is wrong: why capitalism won't save the planet, by Brett Christophers, hardback, 432 pages, ISBN 978-1804292303, Verso, 2024, £22. Kindle and e-book editions available, paperback edition due May 2025.

THIS BOOK is an interesting read about the economics of energy supply. It starts from the premise that the world's priority should be to decarbonise electricity generation and examines why that's not happening.

Capitalist economists, governments and international agencies pronounce that the operation of markets will lead smoothly to decarbonisation, simply because renewables are now cheaper.

The cost of wind and solar power has fallen dramatically. But efforts to decarbonise electricity generation are failing. Christophers says there are no examples of a substantial and zero-support renewable facility anywhere in the world – and explains why. The sector is still utterly dependent on government support. That's because renewable electricity generation isn't a very profitable business, unlike oil and gas production.

Britain's energy sector is one of the

most market-driven in the world. The wholesale cost of the bulk of our electricity for the next day is determined by spot market trades, typically in hourly or half-hourly chunks. But these spot markets affect prices worldwide and are volatile. When wind speeds drop necessitating a switch to reserve gas-fired plants, prices can leap – sometimes to an extreme degree.

Volatile

Such a market is hard for solar and wind generators. It's rare that they can forecast their supply of power 36 hours ahead. This volatility deters renewables investment, but it's great for speculators.

Investments in oil and gas projects are far more profitable. Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson told the company's shareholders in 2015, "As to investment in renewables, quite frankly, we choose not to lose money on purpose."

In sum, capitalism has failed to create a decarbonised electricity sector based on sun and wind.

Despite the recent growth of renewables output, largely government-supported, the global gap between demand and renewable energy supply from sun and

wind has widened.

Global electricity demand almost doubled between 2000 and 2022 – from about 15,000 terawatt-hours a year to nearly 30,000. China and India have in recent years accounted for around four-fifths of global growth in electricity use. And population growth, industrialisation, urbanisation and the spread of domestic electrification will continue to increase electricity use right across Asia and Africa.

Every year, the world's countries are increasing the level of output from fossil fuels, not decreasing it. In 2022, global electricity generation from fossil fuels totalled around 17,400 terawatt-hours, nearly double the 2002 figure.

Countries whose electricity demands have grown the most rely overwhelmingly on fossil fuels to produce power. About 85 per cent of South Africa's electricity comes from coal, around 61 per cent of China's, and around 74 per cent of India's.

To reach net zero by 2050, as demanded by the UN Paris Agreement, would need more than 600 gigawatts of solar capacity and 340 gigawatts of wind capacity every year. The world's largest solar farm, India's Bhadla, capacity 2 gigawatts, spans about 50 square kilometres. So the target means adding a total 15,000 square kilometres of solar farms.

So what can be done to change the situation and to reduce fossil fuel use and to meet future demand?

Christophers concludes that "only the state, by which I mean national governments considered collectively, potentially has both the financial wherewithal and the logistical and administrative capacity rapidly to lift annual global investment in solar and wind capacity from a few hundreds of billions of dollars to substantially in excess of one trillion – and keep it there...".

This is astoundingly unrealistic – does he imagine all national governments will act collectively? And he omits to mention this also means huge tax increases.

And Christophers ignores aspects of his own analysis – for example that only reducing the output from non-renewables, as well as adding renewables, would solve the problem of reducing carbon emissions. Nuclear generation does not merit much

ut it's not happening
subsidies...

'Capitalism has failed to create a decarbonised electricity sector based on sun and wind...'

mention either.

Earlier in the book he says that "there is not one single energy transition, even within a single sector such as electricity generation...what is unfolding and will unfold is a series of geographically disparate local transitions...each unique."

But by the end he has forgotten this crucial point too, failing to recognise that energy transition will be different around the world and that it will take time.

Contradictions

The value of this book is that it highlights contradictory and wishful thinking about decarbonisation, including slogans like "Net Zero by 2050" and "45 per cent reduction by 2030". It also exposes the facile thinking inherent in calls for a "just transition" and "a green new deal", which portray the problem as greedy energy companies and not capitalism itself.

Adapting to changes in climate and reducing carbon emissions can't happen without technological development – reduction in consumption alone is not the answer.

Capitalist-serving governments everywhere will have to be forced to invest in research and technology aimed at reducing reliance on fossil fuels – and to move away from economic measures that penalise long term investment.

In Britain, workers have to confront the government and others who treat "net zero emissions" as meaning "no emissions" and use that policy as a reason for decimating manufacturing industry. And they should not accept sacrificing living standards to maintain the capitalist energy markets. ■

WORKERS

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CHANGE, REAL INVESTMENT**

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Every two months Workers covers the issues of the day: measured, analytical, and clear – and deeply committed to the interests of Britain and the British working class.

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Sixty years ago the youth of Britain made it clear that they forcibly enlisted in the armed forces...

1964: No to conscription

AS THE build-up of NATO forces in Europe continues, its member countries are increasing military spending and the number of personnel in their armed forces. Ten of the 32 NATO members already have conscription. Others are set to follow.

On 17 June this year the US House of Representatives passed a bill requiring men aged from 18 to 26 to be automatically registered for draft conscription. And just weeks before, Rishi Sunak set out plans to introduce national service for 18-year-old males and females. Would a Starmer government pursue that plan?

The media have set this warlike mood – as *The Independent* put it, “Britons face call-up to armed forces if UK goes to war with Russia.” And on BBC News we saw, “UK citizen army: Preparing the ‘pre-war generation’ for conflict.”

Militarisation

Is it possible to resist the militarisation of society, the road to war and the drafting of younger generations into the armed forces? How do we stop militarisation and keep Britain out of war? One answer is that youth are quite capable of not only acquiring the skills necessary to work in a Britain revived industrially and culturally, but also of taking a leading role in developing such opposition.

Agriculture too could use their energy and lead to more self-sufficiency and shorter supply chains that would improve national security. As journalist and farmer Jeremy Clarkson said when urging young people to learn where their food comes from, “Conscription is an idiotic idea – volunteer for the farms instead!”

Mass conscription for British armed

‘The Labour Party was goaded into appearing to support conscription...’

forces in World War One was introduced in 1916 as volunteering and enthusiasm for fighting fell off. That led to resistance from conscientious objectors and “war resisters”.

Conscription ended in 1920 but was fully revived in 1939 at the outbreak of World War Two when there was clearly a threat of invasion. But then it continued for a long period afterwards. The Labour government introduced peacetime conscription in 1948. The service period was later extended in October 1950 due to Britain’s active involvement in the Korean War.

Military campaigns against various struggles for colonial freedom continued through the 1950s. Conscripts saw action in Malaya, Cyprus, Kenya, Aden and Borneo as well as in the 1956 Suez Crisis. Conscription formally ended in December 1960. The last conscripted serviceman left the British armed forces in May 1963.

Harold Macmillan, the Conservative prime minister, resigned in October 1963 in the wake of the Profumo affair, but his party hung on in government until the general election a year later. Whether as a distraction or through real need, their policy discussions during that period frequently cited the armed forces as being under strength – raising the prospect of reintroducing conscription.

Alarm

They goaded the opposition Labour Party into appearing to support conscription, pointing to that party’s then opposition to nuclear weapons. All of this talk caused alarm among young men who were not minded to be drafted.

Britain’s commitments to NATO at the time included contributing 55,000 personnel. Speaking in parliament on 5 March 1964 in a debate about the size of the Army, the war minister James Ramsden pointed to the difficulty of providing such numbers.

Referring to the total army strength of 171,588 at that time he said “We have got to make good the shortages and especially build up the infantry”. The resolution passed that day called for an army strength of 229,000. Antagonism to the USSR featured in the reasoning, as well as involve-



Workers

Young men demonstrating against conscription in

ment in colonial conflicts.

Marcus Lipton, Labour MP for Brixton, saw no problem. He said “...what we need is 30,000 men a year more than we have at present. Some 370,000 men reach the age of 18 every year, and if it were possible by some easy, simple device to pull 10,000 out of the 370,000 and put them in the Army, the problem from the point of view of the Minister of Defence and the Secretary of State for War would be very much simpler.”

But Emrys Hughes (Labour MP for South Ayrshire, a conscientious objector in WW1 and a critic of his party’s policy on war) wasn’t keen. He had pointed out, referring to the forthcoming general election, “But then we hear that after the election, when one of the parties is in power, there is to be some kind of gentlemen’s agreement, as my hon. friend the hon. Member for Dudley [George Wigg, later a Labour minister and peer] calls it, under which the two parties will unite in imposing some kind of selective service on the people.”

y would not be



George Square, Glasgow, February 1963.

Is such collusion happening today? A year of such talk was enough to galvanise the youth of 1964 into action. A slogan advertising a demonstration against conscription, written with a block of chalk on the sandstone wall of the Western Infirmary in Glasgow remained there for over 50 years, fading gradually.

Turnout

Chalked by a short-lived organisation Youth Against the Bomb, it simply said “No Conscription – George Square Sat October 10th”. A sizeable turnout filled the central square, a mixture of youth and trade unionists, many with experience of protesting against the presence of American nuclear bases on the Clyde during the previous few years. Similar protests were held around Britain.

That demonstration was five days before the Harold Wilson Labour Government assumed power. Pressure continued and conscription never saw the light of day. We may need the same simple clarity of those protesters again. ■

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Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.



ABOUT US

As communists, we stand for an independent, united and self-reliant Britain run by the working class – the vast majority of the population. If that’s what you want too, then come and join us.

All our members are thinkers and doers. We work together to advance our class’s interests. Every member can contribute to developing our understanding of what we need to do and how to do it.

What do we do? Rooted in our workplaces, communities and trade unions, we use every opportunity to encourage our fellow workers and friends to explore how Marxism can be applied to Britain now. Marx’s understanding of capitalism is a powerful tool – the Communist Manifesto of 1848 explains the financial crash of 2007/8.

Either we live in an independent Britain deciding our own future or we become slaves to international capital. Leaving the EU was the first, indispensable step. Now begins the fight for real independence.

We have no paid employees, no millionaire donors. Everything we do, we do ourselves, collectively. That includes producing *Workers*, our free email newsletter, our website, pamphlets and social media feeds.

We distribute *Workers*, leaflets and pamphlets in a variety of ways, such as online or in our workplaces, union meetings, communities, market places, railway stations, football grounds – wherever workers are, that is where we aim to be.

We hold regular public meetings around Britain as well as online meetings, study groups and less formal discussions. Talking to people, face to face, is where we have the greatest impact and – just as importantly – learn from other workers’ experience.

So why join the Communist Party? What distinguishes Party members is this: we accept that only Marxist thinking and the organised work that flows from it can transform the working class and Britain. We learn from each other. The real teacher is the fight itself, and in particular the development of ideas and confidence that comes from collective action.

Want to know more? Interested in joining or just in taking part? Get in touch by phone or email. If you want to know more, visit cpbml.org.uk/foundations, come along to our next online or in-person discussion group, or join a study group.

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Take charge, take control

‘Freedom for the capitalist means its opposite for the people. We must claim Britain to make progress...’

THESE ARE critical times for the working class and for Britain. Eight years ago we voted to leave the EU. The Covid-19 pandemic failed to weaken the class, and significant sections have since fought for pay and their industries. Workers will not wander the world as itinerants for hire wherever capitalism sends us. Our fight is here, and no election changes that.

At home capitalism wages war against us, against work, against skill and knowledge and pay. Mass immigration, promoted by successive governments, running at unprecedented levels, is a weapon against British workers, to drive down wages and create a new reserve army of strike-breakers.

When Britain said no to the EU and its “free” movement of labour as a commodity, it was a great step forward. But the enemy opens new fronts as soon as it can. We now have record immigration from non-EU countries and the latest figures show long-term net migration running at 685,000 for 2023.

Capitalism jeopardises food and energy security, our ability to feed ourselves and keep ourselves warm, and fills our rivers and seas with sewage. From potholes to the sabotage of rail projects like HS2, capitalism shows itself bankrupt of any solutions to the problems that face us in day-to-day life.

Our universities, which should be central to finding those solutions, are turned from centres of scholarship and research into factories of orthodoxy and division.

Devolution and separatism are used to attack the working class, and their extension proposed, not just for Scotland and Wales but for regions and even sub-regions. We need unity not division.

Imperialism plans for and promotes war in an ever-expanding list of theatres of conflict, in Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. Calls for increased military spending are common to all parliamentary parties. Some call for the reintroduction of conscription of young workers.

A Labour government enthusiastically joined NATO, in part the brainchild of its

foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, in 1949. Every party in Westminster is committed to British membership and party leaders vie with another to increase the proportion of gross domestic product spent on defence.

We reject attempts to bring wars abroad to British streets and set worker against worker. We say, “Britain out of NATO, no to war!”

Freedom for the capitalist means its opposite for the people. We must claim Britain to make progress. The eighth anniversary of the Brexit vote is behind us – it’s high time to start building real independence.

Whatever people voted in June 2016, now is the time to take charge and take control. Workers in every industry and every city, town and locality must come together to think through what that means for them, whether a renewed fight for pay here, on conditions of employment there, above all a plan for a future for their industry, for jobs and skill.

Workers recognise the importance of energy security for the nation. Politicians of all colours pay lip service to this. But according to government figures in 2023, Britain paid record amounts to European countries for the import of electricity. Our energy supply is not secure. We must tackle this.

Similarly, workers recognise that food security is of critical importance. The “No Farmers, No Food” campaign has gained widespread support but the country continues to import more than one quarter of the foods we consume that can be grown here.

Only workers can save themselves and save Britain. Social democracy is an ideology of decline. Marxism is the only ideology that can analyse the increasingly destructive role of financial capital. So unite in production and action, to build a new Britain.

These ideas were part of the discussions at the recent 20th Congress of the CPBML. The congress political statement will be published in full in due course, but our statement concluded:

Get organised, join your union, build and defend the new Britain, take charge. Join the CPBML, the party of the working class. ■

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