

WORKERS

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DROWNING IN DEBT

War No to NATO and US!

Economy A new direction

Education SEND in crisis

Data centres Eating energy

Wind farms Eating land

Medical students Missing

Net Zero Just stop it!

Elections All the same

Teachers Test ballot

plus Historic Notes,

News, Reviews

and more

WORKERS



Ditch “better”. Go for change.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, we have consistently said, change nothing. And despite all the froth around the local elections in May, they too will change nothing fundamental in Britain.

The elections to the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament do have the potential to bring comfort, or otherwise, to the petty politicians whose only object is to damage the unity of the nation.

But as we say in this issue (see page 12), Britain needs a new direction. It certainly won't get it from the contending political parties. All of them are committed to the management of decline – or in the case of the Greens, to embracing the destruction of industry.

If that wasn't bad enough, it is increasingly clear that none of them actually has a clue about how decline is to be managed, never mind reversed.

Compare the policies of Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, and there's barely a hair's breadth between them. Labour, historically the standard bearer of social democracy, offers nothing, not even a passably coherent philosophy.

Labour has two clear aims: re-incorporation of Britain into the European Union, though it avoids spelling this out clearly; and an increase in defence spending. The Liberal Democrats vary only in publicly professing their devotion to the EU.

Reform UK says it wants British sovereignty in all spheres, but it is also committed to global free trade

and the World Trade Organization. And global free trade is the enemy of sovereignty.

The bald fact is that social democracy, the idea of making advances under capitalism, is dead as far as the parliamentary political parties are concerned. They argue only about the pace of decline.

Yet social democracy, that walking corpse, has not disappeared. It is still alive and well in a section of the working class – the majority, perhaps – who cling on to the idea that things can get better if only the right people are in power.

Here is the great irony of British politics. The working class is the only section of society that wants progress, yet time and time again it delegates the management of the country to a bunch of charlatans who think progress is an idea whose time has gone.

This attitude was epitomised by the TUC campaign three or four years ago under the banner of “We Demand Better” – now echoed in the equally banal “Scotland Demands Better” slogan. (It is as if none of them watched *W1A*, the BBC comedy of ten years earlier.)

The very word “better” sums up the supposed ambitions of social democracy. But Britain doesn't need “better”, it needs change. Revolutionary change. And it won't get it until workers accept that nothing will change until the working class stops delegating politics to establishment politicians and takes responsibility for running Britain.



Cover photo of Cash Converters, Croydon, Kake via Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



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Junior hospital doctors outside the Conservative conference, Manchester, 2023.

The missing medical students

IN 2023, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan set a goal of doubling the number of medical school places to 15,000 by 2031-32. Labour in opposition supported the goal and, of course, claimed in the run-up to the 2024 general election to be the party to defend the NHS.

But it is preparing a new NHS ten year workforce plan that will quietly aim for a smaller number of students. And unlike with some of its U-turns, the government is keeping quiet about this one.

An article in the *British Medical Journal* has uncovered the real state of affairs. It reports that the number of students admitted in 2025-26 and for 2026-27 is far below the planned trajectory for the increase in the NHS plan. When put on the spot by the *BMJ*, the Department of Health and Social Care refused to commit to the goal of 15 000.

The number of actual funded student places this year is the same as last year. Medical schools were given exemptions to take an extra 670 international students, creating an illusion of an increase in NHS student numbers.

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk

ECONOMY

Youth unemployment up

ACCORDING TO the Office for National Statistics, the number of people on company payrolls fell by 130,000 in the year to December 2025. Unemployment rose to its highest rate for nearly five years – 5.2 per cent for those aged 16 and over, based on data for October to December 2025.

But it is young people who are really suffering. Unemployment among people aged 16-24 rose to 16.1 per cent at the end of 2025 – the highest for over a decade.

Officially, unemployment does not mean anyone without a job. To be counted you have to be without work, available for work and seeking work. Otherwise you are just “economically inactive”.

High unemployment usually brings a fall in inflation, as employers take advantage of available workers. And indeed the rate of inflation has come down slightly, to 3 percent from 3.4 per cent last December.

But the cost of essential foods remains high. And despite widespread pay struggles wages for many workers have not kept up with price increases.

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

US incursion threatens all, even Britain

US military action against Venezuela should be universally condemned as a violation of sovereignty. This highlights once again the role of Britain in NATO.

No to Starmer's Brexit reverse

The Labour government cunningly tries to disguise its plan to reverse Brexit as dynamic realignment with the EU.

Health workers' grading fight

Health care assistants are in grading disputes across the country. Cash-strapped NHS trusts are not always keen to settle, leading to some strikes.

Northern England needs better railways

The government promises improvements to rail services in the north of England. But the plans lack detail and won't produce the necessary results for years – or decades.

Overseas doctor programme scrapped

A Birmingham hospital trust has been forced to scrap a poorly regulated international fellowship programme. The scheme recruited doctors from Pakistan, apparently so they could return there after training, but most did not.

Plus: the e-newsletter

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Workers



One of many banners around Haworth campaigning against the proposed Calderdale Energy Park – a huge wind farm – which would wreck the famous moorland landscape.

Net zero destroys land

THE REALITY behind the uncontrolled drive for solar and wind energy is the destruction of productive farmland and damaging valuable moors. And consumer bills will rise to pay for this.

On 10 February, energy secretary Ed Miliband awarded subsidies to 134 new solar farms across England, including the huge West Burton on the border between Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. He also approved 23 others in Wales and Scotland. These solar farms would cover a total of over 40 square miles, mainly like West Burton on good farmland.

Miliband also approved 28 large wind farms, including the Imerys Wind Farm in Cornwall, England's largest onshore wind project in a decade. (He removed the de facto ban soon after taking up office.)

But at 20MW, Imerys is small by comparison to others planned in the Pennines – like Scout Moor 2 (100MW) and Walshaw Moor (302MW). But Miliband isn't getting it all his own way. Active campaign groups are fighting hard against the proposals on several grounds.

Opponents of Scout Moor point out that developments only happen if there's a substantial profit – and that's not the best way to plan energy supply. The objectors to Walshaw emphasise that the installation will damage deep peatlands, a valuable carbon sink.

And turbines up to 200 metres high will destroy the wildness of the moors made famous by the Brontë sisters' novels. Walshaw (now renamed Calderdale Energy Park) has been scaled back – for now. The campaign group is not giving up the fight though.

Calling these installations "farms" or "parks" cannot disguise that they are industrial installations. Rosie Pearson, chair of the Community Planning Alliance, said solar production "represents further destruction of countryside and best farmland while warehouse roofs, car parks and houses sit empty of solar panels".

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk

PAY
Museum staff strike

MEMBERS OF the Prospect trade union working at the London Museum are in dispute over their pay. The Museum is about to reopen on a prestigious new site in Smithfield, central London.

Workers at the museum's Docklands site took strike action on Thursday 19 February, during school half-term. They are following this with continuous industrial action short of strike from 20 February.

The fight is for an improved pay offer that will not leave anyone out of pocket after to inflation. The union submitted a pay claim

in March 2025. The employer took 6 months to respond with an offer and continues to drag its feet.

The initial response was rejected as inadequate, as were two further offers. Prospect says that even the most recent offer represents a below inflation pay rise for most of its members involved in the dispute.

Feeling is strong. The ballot for industrial action returned 88 per cent in favour on a turn out of almost 90 per cent.

The museum is due to complete the first phase of its £437 million redevelopment later this year. The continuing industrial action includes a refusal to take on overtime and voluntary duties and is likely to have an impact on the planned timescale.

COUNCIL TAX

Big rises on the way

AS COUNCIL taxpayers across the country await the expected rises in their council tax bills, seven local authorities have been granted special permission to demand a rise nearly double the usual 4.99 per cent limit.

As anticipated, North Somerset is one such authority. An 8.99 per cent increase could now be charged. This would mean an extra £13.44 a month for a typical band D property.

In 2014, 25 per cent of North Somerset's spending came from

government grants; by 2025 it was only 11 per cent. Just before Christmas, the government cut the council's funding by £18.6 million over the next three years.

Even with the proposed increase, the council will not be able to produce a balanced budget for 2026/27. It still faces a £2.4 million budget gap in its finances, on top of the £18 million of cuts and savings already called for in the planned budget.

Across the country, the increased costs of care for the elderly and disabled, and for children, and the cuts in central government support are bankrupting local councils and leading to worse services. The question is how long that can continue. ■



Teachers marching for pay, February 2023. Their struggle continues.

Teachers test response

THE NATIONAL Education Union is running a ballot of its members in schools in England to test their response to the government's offer of an unfunded 6.5 per cent pay increase over three years.

This offer is unlikely to match inflation. And it will certainly do nothing to alleviate the existing recruitment and retention crisis in schools.

Worse still, as the pay increase is unfunded schools would have to find the money from their budgets, which are already stretched.

The results are likely to be detrimental to the education of pupils: cuts in staffing levels; fewer subject options for students; and reduced support from teaching assistants.

The government also proposes to loosen the rules on "directed time" – the hours teachers are required to work. Workload is already at a record level – one of the reasons teachers are leaving the profession. Without the protection of "directed time" teachers can be asked to work more hours, including before and after school.

NEU has a good track record when it comes to pressuring the government. Last year its indicative ballot returned over 83 per cent support for strike action, with a turnout of 94 per cent, in response to a 2.8 per cent offer. After the ballot, the government eventually settled for 4 per cent.

There is no guarantee of a repeat this year; but a high turnout is an essential first step. The ballot will run from 28 February to 17 April. ■

- Separately, Sixth Form College teachers have turned out to vote by 93.9 per cent for a 4 per cent pay rise, while rejecting the employers' response to their demands on workload.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MARCH

Tuesday 3 March, 7pm

Online CPBML Discussion Meeting (via Zoom)

"How to stop the slow slide back into the EU"

Bit by bit, but with minimal fanfare, the government is taking Britain back under the rule of the European Union and its European Court. It has to be stopped. But how?

Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

MAY

CPBML May Day Meetings

"For British independence. For peace."



Come to celebrate May Day and join the discussion. More details on page 15.

All welcome. Free entry.

Workers of all lands, unite!

Fight for independence!

No to war!

Glasgow, In person: Friday 1 May, 7pm

Renfield Conference Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP

London, In person: Friday 1 May, 7.30pm

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

Manchester, In person: Saturday 9 May, 2pm

Venue and time to be confirmed. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for details.

Bristol, In person: Wednesday 6 May, 6.30pm–9.30pm

The Golden Guinea Function Room, 19 Guinea Street, Bristol BS1 6SX

Britain needs to be out of NATO and out of the grip of US of America's – and the EU's – making...

No to NATO and US warn

AS LONG as Britain is in NATO, our foreign policy is at the mercy of whoever becomes president of the USA. The nature of the current president makes it especially obvious how unacceptable it is for Britain to depend on other states for our security.

NATO membership ties Britain into its aggressive policies. For example, it broke up Yugoslavia, it tried and failed for 20 years to impose a pro-NATO government in Afghanistan, it overthrew the Libyan and Syrian governments, and it ruinously interfered in Ukraine. And always it maintained its longstanding policy of first use of nuclear weapons. NATO is the threat it warns us against.

President Trump insulted his most servile ally when he called the Labour government's May 2025 agreement with Mauritius "an act of great stupidity". Apparently the government agreed with the president, and in obedience withdrew the proposed agreement. But then Trump in a capricious switch said the deal could go ahead anyway!

Realpolitik

In reality this was a familiar piece of colonialist realpolitik. Formal sovereignty over the Chagos Islands was given back while the crucial military base was secured. The deal was very like the Macmillan government's deal with Cyprus – the 1960 Treaty of Establishment for the Republic of Cyprus. The British government kept 99 square miles of land for its military bases, the Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area and the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area.

'Trump's unprecedented threat to seize Greenland...brings further into question Britain's membership of NATO...'



Quintin Soloviev

Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. Donald Trump wants to size the country – and through NATO we

In the agreement with Mauritius, the government agreed to transfer sovereignty over the islands back to Mauritius, while maintaining an initial 99-year lease of Diego Garcia, the site of a key US base.

Starmer had committed the British taxpayer to paying Mauritius £120 million a year, adding up to £35 billion over 99 years, for the privilege of hosting this US base. The treaty, by maintaining the US and British military presence, would also prevent Chagossians from returning to the island.

The British government had consulted the US government on the final treaty prior to its approval. The US government stated

that, following a "comprehensive inter-agency review", it had determined that the agreement "secures the long-term, stable, and effective operation of the joint US-UK military facility at Diego Garcia."

Master and servant

Trump, and his enthusiasts here, were trying to bully Starmer into dropping the agreement – not because it would fail to secure the military base, but just to assert US dominance. This is not so much an alliance as a master/servant relationship.

President Trump's threat to seize Greenland has united virtually the whole world against him. His unprecedented

foreign policy. The alternative is to be dragged into wars

making!



are bound tightly to the USA.

threats to use force against Denmark, a fellow NATO member, have called NATO's whole reason for existence into doubt. Crucially, for us, it also brings further into question Britain's membership of NATO.

Trump threatened to impose 10 per cent tariffs on Britain and on seven other NATO member countries from 1 February, rising to 25 per cent on 1 June, until the USA got control of Greenland. What really threatens a destructive trade war against its allies?

The EU has responded by pledging to further militarise its members' presence in Greenland and the Arctic. This does what Trump wants under the guise of standing

up to him. On 14 February Starmer announced the deployment of a navy carrier strike group to the Arctic, alongside forces from other NATO member countries including the USA.

Starmer says, "Arctic security matters for the whole of NATO and allies should all do more together to address the threat from Russia across different parts of the Arctic."

But it is the USA that is threatening Greenland and the Arctic, nobody else is doing that. And why? Because Greenland is rich in rare earths, tungsten, uranium, titanium, iron ore, copper, nickel, diamonds, and gold.

Trump's aggressive foreign policy is worldwide. US forces attacked Venezuela on 3 January capturing the country's president. And on 29 January, Trump signed an executive order tightening the US decades-long sanctions on Cuba.

This order threatened severe tariffs on any country supplying Cuba with fuel. It named Cuba as "an unusual and extraordinary threat" to the United States, a flagrant reversal of the truth. It is the US government which threatens the people of Cuba, and threatens their independence and sovereignty.

Starmer said that the UK-US relationship "matters profoundly – not just to our security, but to the prosperity and the stability that people here at home depend on." He claims that our defence, security, nuclear and intelligence ties with the USA are crucial to our defence. But how are we safer when our NATO membership ties us to every act of every US president?

Starmer wants to support Greenland, and Europe, without upsetting the reckless and unreliable US president. Starmer is trying to combine supine support of the US government with supine support of the EU. He talked big at the Munich Security Conference on 14 February, but can't escape problems in Britain. No wonder he is panicking.

On 22 January, the US government reached an agreement with NATO's secretary general Mark Rutte, conceding President Trump's key demands of Greenland. This deal was made over the heads of all the NATO member governments. What self-respecting independent

country allows its foreign policy to be made by an unelected official of an undemocratic foreign body?

The proposed deal, agreed at the plutocrats' cabal in Davos, far away from any parliamentary scrutiny, would allow the USA to carry out military and intelligence operations in Greenland. US bases in Greenland would become sovereign US territory. The deal would also make it easier for US corporations to seize Greenland's mineral wealth.

As with Britain's colonial agreement with Cyprus, and as with the USA's one-sided agreement with Britain over all the US bases here, local sovereignty is retained in name, while its substance – real control – goes to the dominant power.

Control

NATO exists to enable the USA to control its members' foreign and defence policies and its military forces and structures. President Trump has ordered all NATO member governments to spend 5 per cent of their GDP on the military.

So they have all tamely endorsed his "Hague Commitment" last year which pledges NATO countries to do this. For Britain, this would mean doubling military spending.

But polling last year found that most Britons are not willing to accept cuts to other kinds of spending in order to spend more on the military. This puts into question the government's desire to deliver even 3.5 per cent of our GDP on defence spending by 2035.

Another poll, conducted by YouGov on 20 January, found that 55 per cent of Britons would be prepared to kick American bases out of Britain if the USA attacked Greenland. 22 per cent were opposed, 23 per cent said they didn't know.

This all raises the question of Britain's NATO membership. How does being a member of NATO make us safer? How does housing over a hundred US military bases and over 10,000 US military personnel make us safer?

Opposition to NATO here in Britain remains muted. But in the interests of our own safety and security, Britain should leave NATO and expel the US military from its bases here. ■

The government says it is going to completely reform the Professionals and parents are looking on with scepticism.

Education: funding crisis



Wiktor Szymanowicz/Alamy Live News

London, 15 September 2025: campaigners rally outside parliament as MPs discuss special educational needs.

IN SEPTEMBER 2019, then education secretary Gavin Williamson launched a review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision. A government White Paper was to follow, but has been repeatedly delayed.

It has finally appeared. Initial responses suggest the sector sees the White Paper as good on ambition, but short on how resources – and crucially expert staff – are to be found to fulfill that ambition.

Meanwhile, Special Schools staff were awaiting the eventual announcement with foreboding rather than anticipation. What is promised is a complete reform of the SEND system. Many fear this will lead to a further dilution of the entitlement of pupils to appropriate additional support when required.

The government will declare that funding for SEND increased by 58 per cent

between 2014 and 2024. But over that period the number of pupils with needs beyond that provided for in general SEND provision rose by 140 per cent, to 576,000 in 2024.

Outcomes

Unsurprisingly the National Audit Office found that spending over £10 billion a year has not led to better outcomes for children, and that the money must be better spent.

All good schools are inclusive. They work hard to meet the individual needs of all their pupils, whether it be through overcoming barriers to their learning, or providing for areas in which they may be gifted.

Many schools have developed excellent practice over the years, particularly in identifying and addressing these barriers. Most manage as best they can within their normal SEND provision and school budgets.

For a small minority of children with an exceptionally high level of need, additional provision was managed through a statutory Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. This brings with it the necessary extra funding.

School budgets have become increasingly inadequate to provide the level of funding required for its general SEND provision. Many parents of those children affected now see the EHC plan as a means of capturing the funds necessary to meet their entitlement.

The temptation for those parents is to emphasise the deficit model of their child in order to reach the higher thresholds required in awarding the EHC plan. This can only be done by the diagnosis of a recognised condition which meets the criteria for a higher level of support.

As a result, children who may have received appropriate support in the past for

special educational needs and disabilities system.

... hits special needs

their identified needs now require additional labelling by an educational psychologist if they are to have these needs met.

The danger is that a system once designed to meet the exceptional needs of a small percentage of pupils whose needs could not reasonably be met within an adequately funded schools' model, is now being overwhelmed. Consequently, some of this inflation in diagnosis is a result of the general shortcomings in school funding.

Disguise

A new survey by the Local Government Association reveals the extent of the difficulty which councils face. Currently, they can disguise the deficits that occur when SEND costs exceed the budget available by an accounting mechanism known as "statutory override". This keeps the deficit off their main balance sheet.

Around 95 per cent of the councils responding to this survey confirmed that their SEND budgets were in deficit. But this "override" is due to end in March 2028; deficits then move onto councils' books. 79 per cent of the councils responding indicated they would not be able to set a balanced budget in 2028/29, with the risk of insolvency.

Much of the councils' difficulty over this spending deficit is due to the cost of provision for pupils with the highest level of need. They require specialised staff in modified educational environments, facilities which most councils cannot provide.

'By failing to allocate the necessary finances the government is redirecting funding to wealthy foreign investors...'

School transport costs

INCREASED SEND spending also puts pressure on other areas of local government spending. In particular, the cost of funded home to school transport has increased sharply.

According to a National Audit Office report last October, over half a million children and young people in England have funded transport from home to school.

The cost rose by 70 per cent between 2015 and 2024, up to £2.3 billion. This huge burden has led to councils spending £415 million more than they had budgeted for in 2023-24.

Several factors combine to increase these transport costs:

- The increase in Education, Health and Care plans means more children are travelling further to have their needs met.
- This in turn means additional unique journeys, relying on smaller and single occupancy vehicles.
- The average transport cost for a pupil

with SEND provision is five times more than for other children.

- Transport operators pass on these costs to the councils who contract them. Particularly in rural areas, cuts in public transport lead to greater reliance on local authority transport.

In trying to balance the books, many councils are cutting discretionary provision, say for over-16s, and revising the distance from home to school which triggers free transport.

Effectively, the council saves a little money while parents have to pay. Councils fund only what they must provide, not what they know is needed. This leads to apparently nonsensical and sometimes dangerous decisions.

Only an ambitious programme of building extensive SEND provision where it is needed, alongside adequate funding for mainstream SEND provision in local schools, will begin to address this growing problem. ■

Local authorities are not allowed to set up their own schools for SEND pupils. But they are legally required to make provision for any child with an EHC plan, and they are allowed to use private schools for these pupils.

Private providers are stepping in to offer the places that councils cannot. According to a *Daily Telegraph* report in January, the Witherslack Group for example, which owns 39 specialist schools in England, charges up to £100,000 a year for pupils with exceptionally complex needs.

The majority stake in Witherslack is held by Mubadala, the Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund whose chairman owns Manchester City. Similarly, Senad Group, which runs special needs schools and other care facilities in the Midlands and Wales, is owned by the Qatari Investment Fund. Another foreign-owned operator cashing in on this lucrative market, with more than one thousand pupils at one or other of its 32 schools, is Waterslide Private

Equity, a Dutch buy-out group.

By continually failing to allocate the necessary finances to schools and to councils, the government is in effect redirecting badly needed education funding into the pockets of wealthy foreign investors. Their schools employ teachers, but usually not on teachers' pay and conditions.

Agency waste

And schools waste even more money paying agencies to recruit the large number of teaching assistants needed for SEND provision rather than employing them directly.

What should be done? Local authorities should be allowed to set up their own SEND schools and take over existing private ones – introducing teachers' pay and conditions there. Agency staffing should be abolished.

Unless this waste is eliminated it won't be possible to get a grip on spending. And the scramble to meet children's needs through EHC plans will continue. ■

Debt hangs over British workers, and it's growing – forcing finance capitalism...

Drowning in debt

A TIDAL wave of debt is engulfing British households. In the middle of January, Citizens Advice revealed that it had helped 400,000 people with debt problems in 2025, an increase of nearly 45 per cent since what it calls the cost of living crisis “took hold” in 2021.

The charity said that a “staggering” 13,300 turned to it for help in the first working week of 2026.

It's no surprise, then, that bankruptcy levels are rising. Insolvencies in the third quarter of 2025 were up 14 per cent on the same period in 2024. It's a reflection of a Britain in which debt is crippling millions of households.

Deregulation

Behind the scenes, massive dependence on debt is one of the consequences of the deregulation of financial markets in the 1980s.

Karl Marx wrote about debt in the third volume of *Capital*. He referred to the working class being “swindled in this form, and to an enormous extent”. He was clear that it was “secondary exploitation, which runs parallel to the primary exploitation taking place in the production process itself”.

Marx was writing in the late 1800s. He saw debt repayments as more or less equivalent to the requirement to buy goods from capitalists in order to subsist. “The distinction between selling and loaning is quite immaterial in this case and merely formal,” he wrote.

That was then. Workers at the time were not able to access loans from banks unless they had property. Most loans were

‘Increasingly, and now overwhelmingly, workers are reliant on financial markets and debt to manage daily life...’

informal, from loan sharks, or from pawn-brokers. Marx could not have imagined how things would develop a century and a half later.

Above all, he was too early to anticipate what economists now call the “financialisation” of workers’ livelihoods. Increasingly, and now overwhelmingly, workers are reliant on financial markets and debt to manage daily life. The secondary exploitation that he talked about is still there, but now vastly expanded.

Studies show that through to the late 1970s bank lending in Britain was more or less equally split between mortgage lending and loans to productive businesses (that is to say non-financial corporations). It subsequently diverged rapidly.

By the time of the 2008 financial crisis, more than 60 per cent of bank lending was going on mortgages, with only about 25 per cent going to non-financial corporations. In other words, finance capital was allocating nearly two-thirds of its resources to mortgages.

The 2008 crisis led to a small decline in mortgage lending, but it is still around 60 per cent of bank lending. Inability of US workers to pay mortgages was a key factor triggering the crisis.

Yet a large part of finance capital still depends on the ability of workers to meet their mortgage repayments.

Mortgage risk

As many commentators have noted, that is a major current risk. Rising consumer prices and increasing unemployment are now squeezing workers’ ability to meet their ongoing mortgage commitments.

But the banks and their shareholders seem not to care. Perhaps they have noted that the more indebted people are, the more likely they are to stay in low-paying jobs in case getting a better paid job doesn't work out and they end up unemployed.

Indeed, a working paper by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2020 – looking at 29 OECD countries – found that the expansion of debt and credit is “associated with lower income growth and greater income risk”.

It is surprising – or maybe not – how



Kake via Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Cash Converters, Croydon. The company has over

few academics have looked at the links between the financialisation of workers’ debts and levels of industrial action. From studies so far, it seems that the more indebted a working class, the less the willingness to resolve issues of pay with industrial action.

Financialisation won't be the only reason. There has been the onslaught of deindustrialisation and outsourcing, for example. But as the author of the OECD paper points out, it is “an important overlooked missing piece” of what he calls the declining strike activity “puzzle”.

But it is self evident rather than puzzling that loaning money to workers is doubly attractive for capitalism. Not only is it profitable but also a way of trying to repress workers from striking for better pay.

That seems true not just for Britain, but

g millions of workers to depend for their existence on



over 180 stores across Britain.

for other countries as well. A paper published in January 2023 (and publicly available), reports strong evidence from the late 1970s across Japan, South Korea, Sweden, the United States and Britain linking financialisation with fewer strikes.

Covid

Covid-19 made matters worse. The Financial Conduct Authority reported in 2021 that the number of adults with “low financial resilience” – over-indebtedness, erratic earnings, low savings – leapt from 10.7 million to 14.2 million during 2020. Over the course of the pandemic a sixth of mortgage holders took up a payment deferral.

Who holds debt? When the House of Commons Library looked at this in June 2025, it found that 84 per cent of the popu-

lation “had some form of credit or loan”. Much of this is mortgage debt and, of course, student loans.

Tellingly, even by excluding student loans and people who pay off their credit card bills in full every month, just about half (48 per cent) of the population held credit or a loan. But that number is overwhelmingly concentrated amongst workers in the prime of their employment: fully 60 per cent of those aged 35 to 44, and 58 per cent among those aged 45 to 54.

When student loans are included, those in their late 20s and early 30s who started university courses between 2012 and 2022 and are on Plan 2 student loans are heading for a particularly vicious debt disaster. They have been hit with fees of £9,000 a year and interest payments of around RPI plus 3 per cent (the exact figure depends

‘Loaning money to workers is not only profitable but also a way to trying to repress workers from striking for better pay...’

on income after graduation).

The Institute for Fiscal Studies published estimates on 6 February this year showing that the highest-earning half of students who graduated in 2022 are likely to end up repaying around £74,000 (in today’s prices) on loans of £48,000 (in today’s prices) over a 30-year term.

No wonder pressure is mounting on the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, to remedy the situation.

Reeves continues to call the student loans system “fair and reasonable” with no hint of understanding that for young workers it is a 30-year debt sentence.

Her decision to freeze the minimum level at which loan repayments start for three years starting from April 2027 has been subjected to a damning analysis by money expert Martin Lewis, who said the decision was “not a moral thing”.

Indeed it is not. But it’s the logical approach of a government wholly committed to dragging the entire population into debt if it can.

In March 2025 household debt was heading towards £2 trillion. By 2030, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, it could be up at £2.9 trillion.

To put that into context, current total annual UK GDP is around £2.8 trillion. So Britain could soon be a nation where workers owe more than they produce in a year.

The working class has traditionally been reluctant to engage with economics. If it is to emerge from the debt debacle, that will have to change. ■

It is evident to all workers, and many capitalists, that Britain is unable to provide the jobs, goods and services people need.

Britain's economy: we need



Workers

TUC march, London, June 2022. Better is not enough. Britain needs a completely new approach to the economy. Photo Workers.

IT IS CLEAR, or it should be, that the present government does not know what to do about the decline. And nor did any of its predecessors. As communists, the CPBML argues that no tinkering with parliamentary government is going to ultimately solve the problem.

We say there will be no progress, or even a halt to the decline, unless the people of Britain – the working class – start to take control and make decisions about how the economy is run. That's a bold assertion, but the alternative is a repetition of failed policies and further decline.

In discussions about alternatives to capitalism, you often hear that socialism is "alright in theory but doesn't work in practice", followed by "how will you do it, then?" It's a reasonable question at one

level but at another it assumes that someone else has the answer – and that's the heart of the problem for the working class.

If British workers rely on others to solve the problems of our nation, surrendering control and responsibility to those who do not share our interests, we will end up with answers that suit them and not us.

At present that means: deindustrialisation, uncontrolled migration, net zero, returning to the EU and preparing for war. The results are: a loss of jobs, especially skilled jobs; fewer opportunities for young workers; inadequate public services and so on.

Capitalism does not meet people's needs, so how to change that? How do workers, the vast majority and the creators of wealth, set about reversing decline?

To think about solutions it is useful to

look back to see how we arrived here. Events in the latter half of the nineteenth century can shed some light on that. The problem of shaking off reliance on others, and instead thinking about how workers can take control, isn't new.

The title character in George Eliot's novel *Felix Holt, The Radical*, written in 1866, says, "I should like to convince you that votes would never give you political power worth having while things are as they are now, and that if you go the right way to work you may get power sooner without votes."

Servile

The novel brings to life the electoral discussions of the time, using a range of subtleties that unmask servile thinking. When

... is experiencing a worsening decline in the economy,
...d. But that observation on its own will not lead to change...

...eed a new direction!



working in Britain. During the 1860s he published key works – including *Wages, Price and Profit* (presented to the International Working Men's Association in London in 1865), and the first volume of *Capital* in 1867.

Capitalists had previously lauded the economic analysis of labour time and value by early economists like Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). But they were quick to sense the threat from Marx's analysis of surplus value – the portion of labour that capitalists extract from workers.

They sought to create popular economic theories that rejected the labour theory of value, that masked over it, or pretended it doesn't exist. Many such theories, all in the interests of capitalism, have come along since.

Arguably the most enduring is the “factors of production”. This can be summarised as: rent to the landowner; interest to the financier; profit to the manufacturer; and wages to the labourer.

Where has value gone?

According to this outlook each group has a contending claim on the distribution of revenue derived from industry and commerce. In every economic textbook, surplus value has disappeared, replaced by

‘Capitalists were quick to sense the threat from Marx’s analysis of surplus value...’

“factors of production”.

This concept completely and deliberately ignores that labour power alone is the sole creator of surplus value which is then distributed as revenue in the form of rent, interest and profit, with as little as possible going to wages.

From 1865 onwards the development of this political and economic falsehood in Britain has proved difficult for workers to shake off. It provides comfort to those who want to see capitalism continue or who fear thinking about an alternative.

During the 1980s another concept was thrust upon us: deindustrialisation. It encapsulates the need for the ruling class to stop British workers' ability to produce. It

Continued on page 14

the novel was written, the leaders in parliament, Disraeli and Gladstone, were falling over themselves to extend the vote.

In 1867, the number of men eligible to vote doubled to 2 million. But 5 million men and all women were still excluded; it was many decades before all workers had the vote.

The subsequent election in 1868 saw the new working class electorate overwhelmingly vote for a Liberal government headed by Gladstone. From 1900 onwards the Labour Party gradually took those votes, but just like the Liberal party it always wished to be part of the ruling apparatus, never challenging it.

For the previous two decades, Karl Marx, a leader in the emerging workers' political movement, had been living and



BRITAIN'S ECONOMY

We need a new direction!

£1

New pamphlet

The dire state of Britain's economy has become a common talking point. British workers are being assailed on all fronts. We are left with two choices: either continue as we are, or strike out in a new direction. This pamphlet contains ideas that can be discussed at the workplace, at home, in the pub or with friends.

Finance must become the servant of productive industry for the country and not an end in itself.

Order online at cpbml.org.uk. £1,



Continued from page 13

expresses that class's belief that British society – by which they mean capitalism – is endangered by production itself.

Their fear has been masked by the use of phrases such as “post-industrial society” and “service economy”, and describing production in Britain as “uncompetitive” and “uneconomic”. A narrative was created to justify closure and the importing of goods we should be making here.

But we also have to question those in the working class who support these distortions. A typical free trade idea – which many workers thought made sense – is that a country is better off trading for products it can get for a lower price elsewhere

‘Workers who want to make positive changes for Britain have to contend with those in our class who think there is nothing wrong with capitalism that a bit of fine tuning can’t rectify...’

rather than making the products itself.

The results of this kind of thinking are with us now. Not least, that as consumption exceeds production, cuts, more borrowing and increased taxes fill the gap.

Without getting carried away by false optimism, the mood in Britain may now be changing. The CPBML has tried to reflect the change in what we publish, in particular the pamphlet *Britain's economy: we need a new direction*, which brings together ideas published in *Workers*.

We say, for example, “The majority of British workers know that what is taking place just isn’t working and won’t work. That as in pre-1917 Russia, workers are weary of a ruling class they despise. And “The idea of allowing a ruling class to appropriate wealth is worn out.”

Further, we argue that “Automation has brought us close to the point where social good not profit could determine how workers can run the economy.” That is a truly radical notion, which would overturn the thinking of the past century and a half.

The rot runs deep

In the end those workers who want to make positive changes for Britain have to contend with those in our class (too many) who think there is nothing really wrong with capitalism that a bit of fine tuning can’t rectify. In fact the rot runs deep, and if we are to take responsibility we have to understand what we are up against.

Here’s one example: currency debasement sounds like something from history lessons – coin clipping and diluting the gold content. But it is with us here and now, for all to see.

The printing of billions of pounds after the 2008 financial crisis led to inflation – around a 35 per cent cumulative price increase since 2022 (based on the Retail Price Index). Now they must crush the economy to soak up that inflation. Before discounting any pay rises that some workers have secured, the purchasing power of the currency has decreased by over one-third in just four years.

The fall in purchasing power has been reflected in the increase in gold prices. Gold has acted as a measure of value to compare against currency depreciation

post-2022.

In 1810 David Ricardo, who influenced Marx, analysed this depreciation in *The High Price of Bullion: A Proof of the Depreciation of Bank Notes*. Ricardo wrote that it’s not gold that increases in value: that is fixed in each bar of gold at its point of production.

Instead it is the money price of gold that increases when there is a significant increase in the quantity of money put into circulation. That is, when money is printed – now called quantitative easing.

The London Bullion Market Association has published its annual forecast for the next 12 months. It sees gold rising to between \$6,000 and \$7,000 an ounce and silver rising to \$160 an ounce.

It says, “Gold remains the headline story after a record-breaking 2025. Analysts expect the metal to average 38 per cent above last year’s levels, fuelled by expectations of lower US real interest rates, continued Fed easing and unwavering central-bank diversification away from the dollar.”

But the most significant of the comments by the LBMA is the reference to what’s called “dollar diversification”, spreading risk away from the dodgy dollar. Many countries, including (before Trump’s intervention) Venezuela, are taking a further step, towards “de-dollarisation”. They realise that the dollar is worthless and are determined to shake off US/dollar economic control.

Ditch the dollar

The USA is mortally afraid of this: it tries to control oil supplies so it can threaten those who want to ditch the dollar. A 2023 *Workers* article analysed this phenomenon, (“Abandoning the Dangerous Dollar”).

The USA has been giving Britain debased dollars in exchange for buying or destroying our manufacturing. British workers have to raise the life-and-death matter of reintroducing that manufacturing. There is no other choice for the economic future of Britain. ■

• This article is based on the opening and discussion at a CPBML public meeting in London in February.

CPBML MAY DAY MEETINGS 2026 FOR BRITISH INDEPENDENCE. FOR PEACE.

On May Day we take stock of Britain and the world.

The ruling class and the government use wars overseas to divert from their attack against the British working class, foremost their plan to rejoin the EU. Reject their plan and join us in rebuilding an independent Britain.

The British working class can act as a force for peace by calling for an end to foreign adventures and interference by our government.

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Social and discussion in
central Manchester
Saturday 9 May, 2pm.
Email info@cpbml.org.uk
for more details and venue
information

LONDON

Speaker and discussion
Friday 1 May, 7.30pm
Bertrand Russell Room
Conway Hall
Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL

BRISTOL

Social and discussion. Free
food.
Wednesday 6 May, 6.30pm to
9.30pm
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SEE CPBML.ORG.UK FOR UP-TO-DATE NEWS OF ALL CPBML EVENTS

Britain is being covered with vast data centres. Workers and a great deal of the power they consume is used keeping tra

Data centres: taking power



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The Vantage Data Centre in Cardiff, one of the largest in Europe. It uses as much electricity as a medium-sized town.

THE UNPLEASANT side effects of the seemingly unstoppable rise in the number of data centres in Britain are beginning to emerge. These “giant warehouses full of powerful computers used to run digital services from movie streaming to online banking”, as the BBC described them, drain energy from the national grid, and put grid infrastructure under huge strain.

Just one example: in December 2025 a report from London’s City Hall said that in 2022 housing developments in West London were told they would have to wait until 2037 for a grid connection. West London is particularly favoured by companies looking to locate data centres. And the problem is not confined to London.

These problems, though, are just the tip of an iceberg heading for the British economy. In January 2025 the government said that data centre usage accounted for 2.5 per cent of energy use. That is set to rise

fourfold by the end of 2025.

At the time of writing, industry market research company Baxtel counts 508 data centres in Britain, with a further 43 under construction. As of November 2025, according to *The Times*, another 100 are going through the planning process. This is a new industrial revolution.

The stark facts are that modern data handling requires vast amounts of power generation and backup generation to keep the computers cool. They generate a lot of heat to compute and move data.

Industrial scale

A large data centre is an industrial-scale operation. One of the largest in Britain (and Europe), the Vantage data centre in Cardiff, when fully operational, will use 158 megawatts, as much electricity as a medium-sized town.

The International Energy Agency says

electricity demand from data centres worldwide is set to more than double by 2030 to around 945 terawatt-hours (TWh), slightly more than the entire electricity consumption of Japan today. AI will be the most significant driver of this increase. Electricity demand from AI-optimised data centres is projected to more than quadruple by 2030.

For example, a report from Loughborough University in January 2025 predicted that by as soon as 2030 AI and related infrastructure could amount to fully a quarter of total British electricity consumption in 2021.

This massive energy draw for these AI and data centres is affecting electricity prices for the working class. It is not easy to separate out their effect on prices in Britain. But a 2025 analysis by Bloomberg of wholesale electricity prices across the US shows that electricity now costs

re going to face even bigger utility bills as a result. And a
 ck of the population...

Power from the people

as much as 267 per cent more for a single month than it did five years ago in areas “located near significant data center activity”.

Other utilities are affected, too. To keep these facilities cool requires significant water, air or refrigeration systems. Often data centres are sited close to open seas but smaller “hubs” or bespoke centres for certain companies may be sited in or near towns and cities inland and may make use of local water and electricity supplies, leading to stress at certain times.

Concerns about the huge amount of energy and water the new data centres will consume are obviously an issue for local authorities. And yet Britain has minimal planning constraints as data centres are classed as warehouses rather than industrial sites.

US funders

More than half of the new data centres would be in London and neighbouring counties. Many are privately funded by US tech giants such as Google and Microsoft and major investment firms.

Microsoft is planning four new data centres in Britain, with an estimated completion between 2027 and 2029 – two in the Leeds area, one near Newport in Wales, and a five-storey site in Acton, north-west London. In September Microsoft said that it will invest \$30 billion in total in what it calls AI infrastructure and ongoing operations from 2025 to 2028. Half of that will go on capital expenditure

‘Modern data handling requires vast amounts of power and backup generation to keep the computers cool...’

Centre for energy consumption

THE VANTAGE data centre in Cardiff is set to be dwarfed by one to be built in Cambois, Northumberland, by QTS – owned by US private equity giant Blackstone. It has planned capacity of 720 megawatts, with work set to begin in 2031 and last for more than three years.

The Cambois centre will cost £10 billion, and will be built on land earmarked as a huge vehicle battery factory for the Britishvolt group, which collapsed in 2023. It will involve building 10 giant data processing buildings covering 540,000 square metres – the size of several large shopping centres – on the site of the for-

mer Blyth Power Station.

The site as a whole will consume a staggering 1.1 gigawatts of power. To put that into context, it’s equivalent to the consumption of a city the size of Newcastle, and on its own amounts to 3 per cent of Britain’s total usage in the summer months.

That’s Britain’s 21st-century economy in a nutshell. A site producing power is closed in 2001. A plan to use it productively, to manufacture, was formed in 2019, and collapsed in 2023. Now it is to be turned into a centre for energy consumption. ■

on infrastructure.

And in September 2025, Google opened a data centre in Hertfordshire, an investment worth £740 million, which it says will use air rather than water to cool its servers.

While the BBC talks about using data centres for digital banking and video streaming, the real driver for more and more data centre capacity is AI. Much of this – it’s impossible to say how much because data centres are notoriously cagey about it – will be used to track and control populations.

It does, though, take masses of energy for the ruling class to track a whole population, and power will be made available to the data centres needed to process the AI – come what may. If that means energy price rises for the working class to pay for the infrastructure needed, so be it.

Bills

A report by the National Energy System Operator in mid 2025, as well as forecasting what the energy mix might be, expects to see electricity demand increase from 290 TWh today to as much as 785 TWh by 2050. That will cost serious money. Expect equally serious rises in electricity bills.

Using AI to generate video is energy-intensive enough: a five-second clip is esti-

mated to use as much energy as running a microwave for an hour. The same goes for using video of crowds to identify individuals.

According to the government, as of November 2025 13 police forces in England and Wales are using live facial recognition (LFR), including the Metropolitan Police. In LFR, crowds are scanned to search for “persons of interest”.

And that’s not all. There’s also retrospective facial recognition (RFR) via the Police National Database, where footage of all kinds can be scanned and people checked against a national database. The government says that RFR is leading to more than 25,000 facial images searches every month – on top of searches via local databases.

With the advances of video-generated AI and bots on social media, the ruling class will attempt to use this technology to manipulate people to retain their class domination. In effect, information warfare on workers.

We have an insight into this warfare with Facebook’s Cambridge Analytica scandal, pinpointing populations to target them with adverts to sway their voting. Or more recently Israeli “geofencing” of American churches in USA with pro-Israeli messaging. AI will supercharge this kind of activity. ■

Polling shows overwhelming support in Scotland for development of North Sea oil and gas. Holyrood and Westminster from a wide range of parties threaten to block net zero.

Just stop net zero!



Gary Bembridge (CC BY 2.0)

A drilling rig in the North Sea. If the government gets its way, all drilling will be banned.

THE RESISTANCE to net zero is constantly growing. Most people across Scotland support the development of our North Sea oil and gas, according to polling published amid mounting job losses across the north-east of Scotland.

The Scotland-wide Survation poll, conducted for True North Advisors, found 58 per cent of respondents “strongly” or “somewhat” support the development and extraction of North Sea oil and gas. Just 13 per cent oppose it, 29 per cent are undecided.

The polling also shows overwhelming

support for domestic energy supply. Three quarters of the 1,003 people surveyed said we should meet as much demand as possible from our own North Sea resources rather than from imports.

Elections

The Holyrood elections will be on Thursday 7 May: energy will be a key issue. The SNP and the Scottish Greens have embraced net zero as another way to harm Britain and fracture the Union. They want our economy to suffer, on the grounds that the worse the economy performs, the better

their electoral prospects.

Criticism of the Starmer government’s Energy Profits Levy is also growing. The then Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, introduced this windfall tax in 2022, when oil and gas prices were at record highs. Prices have since returned to long-term norms, but the levy remains unchanged and it is due to stay in force until March 2030.

The levy is cutting investment and adding to job losses. So our oil and gas production has fallen to record lows, leaving Britain increasingly reliant on imports.

By contrast, Norway is reopening

Developing our own oil and gas resources. Politicians in think they know better...

“dead” oil and gas fields, to extract billions of pounds’ worth of fossil fuels. The fields set for reopening include parts of the Ekofisk reserve in the southern part of Norway’s North Sea sector, next to British waters.

Improvements in technology mean that closed fields that were too expensive to exploit can now be reopened. Many of our shuttered fields could yield similar riches. Our waters still hold over 15 billion barrels of extractable oil and gas, according to the latest report from the North Sea Transition Authority.

Norway’s reopening of its fields will help the country to maintain its high levels of oil and gas production for a decade or more. Its output soared to a 16-year high last year.

The Norwegian Offshore Directorate reported, “One important reason why production remains at such high levels is that the fields are producing for longer than originally planned because new and improved technology has allowed us to continuously improve our understanding of the subsurface.

“New development projects, more production wells and exploration in the surrounding area have helped extend the lifetimes of most fields...A number of fields are producing between 10 and 30 years longer than originally planned. Certain fields that are no longer producing are now being considered for reopening.”

In stark contrast, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has since 2024 banned all new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea. About 180 of Britain’s 280 fields are set to close by 2030. The offshore sector is losing 1,000 jobs a month.

A spokesman for the Energy Department ruled out new exploration in our sector of the North Sea, saying that new oil and gas “will only accelerate the worsening climate crisis”.

Spurious

This is the usual spurious claim that if we stop producing oil and gas we will be helping to save the planet. But imports carry higher lifecycle emissions, so becoming ever more reliant on imports will only increase the emissions we are supposed to

have to reduce.

And the government’s own modelling suggests that Britain will still need nearly 47 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas a year in 2030.

Britain’s reliance on imports is growing fast. In 2024 oil production fell by 8.9 per cent to 31 million tonnes, the lowest level since oil production was established in the 1970s. Net imports of primary oils increased by 12 per cent to 20 million tonnes.

Gas production will be down from 30 bcm to 7 bcm on current trends, while oil is set to fall from 35 million tonnes to just 13 million. This means that we could be 70 per cent dependent on imports – mainly from Norway and the USA.

The very day Miliband boasted how he’d agreed to buy £10 billion worth of Norwegian gas, Norway announced its biggest ever licensing round. We spent over £20 billion last year buying oil and gas from Norway.

Subsidies

Miliband wants us to rely on renewables. To support this policy, he is subsidising them hugely. The average household consumer energy bill for 2025 was £2,500, of which the Green Levy was £228. So much for the oft-repeated claim that green policies would cut our bills by £300.

These levies didn’t even benefit British

‘Becoming ever more reliant on imports will only increase the emissions we are supposed to have to reduce...’

companies. We paid billions of pounds to foreign state-owned bodies and foreign private companies, especially US private equity, giving them guaranteed income streams. Last year, we paid out a record £2.6 billion in subsidies for renewables in the Contracts for Difference scheme. 82 per cent of current and pending offshore wind capacity is foreign owned.

Britain, like any nation, cannot live without a secure energy supply. And we have exploitable resources of oil and gas.

“Just Stop Oil” is not a radical slogan but an anti-British, counter-revolutionary call. Net zero must go. The Miliband mindset must go.

Just Stop Net Zero! ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of public, in-person meetings continues on with our May Day meetings in London, Bristol, Glasgow and Manchester. All meeting details are published on What’s On, page 5, as well as in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M As well as our in-person meetings, we hold regular Zoom discussion meetings – the next one, on the underhand moves to tie Britain to the EU, is on Tuesday 3 March at 7pm. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation. We also run study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further.

M 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.

An Oxford University researcher looks at what people think is climate change, and what actually is happening. The results are

Doom debunked



Martin Pettitt via Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

Wheat harvest, Suffolk. Despite the prophets of gloom, the world produces enough food to feed its population two times over – though hundreds of millions go hungry.

Not the end of the world: how we can be the first generation to build a sustainable planet, by Hannah Ritchie, paperback, 352 pages, ISBN 978-1529931242, Vintage, 2024, £10.99. Kindle and eBook editions available.

DR HANNAH RITCHIE is senior researcher in the Programme for Global Development at Oxford University, and Head of Research at the online publication *Our World in Data*.

Her work is inspired by Hans Rosling, whose fine book *Factfulness*, an evidence-based study of society from a historical perspective, was reviewed in *Workers* January/February 2022. Dr Ritchie applies the same approach to the issues of climate change.

A recent global survey found that in the UK, 72 per cent of 16- to 25-year-olds

believed that the future was frightening and 51 per cent agreed that “humanity was doomed”. Ritchie’s splendid book provides data that refutes this pessimism.

By 2020, 75 per cent had access to clean safe water, up from just 60 per cent in 2000, and 90 per cent of the world had access to electricity. Although air pollution still kills 7 million people every year, according to World Health Organization estimates, death rates from it have halved since 1990.

Child mortality

In 1800, about 43 per cent of the world’s children died before reaching their fifth birthday. Today that figure is 4 per cent. The odds of one’s mother’s dying in childbirth were around 1 in 10,000. Her grandmother’s odds were 30 times higher. Since

1900 the world’s average life expectancy has risen from around 30 years to more than 70.

In 1820, just a tenth of all adults had basic reading skills, today nearly 90 per cent have.

In the 1970s, around 35 per cent of people in developing countries did not get enough calories to eat. By 2015, it was just 13 per cent. Hundreds of millions still go hungry – but we produce enough food to feed a population twice our size.

Crop yields have grown three-, four-, five-fold in the last century. “Genetic breeding...has been absolutely crucial to increasing crop yields across the world, and could play a much bigger role if we’re to develop agriculture that works well in a changing climate. Not only would it allow farmers to achieve good, stable yields, it could even mean we’d need to use fewer fertilisers and pesticides too.”

In 1990, the world produced just 20 million tonnes of seafood from fish farming, now we produce well over 100 million tonnes. We now produce more seafood from fish farming than from wild catch in the oceans.

Some fish stocks are doing well, while others are struggling. There was no clear change, and certainly no evidence of a “global collapse” of fish species, as *The New York Times* proclaimed in 2006.

Some who worry that the world population is too high advocate depopulation. US academic Paul R. Ehrlich argues that the optimal global population is about one billion people, down from our present 8 billion. Dr Ritchie comments, “To get anywhere close to 1, 2 or 3 billion people would mean killing billions or stopping people from having any children at all.”

Others urge “de-growth”, the imposition of worse living standards. But, as Dr Ritchie notes, “Degrowth argues that we can redistribute the world’s wealth from the rich to the poor, giving everyone a good and high standard of living with the resources already at our disposal. But the maths doesn’t check out. The world is far too poor to give everyone a high standard of living today through redistribution alone.” We can reduce our environmental impact while becoming better off.

s happening with
are instructive...

“Ask a soil scientist how many harvests the world has left, and they will laugh. The concept has no scientific meaning...”

In 2017, the UK’s then environment secretary Michael Gove warned that the UK had only 30 harvests left. Dr Ritchie comments, “Ask a soil scientist how many harvests the world has left, and they will laugh. The concept has no scientific meaning. The world’s soils are so diverse and heterogeneous: some are degrading, some are improving, and many are stable as they are. The idea that there is a deadline by which the world’s soils will just die – apparently all at the same time – is bonkers.”

The facts

President Macron said in 2019, “The Amazon rainforest – the lungs which produce 20 per cent of our planet’s oxygen – is on fire.” One, it’s not on fire. Two, it does not produce 20 per cent of our planet’s oxygen. Dr Ritchie points out that the Amazon basin consumes almost exactly the same amount of oxygen as it produces. Since these cancel each other out, the Amazon provides almost none of the oxygen in the atmosphere.

Some 47 per cent of the world’s animal populations are increasing, 42 per cent are decreasing, and 10 per cent aren’t changing at all. 41 per cent of the world’s birds are increasing, 52 per cent are decreasing, and 7 per cent aren’t changing at all.

She concludes, “A wonderful by-product of slowing climate change, fixing our food systems, stopping deforestation, ending plastic pollution and protecting our oceans is that we stop piling pressure on the species around us.” ■

WORKERS

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Workers is the journal of the CPBML, written by workers for workers.

No one is employed to write, edit and design it. It is the product of the labour, thought and commitment of Party comrades and friends who see the need to produce an independent, working-class, communist magazine in and for Britain in the 21st century.

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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**With chancellor Rachel Reeves looking around for funds to
it's instructive to see how the Nazis approached the problem**

1936: Germany plans for

IT WAS August 1936, the month of the Berlin Olympics. But Adolf Hitler, Germany's chancellor, had other things than sport on his mind. He was drafting a memo on the economic situation that would swiftly put the country on the road to war.

Hitler set two tasks: the German army had to be ready for war in four years; and the economy had to be ready for war in four years.

One immediate consequence was the creation of the Four-Year Plan, under the direction of Herman Göring, with the sole object of preparing Germany for war. That began in the autumn of 1936, with the country's largest company, IG Farben, leading its implementation.

Indeed, most of the ideas in Hitler's plan had come directly from IG Farben, written by one of its directors, Karl Krauch, who had been appointed an adviser to Göring in 1935. Krauch would go on to be crucial to the implementation of the Four-Year Plan.

Hitler had singled out the production of artificial fuel and artificial rubber. IG Farben obliged, by among other things later building the world's largest artificial rubber factory at Auschwitz. It would run on the back of 80,000 slave labourers housed in a section of the concentration camp.

Secrecy

The massive investment needed to put Germany on a war footing needed money. And Germany was short of money. Its currency reserves were depleted, gold too. More importantly, it was crucial not to alert

'Hitler had already decided how Germany was going to pay for the bills: by a war of conquest and expropriation...'

the world to what the Nazis were doing.

The solution was already in place, courtesy of Hjalmar Schacht. He was chosen by Hitler in 1933 to be president of Germany's central bank, the Reichsbank. He created a dummy company – the Metallurgische Gesellschaft, or Mefo for short.

Schacht had been president of the Reichsbank before, between 1923 and 1930, but had been dismissed. Now he was returning in triumph. Within weeks, the ingenious solution to Germany's pressing financial woes would burst forth from his inventive brain.

"It was necessary," Schacht later explained, "to discover a method that would avoid inflating the investment holdings of the Reichsbank immoderately and consequently increasing the circulation of money excessively."

"Therefore," he went on, "I had to find some means of getting the sums that were lying idle in pockets and banks, without meaning for it to be long term and without having it undergo the risk of depreciation. That was the reasoning behind the Mefo bonds."

With a startup capitalisation of one billion marks – which Hitler and Schacht arranged to be provided by the four giant firms of Krupp, Siemens, Deutsche Werke and Rheinmetall – this company would eventually promote many billions of marks worth of investment.

Enterprises, old and new, that filled government orders had only to draw drafts on Mefo for the amounts due. These drafts, when presented to the Reichsbank, were immediately convertible into cash.

The success of the Mefo program depended entirely on public acceptance of the Mefo bonds. But the wily Schacht had planned well. Since Mefo bonds were short-term bonds that could be cashed in at any time, there was no real risk in buying, accepting or holding them.

They bore an interest of 4 per cent – a quite acceptable figure in those days – whereas banknotes hidden under the mattress earned nothing. The public quickly took all this into consideration and eagerly accepted the bonds.

While the Reichsbank was able to offer from its own treasury a relatively insignifi-

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The IG Farben works by Auschwitz concentration camp, the world's largest synthetic oil plant, ran on slave labour directly to the SS.

cant 150 million marks for Hitler's war on unemployment, in just four years the German public subscribed more than 12 billion marks worth of Mefo bonds.

These billions, the fruit of the combined imagination, ingenuity and astuteness of Hitler and Schacht, swept away the temporising and fearful conservatism of the bankers. Over the next four years, this enormous credit reserve would make miracles possible.

Rearmament

By 1939, 23 per cent of Germany's GDP was going on rearmament. For comparison, Britain's armaments expenditure is currently running at 2.4 per cent.

Sooner or later, the bills would have to be redeemed. But the government had continued extending the redemption deadlines, all the way up to 1939. Hitler sacked Schacht in January 1939. By then Schacht – not a Nazi and never allowed a say in matters of politics – had done his job.

Schacht had become worried that too much money was going to rearmament

o prepare for war,
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camp. The largest artificial rubber and syn-
- for which IG Farben paid a fee per worker

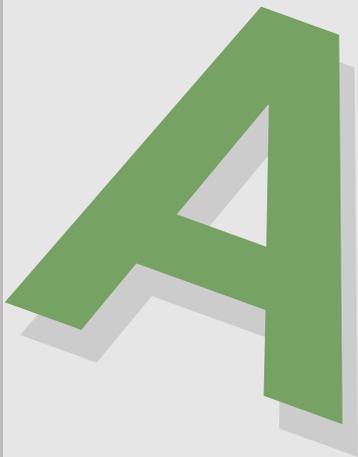
and that his Mefo bills were causing inflation. Hitler had no such worries. He had already decided how Germany was going to pay for the bills: by a war of conquest and expropriation.

When Germany took over Czechoslovakia in March 1939, not even two months after Schacht's dismissal, German companies quickly looted the country's resources. In fact, weeks before the 1938 Munich Agreement which carved up Czechoslovakia and laid the groundwork for the subsequent invasion, IG Farben had negotiated a takeover of its largest dyeworks, the Aussiger Verein.

As the Nazi war machine rolled into action across Europe, Hitler issued decrees on the seizure of property, later presented in the Nuremberg Trials.

A war of conquest might seem to be beyond the abilities of the British ruling class. But it never does to underestimate the depth of their ambitions.

Massive borrowing – a feature of government policies for decades – has to be paid for at some point, somehow. ■



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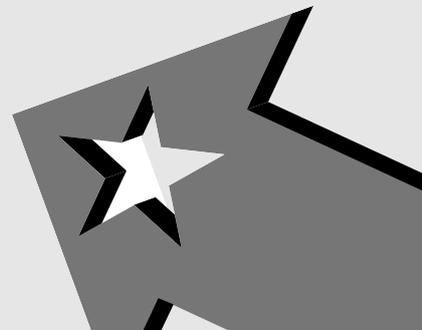
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email info@cpbml.org.uk

x [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)

www.cpbml.org.uk

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Defend Britain! Out of NATO!

‘Unless workers say loud and clear that war will be bad for Britain and therefore wrong, the threat to Britain will increase...’

RISING INTERNATIONAL tensions and the threat of wide scale war are clear for everyone to see. The question for British workers is whether we accept that the government knows what it is doing and needs our support. Or do we believe that it is set on a course that is potentially ruinous to our country and its future – that we must challenge what it is doing.

Where do we think the threat to Britain lies? Is it from Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela or Cuba? Or is it from the USA and NATO and its political arm, the EU? Or is it actually from our own government, intent on war abroad as it fails at home?

Whichever view, it would be folly to assume that there is a stable policy and that the world can be divided into good and bad so all we need do is hope the government chooses the right side. Unless workers say loud and clear that war will be bad for Britain and therefore wrong, the threat to Britain will increase.

The number and intensity of conflicts have both grown. Long-running differences and tensions between Ukraine and Russia (exacerbated by the EU) led to Russia’s invasion. NATO and the USA became involved to support Ukraine, then Trump said he would create peace. The fighting continues – and NATO has expanded closer to Russia by admitting formerly neutral countries.

The Middle East region has suffered for over a century from imperial interference. The violence, terror and counter-terror go on, again with no sign of real resolution.

President Trump has acted directly against a sovereign state, Venezuela, and taken it over for blatantly economic reasons. And threatens to do the same to Cuba. He has forced a nominal ally, Denmark, to cede partial sovereignty over Greenland on the pretence of defending the USA (not Europe) against Russia.

The latest and most dangerous escalation is the massive US military build up against Iran. This is supposedly because of the suppression of internal demonstrations and the potential to use nuclear weapons against Israel and other

US allies. The signs are that the USA is using these as pretexts for bombing Iran – an approach it has adopted many times before.

What’s the reason for this aggression? To gain control of resources, and to protect the economic and military interests of the USA. And in turn, to protect the capitalist world order.

In this unstable world situation, what are Keir Starmer and his government doing? Supporting Trump at every turn! As well as the ongoing military activity in Europe and the Middle East, British forces are now stopping ships in international waters and are sending a detachment to the Arctic “High North”.

At the time of writing Starmer has said no to using US bases in Britain for an attack on Iran. On past form, he’ll give in – or the US will go ahead anyway.

Workers should be asking: what is Britain doing with US bases here? Why do we have sovereign bases in Cyprus used for operations in the Mediterranean and beyond? What are we doing with a base in the Indian Ocean, which the US uses?

And more fundamentally, workers should consider the purpose of the British armed forces. Above all, it must be to defend Britain, the nation state to which we belong. And that does not mean those forces should be used for imperialist adventures and aggression.

The ruling class and its government like to pretend that threats are everywhere, often overstating them. Yet the involvement of Britain, the US and NATO almost always makes things worse. And the threats they talk about are really to the stable world order – US hegemony – and not directly to the people of this country.

No, Britain does not need imperialism – the military or economic domination of other countries – so that international capitalism can thrive. Britain needs industry to thrive, including industry for our own defence. And we need resources to invest in infrastructure, health and education. We must leave NATO and rebuild Britain for the needs of all who live and work here. ■

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