

WORKERS

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SAVE STEEL, SAVE INDUSTRY, SAVE BRITAIN

Scunthorpe Steel reprieved

NHS What next?

Migration Rotherham

Food Vital for security

Class Yes, it matters

Asbestos Remove it!

Energy Net zero challenged

plus Historic Notes,

Grenfell Far more to do

News, Reviews and

May Day Use your power!

more

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

WORKERS



The threat is from within

THE SIGHT of parliamentarians in front of the Union Jack should fool no one. Working class nationalism, British independence and security of our borders are anathema to the majority in Parliament. They would prefer to stand in front of the EU flag.

These people have no connection with Britain's national interests. Their role is to take us further away from the realities of what has happened to Britain over recent decades.

Consumption now regularly exceeds production, with cuts, more borrowing and increased taxes filling the gap. Economic dismay stalks the land. Those who wanted Britain to be a service economy while governments destroyed swathes of industry need to acknowledge their own part in creating the mess.

Along with economic dismay workers face state intimidation aimed at creating fear and anxiety. This is really evident when it comes to foreign events that are not our concern. And the more Britain's rulers are in trouble here, the more they seek diversions abroad, exaggerating external threats.

It is a homegrown power, and our past EU membership, that has closed our factories and wrecked things. So workers shouldn't be distracted by finger pointing to threats from without. The danger we face is from within.

Now the wreckers' mantra is to increase arms expenditure faster than necessary to protect our own borders. Excess armaments get stored in a

warehouse to deteriorate over time or are used to invade somewhere, or get exported to blow something up in a foreign adventure.

Expenditure of this kind is called dead capital. It doesn't produce a product that British workers can consume, but it does produce inflation and destruction. When it comes to the actual need for military border security the British state has instead organised population expansion by importing millions of people of working age. Britain does not need this.

Continuous improvements in automation shrink rather than increase the need for an expanding workforce doing long hours – because through automation the total quantity of living labour going into many products is minimal.

This technological change has wide implications. One is that the working population need not have been increased post 2004 through importing labour. Those British state representatives who have organised this population expansion have consciously caused social division within Britain. There is nothing racist in clearly saying so.

Today the main desire amongst workers is for Britain to be an independent country with an independent economy, with British jobs for British workers. At every turn there has been an internal negative force that has tried to twist this desire into its opposite. To run our own country we need to rid ourselves of that negativity. ■

Cover photograph Darren Staples/PA Media?Alamy Stock Photo



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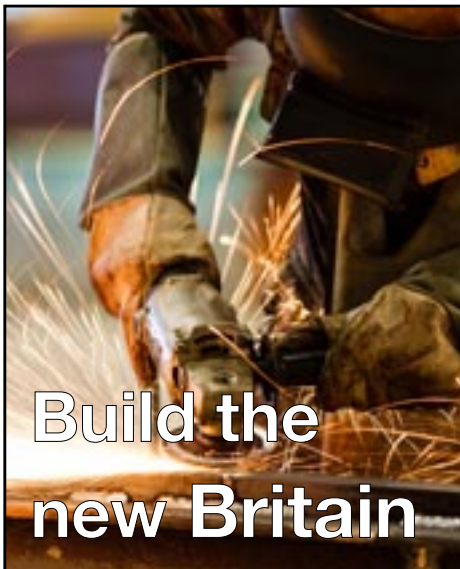
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Workers

Manchester nurses during the 2023 pay fight.

Shaking the NHS – what next?

IN MARCH the government began a shake-up of the NHS, abolishing NHS England (NHSE). Although that was welcomed, medical professionals and trade unions warned against repeating mistakes of the past.

The role of NHS England was inextricably tied up with the disastrous and chaotic 2012 Lansley reforms which sought to entrench an “internal market”. But health secretary Wes Streeting, speaking to parliament, focused on cutting costs – halving funding for integrated care boards (one of the ways the NHS tried to mitigate the impact of the 2012 reforms).

As yet there is no sign of developing a new model of a fully integrated, planned model that the NHS needs. NHSE was the custodian of the ten-year plan for the NHS. That had limitations, but was at least a start. And the fate of workforce planning is so far unknown.

Trade unions and professional bodies were critical of the 2012 reforms. They now fear a repeat of past mistakes. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine and others are concerned that the latest restructuring will detract from patient care.

The way that the announcement was made, with policy changing daily, and the lack of regard for those displaced, also causes concern.

Streeting asked eminent surgeon Ara Darzi to review the performance of the health system. He reported that the NHS was in trouble and set out what needs to be done.

He pointed to the “costly and distracting process of almost constant reorganisation”. Starmer and Streeting seemed to have missed that point, and have ignored Darzi’s view that some of the recent changes like integrated care boards “had the makings of a sensible management structure”.

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

POST OFFICE

The big sell-off

THE SCANDAL-HIT Post Office has announced the next stage of its plans for the business. Up to 1,000 jobs may be lost – and the operation of the remaining offices franchised to private companies.

The Communication Workers Union is furious. It says that the Horizon scandal should have been a wake up call bringing about a complete shift in approach – to its employees as well as to the subpostmasters the Post Office has treated so appallingly.

But instead the state-owned company seems intent on continuing in its old ways. Last November it said that it was looking at options for the future of the 115 directly operated Crown Post Offices.

Then on 8 April it announced that the 108 offices now remaining will be closed. Services will be provided through a franchised business model.

The union points out that the existing franchising model has failed so far. It says that claims of maintaining community services are “laughable” to anyone who has looked at what’s happened.

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

Conscription won't help defend Britain

The idea of conscription keeps returning. The ruling class wants to make the idea acceptable. The defence of Britain is a far wider matter and workers need to ask questions about that.

Fight for pay and funding in schools

NEU members are taking part in a preliminary ballot to ask if they will strike over pay and funding. The union is challenging a below inflation rise in English schools, with no increased funding.

Banks shutting up shop

Banks continue to close branches, denying cash and banking facilities to an increasing number of people.

Science matters

The Supreme Court has ruled that the 2010 Equality Act "sex" means biological sex, not "certificated" sex. Its decision was unanimous in favour of For Women Scotland against the Scottish ministers.

Fighting university redundancies

Many UK universities are facing ruin due to their reliance on the bloated fees of international students. Student numbers are dropping and it's being left to university staff to pick up the pieces.

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.



Hank Roberts

Participants at the north London meeting get their message across.

Get asbestos out of schools!

ON 4 APRIL an impressive meeting was held in Hamilton House, north London, to build a campaign to remove all asbestos from schools. Appropriately, it was held during Global Asbestos Awareness Week. The aim is to press government to take corrective action urgently.

Since 1980, at least 1,400 teachers and support staff and 12,600 pupils have died from mesothelioma – caused by inhaling asbestos fibres. Most victims die within 18 months of receiving a diagnosis. There is no cure; current treatments can only slow the cancer's growth.

Britain has the world's highest mesothelioma rate. Teachers and support staff are five times more likely to develop it than the general population according to one expert.

For decades successive governments have left asbestos where it is, unless visibly damaged. Yet it can be present in ceilings and display boards, which are easily damaged.

Freedom of information requests to the Department for Education have established that there are at least 21,500 schools containing asbestos. Any school built before 1999 – when its use was finally banned – is likely to contain it.

The meeting called for three essential measures as part of a National Asbestos Strategy: a national database of school buildings containing asbestos; proper inspections and recording of asbestos levels in all areas of schools; and a programme to remove asbestos from schools, starting immediately. ■

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

NUCLEAR

Need for action

BRITAIN HAS a need for nuclear power and a world leading company, Rolls-Royce, able to provide it. The company – and trade union Unite – wants the government to seize the opportunity.

Small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) can make an important contribution to Britain's electricity generation. The procurement process is nearing completion after nearly two years.

Rolls-Royce has submitted its final tender to Great British Nuclear after six months of negotiations. Three overseas-based bids are also on the short list. Rolls-Royce has already been chosen to provide SMRs to CEZ in the Czech Republic and has been shortlisted for deployment of this technology in Sweden.

The company says that choosing this British technology will be transformational – unlocking supply chain investment, creating thousands of long-term high-skilled jobs and generating opportunities for growth.

The incoming Labour government continued with the completion initiated by its predecessor, which is open to overseas companies. Neither considered it vital for Britain's energy security and industrial future to give preference to British technology.

Rolls-Royce says that each SMR-based nuclear power plant will generate enough stable low-carbon electricity to power a million homes for over 60 years. The nuclear technology is proven, but this will constitute a new approach to deploying it.

At the time the Sunak government set this in motion, trade union Unite, with many members working in engineering, argued that SMRs should be designed and built in Britain. Nothing has changed.

In early April media reports said that prime minister Keir Starmer is ready to approve the adoption of SMRs, as well as investment in Sizewell C. That's welcome news, so long as it happens (the reports quoted no source and were based on anonymous briefings). And so long as Starmer does not forget this new-found commitment to British industry. ■

FARMING

Support withdrawn

THE GOVERNMENT has closed a key farming support scheme without notice. On 11 March it announced that the Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme (SFI) was immediately closed to new applications.

The scheme, the centrepiece of post-Brexit agricultural policy, was designed to encourage farmers to manage land sustainably to benefit the environment and support food production. This decision has created uncertainty for farmers.

Around 45 per cent of British farms are unsure where their applications are, disrupting planning and spring sowings of arable crops, and forcing farmers to leave land to lie fallow – all reported to the parliamentary committee for environment, food and rural affairs on 1 April.

Farmers Weekly estimated that 4,000 applications were still under review by

DEFRA when the scheme closed. Scheme documentation had previously suggested that at least six weeks' notice would be given before any deadline; many will have missed out.

The Soil Association pointed out that the closure of the scheme would stop farms converting to organic production. Farmers need SFI support for the two-year conversion period before they can market their produce as organic.

Farmers are not the only ones affected. Small-scale vineyards, only recently eligible for support when a 5-hectare threshold was removed, are once more shut out from government support. They had been promised financial recognition for nature-friendly practices, such as £798 per hectare for wildflower cover between rows of vines.

According to WineGB, the national association for the expanding wine industry, under 20 per cent of small vineyards successfully applied for and received sustainable grant funding. ■



Scunthorpe Steel on 12 April, when ministers gained the legal powers to take control.

Scunthorpe steel reprieved

THE SCRAMBLE to acquire the raw materials, notably iron ore and coking coal, needed to avert the closure of the Scunthorpe steel plant, highlights the folly of successive governments in prioritising imports over domestic production in our vital industries.

On 15 April, the government announced that a shipload of raw materials had been bought from the USA to be unloaded at nearby Immingham Docks. Other deliveries have also been arranged to get a steady supply of coke and iron ore pellets to keep the furnaces burning.

Yet a homegrown source of coking coal, from a proposed new mine in Cumbria, has been denied the opportunity to supply this raw material, in the name of decarbonising our energy. And the incoming Labour government sided with opponents of the mine.

It would undoubtedly have been far cheaper, and far cleaner, to source coking coal here than transferring huge loads around the world in diesel powered vessels. Moreover, it could be a reliable, continuous supplier, helping to secure jobs at Scunthorpe, and bringing welcome employment to the north west of Britain.

Instead of keeping the miners of Australia and other countries in work, the government should be compelled to reconsider its blocking of the Cumbria mine as a first step in its new-found commitment to British steelmaking. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY DAY MEETINGS

“Politics is not Parliament! It's on us, the British working class”

See the notice on page 15 of this issue for details of times and venues



Celebrate International Workers' Day 2025 at the CPBML's May Day meetings, held this year in Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester and London.

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

JUNE

Tuesday 10 June, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“Industry, the foundation of sovereignty”

A chance to discuss the importance of industry, particularly for those who cannot make the in-person meeting on the topic in London in July. What do you think? Come and discuss.

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

JULY

Wednesday 9 July 7.30pm

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

In-person CPBML Public Meeting

“Industry, the foundation of sovereignty”

This meeting asserts the vital importance of industry, the basis of every advanced manufacturing nation, the core of British independence, the foundation of our sovereignty. And steel is at the heart of industry. Across the country, thanks to the Scunthorpe workers' heroic efforts, people are increasingly aware of steel's crucial role in our industries and infrastructure. We need steel for a secure future. Come and discuss. All welcome.

Britain truly became united not because of an act of parliament but because of the rise of the working class and working class culture...

The antidote to disunity -

Darren Staples/PA Media/Alamy Stock Photo



15 April: Save our Steel sign at the British Steel site in Scunthorpe, during a visit by Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, after ministers took over British Steel under emergency legislation to stop our last primary steelmaking facility from closing irrevocably.

IT WAS our working class – to which the vast majority of the population belong – that created Britain and its social and cultural fabric in the industrial revolution and beyond. In advocating for such unity that holds us together, the question immediately arises – what has caused disunity, which forces have acted against our social solidarity and the national unity that flowered from that?

Fine historical examples of uniting against onslaughts from capitalists include the Clydeside shipyard work-ins that workers organised in 1971 and 1972. These were a prototype for similar work-ins and occupations throughout Britain in the several years that followed.

The miners’ strike in the 1980s produced a strong sense of united purpose that brought together workers and their families – and community support – from Fife to Kent, from Durham to the Welsh valleys. And more recently the widespread protests, rallies and industrial action against cuts and in support of wages and conditions in 2022 and 2023 impacted effectively in most cities and towns in the land.

Anti-union legislation

A big factor acting against our unity was the philosophy of Thatcherism, supported by a large majority of the working class, sad to say, which legislated to break trade

union solidarity, hampering workers’ organising ability. The rampant legal frameworks established in the 1980s are still being used by governments today.

An era of large-scale destruction of industry was ushered in. A component part of that was an antagonistic attitude from government to “society”, and the atomisation of individuals. Disunity and dysfunction are effects we continue to experience.

Neglect of training for skilled work, underfunding of education, poor housing opportunities, closure of youth facilities, and the isolation experienced during the lockdown period have combined with that atomisation of society to produce widespread mental health problems among

ament or a monarch's ambition. It became one with the

- Britain united

younger generations.

It is precisely for those younger generations of workers that our industries must be restored, but restored with new technologies and vision that enable their imaginations and skills to flourish. Instead unemployed youth are neglected, with half a million never having worked. The "work ethic" may be in danger of being lost. What could be more divisive? What could more create divisions among the generations? We must act quickly to solve such problems.

There are great dangers in being deindustrialised for too long. The lack of skilled engineers and other highly trained workers hampers the passing-on of skilled knowledge. Consequences include the lack of new infrastructure, lack of advanced manufacturing lines, lack of industrial robotics, lack of supply chains, lack of investment in this country. It then becomes very difficult to rebuild manufacturing.

Capitalism attempts to extract more profits from its archaic practices – and imported labour and skills from abroad are used to do so. And now, as globalisation crumbles, Britain finds itself wholly ill-prepared.

Divisions fostered

Capitalism, especially when in crisis, seeks cheaper options and the ability to exploit more effectively. Hence the growing encouragement of immigration of working age men. It then promotes the tarring of those who object with the tags of "racism" or "far-right". Thus more divisiveness is created so it's a win-win.

But that is countered strongly by those workers in Britain who regard anyone working in this land by definition to be a member of the working class, and to stand alongside them in solidarity against the employer and the state. A recent article in *Workers* summed this up, "Not only is this an economic attack, but it is fostering divisions between workers at a time when they need unity."

Stand for peace

First and foremost we need peace to rebuild our industry and culture and create a united country. Not to rebuild it disintegrates the nation and its working class.

Deindustrialisation and its debilitating effects on workers is a subject dealt with in a new study on Rolls-Royce engineers and deindustrialisation in Scotland from the 1950s to the 2020s by Ewan Gibbs and others.

One example from the study brings the question of youth again to the fore: "A welder...underlined his greatest regret arising from closure was the fate of apprentices." They were left high and dry. The study aims to help "scholars in all disciplines to sharpen their understanding of deindustrialisation, as a continuing full-time phenomenon, live and contested in the third decade of the twenty-first century."

Although the study is specifically about Scotland, the unions fighting closures represent workers throughout the whole of Britain. This key factor proved decisive in the referendum of 2014 (and the two years of fierce debate that led up to that) in which the proposal to separate Scotland from the rest of Britain was firmly rejected.

Six trade unions campaigned on the side of unity, held debates among their members and organised public events. That successfully countered any danger of the argument becoming polarised between the false divisions of "left" and "right".

Since then the separatist movement has deteriorated considerably and can be considered a spent force. Some polls show

'First and foremost we need peace to rebuild our industry and culture and create a united country. Not to rebuild it disintegrates the nation and its working class...'

the occasional resurgence, but in both Scotland and Wales separatist ideas are in decline.

But this has not stopped the Scottish administration, for example, advocating for Britain to rejoin the European Union. These advocates of separatism or regionalism look fondly to global markets rather than making things here. They are now receiving a big shock. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 10 June on industry, the basis of every advanced manufacturing nation, the core of British independence. 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 Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with one in London on Wednesday 9 July, also on industry – an opportunity for face-to-face discussion. We also run study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. Plus, see our notice on page 15 for details of our May Day meetings.

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.

Workers looks behind the headlines to find out what is going on

Rotherham: the impact of

ROTHERHAM, A LARGE town in South Yorkshire, is not exceptional. It shares the same problems as many towns across Britain. It did achieve national notoriety over a child sexual exploitation scandal involving men of Pakistani heritage, and then last August for an attack on a local hotel housing asylum seekers.

John Healey, Labour's defence minister, is one of the local MPs. He wrote to the then Home Secretary, Priti Patel, in 2022 complaining about the placement of 130 asylum seekers in a hotel in Manvers, a small former mining village in the north of the borough.

Supported by the Labour-controlled Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Healey reflected the concerns of some local residents. He pointed out that Rotherham already had over 600 asylum seekers, while other parts of the country were taking far fewer, and some had none at all.

One Manvers local stated that local people had a good-natured relationship with the hotel's occupants, but then pointed to the change in the asylum seekers from families to young single men, noting an "undercurrent of resentment" from some locals, particularly older people.

Unemployment

That is hardly surprising. Rotherham has a higher level of unemployment than Yorkshire and the Humber region as a whole. The main industry, mining, was closed down in Manvers and many similar villages, destroying jobs.

Despite recent improvement, unemployment is still high. And now the local steelworks at Aldwarke is threatened, with the potential loss of more relatively well paid jobs.

Another Manvers local said that Rotherham had changed beyond recognition. He accepted that some immigrants were hard-working and happy to take up the low-paid jobs still on offer. But he thought that others exploited Britain's generous welfare benefits, and that large-scale immigration led to a lack of housing and filled-up schools.

The national cost of housing asylum seekers reached around £8 million a day in



Workers

Liberty Steels Rotherham at Aldwarke. Hundreds of jobs and key steel production facilities are under threat.

October 2023. Many people in Rotherham are on low incomes or benefits that don't keep pace with inflation; they face ever higher bills. They want to know why their taxes are supporting hundreds of foreign people, including those who have entered the country illegally.

Many shops are now boarded up in Rotherham town centre. It was hit hard by the opening of the Meadowhall shopping centre in 1990, on the site of a steelworks close to the border of the town.

Crime

The town centre is next to the poorest areas of Rotherham, where many of the immigrants live. Those areas suffer from high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, as does the town centre.

In 2019 the council sought to turn things around with a Town Centre Masterplan. The £47 million transformation

of the former Rotherham Forge into modern, attractive retail and leisure facilities has attracted a new cinema and a 69-room hotel, plus six new independent bars and restaurants.

But the new area, Forge Island, is having trouble attracting customers. One local, a former union shop steward, told *Workers*, "there are often large groups of migrant men hanging around at all times of the day and night. I am genuinely concerned for my safety on the odd occasion that I visit the town centre to go to the pub or go shopping."

In response, South Yorkshire Police has announced a crime crackdown. Starting this April, it promises "an intense focus on removing people who are causing problems with their behaviour and also plans put in place to change the layout of certain areas which may be attracting people to congregate."

ing on with immigration in one town: Rotherham....

of migration on one town



under threat.

Healey is clear that there is a problem with immigrants in Rotherham, though he is guarded in what he says, for fear of being

accused of racism. The local police and the council also know there are problems with immigrants. They now appear to understand the need to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime, often perpetrated by immigrants. But both studiously avoid any reference to immigrants in discussing the issues.

The people of Rotherham certainly know what the problems are, and the causes. What frustrates them, and hampers progress in tackling the problems, is the general unwillingness to openly discuss the issue of uncontrolled immigration.

Appalled

The town's residents were also largely appalled at the riot that happened outside the hotel in Manvers on 4 August 2024. This involved a few hundred fascists, mainly from outside Rotherham, assisted by some local youths looking for trouble. Victimising individual asylum seekers and refugees and trying to burn down their hotel is not the answer.

Around 49 per cent of Rotherham voters backed leaving the EU; only 25 per cent wanted to stay in. They voted overwhelmingly for Brexit largely because they could see the growing immigrant problem and wanted Britain to have proper control over its borders. In that, they have been betrayed by successive governments, first Conservative and now Labour.

Asylum seekers and illegal immigrants

'The police and the council know there are problems, but both studiously avoid any reference to immigrants in discussing the issues...'

are not the main problem – it is government policies that allow legal mass immigration. Immigrants will gravitate towards towns like Rotherham where housing and other costs are relatively low. And with such concentration, there is little chance of integrating with the existing population.

It is not racist to talk about concerns relating to the impact of immigration. Until there is open debate about immigration, and until immigration is significantly restricted and reduced, the immediate future for Rotherham and similar places looks bleak. ■

CPBML public meeting

Wednesday 9 July, London, 7.30pm

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

“Industry, the foundation of sovereignty”

This meeting asserts the vital importance of industry, the basis of every advanced manufacturing nation, the core of British independence, the foundation of our sovereignty. All welcome. Free entry. For details, see www.cpbml.org.uk/events



Who is working class? What is the working class? Do these

Class matters: workers a



Alex Segre/shutterstock.com

The working class makes up the overwhelming majority of people in Britain.

WHO IS a worker and what comprises the working class matter because society and politics are all about class. Anyone wanting to improve things, to tackle and solve problems, must first have a sound grasp of reality, of the material conditions in which people live. They have to be clear about class

‘The working class is made up of everyone who, for most of their lives, must work to live...’

and the working class in particular.

The working class is made up of everyone who, for most of their lives, must work to live. They don’t own the means of production or have significant capital, so they need to work. The capitalist class, on the other hand, owns the means of production and significant capital; capitalists don’t need to work to survive, although some might choose to work.

Production

All forms of society now and in the past revolve around production. Humans need material goods to live and to thrive. This is obvious on a basic level. We all need housing, food, clothing, healthcare but we also need social exchange, culture, entertainment and time to enjoy these things. Meeting our needs requires production and work. Work – and raw materials – are the

basis of all things of value.

If we all need the same things why bother with the term “class”?

The term is necessary because under capitalism, the capitalist class controls production but use it primarily to increase their capital. That is the logic of capitalism.

The individuals concerned aren’t necessarily bad people. However, producing the goods that people need is not their primary incentive. When useful products are produced under capitalism, they are simply a by-product.

We see the consequences of the “logic” of capitalism, that capital must be used primarily to increase capital, play out over and over again.

There are many examples.

- When water companies are run to take money from consumers and put it straight into the pockets of overseas shareholders

se questions matter? Yes, they do...

and capitalism

with minimal or no investment in the infrastructure needed to provide clean water.

- The production of cheap, highly processed junk food, with little or no food value, that has been linked to obesity and higher healthcare costs. (See the feature on page 12.)
- When overseas pension funds “invest” in on-shore wind farms because the British government promises guaranteed profits that will come from the pockets of energy users (we all depend on energy).
- When US business brothers use debt to buy Manchester United and then load the debt onto the club.
- When overseas private equity companies buy up British businesses in order to asset strip and funnel the stored wealth to their investors.

To understand why outrages such as these happen and how we can put a halt to them, we must understand that there are two classes living or operating in Britain with diametrically opposed interests.

The capitalist class is a small minority, but it controls the state, and it controls production. It is the ruling class, and it doesn't rule in the interests of the majority, the working class.

Organisation

Workers have always had to organise to defend themselves and their families. Even before Marx and Engels were born, ideas existed among workers which Marx later articulated – that capitalist society is made up of opposing classes with competing interests.

Luddites of the early nineteenth century were neither mindless nor opposed to technology itself (as modern abusive usage describes them). Rather they were opposed to the introduction of machinery that would rob them of a living, rob them of survival.

The majority knew that breaking a machine was the first step in breaking the class that brought in the machine without caring or planning for the people it would replace. Their attempts to defend their livelihoods were brutally suppressed by the state with show trials and hangings.

Capitalism depends on workers. It needs workers to increase its capital. Yet

without the resistance of workers in the nineteenth century, British capitalism would have exterminated the working class. It would have destroyed itself in the process, a parasite killing its host.

Through struggle, workers have so far managed to survive under capitalism. Our lives today are very different to 200 years ago. Capitalism has also changed. Finance capital dominates, but the parasitic nature of the capitalist class has not changed.

Recently we've seen the emergence of the gig economy and zero hour contracts. Or more precisely, the re-emergence of casual work.

Insecurity

By the mid to late 20th century many British workers enjoyed a period of relative job security and accommodation security. That's no longer the reality for many young workers. Those more fortunate have parents who keep space in their homes for their “boomerang” children.

Recent figures show that one in ten women aged 65 or over are still in work because they cannot afford to retire. We have made many gains, but so long as we live with capitalism those gains can be taken away. This is the logic of capitalism.

We've talked about the working class and the capitalist class. What about the middle class?

The *Cambridge Dictionary* gives this definition: “The middle class is a social group that consists of well-educated people who have good jobs and are not poor but are not very rich. The upper middle class tend to go into business or the professions, becoming, for example, lawyers, doctors, or accountants.”

That description of the middle class is not useful in understanding our society. It is a distraction. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, accountants are more likely to be working class than capitalist. Even if a lawyer, doctor or accountant is the owner or a partner in their practice – and many aren't – they will have worked as an employee for much of their career and may still need to work, so they are working class. They might not see themselves as working class, but that doesn't change the reality of how they work and contribute to society.

‘The dictionary description of the middle class is not useful in understanding our society. It is a distraction...’

Similarly, a self-employed plumber, hairdresser or other trader is working class because they must work to live. If their business expands and they employ others but still need to work themselves – they are working class. If their business grows to such an extent that they are able to sell up and live off the proceeds of their reinvested capital or pay others to manage the business while they take the profits...well, they would technically belong to the capitalist class. (Although that doesn't necessarily make them a bad person!)

What about a professional footballer earning £3 million a year? They are still working class – even though they earn such a ridiculous amount. But the reason they get paid so much is that the work they do allows football club owners like the Glazer brothers to increase their capital.

Meanwhile capitalism withdraws from production here in Britain. It prefers to outsource and strip the country of our national assets – industries, infrastructure and services – because it puts the pursuit of profit, the increase in capital, before the needs of people. If we do not stop capitalism, it will drag us further into war and bring Britain to ruin.

Workers built our nation, fought – against bitter resistance from the capitalists – for regular work, education, health, functioning utilities, reliable affordable energy, a working transport system. We must do this again. This time taking control and keeping it. This is up to us. We the working class must rebuild Britain to meet our needs. ■

A country that is not self-sufficient in food will always be vulnerable to a diet of junk food, or in wartime by blockade and invasion...

Without food, there's no



Workers

6 April: Young Farmers' tractor run, Swaffham, Norfolk.

FOOD PRODUCTION in Britain is in crisis. Attacks come from many directions: successive governments' climate change and net zero policies; tax changes; stubborn refusal to detach from the EU orbit; agricultural land grabs by developers; and the globally controlled companies that adulterate our food.

Measures that seem desirable and progressive on the surface in reality contribute to less access for workers to decent food produced at home. Instead of accepting

ongoing damage to our ability to produce, the CPBML argues for workers to take control and think in terms of "Food for the People".

The Climate Change Committee, a like-minded group of individuals appointed by government, has agriculture in its sights. Their Seventh Carbon Budget, looking forward to the period 2038-2042, calls for total decarbonisation by 2050. This report claims that agriculture accounts for 11 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions, the

fourth highest sector in the economy, but then draws perverse conclusions.

It argues that farmers should shift into woodland creation, peat land restoration and growing energy crops. Upland farms are a particular target – so they propose "destocking" uplands. A warning against increasing food imports is welcome, but this particular one is for the wrong reasons. It's not because of the risk to national food security, but because it would cause "carbon leakage" – more carbon emitted else-

vulnerable to attack – in peacetime by global producers

health or security

where for producing our food.

The committee calls for incentives for farmers and land managers to diversify income streams. Elsewhere the Land Use Framework aims to take about 760,000 hectares out of production, nearly a tenth of farmland, turning it into heath land or woodland. A further 9 per cent will need to change to create climate benefits.

Reeves's attack

The attacks on farming came to a head in 2024. The newly elected government lost no time in showing its priorities. Before the general election, Steve Reed, now the minister in charge of the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), promised farmers no changes to inheritance rules, including agricultural property relief.

These tax exemptions were introduced in the 1980s with the aim of allowing family farms to stay in the family after the death of an owner. Then the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, overthrew this idea in her October budget. She said that any farm worth over £1 million would be subject to 20 per cent inheritance tax.

That this is an ideological attack is reinforced by the words at the time of John McTernan, once an advisor to the Blair government. He said that "farming is an industry we can do without" and that Labour should "do to farmers what Thatcher did to the miners". A government propaganda offensive after the budget tried to paint farmers as rich, claiming that the tax change would affect only the largest farms: it failed.

Just as anyone who lives in a mortgaged house may appear wealthy on paper, so it is for farmers, laden with debt for machinery, feed, seed, fertiliser. Farms are the victims, as are all workers, of rock-eting energy costs.

Tax advisers are fond of saying that inheritance tax is voluntary – and it often is for "high net worth individuals", who can afford expensive accountants to set up discretionary trusts. In the same budget, Rachel Reeves also decided to accelerate the wind-down period of farm subsidies – some farmers will lose nearly 80 per cent of their income this year.

This attack has prompted widespread

demonstrations and action against these anti-farming, anti-food production measures. In London, Edinburgh and Cardiff, at ports, at distribution depots and anywhere ministers raise their heads, farmers are making their point.

Even the chair of the Commons Environment committee admitted that "we have got an agricultural policy that is actually taking people out of food production".

Fundamental to food security is not just production but also food quality. Obesity is rife – the 2022 Health Survey for England estimated that 64 per cent of adults and 27 per cent of children were either overweight or obese. Obesity is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems and type 2 diabetes. The NHS spends considerable resources on treating the consequences of poor diet.

Ultra-processed

The crude adulteration of food in the nineteenth century has been replaced by ultra-processed products, laden with sugars and fats, on the shelves of supermarkets. Additives such as preservatives, colours, and colour stabilisers used widely in food, drinks and medications have resulted in an

'The Climate Change Committee has agriculture in its sights, calling for total decarbonisation by 2050...'

increase in allergies.

But capitalism has no interest in providing good quality nutritious food for workers. Left unchecked, it would gladly keep us at the barest minimum necessary for us to sustain our existence, remain productive and reproduce.

The sustained attempts to suppress wages play their part in ruining our diet. A House of Commons Library Research Briefing in September of last year reported that 7.2 million workers, 11 per cent of the

Continued on page 14

Food for the people

IN 1978 the CPBML published a pamphlet titled *Food for the People!*. We quoted experts in agricultural research who argued that Britain certainly could be self-sufficient in food production, and had a highly efficient agricultural sector. In the intervening years, capitalism has distorted the economy to keep Britain reliant on imported food, prioritising profit over food security.

For the reality of the need for food security – that is, self-sufficiency – the pamphlet looked to the lessons of the Second World War when food production was a question of national survival. Afterwards, and as a consequence, British agriculture became highly mechanized and productive.

Yet even by the 1970s we were already importing over 50 per cent of our

food and the importance of self-sufficiency had been forgotten. The pandemic in 2020 was a sharp reminder, which governments since try to ignore.

In 1978 we were five years into membership of what was then the EEC (now the EU). This led, as many had predicted, to higher food prices, thanks to the Common Agricultural Policy. Controls from Brussels on what could and could not be produced led to the infamous butter mountains and wine lakes – and the destruction of British fruit orchards and much of our fishing industry.

The pamphlet, with a recent postscript, is available online at <https://www.cpbml.org.uk/about/publications>. It's worth a read to reflect on what's changed since then and what hasn't. ■



Continued from page 13

population, are in food poverty, including 17 per cent of our children. The Trussell Trust, which runs a network of food banks, reported supplying the highest number of emergency food parcels they had ever distributed – 3.12 million in 2023-2024.

How can we tolerate this? Food parcels, the modern version of the Victorian soup kitchen, are no long-term solution. Cheap food is frequently bad food, produced inhumanely. The fight for wages is the key to being able to afford a good diet.

Planning

After Brexit, the CAP was replaced by new subsidy arrangements. The direct payments scheme which paid farmers based on the amount of land they farmed, was tapered off. Farm incomes are falling as a result – by 19 per cent in 2023 according to DEFRA's own statistics.

Farmers and the government are engaged in a continuing battle over the

'Capitalism has failed to protect our food supply and the drive to war presents a new threat to food security...'

Previous government attacks

UNDER THE environmental land management schemes of the previous government, still in force and applicable in England, farmers are paid to adopt sustainable farming practices to take land out of food production.

These schemes pay farmers to let land lie fallow – like the infamous EU set-aside – or to boost wildlife. They add to the encouragements for farmers to move out of food production.

These incentives have the result of driving farming families out of the industry. Generations of skill and experience are lost. More productive land is acquired by hobby and weekend farmers and capitalists. They acquire farmland to widen the spread of risk on investment portfolios, to avoid capital gains tax, or to cash in on carbon offset and biodiversity incentives.

Land lost to solar and property developers constitutes another blow to our

food security. Within days of the 2024 election the government approved three new solar farms, including Mallard Pass on the Rutland-Lincolnshire border, over four miles from end to end of prime agricultural land in one of Britain's most productive farming areas. Increasingly that means pressure to use farmland for solar farms, which is counted as part of "total income from farming".

Lease periods for solar farms are increasing too – commonly 40 years or more – taking farmland out of food production for decades. In July 2023 CPRE, the countryside charity, 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." ■

new scheme. The National Farmers' Union has insisted that food production be given as much support as the green initiatives.

The NFU has also pointed out the many other flaws in the government's food and agriculture policies.

As well as the withdrawal of the budget tax proposals, farmers demand a ban on substandard food imports, a ban on dishonest labelling, and measures to increase food security.

Supermarkets

So great has been the pressure from farmers and their supporters that the major supermarkets – Morrisons, Aldi, Lidl, Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's – are converts to food security. All are now lined up behind the farmers and exerting pressure on the government to change course. Supermarkets also bear a significant measure of responsibility for the fraught condition of British farming, squeezing their margins with low food prices – but it's a start.

By understanding Britain's unique geol-

ogy and climate, we know what we can grow most effectively in our conditions, what we might export to others, and what we might import. Revolutions in agricultural production in the eighteenth paved the way for the industrial revolution. When workers moved to the cities, new productive techniques made it possible for them to be fed.

So, the question in 2025 is what do we need to do collectively to ensure food security, for families and households and for the country? Capitalism has failed to protect our food supply and the drive to war presents a further threat to food security.

Our farmers say, "No farmers, No food, No future". We say, "Food for the People – for health and security". But who would be surprised to hear the government echo the words of Rudolf Hess in 1936 as Nazi Germany prepared for war: "Kanonen statt Butter", "Guns before butter"? ■

• This article is based on the introduction to a CPBML public meeting in March.

CPBML MAY DAY MEETINGS 2025

POLITICS IS NOT PARLIAMENT! IT'S ON US, THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS

Celebrate International Workers' Day 2025 at the CPBML's May Day meetings, held this year in Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester and London.

On May Day we take stock of Britain and the world. The priority for the British working class – all who live and work here – is Britain.

Capitalism outsources production and strips Britain of our national assets – and unchecked it will drag us further into war and bring Britain to ruin.

Workers built our nation. We must rebuild Britain to meet our needs and cannot rely on politicians or parliament to do it for us.

Come to celebrate May Day and join the discussion.

All welcome. Free Entry.

Workers of all lands, unite!

Fight for independence!

No to war!



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The drive to import energy in the name of net zero threatens the economy...

Energy self-reliance, not

Norma Desmond via Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Sizewell B in Suffolk will be the last working nuclear power station in Britain after 2030.

THE NEWS that the prime minister Keir Starmer will give the go-ahead for the construction of a new nuclear power plant, Sizewell C in Suffolk, is welcome. This suggests that some of those in government are

‘Manufacturers are starting to question the consequences of adhering to imposed net zero policies...’

rethinking their commitment to net zero at any price.

At the same time, Starmer is expected to agree to a fleet of small modular nuclear reactors, which could be built anywhere in the country where there is a need for continuous power.

Britain’s five existing nuclear plants are close to the end of their working lives. These new moves might be criticised as being already too late. But they represent a change of heart on the main obstacle to nuclear progress – net zero policy dogma and the fiction of cheap renewable energy.

Miliband’s retreat

Energy secretary Ed Miliband is a leading advocate of forcing a move to renewable energy sources. He also had to row back on his commitment to net zero. Confronted with a government decision to green light a third runway at Heathrow, Miliband

reversed his long-held and determined opposition to that development. He now claims it is compatible with net zero!

Other casualties in the drive to net zero are the failure to persuade people to replace their gas boilers with heat pumps, and the failure to tempt people away from petrol and diesel cars into electric vehicles. Previous targets are being dropped or deferred, another welcome step.

Opposition to net zero imposition for domestic heating and cars is based on the reality that consumers are faced with greatly increased costs for something less effective.

Similar opposition must be brought to bear on other projects which blight our lives in the name of net zero.

For example, plans to massively augment the existing electricity grid infrastructure will create more and more power lines, substations and pylons. Some of them will

ons Britain's independence as a modern manufacturing

t net zero dogma

be enormous.

Naturally, people living near these huge constructions oppose their siting.

Miliband proposes to offset up to 40 per cent of the electricity bills of people living within half a kilometre of new or upgraded infrastructure. Opposition to the growth of pylons is strongest in areas where these structures are designed to be built, and the intention is that opponents will effectively be bribed into acquiescence.

Rosie Pearson, of the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons action group, doesn't agree. "Bribing communities with token money off their electricity bills and new playgrounds in return for destruction of their local environment and business has been deeply unpopular since the concept was first proposed." The proposal is likely instead to stoke more widespread opposition when people realise that the cost of the bribe for some will be increased bills for everyone else.

Manufacturers are also starting to question the consequences of adhering to imposed net zero policies. German car-maker Porsche now reports that it will be adding combustion engine and plug-in hybrids to its portfolio of products, in light of their recognition that "...combustion engines will be around for much longer than previously thought."

Electric vehicles

In Europe, as in Britain, sales of EV cars are stalling. Other car makers, including Mercedes-Benz and Renault, have also scaled back their EV targets recently. They pay lip service to the necessity of promoting EVs through government-imposed quotas and levies. But they draw the line when profits are hit because they can't sell the EVs they make.

This stance by carmakers is obliging the government to start bending its own net zero rules. For example, the requirement to phase out the sale of all petrol and diesel vans by 2030 is to be postponed until 2035. Not exactly a reversal of policy but certainly watering it down.

Similarly, makers of "elite" British cars will now be exempt from net zero rules.

That's great for the bosses of firms such as Aston Martin and McLaren. No

doubt they have the ear of senior members of the government. The rest of us need more widespread changes.

Perhaps the tide is turning on net zero policy. If so, it ought to prompt a renewal of opposition rather than relaxation. There is still a long way to go and the zealots have not given up. And some of the harm to our environment and agriculture will be irreversible once developers have seized the land and started work.

Above all, the devastation to British industry in the name of net zero will impact the lives of workers for generations. It is not that the transition to net zero is being managed badly (which it is), but also that the end in itself is flawed.

Closure

At Grangemouth for example, the government's decision to phase out oil and gas exploration has triggered the imminent closure of Scotland's last remaining oil refinery with 500 jobs at stake and 2,500 more in related industries. Proposed alternative uses for the site include a fuel import terminal. This highlights the unremitting drive by governments, present and past, to replace mining or making things here with importing them.

Britain needs oil, and will continue to do so for some time. Instead of using our own resource, we pay another country for theirs and pay someone else to ship it here. It's economic lunacy – a scorched earth policy.

New green jobs have long been claimed as a consequence of moving away from the use of fossil fuels. But there's no evidence of that. "Just another fig leaf," Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham said of the terminal closure, "...to justify its act of industrial vandalism."

Perversely, Miliband has unveiled a plan to create a bioethanol plant which would use Scottish timber. The proposal to effectively "turn trees into petrol" would require subsidies to attract investment, and may create between 50 and 120 jobs.

Drax power station supplies 6 per cent of Britain's electricity by burning wood pellets. Its claims to be "low carbon" are controversial and disputed. And it attracts huge green energy subsidies too.

Another fanciful claim is that renewable

'Instead of using our own oil resource, we pay another country for theirs and pay someone else to ship it here. It's economic lunacy...'

energy will be cheaper. In the absence of any estimate from the energy department of the cost of decarbonisation of the grid, Professor Gordon Hughes, an eminent energy analyst, made a calculation.

His estimate comes out at an extra £25 billion a year more than we now pay, over £900 for each household. He based this on the actual cost of building, maintaining and at times replacing far more machinery and infrastructure than the grid currently employs.

Small wonder Miliband's department is coy about costings. And we don't yet have the engineers that would be needed to carry out the work.

The bigger picture is that reliance on imported energy puts Britain's security at risk. We saw the turmoil when Russian energy was taken out of the picture. Now it is reported that Norway is reconsidering its position as a major energy exporter to many places, including the EU and Britain.

EU energy price harmonisation policies mean that countries like Germany, having gambled heavily on renewable energy to replace the nuclear power on which it previously largely relied, now have to depend on imports. Consequently, despite being almost entirely self-reliant in energy, Norway finds its electricity prices rising. That caused so much dissatisfaction among Norwegians that the government fell. A lesson for British workers and a warning for our own government. ■

Part Two of our investigation into the far-reaching consequences passed but much still needs to be done...

Grenfell's legacy must be

THE APPALLING tragedy of the Grenfell fire, with 72 lives lost, more than 70 injured, continuing trauma for survivors, and long-term health disorders for firefighters present, can hardly be overstated.

Tragic as it was, the fire acted as a catalyst for potential change. The 2024 report which brought the Grenfell Inquiry to a close exposed with utmost clarity a corrupt and incestuous public building culture, operating in plain sight, which imperilled the entire population. It was a watershed moment.

Upgrading the regulatory system became a matter of urgency even as the Inquiry was taking place. Laws were passed – the Fire Safety Act of 2021, the Building Safety Act 2022, and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 applying to England – and similar laws for Scotland and Wales.

Multinational conglomerates and their British subsidiaries, such as Pittsburgh-based Arconic and French-owned Celotex, as well as County Antrim-based Kingspan Insulation, knew UK regulation was weak. Arconic “deliberately concealed” the danger of using the cladding.

Arconic tried to hide behind foreign law. It claimed that its employees could face prosecution under French law if they provided evidence to the Inquiry. (The French government said they wouldn't.) Celotex made “false and misleading claims” about the suitability of its insulation. Kingspan failed to reveal the limitations of its product.

Shockingly, the fire risk sector was completely unregulated, encouraging undercutting and acceptance of unprofessional levels of pay. Anyone could invent qualifications to make themselves out to be a fire engineer or a fire risk assessor.

‘Without tighter regulations the conditions for corrupt practices had ripened to bursting point...’



Jessica Girvan/shutterstock.com

June 2022: memorial to the victims of the Grenfell tower five years after the fire.

One of these impostors advised the finance-obsessed Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The Inquiry found that he had no understanding of the composition of the cladding: it was labelled “fire rated” (a meaningless term) so he simply assumed without question that it was safe to use. It was in fact highly flammable aluminium composite material.

Leading up to the fire there had been confusion in the industry about British versus European standards for grading materials for high-rise buildings. The British Board of Agrément, which described itself as “the UK construction sector’s most trusted certifying body”, had produced misleading certificates. Kingspan and

Celotex seized on them for deceptive marketing purposes.

After the fire Kingspan tried to prevent a ban on flammable materials by devising unorthodox tests intended to continue to mislead. The Inquiry described them as “science secretly perverted for financial gain”.

Incredible

It seems incredible with hindsight that for the first time under the 2021 Act combustible materials were banned by law from being attached to the outside of high-rise buildings. Over twenty years earlier the industry had warned that Britain risked becoming a dumping ground for unsafe materials. Under this law, the regulator

consequences of the Grenfell Tower disaster. New laws were

Effective fire regulation



(now part of the Office for Product Safety and Standards) has the power to take construction products off the market and to prosecute non-compliant companies.

A previous change in the law in 2005 reduced fire service inspections and shifted responsibility to building owners. And that regulation applied only to non-residential working environments. Yet fire risk in residential tower blocks was known since the Ronan Point gas explosion of 1968. Government had been asleep at the wheel for decades.

The question still arises: Why didn't local councils and the fire service use even the limited powers of inspection and enforcement they already had? The answer is partly a lack of personal and collective

responsibility, but also that without tighter regulation the conditions for corrupt practices had ripened to bursting point. Local government, preoccupied with tick-box exercises, identity politics, and anything other than public safety, simply looked the other way.

Had a legal ban on flammable material been in place, there would have been no temptation for the council to save £800,000 on cladding. Cutting corners on interior work too, such as lift maintenance, ventilation, fire doors and compartmentation – factors in the fatal fire – might not have been such a temptation had effective regulation been in place.

New, safer, British Standards of design and construction were set out in 2022, with fire safety to be integrated at the planning stage. Like the unqualified risk assessor, the architect appointed by the council had no experience of aluminium composite material and asked no questions.

The 2022 Act established the role of Building Safety Regulator as part of the Health and Safety Executive. It provided for enhanced training for architects, engineers, and other construction professionals. Some recommendations are still out for consultation, such as criteria for a second escape stairwell.

Social housing

The third major piece of legislation, to regulate social housing, came into effect in 2024. That was in response both to the Grenfell fire and to the death of a two-year old child from exposure to mould. This law requires social housing landlords to appoint a dedicated health and safety lead to conduct fire risk assessments, deliver training, identify causes of a fire, and be the primary point of contact for fire safety issues.

But much of this new act is a rehash of previous regulation, dressed up as new and more forceful, with added self-serving “resident engagement” tick-box clauses. But it does shed light on the weakness of previous regulation.

Previously, regular inspections of council housing did not take place (certainly not of the Grenfell estate), and landlords had no powers to take emergency action (although Grenfell was a ticking time-bomb).

There was a clause in the old legislation known as the “serious detriment” rule, now removed. The regulator was able to claim that no serious detriment to the tenant was proved – a legitimate excuse for inaction. Only now can the regulator act “before people are put at risk”.

That change ought to be reassuring. But as in other areas, it's far easier to set up regulation than it is to bring about effective enforcement. And as with other areas there is a network of regulators which often prevents action.

The social housing regulator has a toothless junior partner, the Housing Ombudsman, continuing from the previous regime and acting as a barrier between tenants and landlords.

And now the Ombudsman will itself be cushioned by an extra layer of bureaucracy, the Social Tenants' Access to Information Scheme.

This scheme poses as the tenant's right to hold the landlord to account. But if the tenant is still dissatisfied the case is passed back to the Housing Ombudsman. Tenants' and leaseholders' organisations will need to devise creative ways to exert control.

The most worthwhile legacy of Grenfell would be a desire on the part of our class to take responsibility for housing, in the realisation that capitalism kills. This means pushing for resources, not only to build more houses but to maintain the homes we' have.

This also means being alert as a class to incompetence, becoming our own enforcers of professional standards and safety, insisting on national standards and well-regulated national manufacturing enterprises.

Building good quality houses and flats for social rent would help drive out the most exploitative landlords and end the stigma of social housing. But if we hand all responsibility to the authorities, the politicians and their regulators, we won't get very far.

The residents of Grenfell demanded respect from their local council and got contempt: they were branded “troublemakers”. If we want to maintain a safe roof over our heads, we'll all need to be prepared to make some trouble. ■

A gallery in Durham dedicated to art by and about miners community is part of Britain's cultural legacy. It should be

Coal and creativity



Courtesy Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland

The display at the entrance to the Mining Art Gallery. Tom McGuinness's *Durham Big Meeting* is on the wall to the right.

Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland. Tickets £30 for a year covering entry to the Mining Art Gallery, the Spanish Gallery, Bishop's Palace and Gardens. Open Wednesday to Sunday plus Bank Holiday Mondays, 10:30 to 16:00. Free entry for carers, Art Fund members and children under 4.

A CENTURY ago mining was at the heart of Britain, employing 1.25 million people. And nowhere was mining more important than in County Durham, with 170,000 miners in 1923. The county's landscape was dominated by winding gear and slag heaps.

Not now. It's been more than 30 years since the last colliery in the Durham coalfield closed. A way of life – one that generated community and comradeship – has disappeared. But it is recorded, in pictorial form, in the Mining Art Gallery in Bishop Auckland.

What is unusual about the gallery is that its founders and many of the volunteers who show visitors round knew many of the artists whose works are represented there, making it a true community venture.

Visitors may be told, for example, about the “most important” work in the gallery,

Durham Big Meeting by Tom McGuinness – important because this depiction of the Durham Miners' Gala was the first picture bought by the gallery rather than donated.

Purchased at auction in Newcastle, *Durham Big Meeting* was brought back squeezed into an Austin Metro with the back seat folded down, and with the paint a little the worse for wear. So gallery founders Gillian Wales and Robert McManners asked McGuinness if he might “freshen it up” – which he did, adding the two founders into the crowd for good measure. It now hangs on the wall facing the entrance, the first picture that visitors see.

McGuinness came to mining later than some, being conscripted as a Bevin Boy in 1944. But when conscription ended he returned to mining, documenting the work and life of Durham miners in his spare time.

Knowledge

Notably, most of the pictures in the Mining Art Gallery were done by miners. They knew what they were painting, and they knew the people they painted. The result is a record of community without condescension or false sentiment. It is life as they experienced it. It is also testimony to the

humanity of working people and their cultural creativity, so often untapped.

McGuinness wasn't an artist before becoming a miner, but he honed his skills at the Spennymoor Settlement, an educational and self-help organisation founded in 1930. And it was the Settlement and its sketching classes, too, that nurtured a local talent, Norman Cornish.

Cornish was born into mining, leaving school at 14 to go down the local pit. Working as a miner for four decades before finally turning professional as an artist, his work has been exhibited all over the North East yet only rarely outside, though he was the subject of a TV documentary by Melvyn Bragg in 1988.

Several of Cornish's paintings hang on the gallery's walls, including two of his favourite subjects: the pit road leading to Spennymoor – a path he trod for 40 years, and the mobile local landmark that was Berriman's chip van.

The van was run by three brothers, of whom it was said that they worked in shifts. At any one time one brother would be peeling potatoes, one would be serving customers and one would be in the pub!

Cornish's *Crowded Bar*, on display in

and their widely known...

‘Cornish’s *Crowded Bar* may be just one painting but it contains an entire world...’

the gallery, may be just one painting but it contains an entire world. The glasses of beer lined up on a table waiting for the miners coming off shift, all thirsty and all wanting a very quick pint. A whippet. A keenly contested dominoes battle.

Cornish would have been a familiar figure to all the men in the pub. He would come off shift himself and sit quietly sketching – his wife had sewn a poacher’s pocket into his coat so that he could carry his sketching materials wherever he went.

Other artists exhibited at the gallery include Bob Olley, who worked for 11 years in Whitburn Colliery near South Shields until it closed in 1968, and another Bevin Boy, Ted Holloway. Olley recently donated his gripping image of the notorious 1984 police attack on striking miners, *Orgreave after Guernica*; he was there himself. At the time of writing the 7 foot long painting hasn’t yet found space for permanent display.

It is certainly not a vast gallery – which makes it easy to visit – and one day it may need bigger premises. Already, as the memory of mining grows more remote and the people who bought works by local miners grow older, the gallery is frequently being offered paintings whose owners want them to be seen and appreciated.

It is clearly right and proper that such a gallery should be where it is, in the heart of former mining country. But this cultural legacy deserves also to be much more widely known throughout Britain.

Just around the corner in Bishop Auckland Town Hall, you can see – for free – other work by McGuinness and Cornish’s epic Miners Gala Mural, originally commissioned in 1962 for Durham’s new County Hall but now on permanent display in Bishop Auckland. ■

WORKERS

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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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

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Our ruling class has a track record of not protecting British interest. One typical episode occurred at the end of the Second World War.

1945: More than a loan

WHEN THE Second World War was won in 1945 by the allies and there was peace at last, one fact became glaringly apparent: the precarious position of Britain's economy, distorted by six years of total war. Britain was exporting only around a fifth of what it had before the war and non-military imports were five times higher than in 1938. There were still 1.4 million people in the armed forces in 1946.

The British economy had been heavily geared towards war production at around 55 per cent of GDP, much greater than in the Soviet Union or America. To make matters worse, US President Truman abruptly ended in August the wartime Lend Lease arrangements that had run since 1941, by which war effort equipment had been donated. Suddenly, payment was expected for undelivered supplies, Britain found it did not have enough dollars, and bankruptcy loomed. As an emergency measure, the government sold gold and minerals, but this could not suffice for long.

Keynes goes to Washington

Prime Minister Attlee dispatched John Maynard Keynes, the economist and government financial adviser, as Britain's negotiator in Washington. Most of Britain expected a gift in recognition of the

'Other stringent conditions were imposed on a submissive Labour government, namely acceptance of the convertibility of sterling and the liberalisation of trade...'

country's contribution to the war effort, which had predated that of the US, and Keynes believed he could wrest a multi-billion dollar grant-in-aid out of the USA rather than a loan. Despite three months of severe clashes and hard wrangling, Keynes returned with a loan and a heart-attack for his troubles. The Anglo American Agreement produced a business loan instead of a subsidy, with extra conditions stacked in America's favour.

Unsurprisingly, the USA ignored sentiment and pressed its own imperial interests proving that a "Special Relationship" had never existed, except inside the confines of Churchill's mind. Two determining factors were at work: our diminished productive base limited Britain's ability to manoeuvre in a peacetime environment; and our rulers' senseless wish to sustain the empire post-war (though it was clearly unaffordable) made them chase a costly external loan.

Although the granting of the loan did strain relations between the two countries, the agreement was never really threatened, despite some opposition in the House of Lords and the likening of America to Shylock by a cabinet minister. In December 1945, Attlee and the Labour Government succumbed, agreeing to not only a US loan of \$4.34 billion (double the size of the then British economy) but also other onerous stipulations.

Contrary to the impression given by politicians in later decades, the loan was never used to finance the war itself, though outstanding Lend-Lease supplies still in transit when peace was declared were paid for within the overall loan. The loan (structured like a mortgage) was to be paid off in 50 annual repayments starting in 1950; payments were mostly interest in the early years and shifted toward capital later on.

Other stringent conditions were imposed on a submissive Labour government, namely acceptance of the convertibility of sterling and the liberalisation of trade. The convertibility of sterling directly caused the financial crisis of 1947, as Britain was forced to let holders of sterling convert their earnings into other currencies such as the dollar and allow these earnings to be spent outside of the sterling area. Convertibility meant the demise of British



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The Blitz, London, 1941. A devastated Britain emerges from the rubble. Picture US National Archives Catalog (Public Domain).

economic management at home and of economic control of the colonies. Gradually, America exploited liberalisation of trade to displace the position of British companies in former colonies.

Despite assertions in subsequent decades, the purpose of the loan was not to rebuild Britain or aid domestic recovery but to meet expensive imperial commitments. As Keynes himself wrote in 1946, "...the American loan is primarily required to meet the political and military expenditure overseas." Keynes estimated that Britain spent £2 billion on policing and administering the Empire. This expenditure was largely responsible for the country's post-war financial difficulties.

Underinvestment at home

For a telling comparison, look at the provision made available for essential sectors of the domestic economy on which working people's livelihoods depended: between 1947 and 1949 only £320 million was invested in building manufacturing industry; £262 million in transport and communication, £160 million in energy industries and £85 million in agriculture and fisheries.

Britain's national debt after the Second World War...



Britain's national debt after the war in debt up to its eyeballs to the USA (Public Domain)..

As there were six deferred instalments, this debt to the USA was only fully repaid by the British government in 2006. Although at the time Treasury Minister Ed Balls acclaimed it as “a sign that the UK repays its debts”, what is probably unusual is that the debt was repaid at all, as Britain has a patchy record on debt repayments. There are unpaid debts that predate the Napoleonic Wars, and War Loan debts from the First World War were not paid off until 2015. And at the height of the Great Depression in 1931, a moratorium on all war debts was agreed and no debt repayments were made or received after 1934.

It was complete stupidity to take on the burden of a huge loan when in 1946 Britain's national debt stood at about 250 per cent of GDP and when the loan was not directed to the essential task of rebuilding our industrial capacity but squandered on a futile attempt to prop up a crumbling empire and support the obsolete role of world policeman. ■

• This is a slightly edited version of an article which originally appeared in *Workers*, December 2013.

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Use your power!

‘Every day, everywhere in Britain and across the world workers produce the necessities of life and all that makes up civilisation. Yet in Britain and elsewhere workers are not in control...’

MAY DAY is a time to celebrate the power of workers and the working class. But we can and must do more than march and carry banners once a year.

Every day, everywhere in Britain and across the world workers produce the necessities of life and all that makes up civilisation. Yet in Britain and elsewhere workers are not in control.

Workers fight to defend working and living conditions, increasingly so over the past three years. Sometimes that’s successful, sometimes not. But the need to fight and to resist greater exploitation does not disappear; victory is only temporary. Employers, the capitalists, and their government will sooner or later come back for more.

When it comes to issues beyond the workplace, we are too often spectators or passive victims in decisions that affect our lives and existence. It need not be so. The working class as a political force has a power that we underestimate.

Capitalists don’t – which is why they take every opportunity to encourage workers to turn on each other. In this they are shamefully aided by poisonous “progressives” in our number who mistake workers’ tolerance for indifference and workers’ desire to put Britain’s needs first as harmful stupidity or worse.

It doesn’t take much for capitalism to go haywire, sending markets and governments into panic mode. The imposition of US tariffs and the economic reaction underline the importance of an independent national economy, which we can control, or at least exercise influence over through government.

And to some extent there are positive developments. After continuing the decades-long policy of undermining British industry and British workers, Keir Starmer seems to have suddenly discovered that industry matters and that’s there’s something important about protecting Britain after all.

It doesn’t matter that for this to happen, it took an incipient trade war triggered by the US and a Chinese company’s attempt to eliminate

production here for economic advantage. What matters is that workers press home the point and allow no turning back.

Real support for Britain, our industries and services, requires control of our borders and an end to massive immigration, legal and illegal. That means an end to employers relying on cheap migrant labour and not training skilled workers here.

It means an end to allowing key companies to be sold off or controlled from abroad. It means an end to closing key industries like steel. It means an end to relying on imports of things that can be made or grown here. It means preference for British companies in infrastructure projects – railways, roads, schools, hospitals and so on.

Above all it means an end to the destructive, backwards and negative net zero policy. Britain needs energy. We have energy if we choose, by exploiting oil and gas and by developing nuclear power.

Over decades British industry has been outsourced to China or to wherever labour was cheapest – with government support and connivance. Capitalists focused on finance capital – making more capital by buying and selling companies, whether or not anything useful was produced.

And to justify this shift, we were told that Britain was now “post-industrial” and we could live on a service economy. To an extent, the working class has been complicit in this thinking. Certainly too many workers accepted the lie, exposed by a crisis over trade in manufactured goods!

Starmer’s wish to embrace the EU again won’t survive these demands – not that there’s any sign they are willing to act nice. So workers might do best to step aside from reruns of the Brexit debate and get back to the basics.

What matters is that we talk about what we need as a class and what Britain needs as a nation – and set about holding to account those who for the moment hold the reins. Their power is nothing to that of the working class when we set our minds to action. ■

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