

WORKERS

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MAY/JUNE 2021 £1

MOVEMENT OF LABOUR: THE DOOR'S STILL WIDE OPEN...



AS EMPLOYERS TURN THEIR BACKS ON TRAINING

Defence Review Planning war **Rail** ScotRail strike
British unity Why we need it **Ukraine** US meddles
Food Grow for independence *plus* News, Book
Steel No future without it Review, Historic
Power Nuclear imperative Notes and more

WORKERS

“No future without steel

EVEN BANANA republics look after their bananas. But in Britain, built on iron, steel and industry, nothing is now sacred. It has become a land where Greensills flourish. Where becoming prime minister is seen as a stepping stone to serious wealth.

Everything about the Greensill saga points to an institutionalised disregard of the interests of the people. Short-term profit is the limit of ambition. Anything can be brought in from abroad, it's said. How else to explain the neglect of the steel industry?

The government talks a good talk about procuring steel from Britain for big public projects, pledging itself to a "level playing field". But when it comes down to it, we see, for example, that the Dreadnought submarines being built by BAE Systems in Cumbria are using mostly French steel.

The same indifference to production has driven the government's decision to pause development of a new mine in Whitehaven, Cumbria, set to produce coking coal necessary to make steel.

But the greatest neglect has been shown in the failure to act to ensure a coherent and viable steel industry in Britain. Instead, the industry has been consciously allowed to flounder, with big chunks of it passing into the hands of speculators backed by even more speculative interests.

When Indian billionaire Sanjeev Gupta bought Liberty Steel, with plants in Scunthorpe, Newport and elsewhere, he was feted as a saviour. Now that the complex web of invoicing involved with the now-

collapsed Greensill is coming to light, it's clear that the plants were not so much rescued as turned into sources of finance for new acquisitions.

It's not just creative invoicing. In 2019 the EU approved Liberty Steel's acquisition of steel plants in Italy, Macedonia, the Czech Republic and Romania for €740 million. In short order Gupta recouped €100 million simply by selling the carbon credits that came with the plants.

Has he done the same with any British steel plants? The question has been raised, in *The Times*, as yet with no answer. If he has, then re-purchasing them will be an added cost for any new buyer.

There's nothing new about capitalists buying things with money they don't really have, or financing acquisitions by asset-stripping. But in a country ruled by finance capital – as Britain is – such activities pervert what should be a productive country providing work by making goods that people need.

The vultures have taken over, and they're gorging themselves on the body of British industry while it's still alive. Liberty Steel Dalzell in Scotland, for example, has full order books for its high-quality steel plate.

The government keeps saying that the market will provide. But all it provides is profits for the financial firms schooled in the shadowy worlds of invoice trading or sub-prime mortgage packages.

As a country, Britain cannot survive on services. We need production, we need industry. What we don't need is capitalism. ■

Cover image of Border Control, Calais, Gary Perkins/shutterstock.com



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Workers

ScotRail ticket examiners, Glasgow Queen Street station. Photo Workers.

Full backing for rail strikes

FOUR SEPARATE days of strike action have been solidly supported by RMT members who work as conductors and ticket examiners for ScotRail, which is operated by the Dutch state-owned company Abellio. As *Workers* went to press, the latest of the weekly strikes had affected the rail network throughout Scotland. Further days of action are planned over the coming weekends.

The workers are fighting for equality with other grades and enhanced payment for rest day working. Abellio, meanwhile, is due to lose the ScotRail franchise in 2022, two years early. ScotRail will then be run by the Scottish government.

Abellio was described as “greedy and aggressive” by Mick Cash, general secretary of the RMT union. In a statement released on 11 April, the third day of strikes, he said it was clear from its failure to communicate with the union that Abellio was happy to keep the dispute running, cancel services and bleed the franchise dry, rather than engage in serious talks with the union over workplace justice.

Cash widened the scope of his ire with a particular focus on the Scottish administration in Edinburgh: “The political leadership in Scotland can no longer sit on the fence and ignore these disputes in their backyard.”

An earlier RMT statement accused the company of shunning the union “as they seek to milk every last penny out of their ScotRail contract”. The union is angry that the dispute had been imposed upon its members – “front-line workers who have kept trains running at huge personal risk” while bosses at ScotRail have been able to “retreat to a place of safety”. ■

US IMPERIALISM

South China Sea

THE US NAVY is now regularly patrolling in the South China Sea. On 7 April, the USS *John Paul Jones* sailed from the Persian Gulf through Indian waters (without the Indian government’s consent) towards the Malacca Strait.

This Strait, the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, is the key choke point for China’s energy supplies. Myanmar’s coastline provides naval access to the Strait.

There is now a grave danger of war in the South China Sea, even possibly a US-led attack on Myanmar. The 1 February military coup ousting US favourite Aung San Suu Kyi could provide the pretext for US intervention.

The CIA has long interfered in that country’s internal affairs. It has armed and funded various terrorist groups – the Arakan Independence Army, the Kachin Independence Army, the United Wa State Army, and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army – as part of its campaign to weaken the country’s independence and unity. ■

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



Denis Zhurav/shutterstock.com



Port of Sevastopol, Crimea.

ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk...

Defence and independence

What should Britain's relations be with other nations? There's a straightforward working-class response to that – and it's not "Global Britain".

Double funding for hospice care, says new report

The government needs to almost double its funding for the hospice care sector by 2030, says Sue Ryder – or face the prospect of having to provide all end-of-life care itself through the NHS.

Bus strikes solid as drivers fight attacks on pay and conditions

Strike action by drivers at Go North West in Manchester has been solid – and well supported in the wider labour movement.

For a united Britain

We review a book that makes the case for continued and renewed union as better both for Scots and for their fellow British citizens.

Nurses need action, not outrage from the sidelines

The government's proposed 1 per cent pay rise for nurses and other NHS staff – a reduction in real terms – has naturally provoked outrage among workers. But it should provoke some soul-searching too.

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.

US support for Ukraine

IN THE WAKE of Joe Biden's installation as US president, and the subsequent renewal of US commitment to NATO, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has signed what is essentially a declaration of war against Russia.

With the innocuous-sounding title of Decree No. 117/2021, published on his official presidential website, Zelenskiy has approved the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council's strategy of "deoccupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory"* of Crimea, including the city of Sevastopol.

Control over the implementation of this strategy is to be vested in the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, according to the decree – giving a free hand to the Ukrainian military.

This makes it Ukraine's official government policy to retake Crimea from Russia – a serious escalation of the crisis there. The Russian government will not give Crimea back to Ukraine because it – justifiably – considers Crimea to be Russian territory. So Ukraine could only take it by force.

Around two-thirds of the population of Crimea is Russian, while less than a sixth is Ukrainian. Its main city, Sevastopol, is home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

Zelenskiy would almost certainly have never signed such a document without Biden's prior approval. Indeed, Zelenskiy announced on Friday 2 April that he had recently received assurances of US support in a phone call with Biden.

On 5 April Voice of America, which is run by a US government agency, published an article detailing how the US had asked Russia to explain "provocations", that is, Russian troop movements near Ukraine's eastern border. The story did not mention the new Ukrainian decree. ■

**The decree is published in Ukrainian. The section in quotation marks has been translated using Google Translate.*

TRANSPORT

New strategy slammed

THE GOVERNMENT'S new bus strategy for England, announced on 15 March, has been met with a lukewarm response, to say the least.

Unite the Union, representing over 70,000 bus workers, pointed out that the new bus strategy will not reverse more than a decade of service cuts that have left many communities isolated.

The union did welcome the implicit admission that deregulation introduced in 1986, which allowed the market to dictate bus routes outside London, has been a failure. It also welcomed proposals to allow local authorities to introduce franchising

similar to those arrangements in place in London, or enter into enhanced partnerships with operators which will help to stop cut-throat competition on profitable routes.

But the franchising proposal was immediately undermined by bus giant Stagecoach, which has just launched legal action against the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. It is seeking a judicial review of the plans.

Unite is unhappy that the strategy fails to introduce minimum standards for bus drivers' pay and conditions and ignores the growing crisis of fatigue, which results in accidents and leads to long-term health problems for drivers. ■

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

MEDICINE

Applications soar

APPLICATIONS TO UK medical schools have increased by over 20 per cent. Figures published by the Medical Schools Council, the representative body for UK medical schools, show that 28,690

would-be doctors have applied for 2021 entry.

Over time, the trend is even more impressive. Back in 2017, 20,100 applied.

Applications to study nursing rose by nearly a third, 32 per cent, to reach 60,130, according to UCAS. All this in spite of a decrease of 40 per cent in nursing applicants from EU countries. ■

Stockcube/shutterstock.com



More crimes and punishments

IT'S BEEN a while, but the state has come back for more powers. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC) currently making its way through parliament is the first attempt since 2003 to make major changes to the Public Order Act 1986.

Past attempts to stamp the authority of the state by defining, criminalising, and punishing public disorder have met with varying degrees of success as the people have decided that enough is enough. The government, undeterred and possibly emboldened by the chance to slip something through during the Covid-19 pandemic, is having another go.

Politicians generally see "law and order" as a vote winner. Citizens usually understand this as living in safe homes and streets, and being able to go about their daily lives in relative peace and without the threat of violence. But governments want something else entirely: control over the people.

Despite ostensibly laudable intentions, the bill's answer to crime is simply more crime and more punishment. Its clauses impose an increase of offences, together with more and longer prison sentences. It ushers in a wider implementation of mandatory sentences which take away the discretion of judges who are presented with the full facts. And this in the country with the highest per capita prison population in western Europe. At well over 100 per cent of notional capacity, our prisons are already hugely overcrowded.

And there is already a massive backlog in criminal trials – made worse by Covid restrictions but existing before – with some trials now being listed for 2023. On 2 April the House of Lords constitution committee published a report showing that the pre-Covid waiting list of Crown Court trials had since leapt from 39,000 to 56,000.

Added to this, the closure of local magistrates' courts (usually with selling off the buildings) and huge pressures on police time have meant justice both delayed and denied. Those charged and remanded face long periods in custody, while crime victims are kept waiting.

The whole bill bolsters the move towards the increasing criminalisation of citizens in Britain, accompanied by ever-widening police powers – particularly over public order – on deliberately vague grounds. Police will be able to ban public protests, for instance, if there is a threat of "serious annoyance" – for instance, noisiness.

The fact is that legal powers granted under vague definitions are likely to be used to increase state control over citizens. Ministers cite as justification the Extinction Rebellion protests. Climbing onto tube trains during rush hour is certainly a serious annoyance, although furious commuters on their way to work managed to deal with that much more effectively than the police – or anything being proposed in the new bill. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

For obvious reasons, CPBML public – physical – meetings are not currently taking place. But we are holding a series of online discussion meetings via Zoom, including a May Day Rally. You're welcome to take part, or just listen in. Just email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation and a link to the discussion.

To keep up-to-date as things change, make sure you're signed up to receive our electronic newsletter (see the foot of the left-hand column, page 4).

MAY

Saturday 1 May, 7pm

CPBML May Day Rally (via Zoom)

"Science and industry for an independent Britain"

Can Britain – and the British working class – survive without industries driven by investment in science and technology? A short presentation will be followed by discussion.

JUNE

Tuesday 8 June, 7pm

Discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Migration – has anything really changed?"

Brexit was supposed to be the prelude to a new approach to the movement of labour. What has been the reality? And what should Britain's policy be?

JULY

Tuesday 6 July, 7pm

Discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Defence, not aggression"

What does the defence of Britain mean? An opportunity to discuss war, peace and our place in the world.



Listen to Home Secretary Priti Patel and other ministers and cracking down on all immigration, legal and illegal. But che

Free movement? Come o



Gary Perkin/shutterstock.com

UK Border Control, Calais.

THE COVID-19 pandemic has saved the government a few blushes, and not least on immigration. Global travel crackdowns have choked off the legal routes of entry into Britain, both for work and for study.

For now, migration into Britain is necessarily low. Only after the pandemic will we see what becomes of government promises over immigration in its 2019 election manifesto. But the signs are bad.

And the main reason for pessimism can be found in the manifesto itself. It is littered with a phrase that has come to symbolise government doublespeak on migration: “the brightest and the best”.

All is right and justifiable in the name of the brightest and the best. But there is a hidden subtext, a qualification: provided that the brightest and the best come from abroad. No country is to be left unscoured, even – or perhaps especially – those in

desperate need of their skilled workers.

Almost unnoticed, the government signed a trade deal with India in February – not a full-blown free trade deal, more a step along the way to one. It called the deal an “enhanced trade partnership”, and trumpeted it in a press release whose title focused on an alleged 1,500 jobs coming to Britain via Indian conglomerate Tata.

Rising numbers

But the agreement was noticed by *Personnel Today*, a professional magazine that understands what’s going on. In a revealing article, it said the deal, when combined with the effects of the points-based immigration system announced in January, could see the numbers of migrant workers entering Britain rise.

Immigration solicitor Yash Dubal, quoted in the article, said, “When you ana-

lyse the details of the new system it is apparent that certain measures have been put in place to encourage more people to come here, rather than to deter them – which is the message the government would rather people believe.”

Dubal said the government had been “rather clever, because those who want less immigration have had their attention diverted with talk of tough new rules”. The reality, he said, is a far more open regime that favours foreign workers.

One of the key changes is the abolition of the so-called resident labour market test. Before then, employers looking to bring in labour on a general visa, known as Tier 2, had to prove that the job could not be filled by someone in Britain by advertising it for 28 days in a specific way.

During the 2016 referendum campaign there was much talk of stopping the scan-

and you might be forgiven for thinking that the government is
 cap labour is still being encouraged into Britain...

on in, says government

dal of some jobs in Britain only being advertised in Poland. But instead of insisting on all vacancies being advertised here before being touted abroad, the government has simply removed any requirement to advertise, including for migrant workers from outside the EU. This is what it means by fairness and equality of opportunity.

The January changes also included lowering the minimum salary for a skilled migrant – now defined as equipped with an equivalent of A-levels rather than, as previously, with a degree – from £30,000 to £25,600. Also scrapped is the annual limit on visas for skilled workers (it was 20,700).

There's a proviso that migrant workers on a skilled workers visa must be paid at least the going rate. But there is also an exception for designated shortage occupations (and there are a lot of those) where they can be paid up to 20 per cent below the going rate.

Scrapped

To make migration even more attractive, the six-year limit on the visa has been scrapped: it is now indefinite, with the potential to acquire permanent permission to stay after five years.

It's almost as if the government has asked how to design a system to maximise immigration while giving the impression of control, and come up with the answer.

Meanwhile, it has pressed ahead with a pilot scheme to attract seasonal farmworkers to Britain. The idea of legislating for decent wages and conditions for work on British farms obviously escapes it.

The scheme started in 2019 with 5,000 visas. In December 2020 it was expanded to 30,000 visas, and includes workers from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It has seen ruthless exploitation, documented by the *Financial Times* in March, of workers picking fruit in Scotland destined for the likes of Tesco and Marks and Spencer.

Not to mention the government's invitation to 5 million people in Hong Kong to settle in Britain, something that Home Secretary Priti Patel helpfully reminded us of when introducing the new policy on illegal immigration.

That new policy, announced on 24 March this year, is full of fine words about

“Those who want less immigration have had their attention diverted with talk of tough new rules.”

taking back control, firmness and fairness. But it's hard to take any of it seriously, given that – as the National Audit Office revealed last year – the government has no idea how many illegal immigrants there are in Britain, and has not had an up-to-date estimate since 2005. (Nor has it said it is working on new numbers.)

The absence of numbers is a blessing for the government, since there is no baseline against which the success of its policy can be judged. Where it does have estimates, it can come badly unstuck, as over the number of citizens of EU states seeking permanent residence in Britain.

When Teresa May negotiated the first version of the Withdrawal Agreement from the EU, the official estimates were that there were around 3 million citizens of EU states living here. Fast forward to the end of March this year, and no fewer than 5.3 million of them had applied to the settlement scheme. And the deadline for registering is not until the end of June!

The Conservative manifesto talked about an overall lowering of migration, taking into account the notion of fewer low-income migrants coming. The last official figures on migration before the pandemic hit tell a rather different story.

Net migration for the year to March 2020 was around 310,000, according to the Office for National Statistics – treble the number in 2013. And using new, more accurate methodology the ONS now reckons that EU immigration in the nine years ending in March 2020 averaged 213,000 a year, up from previous estimates of an average of 123,000.

The overall figure for the year to this March is the highest for four years –

despite a big fall in recorded numbers of immigrants coming from the EU. That's the reality behind the slogan “Global Britain”: employers in our country, and successive governments, will go to the ends of the earth to recruit workers. And bend over backwards to get them in.

Workers has documented the effect of this policy on the nations that have allowed, or even encouraged, their skilled workers to be sucked in by British employers. These include Romania, where swathes of the population have been stripped of access to doctors and dentists, and many African countries, looted of their medical staff.

Corrosive

But there's another, equally corrosive, effect of this worldwide hunt for talent: the deliberate neglect of the wells of talent that exist in this country. You only have to look at the government's own 2018 report into outcomes for children eligible for free school meals to see the neglect and waste of talent caused by failure to deal with the effects of poverty..

How many Cricks or Hodgkins might there be in Britain if we had a system designed to maximise the talent of all our young people? As it is, notes the report, 18 per cent of those leaving school in 2018 at age 18 did so without reaching the standard of 5 or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalent. Around 40 per cent leave with fewer than 2 A-levels.

The neglect extends into all areas of education and training. After all, why bother to spend money developing talent in Britain when it's freely available abroad? So the price for Global Britain is being paid not just by other countries but by working class families in this country whose children are denied the opportunities they deserve.

Over the past decade wages and productivity have stagnated, and spending on further and adult education has slumped. And from 2010 to 2019 net migration exceeded the government's “target” of 100,000 a year in every year – 2012 was the last year it was even below 200,000.

Only the wilfully blind could fail to join the dots here. There is a structural failing at the heart of the problem. And it's called capitalism. ■

**Business and governments want skilled workers, but not to
Instead, they want to go on importing labour from abroad –**

Training: employers still



Monkey Business Images/shutterstock.com

Apprentice car mechanics.

THE CONFEDERATION OF British Industry's reaction to the latest Budget is typical of the employer stance on training the workforce in Britain. "It's a missed opportunity to reform the apprenticeship levy, into a broader 'skills and training' levy that encourages firms to invest in a wider range of training or methods" said Matthew Percival, the CBI's director of people and skills.

And there we have it. With some honourable exceptions, employers in Britain have for decades had to be either lured (Percival's "encouraged") or dragged kicking and screaming before they will provide training whether that be for the workers they already employ or apprenticeships for young people, particularly where that leads to actual jobs.

Also in March, a Parliamentary Committee launched yet another inquiry into how to address the paucity of adult skills training in Britain. The only certainty is that whatever the inquiry recommends, the employers will again be "the ghost at the feast" as skills expert and Oxford University professor Ewart Keep describes them.

In surveys since the 1950s, the excuse given is the fear of "poaching" by other companies. But that is spurious, as research shows that employers can coordinate to solve the commitment problem to training and reduce free-riding.

Other countries have perfectly serviceable training systems where employers manage to collaborate with government and unions to provide training. Rather than train British workers, employers here – in the private and public sectors alike – have preferred to have other countries do the training, then import the skilled labour.

Culprits

Since the introduction of the ill-fated Apprenticeship Levy in 2017, apprenticeship started with large employers – those with 250 or more employees – have fallen by 9 per cent. Britain's small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are the worst culprits. Training is not in their business plans or at best it is not significant, according to the Federation of Small Businesses.

Apprenticeship starts have fallen by 34 per cent in small businesses and 42 per

cent in medium-sized enterprises. SMEs are a fundamental part of the British economy – 61 per cent – so these figures are deeply troubling.

Research published in February 2020 by the City & Guilds training group found that 34 per cent of respondents have either not received workplace training in the last five years or have never had any such training – equating to 17.8 million people with outdated skills. Tellingly, the City & Guilds report, *Missing Millions*, is subtitled *Considering the untapped potential of millions of working age people in the UK*.

Employers in Britain have been wriggling out of training workers since the post-war period.

It has been nothing to do with whether the country is prosperous or going through austerity, whether there is high or low employment.

It is to do with an employer mindset which, for most of the last 40 years, has been supported and encouraged by their acolytes in government.

The exception was between 1964 and 1982 when employers were forced by the

have to train them or even finance their training.
leaving young British workers bereft of opportunities...

the ghost at the feast

forward-thinking Industrial Training Act into paying a training levy and taking part in tripartite Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) with government and trade unions. Introduced by a Conservative government, and implemented by the Labour government that followed, the Act had bipartisan support.

Leading up to the Act, complaints about employers' failure to train had been similar to today, as evidenced by the intended function of the ITBs which was "to enable decisions on the scale of training to be better related to economic needs and technological developments"; to improve the overall quality of industrial training and to establish minimum standards; and to spread the cost more fairly.

Vocal

What made the government take action was the opinion of a feisty post-war public, increasingly vocal in condemning *laissez faire* in the labour market and its consequences: a decline in training and a shortage of skilled labour.

But the Act did not last. Employers, having failed in their onslaught against the ITBs in 1972, finally got their way a decade later. Following the election of the doyenne of the free market, Margaret Thatcher, in 1979 most of the ITBs, along with the training levy, were abolished. The voluntaristic approach to training came into its own once again.

Between 1981 and 2015 there were 61 Secretaries of State with responsibility for skills policy, each with their own agenda for change, and not one of them with the backbone to stand up to employers and their dereliction of duty towards training.

'Employers in Britain have been wriggling out of training workers since the post-war period...'

There is another way...

IN GERMANY, the government and employers bear proportionately the costs of a dual vocational training system. Not all businesses that are authorised to train workers actually do so. In some occupations, providing vocational training results in net income for the businesses involved.

Businesses benefit because vocational training programmes can serve as an investment in their recruitment strategies. For society financial involvement by companies helps keep government expenditure for vocational training at a relatively low level.

There are clear guidelines, with helpful warnings about some of the pitfalls, for other countries wanting to adopt a similarly coordinated approach to training, which countries as diverse as South Korea and Mexico have done.

In Germany, ministries at national and federal-state level, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), the employers' associations and the trade unions are involved in the development of school and company curricula. The underlying consensus leads to a high level of acceptance of the standards among all stakeholders. ■

The rot worsened during the Blair years (1997 to 2010) with the promotion of university education over training, the creation of a reserve army of workers from the EU, and the promulgation of the EU-inspired notion of "lifelong learning".

This sweet-sounding idea was forensically taken apart by Professor Frank Coffield in 1999. He showed how it condemns workers to be individually responsible for their own training, re-training and then re-training again, all at their own expense.

Tony Blair and his followers tried to ensure that for decades to come the need for employers to train workers in Britain would be obviated by the easy import of labour, skilled as well as unskilled.

Damage

As the article on migration in this issue (see page 8) shows, with Britain out of the EU employers are now looking elsewhere for skilled labour, no matter the damage to other countries – and as ever aided and abetted by government. Anything rather than train workers in Britain.

In sharp contrast to this, employers elsewhere can and do train their workforce. The dual vocational training system in Germany (see Box), Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Denmark would be perfectly possible in Britain, with a set-up not dissimilar in principle to the Industrial

Training Boards of the 1960s and 1970s.

Self-evidently the structures in place to support training in different countries have their roots in particular industrial and political histories. But in countries where coordinated vocational training is in place, research shows consistently that there are two key factors at work.

The first is that societies there expect employers to engage in training, which includes a commitment to funding. Companies which do not train know they risk losing public approval. The second is that vocational training is highly valued. It is the public, workers, in those countries, who ultimately call the shots.

So employers do pay a levy. And industry by industry, they do participate in the equivalent of the tripartite Industrial Training Boards with government and unions.

After many decades you'd have to be deaf not to hear the message: employers in Britain won't train workers voluntarily. So we have to make governments more afraid of us than they are of the employers, as when the Industrial Training Boards were established. But at the same time we have to tear ourselves away from a near-exclusive reliance on the overblown and very expensive status of a university degree.

Otherwise we will only get the skills we deserve. And the workers of Britain will pay the price. ■

The government calls it an integrated defence review, but to military aggression in all corners of the world...

Talking defence, planning



UK MOD © Crown copyright 2019

“Supercarrier” HMS *The Prince of Wales*, sister ship of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and built to carry US-made F-35B Lightning jets.

IN THE MIDDLE of March the government came out with a definition of what it means by the term “Global Britain”. How bad can it be? Whatever your expectations may be, prepare to have them lowered.

The government’s *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, to give it its full title, sets out an aggressive and reactionary policy. It promises a return to “East of Suez”, a posture Britain wisely ended in 1968.

The language is telling. It says in its overview, “A defence of the status quo is no longer sufficient for the decade ahead.” This is what imperialists used to call a “forward policy”, one of even more interventions abroad.

Money is no object: the government’s 2020 Spending Review planned an extra £24 billion on defence over four years, most of it to go on investment in equip-

ment. To put that into context, a review by the Royal United Services Institute noted it was the biggest increase in defence investment since the Korean War 70 years ago.

Global Britain promises more troops fighting more wars all over the world, creating “armed forces that are both prepared for warfighting and more persistently engaged worldwide through forward deployment, training, capacity-building and education...”

Away from Britain

Despite drastic cuts in the size of the British Army, the government says it will deploy “more of our armed forces overseas more often and for longer periods of time”. That won’t leave many left to defend Britain if need be.

The review’s title – unsurprisingly – echoes what Trump’s Defense Secretary James Mattis said in 2018: “great Power

competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of U.S. national security.”

Other echoes abound. Britain may not have a Department of Homeland Security (yet), but the document has many references to “homeland security”. And what do we need security from? It’s Russia, according to the government, calling it “destabilizing”, an “opportunistic state” and “the most acute threat in the [Euro-Atlantic] region”.

Ominously, it threatens, “We will also support others in the Eastern European neighbourhood and beyond to build their resilience to state threats.” This explicitly includes Ukraine. (See News, page 3.)

You couldn’t find a greater contrast to British scientists, who have worked closely with their Russian colleagues on developing anti-Covid vaccines, with trials testing the Oxford and Sputnik vaccines in combination. This scientific and cultural collaboration is a model for how countries should

it's full of offensive policies that will give the green light

ing wars

act together to meet the challenges of the future.

What's the biggest threat to our economic security? It is finance capital and its push for the free movement of capital and labour, along with its divine right to move work in and out of countries when it suits the interests of profit. It is the ever-present reality and threat of unemployment.

But not according to the review. The government says that the biggest state-based threat to Britain's economic security is...China. It warns of "the systemic challenge that [China] poses to our security, prosperity and values – and those of our allies and partners".

In early 2019 the May government sent a Royal Navy frigate to the South China Sea. Now the Johnson government is to go further, with plans to deploy "supercarrier" HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and a carrier fleet in the disputed area in May this year. None of this is good news for peace.

Bases

The USA has 800 military bases in 90 different countries, 400 of them around China. Britain, tagging along behind, runs 60 bases abroad, many close to China, and has troops stationed at a further 85, according to a detailed investigation published in *Declassified* in 2020.

That, though, is not enough for this government. The review includes a pledge to invest yet more in military bases in Cyprus, Gibraltar, Germany, Kenya, Oman and Singapore.

For comparison, China has four bases abroad, according to Wikipedia – in Djibouti, Myanmar, Tajikistan and Argentina. Four too many. But all the same, four versus 840 for the US and Britain.

'All the evidence is that the British people oppose the US's aggressive posture...'

The review asserts, "We will remain the most engaged non-regional partner on denuclearisation by North Korea and on sanctions enforcement." Non-regional, indeed.

The ruling class effort to drum up support for its wars of aggression by putting up demons – President Putin, President Xi Jinping – is not working. On the contrary – all the evidence is that British people oppose the USA's aggressive posture.

A recent poll by Datapraxis and YouGov for the European Council on Foreign Relations found that more than half want Britain to stay neutral in any conflict between the USA and China or the USA and Russia.

None of the countries misdescribed as threats – Russia, China, Iran, North Korea – has ever attacked Britain.

Russia has never organised a 14-army war of intervention against Britain to try to reimpose a feudal autocrat, as Britain and 13 other countries did against Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1920. China has never forced us to import lethal drugs. Britain waged two wars against China (the second along with France) in the 19th century to make it import opium.

Iran has never organised the overthrow of our elected government – unlike the coup orchestrated by the USA and Britain in 1953. And no Korean government had ever sent its forces halfway round the world to kill upwards of a tenth of our people, unlike the US, Britain and others in the Korean War.

No wonder these countries do not trust Britain's intentions. Why should they?

And it gets worse. The review recommends dangerous extensions of the government's licence to use nuclear weapons, all under the cover of saying they would be used "only in extreme circumstances of self-defence". But read carefully: that's "self-defence, including the defence of our NATO Allies". So not just in self-defence.

Likewise, it promises that Britain will not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear state that has signed the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. But once again, read on: the assurance does not apply to any state "in material breach of those non-proliferation

obligations", and Britain reserves "the right to review this assurance" if the future threat of weapons of mass destruction, or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact, "makes it necessary".

As if all this were not enough, the review also formalises the weaponisation of "human rights". It boasts of having introduced a new system of sanctions to target "human rights violators and abusers around the world".

That includes being the first European country to announce sanctions against individuals associated with the Belarus government in September 2020 a month after elections there. But there have been no sanctions against the USA for the stream of police killings of black people, or Saudi Arabia (Jamal Khashoggi).

Following the USA

There's a clear thread running through the report – one of support for the USA's new world order as expressed in NATO and the World Trade Organization, as well as institutions such as the EU, ASEAN – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Britain is an associate member!), and the CPTPP – the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (which Britain has recently applied to join).

It's not what workers in Britain want or need. We need to focus on the defence of Britain, controlling our borders, protecting our fishing waters.

We need to build coastal protection vessels, not aircraft carriers to patrol the South China Sea. We need a defence and security industrial strategy, building ships in Scotland, armoured vehicles in Wales, aircraft in England, and satellites that Britain can control and rely on.

We need to control our nuclear deterrent, not allow the USA to control it. We need our own global positioning satellite system and our own satellite launch capability. Above all, Britain needs to cooperate with other governments, respect their different ways of life, different systems, not seek to impose the workings of British capitalism on theirs.

We should deal with them on an equal basis, not interfere in their internal affairs. ■

The threat to the unity of the British working class comes from Britain who kid themselves that it doesn't matter to them.

Why we all need the Uni



Janusz Pienkowski/shutterstock.com

Scottish pound notes: sterling unites us all.

IT IS MUSIC to the Welsh and Scottish separatist ears when a worker in the southern part of Britain says, "Well, if they want to break up Britain let them."

The assumption behind this is that the remainder of Britain would be fine without them. This type of beggar-thy-neighbour thinking needs to be addressed – because we would all lose if break up were to occur.

Open support for separatism is one

'The reality is that Britain's economy is based on mutuality across the whole country...'

thing. But it is also important to identify the appeasers who pretend to be British patriots while pushing to give the likes of the SNP more powers. Their divisive objectives are currently smuggled in under the guise of "constitutional settlement".

Like separatists, the appeasers also rely on workers in England shrugging their shoulders in indifference. But surely even to be still talking about the break-up of Britain in 2021 is bizarre. We should instead be addressing British independence and how to achieve industrial self-reliance wherever possible. And that means a united working class.

Yet there are people trying to encourage British workers to shoot themselves in the foot. This type of divisive encouragement does not come about by accident – it is born from a fear of having to face a united British working class that wants an industrial and commercial future.

Within all this, the importance of British working-class unity cannot be expressed

with a few warm words: it must have substance and be linked to reality and needs.

First, the reality is that Britain's economy is based on mutuality across the whole country. Taxation, spending and monetary policy remain largely coordinated. It means risks are pooled with a common insurance against uncertainty

Sharing risk

For example, during the virus crisis currency reserves became immediately accessible. That risk sharing and pooled exposure to risk would be lost through break-up.

It is also worth noting that our mutuality is still clearly evident – despite the appeasers' best endeavours. These include Westminster's granting of devolved tax-raising powers in the aftermath of the 2014 SNP referendum defeat and the disastrous Smith Commission report.

The second reality is that the role of the Bank of England as the Central Bank and a

**not just from separatists, but also from those throughout
It does. And nowhere more than with the currency...**

on – and sterling

government able to borrow in its own currency is vital to any response to the type of problems we currently face – and that includes resolving the problems left over from the banking collapse of 2008 to 2010 which still need to be resolved.

A united approach to Britain's regeneration should also ensure there is adequate funding flowing directly from the UK government to local authorities – with local authorities throughout Britain revitalised. Integrated yet decentralised, this approach would also ensure that local authorities concentrate on administrative competence.

Grandstanding

The fact is that the political grandstanding and “rainbow politics” that have plagued local administrations since the 1980s have simply led to workers being even more alienated from local councils.

Those “progressives” who refute this suggestion should honestly ask themselves whether their endeavours have brought a clearer understanding of socialism. Or have they simply fostered division among the working class under the weasel word “diversity” (as in let's celebrate division)?

Political confusion of this nature, so painfully evident since 1979, gave the likes of the SNP the opportunity to step into a vacuum created by successive government attacks on local authorities. Actually these attacks, including the Poll Tax push, gave the SNP and its acolytes a fake alternative narrative.

The outcome in 2021 is that we are saddled with mini parliamentary debating chambers with British civil servants in Scotland and Wales being tasked to administer break-up. All paid for by the British taxpayer. You couldn't make it up. E

But it doesn't end there. Just consider this SNP strapline currently featuring in election leaflets being pushed through letterboxes in Scotland: “We must not be denied our democratic voice again. To protect our international relationships, our economy and Scotland we must become an independent nation and take our place in the world.”

How hollow these words sound when set against reality. One of Britain's central realities is our currency, the pound, which

‘As a means of reckoning, the pound is a major component in our collective fight for a better future...’

,unites working people in its role as a medium of exchange, a unit of account and a store of value. It is the key reference point in the fight for wages, pensions and improved living standards. As a means of reckoning, the pound is a major part of our collective fight for a better future.

So what does the SNP say about currency. Well, its “independent” strategy is to have a relatively long transition period – years and years – where it would continue to use sterling. So, the question is where does British democracy fit in with this notion? Quite simply, it doesn't.

Democratic

The SNP assertion rests on the hope that those workers down South will meekly say that they can continue to use the pound if they want to. This limp indifference – if it were to prevail – does not have the grip of clear reasoning. It is not an informed democratic approach.

If the Bank of England is prevented by outside influences such as the SNP from regulating the quantity of money in circulation, then the task entrusted to it – of maintaining currency stability and the stability of the financial system – would have no meaning.

This is best summed up in the recent CPBML statement against break-up (see back page) where we note that neither Wales nor Scotland could suddenly create their own currencies. Nor could either quickly join the euro, since that would involve accession to the European Union – a long and tortuous business. As the statement says, “a weaker, less stable currency could only be bad news for every worker in

Britain”. Who then is to be denied a democratic voice? Does the SNP believe it has the right to seriously undermine the pound and have the rest of us shut up and put up while it does so?

Actually, the SNP demand is for precisely the type of currency structure workers rejected from the time of the Blair government's Welsh and Scottish devolution push in 1997. The plan then was to introduce the euro shortly thereafter, in 2000. Blair was still pursuing the idea in his second term of office.

Experience has since shown that separate countries using the euro – a currency which has no effective fiscal or central banking oversight – leads to severe problems. In effect most countries currently using the euro find that it bears no relationship to their country's actual productivity rates.

The result is a contradictory non-mutualised mess without a unifying core. Why would British workers want to replicate the shortcomings of the euro by permitting separate states to use sterling in the same manner? Yet it is just this structure that Scottish and Welsh separatists would like to see.

Given the collective attributes of our currency it is hardly surprising that those who want to undermine working-class unity are keen for the break-up of Britain – and by extension the break-up of the pound. Clearly the process of gradualism to help bring this about while pretending otherwise must be addressed.

Rejected

Only one thing stopped these enemies of the pound from introducing the euro from 2000 onwards: the fact that British workers consistently rejected such an idea. Politically this made the anti-Britain project untenable. In 2021 the same attitude must be taken towards break-up, north and south.

We cannot wish away the attempts by separatists to break up Britain. The alienated thinking by some in England who meekly say “it's up to them” must be tackled. It is high time that we all unite and focus on the independent future of Britain. Now that's working-class democracy. ■

**If Britain is to be self-reliant in energy nuclear is going to
reliance on unstable governments and blocs or a radical r**

Nuclear – our best guarara

SJMPhotos/shutterstock.com



EDF's Dungeness B nuclear station, photographed at dusk in March 2018, the year it went offline. It is due to come back into operation in August this

WITH SO MUCH doubt surrounding the future of energy supply in Britain, it is worth noting that Hinkley Point C power station in Somerset has passed a further milestone in construction, with the final concrete pours of the six cooling water tunnel heads, ahead of schedule. These innovative structures cap the intake and outfall tunnels now being bored offshore.

The next stage in the operation involves transporting the heads into the Bristol Channel, to be lifted in place onto the vertical shafts which will form the cooling water system.

This is a challenging engineering operation, in a tidal range of 13 metres, the second highest in the world. The heads are huge – the biggest weighs in at 4,650 tonnes. It will take the two largest crane vessels in the world, *Gulliver* and *Rambiz*, working in tandem to lift each head.

Many questioned the deal the government struck with the French EDF company to build this power station, not least the guaranteed prices once energy starts to be generated, effectively making British taxpayers subsidise a French state-controlled

company to the tune of £29.7 billion.

But the deal has been done. And as Hinkley Point C nears completion, it represents the sole concrete indicator that the government will continue to regard nuclear as a major component of our energy mix.

Decision time

Most of the rest of Britain's remaining nuclear stations are approaching the end of their life, and some big decisions need to be made. The government is in a cleft stick of its own muddled convictions. It celebrates being free of the EU's internal energy market, but continues to hope that "the market will provide" (wherever that market may be).

Well, if we can subsidise a French company, why can't we subsidise a British company? We need to press for a commitment to self-reliance in energy, with new nuclear facilities as the jewel in the crown.

Nuclear, after all, is the safest form of large scale, reliable energy that a modern economy could have, both in terms of fewest deaths caused by accidents, and lowest carbon footprint.

Alarmists point to previous accidents, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima, which have become causes célèbres for those opposed to nuclear power. But loss of life, such as it was, arose from bungling, cost cutting and lack of forward planning, rather than any inherent and uncontrollable risk.

There is risk, as with everything in life. The issue is, how big a risk, how can it be managed? Panic is no answer. Such a response would have banned Atlantic shipping after the *Titanic* sank.

As an illustration of how risk aversity can lead to misplaced fear, local press reporting on Hinkley is instructive. Somerset council has published its safety plans for the power station, including advice to the local population in the event of an incident that might lead to an unplanned release. *Wales Online* led its article on the plans with "People across Cardiff would be told to stop consuming vegetables, milk and water...".

The chances of such an incident are remote, but prudent safety precautions make for a considered response if required.

have to be part of the mix. – The alternative is either reduction in industry and living standards...

gantee of energy security



year.

Also raised in this account was anxiety about the planned disposal of dredged sediment from Hinckley A and Hinckley B, even though a report from Natural Resources Wales clearly acknowledged that testing of sediment samples had found radioactive levels so low as not to require further investigation – “from radiological conclusions, there is no objection to this material being dumped”, it concluded..

To compound government hesitancy, it looks for every opportunity to parade its “green” credentials by repeatedly deferring to a largely unscientific but vociferous environmental activist lobby.

Take the recent volte-face over the pro-

‘In place of real jobs, the elusive prospect of “green jobs” is once again dangled...’

posed new coal mine near Whitehaven. Originally approved by Cumbria council last October and given the green light by communities secretary Robert Jenrick, the project would produce 2.7 million tonnes of coking coal a year and generate 500 full-time skilled jobs.

Cue the predictable response from Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and others that the mine would paint Britain’s attitude to its climate responsibilities in a negative light, particularly when hosting a UN climate change summit later this year.

With all the ducks beginning to line up, the government’s own Committee on Climate Change (CCC) pitched in, persuading Jenrick to reverse his decision and order a public enquiry. And to cap it all and prove that the government is “on message”, business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng weighed in on Radio 4’s *Today* programme on 17 March, announcing that there were “very compelling reasons” not to open the mine.

And yet coking coal is for steel making rather than electricity generation. Up to 85 per cent of the output is scheduled for export, and coking coal is readily available anyway on the open market. In other words, it’s fine to burn the stuff so long as someone else digs it. Since most coking coal is mined in North America and Australia, that means a great deal of costly, not to say polluting, transportation just to placate mining opponents here.

The pandemic has exposed the risks associated with long and “just in time” supply chains. It would be myopic in the extreme not to see the benefits of local production and consumption in this case.

Meanwhile, the people of Cumbria, who very much welcomed the opening of the new pit, face further uncertainty. With some parts of the county among the poorest in England, and devastation from flooding in recent years, the proposed opening of the mine (the first in this country for 30 years) offered real jobs, and with them a sense of optimism for the future.

But in place of real jobs, the elusive prospect of “green” jobs is once again dangled. Environmental doom-sayers are having a field day.

Enter Cumbria Action for Sustainability,

a charity which campaigns for a carbon free Cumbria. According to a report it commissioned, more than 9,000 green jobs could be created in Cumbria, largely through a quadrupling of renewable energy and improvements in the energy efficiency of buildings over the next 15 years.

The organisation’s chief executive recognises that people need real jobs, but argues that “...green jobs bring additional benefits such as cutting people’s heating bills, reducing air pollution and boosting healthy travel”.

Worthy aspirations, but haven’t we heard this all before? Only last month the government scrapped its Green Homes Grant Scheme for improved home insulation, conceding that only 10 per cent of its target of 600 homes had been reached. The coalition government had a similar scheme, but of the 26 million homes due to benefit, only 15,000 accepted the offer.

Contradiction

Professor Ian Watson, an influential environmental expert, unwittingly exposed the contradiction at the heart of this green utopia myth. Fulminating against the government’s initial acceptance of the decision to allow the mine to go ahead, he claimed this was in contradiction to its commitment to address climate change.

In fact government actions at that point matched its words perfectly. If we are to make steel, it requires coking coal, and the least polluting way to get it is to mine our own.

People undoubtedly aspire to cleaner air and a less polluted atmosphere, but they will not be fobbed off with meaningless jargon. Investment in a burgeoning nuclear industry, coupled with a resolve to deploy locally available resources when there is an economic case for doing so, is our best bet if we are serious about a sustainable and improving Britain. ■

Many of the ideas in this article were inspired by a recent CPBML online public discussion on Britain’s energy security. If you’d like to take part in future discussions, see *What’s On*, page 5, or notices in our e-newsletter (page 4).

It's one of the central tasks of any government: to be able to be left to market forces, just-in-time logistics, or the whims of

Grow for independence,

WHEN THE “Kent variant” outbreak of Covid-19 hit, some foods bound for Britain suddenly became unavailable on supermarket shelves after France stopped traffic across the Channel. It's a very topical example of what people are starting to call “food security”: the ability of a country to feed its people.

The short supply of commodities that resulted has largely been overcome by the efforts of workers in the food sector, but could return any time another variant becomes a threat.

Our history contains other enlightening examples. The beginnings of both the First and Second World Wars exposed a dangerous dependence on imports, discussed in more detail in the September 2020 issue of *Workers*.

Earlier, the Boer War had exposed the poor nutritional state of the people. A third of all conscripts were deemed medically unfit for military service.

The weakness of the current system has also been exposed by events such as the lorry drivers' strike in 2000 and the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010. The eruption stopped air freight of such apparently vital goods as Kenyan roses, asparagus, beans and broccoli – none of which falls into the category of non-indigenous, that is to say crops which the British climate and conditions prevent us from growing.

Crises

Internationally there have been two recent food price crises, from 2007-2008, coinciding with the banking collapse, and 2010-2012. The first of these saw food riots in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These events repay study, not least for the role speculation by hedge funds played in making things worse by raising prices.

These events also expose the vulnerability of the just-in-time approach to logistics that has come to dominate the food industry. Capitalists love just-in-time. It decreases the amount they have to spend on storage, and, above all, labour. But it does not meet the needs of the people.

In 2019 Britain imported 45 per cent of the food we eat. Measured another way, researchers have estimated that, of the recommended daily levels of nutrients, we



Trucks from France leaving a DFDS ferry in Dover, March 2021. Britain's food supply is wide open

depend on imports to meet our energy, fibre, total carbohydrate, iron, zinc and vitamin A requirements.

We currently produce only 16 per cent of our fruit but that could change – see the article in this issue on apples and pears (see page 18), which tells both the sorry history of grubbing up orchards, but also of a revival.

While few of us work directly in agriculture, around 428,000 workers, far more work in the food industry as a whole, including manufacturing, retail, wholesale and catering – around 4.1 million out of the UK workforce of about 33 million.

The structure of the food industry does not help security of supply. Eight or nine supermarkets, some foreign-owned, dominate. One of them, Tesco, accounts for nigh-on 30 per cent of the market.

Contract catering is dominated by two giants, the French Sodexo and the British company Compass, while fast food is the preserve of large, usually American companies. The rest of the catering sector is mainly small enterprises. Is this what a secure, safe food industrial sector should look like?

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee recently

to ensure that the population can be fed. That can't be
of foreign governments...

plan for the people



en to disruption by foreign countries.

issued a second report on food security in the context of Covid-19, dominated by discussion of food poverty, and measures such as food banks, food parcels, and free school meals. Much of what is said would not be out of place in one of those Victorian sermons on the necessity of charity towards the deserving poor.

What has brought us to this pass? The concerted depression of wage levels, unemployment, a war on the workers, and a belief among some in the working class that arguing about the level of state benefits is a substitute for fighting for wages.

Only a revival of the central purpose of

trade union organisation, to fight to control and increase the price at which we sell our labour power, will put this discussion in its proper perspective.

The government has promised us a Food Security Minister, annual reports, and is looking at enshrining in legislation a "Right to Food". Such rights do little except to line lawyers' pockets.

It also appointed Henry Dimbleby to devise a National Food Strategy, and Dimbleby's second report is due out in July. If the first report, discussed last year in *Workers*, is anything to go by, it is unlikely to offer the thinking at a national level that the situation requires.

Solutions

What solutions might there be? What can we do to produce more ourselves? And how might this be achieved? Climate and geology play a part, but human knowledge and skill can transcend these limitations. There will always be foods that are impossible to produce cost-effectively in Britain, and trade deals are being agreed weekly with countries that can supply some of these.

The 98 per cent increase in world population between 1961 and 2000, largely driven by an increase in food productivity of 146 per cent, was enabled by scientific advances. Many yields doubled. What can research now contribute to ensure greater food security? We can do even more in the control of animal, fish and plant disease. We can apply recent insights in genomics to animal, fish and plant breeding.

We have a better understanding of weather conditions and forecasting: satellite imaging allows us to understand and anticipate weather conditions with increasing accuracy, and to understand land use. We could eliminate waste in food production and distribution. Can we increase the areas of land and water we have under cultivation, and how should we do so?

Researchers are also considering the potential of new sources of food. We should not dismiss these out of hand, though the search for them is often driven by doom-mongers. These include new cereals and pulses, insects, marine food sources not yet exploited, and even algae.

'There is one simple measure to increase food security – the revival of the provision of food at work...'

But there is one simple measure to increase food security – the revival of the provision of food at work. At one time workplaces, hospitals and schools could be relied on to provide canteens with nutritious cheap meals, prepared on site. Too many workplaces have closed these down, or outsourced them and ramped up prices.

Many workers have even allowed the abolition of a lunch break, time needed to eat a decent lunch, and, incidentally, discuss the issues of the day with one another.

Cheap labour

But above all, the food industry as currently organised relies on cheap labour. Workers in the sector must assert their skills, and demand that labour in the industry be paid properly, that job insecurity be eliminated, and that the employer and the government support the skills and training needed for a food-secure Britain.

We must never allow the government to impose any economic blockade aimed to bully other countries by cutting off the supply of food. One of the principal aims of economic blockades, as practised by imperialist powers against countries that assert their independence, has been to starve the population into submission and compliance.

This was the approach taken, alongside military intervention, with the infant Soviet Union, or more recently against Iraq. The longest-lasting blockade in modern history, still in force, is the US blockade of Cuba, initiated by John Kennedy in 1962. ■

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen increased discussion of growers are thinking positively along the same lines...

Bouncing back: the return



Supermarkets are still needlessly selling foreign apples, but apples grown here such as Gala and Braeburn are making headway.

THE COVID-19 pandemic has seen increased discussion of home food production and less reliance on food imports (along with many other products).

‘Since the 1970s, 60 per cent of our apple orchards have been grubbed up...’

Encouragingly, British food growers are thinking positively along the same lines.

British Apples & Pears, the trade association which supports its British grower members and promotes British grown apples and pears to the public, wants to see 60 per cent of all apples on UK supermarket shelves British by 2030. At the moment it’s less than half – 42 per cent.

It’s an ambitious target for an industry that was in almost terminal decline and which has been fighting its way back since the late 1980s. Back then it was impossible to find a British apple in most supermarkets.

The rot started when Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. Home varieties were undercut by French Golden Delicious and Granny Smith which received aggressive marketing support, tipping the industry into decline.

As the EEC became the EU it brought in regulations which further undermined the British fruit industry as the traditional British apple varieties did not easily conform to the standards. Since the 1970s, 60 per cent of our apple orchards have been grubbed up, often with EU grants that forbade replanting within 15 years.

Kent, the Garden of England, lost 85

home food production. Encouragingly, some British food

Turn of British fruit

per cent of its apple orchards. Hereford fared even worse, losing 90 per cent. Half of Britain's pear orchards have been ploughed up. And yet the industry is clawing its way back.

There are two aspects of this fightback. Firstly, a solid conviction among growers that the British climate produces some of the best-tasting apples in the world. And secondly, the growers have applied scientific knowledge and organisation to develop and promote their product.

Best taste

Talk about increasing self-reliance in food production can lead to comments such as, "Oh, so you want to grow bananas and melons." No, we just want to stop importing inferior versions of what we grow best in Britain. And apples would be at the top of that list.

The fact is that apples are ideally suited for Britain. They fare well in the British climate from north to south, with sufficient heat and coolness to produce a range of very tasty apples.

Britain is also home to one of the finest cooking apples in the world – the Bramley Seedling. It was the Bramley growers who took the lead after the EU-induced decline, establishing the Bramley Campaign in 1989 and running successful consumer campaigns funded by a voluntary subscription from growers and fans. A year later the trade association English Apples and Pears was founded, and this then became British Apples and Pears.

We now consume around 122,000 tonnes of British-grown apples a year. Home demand is so strong we only export 3 per cent of our crop. But we still have to import more than half of the apples we consume – hence the importance of the target to increase home production.

Science and organisation

The growers loved the old varieties of apples, but they knew they could not rely on history. They didn't want the apple industry to become a museum piece, and they knew that the supermarkets that control 85 per cent of food sales in Britain would not accept the old varieties.



Diamond Geezer (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Pears at Brogdale National Fruit Collection.

A reservoir of fruit genetics

BRITAIN DOES have a National Fruit Collection at Brogdale in Kent – still the largest fruit collection in the world growing on one site. It comprises over 4,000 fruit varieties: around 2,131 apples, 523 pears, 404 cherries, 332 plums, 48 hazelnuts and cobnuts, some 150 gooseberries and around 300 currants (black, red, white and pink), as well as small collections of vines, quinces, medlars and apricots.

Like the fruit trees it safeguards, Brogdale – in origin a state-funded research station – itself almost disap-

peared itself when the Thatcher government removed funding in the 1980s, ushering in a long period of uncertainty. Now it is run by a trust in conjunction with the University of Reading.

Internationally important, Brogdale is nevertheless a charity, receiving no government funding and relying substantially on revenues from events and festivals, visits and tours, classes, and courses.

With its great collection, Brogdale is a reservoir of plant genetic material and human expertise and a huge asset for future development of the industry. ■

So they decided to grow cultivars originally raised in New Zealand – for example Jazz, Braeburn, Gala and Pink Lady – and grow them in Britain. Since then, they have increased the range and you will find varieties such as Envy, Sweetie, Evelina, Red Prince and Magic Star (also known as Kentish Kiss, when retailed in Tesco!).

These varieties have been carefully selected for their ability to produce high

volumes and their excellent storage properties which allow the growers to offer British apples on a year-round basis. Already, British apple sales have grown by 40 per cent in volume since 2009 thanks to this varietal shift.

The growers are now demanding more government support for research funding to develop all aspects of the fruit industry and to train a new generation of growers. ■

This extraordinary book gives a much-needed perspective on the Asia-Pacific region, where the USA and its Western allies are aligned against China.

Western power play in the Asia-Pacific

Power and primacy: a history of Western intervention in the Asia-Pacific, by AB Abrams, paperback, 752 pages, ISBN 978-1-789976236, Peter Lang, 2019, £25. Kindle edition available.

The USA tries to divide and rule Asia. In 1997 it enforced rapid market liberalisation, primarily the lifting of capital controls, to destabilise the rising economies of Asia. The threat is military as well as economic.

More than 60 per cent of US armed forces are now deployed in the Asia-Pacific region; the aim is to contain China. British warships help to enforce the USA's punitive economic sanctions against North Korea. And our forces have taken part in military drills in South Korea alongside US and other Western forces. They have rehearsed "preventive" air strikes on civilian targets, an invasion of North Korea and the killing of its leadership.

China, North Korea, and Malaysia did not lift their capital controls and so escaped US economic domination. The US fruitlessly tried to persuade China to adopt neoliberal policies – privatisation, deregulation and so on – to open the Chinese economy to both US commodities and capital.

Catastrophic

Those tactics succeeded with Boris Yeltsin's Russia, leading to catastrophic destruction of the Russian economy. But there was no Chinese Yeltsin. Abrams observes "China's policy independence and refusal to reform its economic and political systems are key factors in making it the only Asian power capable of ending Western primacy and seriously challenging the Western Bloc's regional dominance."

'The US is currently the only country capable of waging war across an ocean...'



US Navy/Comer D. Blake (CC BY-NC 2.0)

12 April 2021: F16 fighters flying over the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* in the South China Sea.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership and the "Pivot to Asia" were the two faces of US ambitions – economic policy in unity with strategic policy, designed to constrain China's rise. Obama said, "We have to make sure America writes the rules of the global economy... if we don't write the rules for trade around the world – guess what – China will."

Multinational companies, mainly American, gained rights in the TPP to veto government regulations. The TPP also harmed American workers' interests, by enabling outsourcing to cheaper countries. In the 2016 US presidential campaign Trump pledged to end the deal. One of his first acts as President was to do so.

Abrams explains that the ability of the US to deploy military force and conduct operations far from its own territory is superior to any other power. As well as the technical ability of its armed forces, the US has

military bases across the world.

The US has a material military advantage over all other countries. It has a global network of military satellites and the US Navy is currently the only one in the world capable of waging an offensive war across an ocean. Its carrier fleet outnumbers the rest of the world's combined.

Modernisation

China's People's Liberation Army Navy and Air Force, by contrast, have negligible long-range power projection capabilities. Its modernisation programme has overwhelmingly focused on defence, such as land-based missile launchers to target enemy ships near the Chinese coasts and warships designed to operate near the country's own coasts.

China's claims to island groups in the South China Sea were recognised by the World War Two Allied powers as the

MAY/JUNE 2021

on the Asia-Pacific
against China...

the Pacific



South China Sea. Photo US Navy/Conner D. Blake (CC BY-NC-SA)

restoration of Chinese territories seized by Japan. But from 1950 to 1979 the USA recognised the defeated Kuomintang government in Taiwan as China's legitimate government. It sought permission from that government for mapping and nautical surveys off the islands – in effect recognising that they were part of China.

Yet in July 2010 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared for the first time that the South China Sea was a sphere of US national interest. US plans then began to refer to “offshore control” – the ability to blockade China's seaborne trade, aiming to cripple its economy.

More recently the CIA has used Islamist proxies to destabilise Central Asia and threaten Russia and China. In 2017 China's security forces intercepted an unprecedented number of trained jihadist fighters trying to enter the country, a tenfold increase on the previous year. ■

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During World War Two, the government prosecuted seven they defended their union convenor. It did not turn out how

1941: Seven against the

EIGHTY YEARS ago, workers at a small London factory stood up for their convenor, victimised and unfairly sacked. Their strike, supposedly illegal in wartime, ended in the trial of seven shop stewards at the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey. Although found guilty, they were not imprisoned. The USSR had entered the war against Hitler on the day they were to be sentenced.

At that point, the British ruling class, government and employers, were more keen on suppressing their own working class than fighting fascism. Winston Churchill became prime minister in May 1940 in place of Neville Chamberlain, whose government was seen as incompetent and wanting to appease Hitler. Instead they hoped Germany would go to war against the Soviet Union.

Despite Churchill's change of tack, there was little sense that Britain was doing all it could to resist fascism. Many workers feared a repetition of World War I, where they fought and died in the name of competing imperialist powers.

Fears

Those fears were heightened by employers who saw war production as a means to get rich, not to defend the country. The government paid "cost plus" on war contracts – perpetuating inefficiency and with no incentive to avoid leaving their workers without enough work to do. They were paid regardless.

But there was no intention of letting workers share in the bounty. Churchill appointed Ernest Bevin, formerly general secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union, as Minister of Labour. Bevin had unprecedented powers. In July 1940 the government imposed the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, known as Order 1305. This banned all strikes and lockouts, and imposed binding arbitration.

The Swift Scales factory in Park Royal, London, employed 130 workers. Like many other light engineering factories it switched to making aircraft parts. And as with others the introduction of skilled engineers brought union organisation. There was continual strife between the employers and the workers. An enquiry in February 1941

by the Ministry of Supply after a successful strike against the sacking of a shop steward noted the deficient and bungling management at Swift Scales.

On 17 April 1941 the employer then dismissed the convenor, a Jamaican, the leading workplace union representative, on the pretext of poor timekeeping. It emerged at the trial that this was on the recommendation of the government enquiry.

After hurried and unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the employer, workers went on strike that day demanding his reinstatement. Bevin thought he'd found the opportunity to make an example of them – as they refused to recognise the validity of Order 1305 and refused to return to work awaiting official arbitration.

Workers in London and across the country gave support. Local shop stewards sent a message to Bevin: "Because of the chaotic state of production in other factories, together with the move against trade union organisation and democratic rights, we support and wholeheartedly endorse this action of resistance."

The strike stayed solid as the legal machinery moved slowly on. Eventually Bevin took the case to the Old Bailey. The seven shop stewards, six men and one woman, were charged with "having taken part in a dispute which was not notified in accordance with the provisions of [Order 1305]".

One of the stewards and acting convenor was Reg Birch, who 25 years later was founder member of the CPBML. With the agreement of the others, he defended himself. He sought to subpoena Bevin to explain what it was he thought at the time

'Solidarity and support for the stewards was enormous and a threat to the government...'



The Old Bailey, London, where the trial of the seven

of instituting proceedings. Order 1305 said the existence of a trade dispute was entirely up to the Minister of Labour. Bevin did not appear.

The regulations also prevented management from instigating a dispute by locking workers out until they agreed terms. Birch pointed out that the government had used its power only against workers. For example, at the time of the trial 3,000 dockers in Manchester were locked out by their employers.

Challenge

Birch challenged the government's attempts to introduce Nazi methods to Britain. He argued that Order 1305 was in effect a return to the Combination Acts which outlawed trade union activity at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. These were not replaced until 25 years later after years of concerted working class opposition.

A guilty verdict was seen as a foregone conclusion. The government at first wanted a long prison sentence and heavy fines.

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ven shop stewards was held. Photo

Workers everywhere were fully alerted: solidarity and support for the stewards was enormous and a threat to the government.

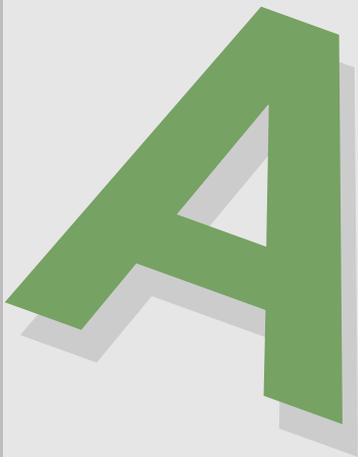
But on 22 June 1941, the day sentence was due, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. This changed everything. The workers of Britain would support the USSR as their ally in a war against Hitler and the Nazis. The conduct of the war changed.

The government could now extricate itself from its own stupidity. Bevin realised how much damage would be done to the war effort with widespread industrial action. The defendants were offered the option of going to prison or being bound over to behave.

The sevens stewards agreed to be bound over – and of course they then carried on their union work just as before.

Order 1305 was not repealed until 1951. Kent miners at Betteshanger Colliery were prosecuted in 1942 and it was used against London dockers after the war. But the trial of the seven stewards had drawn its teeth. ■

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Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

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

All our members are thinkers, doers and leaders. All are expected to work to advance our class's interests. All must help to develop our understanding of what we need to do and how to do it.

What do we do? Rooted in our workplaces, communities and trade unions, we use every opportunity to encourage our colleagues and friends to embrace the Marxist practice and theory that alone can lead to the revolution that Britain needs. Marx's understanding of capitalism is a powerful tool – the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 explains the crash of 2007/8.

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

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

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

We hold public meetings around Britain (Covid permitting), in-depth study groups and less formal discussions. Talking to people, face to face, is where we have the greatest impact and – just as importantly – learn from other workers' experience.

We are not an elite, intellectually superior to our fellow workers. All that distinguishes Party members is this: we accept that only Marxist thinking and the organised work that flows from it can transform the working class and Britain. The real teacher is the fight itself, and in particular the development of ideas and confidence that comes from collective action.

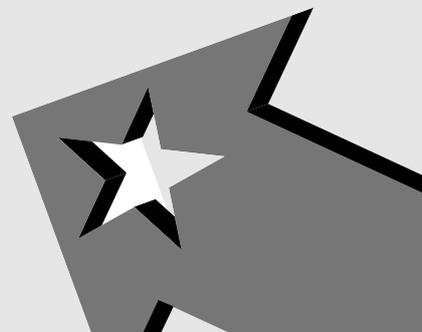
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Five reasons why Britain should stay united

A statement on British unity from the CPBML

FORCES WITHIN BRITAIN sympathetic to the EU and backed by it are seeking to tear our country apart – just when Britain has liberated itself from Brussels to chart an independent course in the world. But a united Britain is a condition for progress, says the CPBML.

Because capitalism wants to break up the British working class

Workers created the nation of Britain and our democratic working class culture. It is our common legacy. Far more unites us than divides us. The workers of England, Scotland and Wales have been united for centuries. Governments come and go, while working class unity is fundamental and should be enduring.

Ireland has always been a separate nation, though one divided by a colonial history. We want the friendliest relations with the whole of Ireland. And we stand against EU attempts to use the Withdrawal Agreement to keep a toe-hold in the UK. Only the people of Ireland can decide the future of the island.

Because our unity is essential for the war against capitalism

Unity is strength. The world's multinational corporations don't want to deal with nation states that uphold their own sovereignty. Separation, devolution, federalism, regionalism, privatisation and deregulation all break up Britain in one way or another. All let multinational corporations operate more freely. A united Britain is our best defence against predatory global capital.

Because the break-up of nation states is bad for workers

We have a long history of Britain-wide organisation, trade and collaboration in science and culture. Separatists trade on divisiveness and disrespect. Even the prospect of separation weakens our bonds of solidarity, bringing

political and economic uncertainty as well as social division and intolerance. Everybody in England, Scotland and Wales has the right to raise their voice on the issue of national unity, against the dismemberment of our country. Better to turn to a far more noble cause, that of building an independent Britain.

Because splitting Britain into separate states would hit the £ in everyone's pockets

Clearly neither Wales nor Scotland could suddenly create their own currencies. In practice they would have to stay with sterling or join the euro. And since the euro would – rightly – be too unpopular (and bring dependence on Brussels) that would mean using sterling. But with the Bank of England's control over public debt in Scotland or Wales removed, its ability to manage sterling would be undermined. Currently, currency risks are shared by all British taxpayers. Imagine if English taxpayers had to support the pound alone with the currency exposed to the wider use of two separate states. That would mirror the weakness of separate states using the euro, and lead to a weaker, less stable pound – bad news for every worker in Britain.

Because we are one nation with common interests. Unity works

Together, we can and must build on our long history of workers' unity. Investment in our integrated transport and energy infrastructure strengthens that unity. Constitutional tinkering does not. Leaving the EU gives all of us the chance to make our union stronger by rebuilding our economy. Workers must now take charge in our industries and public services, our fisheries and our farms, and fight together to build the real economy in the interests of the whole of Britain. ■

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