

WORKERS

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025 £1



THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS AND ITS TRADE UNIONS

Energy prices Behind the rises **NATO/EU** No to war!

Nationalisation No alternative **Food safety** Speak up

Census Knowing the nation **Steel** EU tariffs threat

University challenge It's debt *plus* Historic Notes,

Energy A radical rethink **News, Reviews and**

Pharma Investment dries up **more**

WORKERS



An unhealthy obsession

THE MEDIA in Britain seem obsessed by the politics and political thought of the USA, a trend shared by too many. It's an unhealthy obsession and a deliberate distraction from our pressing needs.

Elections and other events in the USA are covered and discussed as if Britain were part of the US. It is taken as an opportunity to overlook and distract from events in Britain.

Consequently – as with religious and cultural divisions from the Middle East and South Asia – this obsession with the USA imports conflicts from elsewhere to discussion in Britain.

Our working class has enough divisions of its own to resolve, without importing others.

We are told Scotland, England and Wales are different nations; or that older people steal the birthright of the young; or that women must fight the oppression of men. And above all, that questioning open borders is inherently racist.

The British ruling class of course has a long and inglorious history of colonising and dividing other countries, starting with Ireland. It's an object lesson closer to home, if one were needed, of the interest the ruling class has in dividing workers – and what happens if workers acquiesce.

Britain needs to change its own internal politics and way of looking at the world.

We must learn not to leave important things to others, not to seek, against all experience, an

honest politician for salvation, and not to follow one who seems to say what we think, for now. All are within the parliamentary system and beholden to capitalism and its workings. All will disappoint in the end.

Have we learned nothing nearly 100 years after success in the struggle to achieve universal adult suffrage? It became an end in itself, a reason to rely on others, rather than a springboard to greater working class development.

Let's learn about other countries' workers, politics, economies – of course. Let's learn about global economic changes and trends affecting Britain. But let's not mistake either for the political analysis and guide to action that we desperately need.

Don't join the deniers and denigrators of Britain and its workers. Oppose those who can't wait to get back to the domination of the EU, or who seek instead complete subservience to the USA. They fear working class unity above all else, and want to ignore any expression of working class political action.

These heroes wilt at the sight of a few flags – the Union Jack or St George's Cross. These flags were a V-sign to the government – not a threat to other workers. Those politicians who seek to divide in the end see only division; they are the only ones who should be worried. A working class wanting collective progress welcomes national independence. ■

Cover photograph Workers



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**UNIVERSITIES****DOCTORS****STEEL****BUS DRIVERS****PHARMA****CENSORSHIP****FACTS MATTER****E-NEWSLETTER****ON THE WEB****WHAT'S ON**

In dispute across Britain

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UCU members demonstrating at the Scottish TUC in April this year.

Universities in dispute

ALL OVER Britain university workers are dealing with the consequences of the current funding crisis in the sector. Some are preparing to take action.

The University of Derby has announced proposals which could mean that about 265 staff would lose their jobs – more than 5 per cent of its workforce. The university has already shut down some courses.

Cardiff University members of the University and College Union have voted overwhelmingly for strike action, which could pave the way for a statutory postal industrial action ballot.

Lancaster University UCU members have also voted overwhelmingly for a strike, in a statutory postal industrial action ballot. On a turnout of 58 per cent, 88 per cent voted for strike action, and 94 per cent voted for action short of a strike.

UCU members across Scotland are preparing for an autumn of industrial action as the funding and job cuts crisis in Scottish universities deepens.

In October, three branches in Scotland backed industrial action against job losses: University of the West of Scotland, University of the Highlands and Islands, and University of Dundee. Members at University of Edinburgh took action earlier this semester. UCU members there are re-balloting to extend their strike mandate. ■

DOCTORS

Fighting for a future

FOUNDATION YEAR 1 doctor members of the British Medical Association (BMA) have voted by a huge margin to strike over unemployment and lack of training opportunities. The first strike will run from 14 to 19 November, unless the government resumes talks in good faith.

These doctors have recently graduated from medical school: 97 per cent voted to support strike action. One-third of all resident doctors (formerly known as doctors in training or junior doctors) surveyed by the BMA in July had been unable to secure substantive, or even regular locum, work from August onwards. Around 30,000 doctors have to compete for just 10,000 places in the first round of specialty training, NHS England figures show. In psychiatry, the worst affected specialty, more than 10,000 doctors applied for 500 places. And in general practice five doctors apply for every general practitioner training post. ■

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

FACTS MATTER

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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

Airport sale – bad news

London City Airport is now effectively under the control of investment giant Macquarie, the Australian-based multinational group.

Nord Stream and the war in Ukraine

In September 2022, three of the four pipelines connecting Germany and Russia were blown up. At the time this was blamed on Russia, which had invaded Ukraine a few months earlier.

Energy levies rising

The Labour government, and energy minister Ed Miliband in particular, said renewable energy would reduce electricity prices by £300 by 2030. Things are not turning out that way.

Critical minerals – still no action

Last December the government said a strategy on critical minerals would be ready in spring. But there's still no sign of it – and the delay is raising doubts and damaging Britain's industrial interests.

Government head in the clouds

Labour's promise to transform the civil service may be going the same way as many earlier attempts. But this time in addition they seem to have fallen for the charms of big tech companies.

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Workers



Liberty Speciality Steels, Aldwarke: its future is shaky enough – now it faces tariffs.

EU threat to steelmaking

THE EU has announced steel tariffs of up to 50 per cent on steel imports, including those from Britain. This is in line with its aggressive policy of trying to rope Britain back into its orbit. Starmer talks about a “reset” with the EU and there is both an EU delegation to the UK and a UK mission to the EU. But that is proving no help to our steel industry.

This may be an EU tactic to demand more concessions from Starmer – particularly on the youth mobility scheme allowing an unlimited number of younger Europeans to travel to Britain for four years.

A senior EU official said that talks on exempting Britain from steel tariffs would provide a “powerful incentive” for the government to offer further concessions, adding: “We also would like to have an agreement with them.” But the EU delegation to the UK claimed that there was “no link whatsoever” between the steel tariffs and talks on youth mobility.

Whatever the reasons for the tariffs, they pose a significant risk to the future of British steelmaking, a key British industry. Trade unions have called on the government to act with a strategic approach to the domestic industry. Around 1.9 million of the 4 million tons of steel Britain manufactures annually goes to the EU, about 80 per cent of our steel exports. By comparison the US, also threatening tariffs, imports just 200,000 tons of British steel.

Over half of the steel produced in Britain is exported. Why there is not more demand for British steel to be used within Britain isn't a mystery. Private companies have been allowed to import cheaper steel from abroad and successive governments have made no effective moves to give preference to steel made in Britain.

At the Labour Party conference in October, the chancellor Rachel Reeves announced a shift in policy. Now major public contracts must favour British-made steel and British-built ships. Unite and other unions have long been calling for such measures.

The test will be whether government's new-found support for the steel industry survives its desire to appease the EU. ■

BUS DRIVERS

Pay victory

Strike action by bus drivers across Greater Manchester has led to a 12 per cent increase in pay over two years.

Bus operators Stagecoach and Metrolink originally offered a pay increase of only 3.5 per cent. Through their trade union Unite, the workers balloted for and carried out a series of strike days in September thereby disrupting bus services of “The Bee Network”, Greater Manchester's integrated transport system.

The initial 5.9 per cent pay rise will be fully backdated to April 2025. The drivers will receive a further 5.9 per cent increase next April on all rates of pay including weekend

and sick pay.

Unite regional officer Colin Hayden described this as a fantastic deal for the drivers. He said, “This win only came about as the members stuck together to fight for the pay deal they deserved.”

As well as improved pay, drivers have also achieved improved starter rates and better working arrangements over the Christmas period.

- Bus drivers elsewhere in the country have also been successful in their pay disputes.

In Brighton and Crawley they secured a 5.2 per cent increase. Unite members voted to strike for two days in early October. Brighton Bus Company (part of the overseas-owned Go Ahead group) was forced to improve the initial offer and correct pay anomalies between depots. ■

CENSORSHIP

Climbdown in Scotland

THE NATIONAL Library of Scotland has rescinded its controversial decision to exclude the book *The Women Who Wouldn't Wheesh't* from its Dear Library exhibition, previously reported in *Workers*.

Members of the public were asked to nominate influential books for inclusion in the exhibition, held to mark the library's centenary, and *The Women Who Wouldn't Wheesh't* easily met the threshold for nominations.

But members of the National Library of Scotland's staff LGBT network objected to its content and the book was excluded.

After widespread criticism, the NLS backed down, and at a meeting with the book's editors, apologised and restored the book to its place in the exhibition.

The book's editors, Susan Dalgety and Lucy Hunter Blackburn, in a statement posted on X, accepted the apology and said that they hoped that this was a "turning point in public discourse".

An independent review of the decision has now found that it was based on "inadequate evidence and consultation" and that the claims by the LGBT network were "threatening and inappropriate". The review was carried out by a Scottish advocate.

The chairman of the NLS Board, Drummond Bone, will resign to be replaced by Christopher Smith in January. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 11 November, 7pm

Online CPBML Discussion Meeting (via Zoom)

"What does it mean to be British?"

The distaste of the ruling class for British workers exercising their political power is evident, even in such a small thing as defiantly flying flags.

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

JANUARY

Tuesday 13 January, 7pm

Online CPBML Discussion Meeting (via Zoom)

"Britain's economy: we need a new direction!"

Finance must become the servant of productive industry for the country and not an end in itself. British workers have two choices: continue as we are, or strike out in a new direction.

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



AstraZeneca's Discovery Centre in Cambridge: in September the company said it was "pausing" a planned £200 million investment in the site.

Danger for British pharma

A LEADING scientist has warned that the pharmaceutical industry in Britain is under threat. It is a world leader in drugs research, but that may not last. Several drug companies have pulled research investment this year.

John Bell is an industry veteran, a researcher and former professor of medicine. He played a prominent role on the Vaccine Taskforce during the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme in September, Bell expressed concern that Britain is becoming a less attractive place for drug companies to conduct research. Those tensions have been stoked by Donald Trump incentivising the industries to preferentially invest in the United States.

The effects are dramatic. London listed AstraZeneca has put a £200 million development programme on hold, citing "challenging conditions" in Britain.

Merck has abandoned plans for a £1 billion research hub in Kings Cross, central London: it was projected to provide up to 800 high quality research jobs. And the British pharmaceutical giant GSK has announced that it intends to invest around £22 billion in the US over the next five years.

There is potential real-estate investment on the horizon from, for example, Prologis and Relation Therapeutics. But there is already a surfeit of empty life sciences laboratories: the current vacancy rate is around 32 per cent.

The government claims that it has a strategy to make Britain "the destination of choice for Life Sciences Companies to invest; supporting our health, wealth and industrial resilience." The fall in investment and the surfeit of laboratory space cast doubt on those government pledges to make Britain a life sciences superpower. ■

RETAIL

Shops, not stalls

A CAMPAIGN is developing in Wanstead, in North-East London, to save its High Street. Redbridge council has decided, behind closed doors, to allow six seven-day-a-week market stalls along the street. It claims the stalls will provide a good location for pedestrians using the pavement area, and that they will complement other businesses in the area.

Boran Kortelli, who owns greengrocers Harvey's, said, "It's not fair for us who pay ridiculous business rates and rent when stall holders are going to be paying way less."

Local resident Paul Thackray said, "I'm sure that this will just be the start, then more stalls will be added, and we'll end up with a load of boarded up shops who can't pay business rates with a row of street stalls in front of them."

A public meeting of over 300 on 27 September, and a petition already signed by 1,955 people, showed how unpopular the proposal is in Wanstead. ■

Can we be sure any longer the Ukraine war will stay in Ukraine's hands – want us to fret about, talking about preparation for war?

No to NATO/EU war!

BRITAIN IS out of the EU, yet not fully liberated because we remain a member of NATO, as well as being signed up to the defence structure of the EU. We are bound by both to cooperate militarily.

NATO describes the EU as “a unique and essential partner”. So we need to understand that special relationship – the EU and NATO – and how the British government forms a collaborative threesome in addition to the US.

NATO chiefs say we have already been at war for two years – not cold war, not hot war, but a new form – “hybrid war” – with presumed Russian cyber-attacks on business and industry here, and computer-savvy British teenagers recruited as proxies to commit crimes of sabotage such as arson or hacking.

Then up jumps Poland's Donald Tusk and invokes Article 4 of the NATO Treaty, one perilous step away from Article 5's instructions – an attack on one demands retaliation by all.

British escalation

And which country is first to answer Tusk's call to escalate? Britain – offering to escalate operations along the EU's eastern flank. Operation Eastern Sentry involves hundreds of British personnel doing NATO's work.

NATO's new head Mark Rutte instructs our armed forces to shift to “a more lethal wartime mindset”. That word “lethal” has upset a lot of people who had believed in NATO as a peacekeeping force. So prime minister Keir Starmer offers British boots on the ground – the so-called peacekeeping boots that people remember from Yugoslavia and Afghanistan – the boots that trample on sovereignty, and prolong hostilities.

‘And which country is first to answer Tusk's call to escalate? Britain...’



Berlin, 3 October 2025: thousands demonstrate in the German capital against war and rearmament. “Ukrainians! Die for USA/EU?”.

Now NATO overtly acts to protect finance capital worldwide. And that makes Starmer so proud, he repeatedly claims that “Britain stands ready to act” – “stands ready to support any further NATO deployments”, and a whole chorus of Labour MPs sing of unshakeable commitment to NATO.

Storm missiles

Last year, British Storm Shadow missiles were authorised for use inside Russia. This escalation by NATO forces violated an undertaking that they were for use only in Ukraine and prompted the warning that British military facilities could face retaliation. We hear now of Russia blocking SKYNET, Britain's space-based communications satellites (operated by Babcock International, British-based, for now).

NATO expansion multiplies the likeli-

hood that Article 5 might be invoked. The more members, the greater the risk. The rules governing Article 5 have been increasingly bent to include non-members – 35 so-called partners for peace – many taking part in exercises simulating response to an attack on a member state.

For example, manoeuvres take place in the Nevada desert clearly simulating war against China. War over Taiwan is predicted within two years. It would be NATO's war not ours.

China is accused of weaponising its industrial and economic superiority. Sinophobes accusing the government of appeasement should consider the real reason China occupies such a dominant position in British industry, technology and in our universities. For decades, the British ruling class has pursued a policy of depen-

Ukraine? That's the question warmongers – civilian and for escalation...



ent. Signs read "Out of NATO" and (T-shirt)

dence on foreign investment, imports and funding. It has sold off its assets, destroyed its industrial base, and through the City of London subjected the working class to the predations of the market.

It's not the Chinese the British government has kowtowed to, it's finance capital, the real enemy of workers.

In June Starmer brought out his updated National Security Strategy. With no shame it says, "Foreign policy should answer directly to the concerns of working people...Wars drive up their bills". The Strategy views "higher living standards as an essential national security goal".

Then, the Defence Industrial Strategy was published in September. This contains Starmer's big PR reveal – his "Defence Dividend" – priming us to think of NATO and war as a public benefit.

In that strategy, the MOD credits the war in Ukraine with a "rapid, continual cycle of innovation between industry and the front line". It's saying, technical innovation is defeating Putin and is the way forward for NATO, fuelled by flows of venture capital, private equity, public-private partnerships and the like.

The cost

Let's look at the cost of being in NATO's war. NATO has demanded that defence spending rise to 5 per cent of GDP by 2035, and to 4.1 per cent by 2027. Does this meet working class concerns about the cost of living? Starmer agreed to it, saying "it honours our commitment to be a leader in NATO", and the EU congratulated him for "doing the right thing".

Britain is NATO's third biggest spender after the US and Germany. This includes the cost of supplying a nuclear deterrent specifically at the disposal of NATO allies. Britain is the only European country to offer a nuclear deterrent to defend the NATO allies. And then there's the cost of taking part in NATO-led operations – on average 14 of these each year from 2015 to 2023.

Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, has added to the expense. She calls for a "drone wall" costing billions on the EU's eastern flank, and surveillance from space. She announced a "drone alliance" with Kyiv at 6 billion euros out of a 100 billion euro loan from the EU.

Defence contractors say parts are already deployed and fully automated to intercept. They are waiting to see whether countries other than the Baltic states want to invest.

The EU has its eyes on Britain. A policy paper reveals that the EU views Starmer's Coalition of the Willing, with Britain at its heart, as a potential source of joint borrowing. That would be by means of an EU defence bond, which they say could be issued within EU rules only by a coalition of countries. Was that the idea all along?

We'd do better to remove ourselves altogether from further entanglement in coalitions and build up our own defences suited to our own needs, not the needs of NATO – not to Rutte's dramatic instruction to "turbocharge defence production with a

'The EU has its eyes on Britain as a source of joint borrowing. That would be by means of an EU defence bond. Was that the idea all along?'

400 per cent quantum leap".

We must make a switch from finance capital which controls us, to industry and production which we could control. Funding for our industry and services is no longer controlled by Brussels. It must not be controlled by NATO or the US. If you want peace, why put your trust in people who want war?

De-escalate

From this moment in history, de-escalation must be the way forward for Britain, and the best way to do that is by leaving NATO.

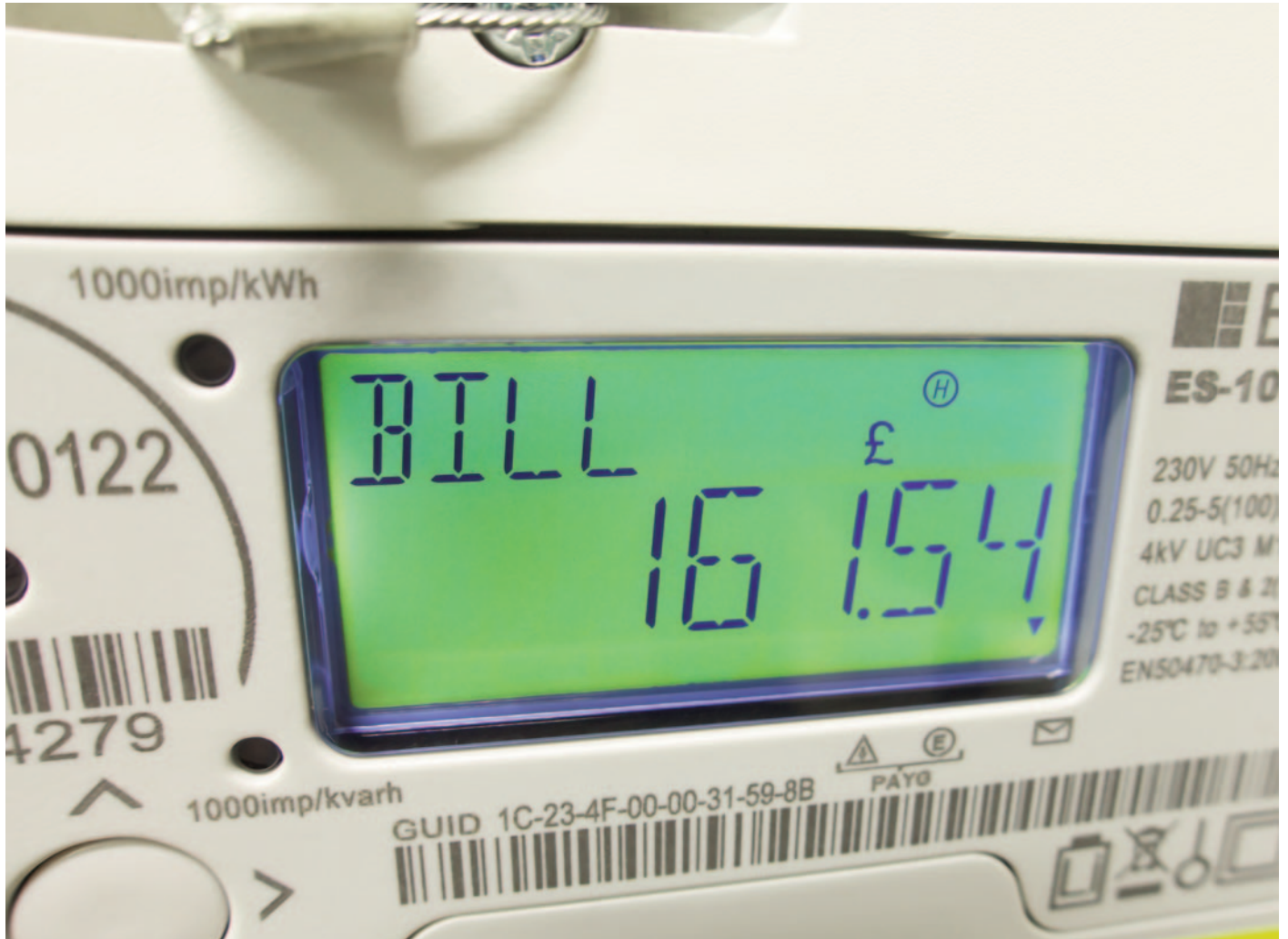
Instead of producing to serve foreign powers, we must use our resources for what we need at home. The task of workers now is to rebuild and maintain an independent industrial base – including defence, our nuclear deterrent, nuclear reactors, electricity grids, steel and chemicals, oil refineries, undersea cables, railways and energy pipelines. If attacked we would defend ourselves.

With the working class in control we could build up our armed forces and train them for peacetime as much as military work – for coastal defence, and for protection of trading and fishing vessels, our sea routes, and our farmland. ■

• This article is an edited extract from the introduction to a CPBML public meeting in London in October.

The government persists in pursuit of arbitrary net zero goals and we are all suffering the consequence...

The real reason for the energy crisis



The meters may be smart, but the policies causing high bills are anything but.

KEIR STARMER'S diehard commitment to net zero is damaging Britain and its economy through high energy prices, a dependency on imported power and a demand to cut energy use.

Since 2004 energy prices for British businesses have increased enormously, from 4 to 25 pence per kWh, crushing production and productivity. More expensive electricity makes it less profitable to invest in labour-saving innovations. Industrial revival isn't possible without lower energy prices.

The new National Energy System Operator aims for "up to a 54 per cent reduction in peak demand in 2050", using a

system of tariffs. So, to reach net zero, we must cut our use of energy.

The problem of high energy prices goes back a long way. From 1960 to 1990 our electricity supply rose by 3 per cent a year, under the Central Electricity Generating Board. It used government bonds to fund energy projects cheaply, and prices were kept down.

Privatisation

But in 1989 Margaret Thatcher passed the Energy Act, which broke up the CEGB and privatised the industry. As a result, energy supplies fell as prices soared. Projects have come to rely on more costly private

markets for funding – and nuclear power has stagnated.

Because wind and solar are not reliably able to meet our current needs, we must reduce our energy use to meet their inadequacy – an arbitrary and perverse approach to economic policy. Britain's economy must be sacrificed, to cut our one per cent of world's emissions.

Absurd amounts go to energy providers that don't provide. Last year the government paid £25.8 billion in subsidies – £850 from every household – to green energy companies. This included £1.5 billion to compensate wind farm owners when they had to turn off their turbines

goals, raising the price of energy and risking shortages. We

energy price hikes

because they were generating too much power to feed into the grid.

Despite the overall increase in electricity generated from wind, the supply is not consistent from hour to hour, day to day. The grid operator must constantly balance supply and demand. Gas-powered stations (and connectors from other countries) must be available to fill in when wind fails – and then the market price shoots up.

No surprise

No wonder Britain has the highest industrial electricity prices in the developed world, and the fourth highest domestic prices. That's no surprise. In general, countries with high levels of wind and solar power have the highest electricity prices. Countries with little or no wind and solar power have low electricity prices. Yet Miliband wants to spend billions on quadrupling offshore wind and doubling onshore wind in just five years.

The government is offering particularly high minimum prices to ensure that its latest round of renewables licensing does not flop like the last one. In the recent round of wind power auctions it has offered investors a guaranteed price – for the next 20 years – even higher than last year's subsidies, which were higher than the cost of gas-generated electricity.

The Met Office says mean wind speeds in Britain have been trending downwards since 1969. This has huge implications, given that turbine output varies according to the cube of wind speed.

Greencoat UK Wind – which calls itself Britain's leading renewables infrastructure fund and owns 49 wind farms – warned in July that, because of low wind speeds, its turbines produced 14 per cent less power in the previous six months than it had forecast.

And it's not enough to produce renewable energy. It has to reach industry and households. That means many more high-voltage transmission lines will be needed across the country, along with a grid that can cope with intermittent supply from the turbines and their low energy density.

This would be hugely costly and would occupy vast tracts of farmland. The National Energy System Operator esti-

mates that £31 billion worth of upgrades would be required across the electricity network over the next five years.

It will be many years before there is enough installed renewable, nuclear and storage capacity to enable the old infrastructure to be switched off safely. Renewables are inherently variable, and battery technology isn't yet adequate to store vast amounts of electrical energy needed to provide a consistent supply.

Compared with renewables, gas and nuclear power have greater "power density" – that is, they are available more of the time. There are other advantages too: they are relatively cheap in the long term; they need far less land than wind and solar installations; and they use steel and concrete more efficiently than wind farms.

Energy secretary Ed Miliband's promise that household fuel bills will be £300 lower by 2030 is just wishful thinking. The government's own Climate Change Committee admits that there will be no "net zero dividend" before 2038, or even 2042.

Opportunities destroyed

The government is so determined to impose "a fair and orderly transition" away from oil and gas to wind and solar power that it is destroying the opportunities to exploit our existing oil and gas reserves.

It has banned new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea, though it now hints at change. New drilling and exploitation could be worth £165 billion and provide 200,000 jobs, according to industry group Offshore Energies UK.

Instead, according to official statistics, British oil output has fallen 42 per cent below pre-pandemic levels, and gas output is down 21 per cent.

The result: Britain is importing from Norway oil and gas taken from the very same seabed that it could be exploiting but won't. So Norway gets the jobs, the profits and the taxes. We get the price rises.

Britain imported 47 per cent of its total energy needs in the first quarter of this year, nearly a tenth more than in 2019. Greens take note: transporting the oil and gas costs money and adds to emissions.

Yet a new analysis by Westwood Global Energy Group says there are still 7.5

'No wonder Britain has the highest industrial electricity prices in the developed world, and the fourth highest domestic prices...'

billion barrels of oil and gas in the North Sea, 3 billion more than the government says. Another energy analyst company, Wood Mackenzie, says there could be 14 billion barrels of recoverable oil and gas in the UK's existing North Sea fields.

And the government's North Sea Transition Authority estimates that there could be a further 15 billion barrels in unexplored areas outside the existing fields – that is, on top of those estimates.

Labour's manifesto pledged to raise the effective rate of tax on what remains of UK North Sea production to an almost prohibitive 78 per cent and to end "unjustifiably generous" investment allowances.

In November 2024 the government carried out this pledge and intends to keep the tax rate at that level until 2030. The result is utterly predictable (and in the eyes of government and Greens, desirable): a fall in investment and production.

To net zero enthusiasts, oil and gas workers are part of the enemy, special interest groups that need to be defeated.

Green groups, and the governments that embrace their backward ideas, want to stop us creating the energy that keeps our lights on and powers industry. They dogmatically oppose nuclear power and what they call "unnecessary economic growth". And to achieve that reactionary aim, they want the people of Britain to pay unnecessarily high prices for energy. ■

A *Workers* reader writes about a thorough challenge to net zero source...

Energy abundance – a radical



Roger D Kidd, via Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Electricity substation, Gravelly Hill, Birmingham.

THE MOST significant and interesting contribution to discussion of net zero, industry and energy during the conference season definitely came from the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

The SDP green paper *Energy Abundance* tackles net zero ideology head on and proposes a radical re-think of energy policy and national renewal. It calls for a break from policies that have led to high energy prices and deindustrialisation.

The paper is more than just a dry policy document – it's a complete break with the other parties' energy consensus. It reads like a manifesto for material realism in an age of abstraction. Where the consensus parties emphasise net zero, decarbonisation and "just transitions" – the SDP uses

the language of "sovereignty" and "productivity" and is critical of the costs to Britain of energy policy driven by ideology.

Reality

The paper is firmly based in material reality. It is essential reading for those who have had enough of high energy prices, intermittent sources soaking up money in subsidies, windmill generation dressed up as progress and the idea that Britain can remain a serious country while importing half its energy and pricing its industry out of existence.

The paper's authors – Matthew Kirtley and Alastair Mellon – don't hedge. They argue that Britain's energy crisis is self-inflicted, born of "indifference, profiteering

and lunacy". That's not just rhetorical heat. It's backed by data: a 262.8 per cent real-terms rise in industrial electricity prices since 2004, and an estimated £3 trillion in lost output over two decades. What makes this paper compelling, though, isn't just that it is a critique. It is that the SDP outlines clear alternatives.

It proposes a ten-year emergency plan to rebuild Britain's energy system from the ground up. At its heart is a new state-owned monopoly – Central Energy – tasked with building 100 GW of new generation capacity: 40 GW gas, 20 GW coal, and 40 GW nuclear.

This is a full-scale reversal of the net zero project.

The paper drives a horse and cart

Net zero orthodoxy – from a surprising radical rethink

through the risible assumptions of the green ideology: that, for example, wind and solar are environmentally friendly and an almost free energy source just waiting to be exploited.

So, the paper explains clearly energy density in terms of land use. Compared to natural gas, solar requires 40 times more land for the same nominal installed capacity, offshore wind 90 times more and onshore wind 230 times more. The capital cost for each unit of installed capacity is greater too. Land must be acquired and prepared; generation equipment, such as turbines and solar panels, and its infrastructure – cabling, collection stations, networking systems – must be installed. Also wind and solar have a significantly lower capacity factor (availability) compared to other generation sources.

The *Energy Abundance* green paper outlines three positive shifts away from net zero orthodoxy.

1. Energy as a public good, not a market commodity

The SDP calls time on the privatised energy market. They propose nationalising the entire system – from generation to retail – and fixing prices at 10p/kWh, roughly 60 per cent below current levels. This isn't nostalgia for the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), it's a recognition that energy is foundational. You can't run a country totally at the mercy of the market, especially an international market.

By treating energy as infrastructure rather than a tradable asset, the SDP reasserts the role of the state in securing prosperity. It's a shift from market logic to civic logic.

2. Planning over intermittency

The paper is scathing about the rise of renewables (although it does not challenge the orthodoxy of climate change), because it rejects the idea that intermittency can be the backbone of a modern grid. The authors argue that the push for wind and solar has led to suppressed demand, price volatility, and a grid that's dangerously fragile.

Their alternative is unapologetically firm although it may ruffle many feathers: gas,

coal, and nuclear. These are technologies that can be planned, dispatched, and scaled. It's a return to engineering logic, and a rejection of the idea that virtue can substitute for voltage.

3. Linking currency to energy: the energy credit

Perhaps the boldest proposal is the introduction of an "energy credit" – a new unit of account that pegs the pound to kilowatt-hours. This would anchor monetary value in physical production, reversing decades of financial abstraction.

It's an idea that borders on revolutionary. By linking currency to energy, the SDP aims to restore the connection between value and work, between money and matter. It's a philosophical shift as much as a policy one.

What about existing net zero infrastructure? The paper is blunt. The SDP proposes repealing the 2008 Climate Change Act and redirecting its earmarked spending to fund new coal and gas stations. That's not just a change of direction – it's a repudiation of the thinking behind net zero.

Its authors argue that much of the existing net zero infrastructure – offshore wind, interconnectors, battery subsidies – was built on flawed assumptions about demand suppression, about the scalability of intermittency, and about the ability of markets to deliver resilience.

But they don't propose tearing it all down. Instead, they suggest rationalising it. That means re-evaluating projects based on their contribution to grid stability and economic productivity – not their compliance with emissions targets.

In practice, this would mean:

- Retaining renewables where they're cost-effective and dispatchable, such as hydro or biomass.
- Deprioritising offshore wind farms that require vast subsidies and grid balancing costs.
- Halting further investment in interconnectors that deepen import dependence.

It's not a scorched-earth policy but it is a complete reorientation – from climate compliance to national capability.

The *Energy Abundance* green paper is a well argued, technical document which

'What makes this paper compelling, though, isn't just that it is a critique. It is that the SDP outlines clear alternatives...'

clearly explains the problem and sets out the solution. But in doing so it becomes deeply political. It calls out the flawed ideology and the "pretence" of elites who "traded our prosperity for their own self-righteousness".

The document uses past history. The authors recall the CEGB, the dash for gas, and the coal closures – but refreshingly not as nostalgia, but as lessons. They understand that energy isn't just a commodity – it's the driving force of a nation, and the systems to provide it need planning.

This is a paper that won't please everyone. It's not trying to. It's trying to start a fight – with the consensus, with orthodoxy, groupthink and ideology, and with the idea that Britain can just muddle through.

The SDP's *Energy Abundance* is a rare thing in British politics: a document that combines economic realism with political courage. It doesn't just diagnose the problem – it proposes a cure. And while that cure may be controversial, it's coherent.

In an age of abstract ideals this is a paper rooted in the material world, and it refuses to pretend that prosperity can be conjured from spreadsheets and slogans. It is willing to do the heavy lifting of tackling a serious source of national decline. ■

Our reader aims to contribute to the debate on net zero and influence it in a positive direction, as does *Workers*. This article is a shorter version of his blog piece – see <https://shorturl.at/XFCxj>

For better or worse, there's nothing like British trade union church. The working class created them to survive. But de

The British working class



TUC march for union rights, Cheltenham, January 2024.

WHAT ARE trade unions? What are they for, and what should they do? Any glib one-line answer would be a glib one-line answer about the British working class as a whole, and that won't do.

We would never say, "the British working class has no purpose, I don't like its leaders, I'll refuse to join it." So we shouldn't say those things about the trade unions, either. And the reason is that the British working class created those unions, and the latter are as much a reflection of the former now as they ever were.

British unions are special. Like darts, shove ha'penny and association football they are great British inventions which have been taken across the world, with differing degrees of success.

The specific origins of trade unions here are important. In many countries

unions have been set up by employers or governments, or they are divided along religious lines, or they are company unions or works councils. Or there is more than one national trade union centre. Here none of those things has ever applied.

After the Second World War, British trade union leaders set up unions in west Germany, and they give a fascinating glimpse into what those leaders thought an ideal union should look like. Industry-based, not trade-based, and nationally focused, with little attention paid to local organisation. Division was encouraged over unity, certainly not unity with unions in the other part of Germany.

Differences introduced

In Italy religious differences have been introduced into trade union organisation, and in France political divisions created. Only in Britain have none of these divisions flourished, and only one national centre obtains. But workers do not follow it blindly.

The EU referendum was instructive. Almost all unions did all they could to convince their members (with EU money they didn't tell their members about) to remain. Yet a great number of trade union members did the opposite and voted to leave. Today, they want an end to mass immigration, but still they allow their unions to encourage it.

In this country trade unions began locally, sometimes very locally. Some embraced one workshop in one trade in one town. They didn't need to be regional, or national, because they were dealing with a local employer. As employers became regional, and national, unions responded. That's how they became national unions.

Having said that unions here have some special characteristics, two countries have unions with some marked similarities to ours: Russia and Cuba.

In both countries trade unions locally organised in a single national centre that pre-dated their revolutions, and, like ours, were created in illegality. Often derided as

• This article is based on the introduction to a CPBML online discussion meeting in September.

ns, set up by workers, not by employer, government or
 efence is not enough...

ss and its trade unions

being agents of a socialist state, they began, and in the Cuban case mainly remain, fiercely independent. Cuba and Russia learned a great deal from British trade unions. What could British workers learn from the history of Cuba and Russia?

The origins of British unions go back well before the Industrial Revolution – the stonemasons who built the cathedrals more than a thousand years ago were among the first to create what were essentially trade unions without the name – but it is with the Industrial Revolution that trade unions became what they are.

Trades

In Britain we talk of trade unions, rather than labour unions, as the Americans and some other countries do. Here unions were specifically created to represent workers in particular trades, ultimately to seek to regulate or even control those trades, not just represent anyone who happened to come to work.

This has sometimes been derided as elitist. Yet it has always been the most skilled in a trade who have led the way against the employers, to be followed by those whose employment is by definition more precarious because it is less skilled.

The British working class was created by, and in turn created, the Industrial Revolution. And in order to survive they, we, created trade unions. Had we not, then early industrial capitalism would have destroyed itself because it would have destroyed the working class, it would have starved and worked us to death. Only trade unions stopped that – and it was the first of many times that trade unions saved capitalism.

Workers erected a machinery to stand between them and their brutal employers. And the brutality of those British employers should never be forgotten. Deportations as well as executions for the crime of setting up unions were not uncommon.

Who likes them?

British unions are unique as an institution in Britain now, because no one likes them. The state doesn't like unions and is always seeking to criminalise their activities. The law despises them, because they stand for

collective, not individual rights. The public seem not to like them, or they would join in greater numbers. The media don't like them – when did you last see a piece on the news about some good work a union did?

Even their members don't like them. But that's all right as long as criticism is constructive. We only have a limited right to criticise another person's union. We have more than a right, we have an obligation, to criticise our own. But in the proper sense of criticism: to evaluate, to seek to improve.

Far too many dilettantes who think they know what they're talking about criticise endlessly from the sidelines. These are usually people who have never pulled their weight in their own union, if they even belong to one, and never recruited a member. If you've no useful suggestion, shut up.

The good and the bad

The trade unions contain everything that is good about the working class, but also everything that is bad about the working class. The courage and clarity of their establishment and organisation are mirrored by their worst outgrowth, social democracy, the desire to live with their employers, ultimately to live with capitalism.

You could say that social democracy began with the restoration of the monarch in 1660, eleven years after the execution of his father. But trade unions are unique in inventing a collective, institutionalised wish not to run their own country. The institution they invented for this purpose is the Labour Party. Created deceitfully, not to achieve socialism as they said, but to prevent socialism, as they've done. Actions speak louder than words.

But trade unions can, and often do, control their own workplaces. A strike should be a taking control of your workplace. But rarely does a union control its industry. We are taught to believe that they should not. How can the government threaten the existence of trade unions, but not the other way round?

Unions are not organs of political change. They are workplace protection. Indeed, if we can't control even our workplace, how can we control our country?

'The British working class was created by, and in turn created, the Industrial Revolution. And to survive they, we, created trade unions...'

There needs to be a specific organisation created whose sole objective is to address that question of political power.

How does the working class, for its own safety, achieve real political power, how does it become the ruling class? And the organisation that was created by trade unionists to seek to fulfil that aim is this Party, the CPBML.

Defence, no matter how good, is not enough. Because just like darts, shove ha'penny and football, permanent defence wins no trophies. No matter how good the defence, if you don't remove the attackers, they'll just keep coming back. And that is the history of the last 50 years. Of the last 350 years, in fact. What's new is that capitalism is destroying Britain, industry, sovereignty.

Joining

The issue of the day is recruitment. Why don't more workers join? Why don't those who do join, then join in? Are the so-called "new industries" impossible to organise? Yet how can they be more difficult to organise than farm labourers 200 years ago? The real significance of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, perhaps, is that they make you think about all those who didn't get caught.

Every new industry, every new set of skills, always began without collective organisation of the workers. Individual

Continued on page 14



Continued from page 13

stonemasons preceded the collective organisation of masons. Agriculture was around for thousands of years before agricultural workers formed unions. Pits, engineering and docks all existed before their respective unions were formed.

Now we are in a period of the creation of new technologies, and new ways of working. There will be a time lag before zero hours contracts, home working and AI can be collectively mastered by being unionised. And many of these problems are old, not new: zero hours contracts are as old as slavery, never mind capitalism, and new technology started with the invention of the wheel.

But the ways to master these modern forms need to be the subject of much and deep discussion among the workers in

those fields. What would we say to assist them?

One great advance has been that, in practice if not in theory, people recognise that there are really only two classes in Britain. Some might prattle on about middle class, or even lower middle class, but as far as unions are concerned everyone except a capitalist, an employer, can, and should join.

Unions have long since ceased to be the preserve of manual workers and now embrace all types of worker – a far better, prouder term than the limp “employee”, or even worse, “member of staff”. If you go out to work for a living, join a union, even if nobody else does (just don’t feel obliged to tell anyone, until you’ve recruited a few).

A platform

The really difficult thing to say in a trade union is that it’s not an end in itself. It’s a jumping off point, a platform, a base from which to advance. This isn’t to be manipulative, quite the reverse.

The proponents of living with capitalism are the dishonest ones. They don’t say: this is as good as it’s ever going to get; expect no more; let the bosses get on with things and leave us alone. Oh, and get ready for war, that’s what we’re working on now. No, they say none of these things, they say the opposite. They say, vote Labour and we’ll get what we want.

‘One great advance is that, in practice if not in theory, people recognise that there are really only two classes in Britain...’

But look where that’s landed us, with the worst Labour government in history, and that’s saying something. The question isn’t why is this Labour government so bad, rather it’s why on earth are we putting up with it?

It is the British working class that is the issue, the problem, not the unions they have created. But the idea that real progress towards a change of class power could be made without trade union members is fanciful.

At present it’s clear that British workers want progress, they want change. But they want someone else to do it for them. And that’s what really has to change. ■



CPBML online discussion meeting

Tuesday 11 November 2025, 7pm, by Zoom

“What does it mean to be British?”

The ruling class continues to denigrate the referendum votes for the unity of Britain in 2014 and for exit from the EU in 2016. Their distaste for British workers exercising their political power is evident, even in such a small thing as defiantly flying flags.

To be British is simple – you live and work here, nowhere else. But the existence of an independent nation can’t be taken for granted. And it doesn’t matter if it’s the EU or USA trying to dominate our lives: both should be opposed. Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

The wave of privatisations in the past 45 years has devastated British industry...

Nationalise or die



Chris Goddard/shutterstock.com

Port Talbot, where the last blast furnace closed in September 2024.

‘For British Steel to be saved it must have British ownership...’

National Health Service, universal education, improved pensions and much more.

But this “post-war consensus” only lasted about 30 years, swept aside by the wave of privatisations which ushered in a new war on British industry and British workers.

So today, calls for renationalisation of once again embattled industries must confront reality. Like so many of our industries and vital utilities, steel is foreign owned. It is fanciful to imagine that we can confront Indian steel owner Tata and demand that it run British Steel in the interests of Britain; it is run in the interests of Tata.

For British Steel to be saved it must have British ownership. We have the skills, the expertise and the management knowhow to organise the industry. What we lack is control in the form of ownership.

The only possible shape which that control could take is a government buyout. But we appear to lack a government, or any possible government, which is prepared to deviate from the approach of courting overseas investment and selling what remains of our assets.

Terrified

The present government is terrified of the responsibility of running any industry. They also balk at the sums involved, as did many in the late 1940s.

The truth is, there is money available, not least the billions wasted on net zero and decarbonisation projects.

The question is, do we have the determination that our forebears had 80 years ago? We have a long way to go. We could start with a national conversation about what we want Britain to look like for our children, deciding what is essential for a developed industrial future. ■

AFTER THE six devastating years of the Second World War, the British economy was in ruins. Rebuilding was the order of the day, and major industries and services were identified as key for redevelopment.

Nationalisation, bringing privately owned assets into public control, was seen as the vehicle to ensure that the necessary nationwide planning, re-tooling and investment could be undertaken.

The primary factor in this change of direction was not the Labour government. It was the will of the people, both the military personnel returning from active service in the war, and the civilians who had endured it.

No going back

They were absolutely determined that there would be no going back to the old days and the old ways, of mass unemployment, sweatshop working, slum housing, rudimentary education for most, and health-care only for those who had money.

In rapid succession, coal, electricity, railways and the iron and steel industry were nationalised. These industries, so fundamental to the war effort, had for years

been run down in private hands, starved of investment and innovation.

The owners and their shareholders were either unable or unwilling to enact change, and so were replaced by boards, with ministerial oversight, charged with managing the industries on behalf of the nation.

In the coal industry for instance, the National Coal Board was created, bringing every pit with more than 30 working miners into public ownership. The colossal task of standardising the structure, pay and conditions, which varied immensely from mine to mine, was undertaken.

Wages began to increase, and the introduction of the five-day week improved life for working pitmen, and attracted new recruits to the industry. Miners themselves broadly welcomed the new approach, with notices at each pit proclaiming “managed by the NCB on behalf of the people”. Incidentally, that did not stop the miners challenging slipshod management.

In industry, and in society at large, the will of the whole people brought about profound change to work, and forced the introduction of the Welfare State, the

We all have to eat, every day. And the safety of what we put in our mouths – particularly after Brexit – is the government doing outsourcing?

Food standards: don't let



Gareth Fuller/PA Images/alamy.com

Sevington Inland Border Facility in Ashford, Kent: built at huge cost, it has hardly been used. Now it is rumoured to be up for sale.

ANYONE CONCERNED about food standards – both in relation to quality and safety – will be feeling a bit queasy as the government cosies up to the European Union. Egged on by big agribusiness, it is ceding control and sovereignty in small steps that are largely eluding scrutiny in the mass media.

The most obvious move came in May with the announcement of the new Strategic Partnership with the EU. That's about more than food standards, of course. It covers everything from foreign policy and defence to trade and industry.

The joint statement issued by the EU and Britain at the time noted: "We reflected on the need to develop an ambitious, dynamic relationship which meets the needs of our citizens." The key word here is "dynamic".

Dynamism sounds good, doesn't it? Who doesn't want to be dynamic? But in the particular language of Brussels-speak dynamic means regulations that change automatically whenever the EU changes

them. Dynamic means subordination to the EU and the European Court of Justice.

That dynamism is set to be confirmed in law with the development of a Sanitary and Phytosanitary Zone, or SPS. That is still being developed. But it is already clear that although Britain will have access to the EU committees that make the rules on animal and plant (that's the "phyto" bit) health, it will not have any role in decision making. No vote. And it will have to pay for access to the committees and their data.

Delayed

Agreement on the SPS may in fact be some way off. Speaking at a British-Irish Chamber of Commerce conference in Dublin on 2 October, EU trade commissioner Maros Sefcovic said that the "most optimistic" assessment would be that the agreement would be in place within a year.

That, though, has not stopped Keir Starmer's government from moving to dismantle the checks in place on a range of products. On 2 June, it announced that

most fruit and vegetable imports from the EU would no longer be subject to border checks.

Laughably, the government says,

'On 2 June, the government announced that most fruit and vegetable imports from the EU would no longer be subject to border checks....'

but in our mouths is exceptionally important. So what –
forcing standard-setting to Brussels?

Leave it up to Westminster

“Protecting UK biosecurity remains a key government priority, and risk-based surveillance will continue to manage the biosecurity risks of these products.” In practice, surveillance has all but ended.

Big business is delighted, to go by reactions published by *The Grocer* magazine. The only salutary warning came from the International Meat Trade Association. It fears that what it calls one of the few benefits of Brexit, “the ability to move quicker than the EU bloc”, could be lost.

“We’re keen to understand what assessment government has made on what this would mean for our relations with third countries,” the association said in May. “Food security is national security; food regulation should not be wholly outsourced to the EU, it is important that the UK retains some material influence in this area.”

The Royal Horticultural Society has not responded to the changes, although the import of seeds and plants is a key area for horticulturists. While Britain was in the EU, individuals were free to bring in seeds and plants for their own personal use with no checks whatsoever.

The result? Ash dieback, box tree moth and horse chestnut leaf miner have spread widely in Britain, causing, says the society, “significant changes to our landscape and horticultural practices”.

Under regulations introduced after Brexit, all plant material – for personal use included – require a phytosanitary certificate. Since August 2025 that requirement has been loosened, applying only to high or medium-high risk plants.

Not content with easing checks on fruit and vegetables, the government went further on 18 August, suspending the planned introduction of extra border checks on live animals and meat products entering Britain.

These checks were originally planned to come into force in 2021, but as with virtually anything associated with Brexit, delay has followed delay. Most recently, the planned introduction in October 2024 was postponed in September that year.

Now the controls – and all the work associated with bringing them in – has been abandoned. This included new bor-

Precision breeding

A BIG QUESTION hovering over the planned Sanitary and Phytosanitary Strategy is what’s going to happen with so-called precision breeding – using techniques such as gene editing to produce crop varieties that are healthier, or grow faster, or are more resilient to climate change.

One of the benefits of Brexit was that Britain could break free of the EU’s stifling biotechnology restrictions. The result was the legislation that, from November this year, will allow companies to apply for authorisation to sell seeds and food

produced with precision breeding.

The EU, many of whose member state governments are in thrall to Green minorities, has been dragging its feet, though changes to allow some precision breeding may emerge next year.

The worry in Britain is that the new agreement, coupled with the concept of dynamic alignment, might see Britain chained to EU regulations once again. The National Farmers’ Union, no friend of Brexit, is calling for precision breeding to be excluded from the forthcoming agreement. ■

der control stations, including a major installation at Sevington in Kent.

True to form, the National Farmers’ Union – whose council opposed Brexit back in 2016 – has backed the planned SPS agreement. Meanwhile, the National Pig Association has raised concerns.

“While we would always welcome steps to ease the trade burdens, we continue to stress that this must not be done in a way that potentially leaves UK livestock more exposed to imported disease by reducing inspections where they are needed,” said the association.

“While pigs imported for commercial breeding purposes are already tested for diseases at dedicated quarantine facilities, the same cannot be said for pet or hobby pigs and they do pose a risk to national biosecurity.”

Risks

The British Veterinary Association was even more forthright. It recognises the government’s desire to facilitate smoother trade, but warns that the suspension of planned checks “risks serious implications for the UK’s biosecurity while the details of the UK-EU deal continue to be negotiated”.

It added, “The Government must engage with the veterinary profession to ensure that efforts to ease trade do not come at the expense of the UK’s human and animal health and welfare.”

The shambles – and that’s not too strong a word – in Britain’s biosecurity was laid bare in a report by the National Audit Office published in June this year. Noting that there have been outbreaks of animal diseases in each of the past six years, it says that Defra and the Animal & Plant Health Agency “would struggle to cope with a more serious outbreak of animal disease”.

For reference, the foot-and-mouth epidemic in 2001 cost an estimated £13.8 billion at 2023/24 prices. And bird flu has resulted in the culling of 7.2 million birds between November 2020 and mid-March this year.

According to the report, Defra estimates that only 1 in 20 live animals imported into Britain from the EU and the rest of the world are currently undergoing physical checks.

The government’s target was 100 per cent at border control posts by the end of 2024. Meanwhile, the Animal & Plant Health Agency has a “vacancy factor” of 20 per cent.

British people who worry about biosecurity are going to have to express their concerns more loudly. The stark truth is that both this government and the EU are really only bothered about keeping large agribusiness happy. Leaving it to Westminster to keep us safe is not an option. ■

Many of Britain's universities are sliding deeper and deeper into debt, and they are calling for yet more dependence on the volatile global market.

The real university challenge



Workers

Sussex University, one of the universities deepest in debt.

AS THE NEW university term begins, over 40 per cent of Britain's higher education institutions are in deficit, according to analysis by the National Centre for Universities & Business. Closures may soon follow.

Across the sector there is a growing worry about what is called a "disorderly exit". That's a euphemism for the total

financial collapse of a university. This would have a devastating effect on the students mid-way through their studies – as well as ending vital economic partnerships.

For years *Workers* has highlighted the risk of reliance on international students as a major source of income for the sector – as in an article from 2020: "A sustainable future for higher education".

'Unhealthy'

In 2023 the House of Lords agreed with us. A report pointed out that "many higher education providers have developed an unhealthy and unsustainable reliance on fees from international students."

The report noted that the Office for Students, which regulates the higher education sector, is not trusted by students or

universities. Both groups called on the government to put in place a stable, long-term funding model for the higher education sector; this was ignored.

A year later the employers' umbrella organisation, Universities UK, managed to produce its own report on the future of universities. It also asked for the government to review the higher education funding model.

But Universities UK avoids any discussion of the "unhealthy reliance" on fees from international students. On the contrary it continues to argue in favour of globalisation, claiming benefits from "hosting international students; and delivering transnational education". It called on the government to develop a global strategy for universities and criticised the plan to charge a

'Universities UK continues to argue in favour of globalisation...'

er into debt. Yet, instead of looking for solid foundations,
global market for international students...

Challenge: debt

levy on international students.

Westminster politicians of all stripes still boast of our “great universities”, and it is true that many British academic institutions continue to be important seats of learning. Innovative ideas are generated by university staff and students and Nobel prizes are still awarded to UK academics.

Negligence

But government negligence in addressing the damage caused by their funding model is now plain for all to see. The risk of harm to students and university staff is growing by the day. This harm will radiate across communities: in many towns and cities the university is among the largest employers. Many universities are linked to other employers in the area. This is a symptom of the decline of large industrial employers.

Over the past year the University and College Union has been monitoring the job losses already declared across British universities. UCU general secretary Jo Grady announced on 14 October that over 65,000 UCU members will be balloted to take strike action in a fight to protect jobs, wages and working conditions.

Grady said, “Over 15,000 jobs up for the chop. Meanwhile, staff who remain are being told to accept a huge real terms pay cut as they see their teaching and student learning conditions degraded. Our members have no choice but to vote yes for strike action and fight to protect higher education.”

The ballot opened on Monday 20 October and will run until Friday 28 November. It will be aggregated across 138 institutions meaning a successful result would pave the way for strike action at all 138 campuses in the New Year.

Shrinking

University employers have established a Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce to encourage universities to collaborate more closely “to achieve greater efficiency”. What is happening at the Universities of Kent and Greenwich (see Box) may be an indication of how the employers intend to shrink and cripple the higher education sector.

The Kent/Greenwich hook-up will be a

‘Super university’ – or not?

IN SEPTEMBER, the University of Greenwich and the University of Kent announced a plan to create a new “trail-blazing” multi-university. Branded as the London and South East University Group, they would come together under one structure and one vice-chancellor – but keeping their names and local presence.

Universities UK described this as “a perfect example of the creative thinking” needed in the sector. The reality is different: Kent had a £31 million deficit in 2024, up from £12 million the year before.

Kent’s business model was to place itself as a “European University”, relying

heavily on international student income. This university, which prided itself on its lack of roots in Britain, will be the first to be subsumed. Its website still emphasises global activity.

Greenwich is one of the few institutions in surplus. A report in *University World News* suggested that it may be hoping to buy research capability and prestige, but it may also end up having to strip them back.

And 20 per cent of Greenwich’s income is dependent on international students. That’s threatened since the government tightened rules on dependants and how long they could remain post study. ■

“super university” built on sand. Other unstable couplings may follow. University staff need to demand a funding model built on solid foundations, not on speculation in volatile and declining international markets.

Existential threat

The existential threat to the sector demands that UCU refocus on issues relating to their jobs and conditions here in

Britain. This will be a challenge for some branches who have preferred to focus on international issues or matters of gender identity.

A good sign is that the choice of slogan for this autumn campaign is “We are the university.” This acknowledges that the only people who can change the direction of British universities are the staff who work there in conjunction with their students. ■



BRITAIN'S ECONOMY

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A new book sets out the case for nuclear power as the key to decarbonisation and the consequences of ignoring its potential...

Go nuclear!

John Fielding, via Wikipedia (CC BY 2.0)



Sizewell B nuclear station, on the Suffolk Coast.

Going nuclear: how the atom will save the world, by Tim Gregory, hardback, 384 pages, ISBN 978-1847928078, Bodley Head, 2025, £25. Kindle and eBook editions available; paperback due out June 2026.

TIM GREGORY is a nuclear chemist at the United Kingdom National Nuclear Laboratory at Sellafield. He aims to show how nuclear power is the only way we can decarbonise our world while sustaining economic growth, protecting the environment, and continuing the progress of the past century.

The 2023 COP28 climate conference recognised the “key role of nuclear energy in achieving global net zero.” It included a commitment to developing and building small nuclear reactors.

To reach net zero, we need emissions-free sources of electricity. Nuclear power is emissions-free. To reach net zero while having reliable energy sources, we need sources of electricity that are dependable, potent, and available 24/7. Nuclear power fits the bill.

By contrast, the alternatives prove to be neither very alternative nor very emis-

sions-free. Gregory points out that electric cars don’t reduce net emissions. While they’re zero-emissions on the road, and aggressively marketed as such, electric cars are only really zero-emissions if the electricity that charges them is generated emission-free – which it isn’t.

In other words, charging cars with electricity generated with fossil fuels replaces the internal combustion engine with an external combustion engine.

Rock solid

In 2024, the Breakthrough Institute assessed the amount of rock that needs to be mined to generate a gigawatt-hour of electricity from different sources. Coal is by far the most mining-intensive. Wind-power needs 160 to 340 per cent more rock to be mined than nuclear power does, and solar power needs 240 per cent more than nuclear power.

Nearly 60 per cent of all the electricity Germany has generated since 2000 came from fossil fuel-fired power stations. For France, 9.6 per cent. That’s because Germany snubbed nuclear and France embraced it. In 1974, France started the biggest rollout of nuclear power that any

nation had – and has since – undertaken. It built 54 pressurised water reactors in 25 years. All still work, and French households pay less for their electricity than the EU average.

France doesn’t have its own uranium reserves, so since 1987 it has been making its own recycled uranium. It turns the major component of spent fuel, enriched uranium, into fresh nuclear fuel rods. 95 per cent of its spent fuel is recycled.

France has stored 34,000 tonnes of recycled uranium so far; this contains as much energy as 490 million tonnes of coal or 2.3 trillion barrels of oil. This stockpile, if burned in a Canada deuterium uranium reactor, could power it for 680 years. France has made this recycling economical. It adds less than one euro a month to the average household electricity bill.

Recycling

Britain could recycle its 141 tonnes stockpile of “waste” plutonium to power six to ten breeder reactors, each able to produce 1,000 megawatts of electricity. There’s enough plutonium to power the two new reactors at Hinkley Point C – which will generate the electricity to meet the needs of three million people every year – until 2120. We could double our current nuclear capacity by burning this nuclear waste.

But successive governments have classified this plutonium as a “zero value asset”. In 2024 the Sunak government announced that it wouldn’t be using the plutonium to power its new fleet of reactors. Then this year the Labour government announced that the plutonium will be buried. All that latent emissions-free energy wasted, put out of reach.

Gregory examines the much-publicised “nuclear disasters” at Chernobyl and Fukushima. Of those directly involved with the accident at Chernobyl, fewer than 40 people died. Later, there were also 15 thyroid cancer deaths. Not the 57,000 deaths forecast by the Union of Concerned Scientists! And HBO falsely claimed in its 2019 Chernobyl TV miniseries that “there was a dramatic spike in cancer rates across Ukraine and Belarus.”

Fukushima’s confirmed direct death toll was one. What about later deaths among

y energy source

**'To reach net zero,
we need emissions-
free sources of
electricity. Nuclear
power is emissions-
free...'**

members of the public? There aren't any. In 2022, the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation summed up eleven years of Fukushima research. It found no evidence that radiation had caused any adverse health effects at all, even among those who lived close to the power station. But 2,300 people died of stress, caused by the botched evacuation.

The Japanese government responded foolishly by closing down all its nuclear power stations, instead relying on fossil fuels, including coal. The result? An extra 10,000 to 27,000 air pollution deaths between 2011 and 2017.

Japan has no coal or gas, so relies heavily on imports, which makes fossil fuels expensive. The government put the costs of replacing nuclear power onto bill-payers, making electricity unaffordable for many. People were forced to switch off their electric heating units to save money, and in the three years after the accident 4,500 people died from the cold.

The Merkel government in Germany, nearly 6,000 miles away from the nearest tsunami, reacted in the same way with similar results. Air pollution from coal killed an estimated 5,600 people between 2011 and 2019.

Gregory concludes, "Building nuclear power stations and circularising their fuel cycles with breeder reactors – starting now, and in earnest – is the single biggest environmental step we could take. It's the way we'll power the world – cleanly and reliably – far beyond our net zero deadlines; carbon dioxide doesn't enter the nuclear equation." ■

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To run a nation you need to know about who lives within. O
govern the economy or health, and much else besides...

The census: knowing th

CENSUSES PROVIDE detailed information about national demographics and also play an important part in deciding on resource allocation to service providers. They can bring people together and give us a true sense of the society we live in. But they can also divide.

The development of a regular counting of the population of Britain was prompted by John Rickman, a government official, who devised the methods for the first British census in 1801, and who prepared census reports up to 1831.

The main aim of the March 1801 census was to assess how many men were fit to fight in the war against France. It was a rough headcount and stated that the population of England, Scotland and Wales was 10.9 million.

The nineteenth century censuses registered the great shifts of population from the country to the towns and cities as new industries sprang up. For example, Manchester grew from 70,409 people in the 1801 census to 543,872 in 1901. Adjoining places like Salford grew at a similar rate.

The first four censuses up to 1831 were mainly headcounts with little personal information collected. Then things began to change.

The 1841 census recorded the names of residents, and the ages of those over 15, as well as occupations. Also it noted whether or not the occupants resided in the same county in which they were born, or whether they had been born in "foreign parts" of Britain.

The 1851 census was the first to record the full details of birth location for individuals. It also required the exact age of each

member of the household and recorded each person's relationship to the head of the household, as well as any members out working at night, and anyone with a disability.

William Farr, Superintendent of Statistics, was responsible for producing the censuses of 1851, 1861 and 1871. Coming from a medical background, he was interested in using data from the Births, Marriages and Deaths Register to chart the incidences of epidemic diseases.

This had a huge impact. For instance, Farr's work on smallpox led to legislation in 1835 making vaccination compulsory.

From 1851 on, the census asked for more detail about people's occupations, identifying over 300 categories in total. Agricultural work had declined, while manufacturing jobs, mining and professional services had increased. "Masters" in trade and manufacture were required to state the number of employees they had working under them.

The nineteenth century saw a huge expansion in the information collected. By 1851 information on rank, occupation, profession was gathered, for example. Questions about infirmity were added in 1851, then dropped in 1921.

Enter religion

By the end of the twentieth century the census was recording details about where people were born, indoor sanitation and so on. Then, in 2001, religion found its way into the census.

The question about religion was voluntary, but symptomatic of a desire by governments to slice up and fragment the people of Britain. The census had expanded from clear social questions, such as dwellings with indoor sanitation, to add divisive questions about personal identity.

Already in 1991 the government had decided asking people the straight question of where they were born was not enough. The census asked for information about "ethnicity", a vague and potentially misleading concept.

The religion question did not go unopposed. The British Humanist Association in particular criticised the phrasing, "What is your religion", as a leading question that



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SUFFRAGETTE PROCESSION JUNE

The 1911 census was widely boycotted by suffragettes. "No Census".

would exaggerate those actually practising a religion.

In the 2011 census immigrants were asked about the date of their arrival and how long they intended to stay. Those whose first language was not English were required to say how well they spoke the language.

All well and good – but what about those living and working illegally, who of course did not fill in the forms?

No wonder official figures in the census for migration seem woefully inaccurate compared with the estimated total British population. The lack of proper border controls means Britain cannot plan properly, leaving the country vulnerable in a crisis like a recession or a pandemic.

In any case, previous experience had suggested that immigrants, whether legal or not, might not respond well to questions that could affect their livelihood. The 1991 census was seen by many as designed to identify people who would have to pay the poll tax – which many didn't want to do.

The result was that the population of Britain was undercounted by over a million, and the undercounting of immigrants was particularly marked. Later adjustments in

'The census expanded from clear social questions to add divisive ones about personal identity...'

otherwise you can't the nation



gettes, organising under the slogan, "No Vote,

the light of new evidence had to raise the number of immigrants by a whopping 23 per cent.

Most recently, in 2021, people were asked about their sexual orientation. Another attempt to create division. But the question was full of terms whose meaning was not familiar to many, such as "gender", "trans man" and so on.

The result was a farce: Newham, for example, appeared to have the highest number of trans people. Brighton ranked 20th among UK boroughs. Overall, 0.4 per cent of people with English as a first language declared themselves as trans, against 2.2 per cent of those who did not speak English well.

In 2020 the UK's national statistician, Ian Diamond, floated the idea that the 2021 census might be the last. But so many people criticised this proposal that it now seems likely that the pattern of censuses will continue. In June the UK Statistics Authority recommended a census in 2031. A good outcome.

Obviously there is no guarantee that having accurate data means it will be used well, but without it there is little chance of making the right decisions. ■



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Tax and war: workers have a choice

‘The big catch is that this government, acting for the capitalist ruling class, wants to re-arm, to increase military spending. Its problem is to re-arm without raising taxes – or at least not be seen to do so...’

TAXES WILL rise in the Budget on 26 November – what’s the excuse? Tories, Reform, Brexit, lazy workers, low productivity. Never the EU, never devolution, never net zero policy, never lack of investment, never the debt to financial markets and interest paid. Never capitalism.

Debt, borrowing from financial markets, is a critical factor for any government.

But there are plenty of signs that another financial “correction” (that is, crash or recession) isn’t far off. The sharply rising valuation of AI companies, lauded by the government as the engine of future growth, can’t continue.

As is the capitalist way, plenty will go bust as the bubble bursts.

The financial markets are nervy; bond rates are going up and down. One day it’s all doom and gloom, the Chancellor’s budgetary headroom is all gone. The next day inflation isn’t quite as high as the market expected (though still nearly twice the Bank of England target), all is sunshine and Rachel Reeves says everything is going to plan.

The big catch is that this government, acting for the capitalist ruling class, wants to re-arm, to increase military spending. Starmer hardly talks about anything else, it seems.

Its problem is to re-arm without raising taxes – or at least not be seen to do so.

The choices being made by this government seem, barely credibly, to be worse than their incompetent predecessors. Let’s cede back to the EU the (limited) independence we gained by leaving, in return for – nothing. The youth mobility scheme where the EU dictated the terms won’t help British youth.

And at the same time, let’s cosy up to the USA and watch the continued exodus of highly valued companies to US control, followed by the loss of skill and jobs. In

return for – nothing, again. Except a seat at the warmongers’ table.

Workers need to be clear when thinking about the capitalist economy – of Britain and elsewhere. The Thatcherite free market experiment begun in the 1970s has totally failed. The idea was to reduce state control and release the fetters on the capitalists’ ability to make profits.

Market freedom ramped up the domination of finance capital over industrial capital. The drive to make profits found its outlet in buying and selling companies, and ever more exotic and risky financial deals.

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 created the capitalist need for quantitative easing (that is, printing money). That fuelled inflation – a way of cutting the share workers get of the value their work creates.

The capitalist failure to invest, and the extraction of value from British companies paying dividends to overseas owners, has led not only to inflation, but it has also been used to boost immigration.

If they are honest, workers know that change and rebuilding is needed in Britain – a tremendous amount. And who is going to sort out the mess? Leave it to Labour is not going well, predictably. Given that the problems are endemic to capitalism, would any other government in Westminster do any better?

Is there any alternative in the long term to the takeover of power by the workers of Britain – the means of production, distribution and exchange? How else could we liberate the potential of our working class, which is shackled by finance capital?

That’s a daring idea, and there are naturally many questions that need answering about how to build and maintain such a movement. But would we not be better off doing that than standing by watching preparations for war? ■

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