

# WORKERS

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## TECHNOLOGY SOVEREIGNTY IN THE BALANCE

**SCOTLAND** Coalition chaos

**STEEL** Jobs saved

**LONDON** On the front line

**SCOTRAIL** Axe falls

**TEACHERS** Training change

*plus* News, Book

**ZERO CARBON** True cost

Review, Historic

**CUBA** Behind the protests

Notes and more

# WORKERS



## No to imperialist wars

WHAT HAS been achieved by the last twenty years of British military interference in the affairs of Afghanistan? Nothing. Certainly nothing good.

After twenty years of occupation the Taliban has swept back into power without a fight. Neither the British nor the US governments had the slightest clue how quickly this would happen. But then imperialists never do understand other countries (any more than they understand their own).

Our prime minister can blame President Biden all he likes for not giving advance notice of the US withdrawal. What he cannot escape is that this humiliating and inevitable outcome results from Conservative, Labour and Coalition foreign policy in Afghanistan.

Look back to Margaret Thatcher in 1981 “invading” Afghan territory from Pakistan, providing arms to the mujaheddin, and encouraging the US to do likewise. Or Blair in 2001, like Thatcher before him acting as a malevolent imp on US shoulders and encouraging its imperialist adventures, standing “shoulder to shoulder” with George Bush over Iraq.

Twenty years of war in the name of instilling “Western values” – all have brought havoc and death to the Afghan people. And the costs here have been staggering. 457 British servicemen and women have died, many others wounded and maimed for life. The financial penalties alone are estimated at upwards of £40 billion, let alone the grieving families and the costs to Britain’s health services.

Those who argue that Britain should intervene

abroad to stop terrorism here forget, or more likely ignore, that terrorism came to the streets of London and other British cities from young men born and bred in Britain, not in Afghanistan.

At the time of the 2001 invasion we wrote in *Workers*, “The US, meanwhile, bombs Afghani children, Red Cross depots and refugees, and occasionally the Taliban, in a war that will not destroy terrorism but will exacerbate and perpetuate that country’s agony. The war must be stopped, not because it is a war against terrorism, but because it is the opposite.” That remains true.

Workers in Britain cannot allow this cycle of terror and war to continue. However much we might sympathise now with the people of Afghanistan, foreign interference brings no benefits – not to the people of the invaded country, and not to the working class of the invaders.

It is up to the working class, the overwhelming majority of our people, to reject that view. Britain must adopt an independent foreign policy – not cling on to the coat tails of the US (only to find that the US has ditched its coat) or indulge in the “great power” politics of its global Britain strategy.

There is only one foreign policy fit for an independent Britain: non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and mutual respect for the sovereignty of other nations. In Britain and abroad, it is only the people of a country that can solve its problems.

No more imperialist wars!



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ScotRail train at Glasgow Central Station.

## ScotRail services face axe

NOT TO BE outdone by the headlong rush across Britain to cut back rail services, Scotland has joined the fray announcing proposals to permanently slash its train services. Publishing a consultation document on 20 August, ScotRail operator Abellio (Dutch national railways) claims that before Covid-19 there were “significantly” more seats provided on trains than were required, “Under five and a half million passenger journey miles were completed on a typical weekday, which was just 23 per cent of the available number of seats. In other words, seats were empty for 77 per cent of the distance that was travelled,” it says.

It then claimed that returning to the pre-pandemic timetable would increase emissions, ignoring the probable much greater level of emissions from more cars on the road should it go ahead with its proposal to cut 300 of the 2,400 services that existed before Covid-19.

Unions are calling on the SNP-controlled Scottish devolved administration to ensure the proposals do not see the light of day. But Abellio hands ScotRail back to Holyrood to run directly in the public sector next year, and the administration is as committed to attacking rail workers and their trade unions as Westminster.

Meanwhile, ScotRail’s current owner Abellio confidently predicts not only a return to previous passenger levels in the Netherlands but is planning for expansion. Exploiting the retrenchment of the airlines and the swing in popularity away from air travel, huge sums are now being invested across Europe in new overnight trains, putting back in place international sleeper services that have dwindled over the past decade.

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

## BTECs

### Scrapping opposed

AN ANNOUNCEMENT by education secretary Gavin Williamson that BTEC qualifications are effectively to be scrapped in 2023 has met with widespread condemnation across the further education and university sectors.

Twelve organisations, including the main teaching unions, the Association of School and College Leaders and the Grammar School Heads Association, sent Williamson a joint letter on 29 July denouncing the move as “completely out of step with views expressed by our members”.

BTECs and other applied qualifications are taken by around 260,000 college and sixth-form students. Abandoning them will devalue their reputation, and could lead to higher drop-out rates.

The twelve organisations signing the letter have set up a Twitter campaign against the proposals under the hashtag #ProtectStudentChoice.

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

## 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](http://cpbml.org.uk) and follow the embedded links. If we’ve got something wrong, please let us know!

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If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 07308 979308 or email [workers@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:workers@cpbml.org.uk)



### ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk)

#### Chinese firm buys Britain's biggest chip manufacturer

Britain's largest computer chip maker is being swallowed up by Nexperia of the Netherlands, a Chinese-controlled corporation.

#### Financial distortions in the NHS

Two years after the event, it has taken a court order to reveal that NHS trust lost over £360,000 through the cancellation of a music festival. It's a symptom of much that is wrong within the NHS.

#### Slovenian EU presidency ignites fresh discord

On 1 July Slovenia took over the rotating presidency of the European Council – and promptly ignited a furious row with the Commission how countries like Slovenia are treated.

#### Cuba ships vaccine to Venezuela, defying US blockades

Cuba has begun shipping its Abdala vaccine against Covid-19 to Venezuela, despite US economic and financial blockades of the two countries.

#### Massive expansion for Sunderland electric battery plant

Nissan is to build a "gigafactory" to make batteries for electric cars as well as a new electric car as part of a £1 billion expansion of its Sunderland factory.

### Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit [cpbml.org.uk](http://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.

## IRAQ US ends combat ops

ON 26 JULY, the US government declared the long-overdue end of its combat operations in Iraq. Almost 20 years overdue, in fact.

This was George Bush and Tony Blair's war. Despite overwhelming opposition (mirrored in countries across the world), the House of Commons voted for war on 18 March 2003. And it did so by a massive majority too: 412 to 149.

In March 2003 Iraq attacked no country. So there were no grounds to attack Iraq. Just a dodgy dossier. That made the attack on Iraq by the United States and Britain in March 2003 an illegal war of aggression.

It also took a heavy toll on the people of Iraq. From March 2003 to February 2020, the war resulted in the violent deaths of 185,000-208,000 civilians.

Then the coalition government headed by David Cameron attacked Libya in an equally disastrous war. The Johnson government is similarly, but more covertly, intervening in Syria and Ukraine. ■



Workers

Sheffield Forgemasters, in Brightside Lane, Sheffield. Steel has been made on the site since 1805.

## Steel jobs saved

MORE THAN 600 steel-making jobs at Sheffield Forgemasters have been secured following the decision to nationalise the company. The takeover by the Ministry of Defence also secures the supply chain for high-quality steel for the next generation of Britain's defence investment programmes.

The government stated that Forgemasters is the only available British manufacturer with the skills and capability to produce large scale high-integrity castings and forgings from specialist steels in an integrated facility to the highest standards required for these programmes. It will invest around £400 million in the company over the next decade.

Forgemasters will continue to operate in areas outside of defence, and is looking to play a key role in the supply of specialist steel components to the nuclear and offshore wind sectors.

Tellingly, Forgemasters Chief Executive Officer David Bond said: "We'll be a public corporation and what that allows us to do is to get the government to invest in the business on a scale we could never achieve as a private company."

This comment, coming from what is now a nationalised company, illustrates how this government has moved away from dogmatic ideological opposition to public ownership, and now seems to be embracing the freedom conferred by leaving the European Union and taking a more interventionist stance to protect British industry.

The decision to nationalise Forgemasters must now be followed by decisive action on the part of the government to protect Britain's steel making capacity. Germany produces six times as much steel as Britain, and even Austria now produces more than Britain. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).



## Squeeze on medical students

MEDICAL SCHOOLS saw an astonishing 21 per cent surge in applications to train to be a doctor for entry in 2021, and the jump in numbers getting top A Level grades means that even more young people will have the qualifications they need to start training.

The steep rise in applications is thought to result from the pandemic publicity for the admirable job done by health workers (there was an even bigger jump for nursing). Given the huge shortage of doctors, you might have expected the numbers to have been greeted with relief from government, but not at all.

In fact, as a *Telegraph* article of 9 August points out, a record proportion of the applicants who have just received their exam results and successfully qualified to go to medical school will find themselves without a place. Why? Medicine is fiercely competitive but, says the article, far more high-quality applicants could train – and should be able to do so.

The writer, consultant surgeon J Meirion Thomas, points out that the 28,690 applicants faced competition for around just 9,000 places – and that's with the cap on places raised since last year (but not by much).

What's the reason for this waste of talent? As Thomas says, it's just too expensive to train doctors in Britain, and so much cheaper to import them already trained from abroad.

This attitude is not new. Doctors have come from abroad to work in the NHS since it was founded. But Britain now – since 2018 – imports more doctors than it trains. In 2019 60 per cent of new doctors were trained overseas, most at the cost of countries that can ill afford to lose them.

With no shame at the betrayal of our aspiring students, the government said it planned to increase the percentage from abroad before the pandemic struck. This approach looks like being resumed for the 2021 intake and beyond – even though the Department of Health has a list of 145 countries which Britain should not recruit from.

In 2019 the General Medical Council (GMC) registered 10,966 overseas doctors, 8,505 of them from poorer countries outside Europe. Yet the GMC is signed up to the WHO code of practice which states “member states should discourage active recruitment of health professionals from developing countries facing critical shortages of health workers”.

In fact a 2019 GMC workforce survey reported the dramatic increase in foreign-trained doctors joining the UK workforce – which doubled each year between 2017 and 2019 – as a positive trend, saying that we need to “maximise the flow of new non-UK doctors”.

In 2018 health secretary Jeremy Hunt announced the creation of five new medical schools, to provide 1,500 new doctors starting in 2023. He also pledged for Britain to be self-sufficient in doctors from 2025.

The target is laudable but is already impossible to fulfil given the present restriction on places in medical schools. The schools will be full to bursting. And already they are asking simply applicants to defer their place for a year – trying to put off this year's crisis by simply adding to a dire situation in 2022.

Thomas calls for an immediate doubling of medical school places for this year. His many critics point out the obstacles to such a plan, including the shortage of capacity of hospital placements and supervision, as well as funding. But, he says, the situation is an emergency which can't wait for solutions to be kicked down the road, and the waste of UK talent is wholly unethical. If we don't seize the chance now how else is the situation to improve?

The shock onset of Covid-19 brought rapid measures in health provision and organisation which would have been inconceivable beforehand. In an emergency it's time to take the same approach to dealing with doctor shortage – not by poaching from abroad but by training talented young people here. ■

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

CPBML public – physical – meetings are not currently taking place. But we are holding a series of online discussion meetings via Zoom. To keep up-to-date as things change, make sure you're signed up to receive our electronic newsletter.

#### SEPTEMBER

Tuesday 7 September, 7pm

Discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“Free speech, and why it matters”

Why is open discussion so vital to progress? Is it under threat, and if so from where? Who is trying to shut down discussion of the issues that matter to Britain? You're welcome to take part or just listen in. Email [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk) for an invitation and a link to the discussion.

#### OCTOBER

Tuesday 5 October, 7pm

Discussion meeting (via Zoom)

Topic to be announced. Hold the date.

## RAIL

### ScotRail pay fight

SCOTLAND IS CURRENTLY hosting the longest pay dispute on the railways so far, with ScotRail guards striking every Sunday since 28 March. RMT members are incensed that while ScotRail drivers were granted enhanced pay for rest day working other grades were not.

ScotRail ticket examiners, who work mainly in the Glasgow area, joined the Sunday walkouts from 2 May. And cleaners began an effective work to rule on 13 July, refusing to work overtime, rest days or in a higher grade until further notice.

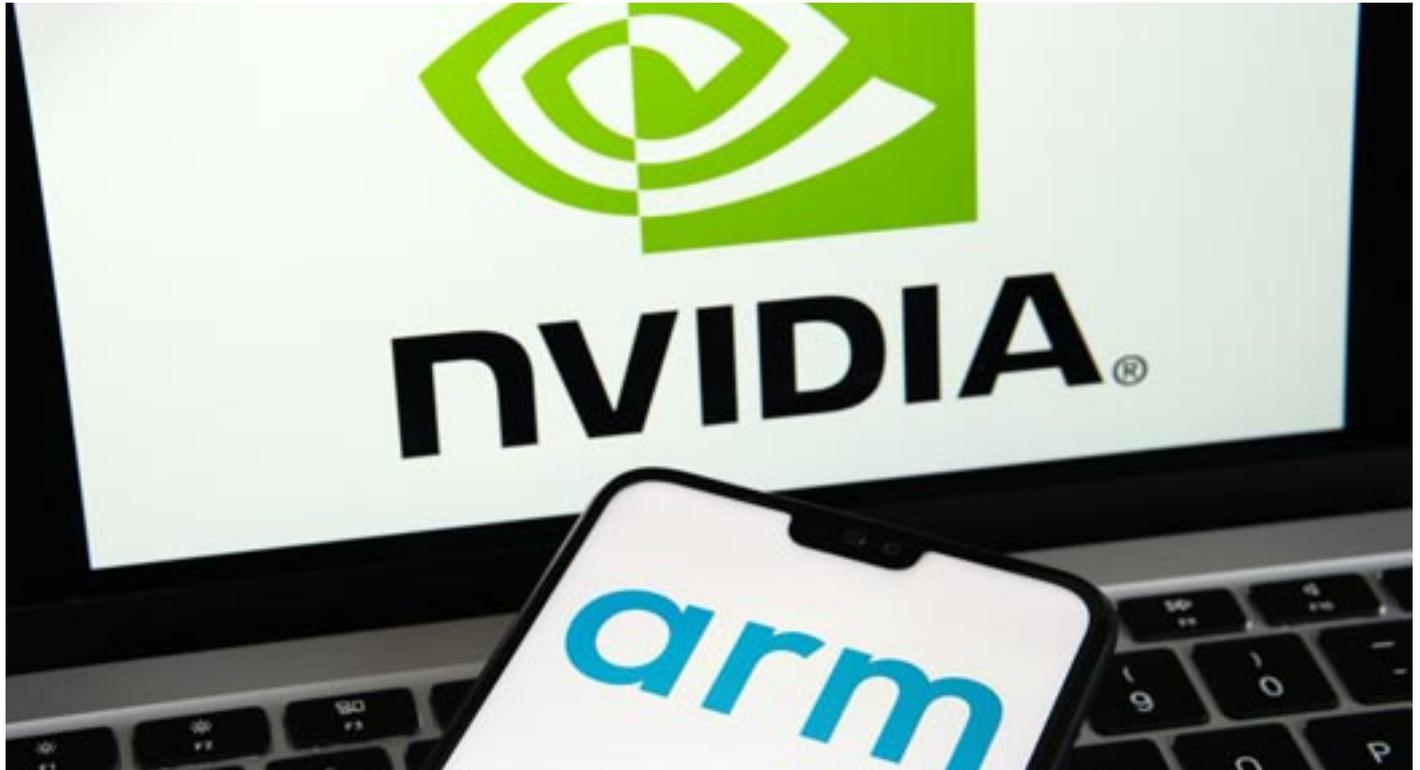
Then ticket barrier staff joined the cleaners in taking action. TSSA has also joined in, with its conductor team managers, revenue team managers and on-train managers voting for industrial action over workload and staff shortages, and the expectation by ScotRail that they would cover for RMT members taking industrial action.

- The RMT is also pursuing pay disputes on behalf of its cleaner members employed directly by Transport for Wales, and indirectly by Merseyrail through its contractors Mitie and train maintainer Stadler, a Swiss company which is seeking to force through a 13 per cent cut in pay using hire and fire tactics. ■

Regulators around the world are looking closely at a massive bid by US company Nvidia for one of the world's leading chip designers – the British company ARM Holdings

# Technology sovereignty

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The proposed Nvidia takeover of ARM Holdings could give the US power over what products British companies can export.

REGULATORS AROUND the world are looking closely at a massive bid by US company Nvidia for one of the world's leading chip companies – and it's a British company. The authorities in the US, the EU, China and the UK all have their eyes on the \$40 billion (£28 billion) deal.

Why all the attention, and where do Britain's interests lie?

The company concerned is ARM Holdings, one of the jewels in the country's technology crown. It was born and bred in Cambridge, and was listed on the London stock exchange until 2016 when it was bought for £24.3 billion by Japanese tech-

nology conglomerate SoftBank, which runs the largest private investment fund in the world.

ARM is not a household name in Britain, nor indeed anywhere in the world, because it is one of those companies that sell not to individual consumers but to companies. Yet chips that use its designs are in virtually every household, indeed every pocket, in the country. Perhaps in the world.

In 2015, before it was bought by SoftBank, its designs were etched into 15 billion chips sold worldwide – at the time, more than the far better-known chip company Intel had sold in its entire history.

In the last three months of 2020, pandemic or no pandemic, 6.7 billion chips manufactured to its designs were shipped. According to the company in February 2021, a total of 190 billion ARM chips have been made for use in applications from sensors to smartphones and supercomputers. That's around 24 chips for every man, woman and child on the planet.

Technologies developed by ARM – in

particular its new V9 architecture – will be at the centre of emerging artificial intelligence, quantum computing and 5G technologies, which is why worldwide interest is so sharp.

They herald a world where big data centres, which use vast amounts of energy and place a huge demand on the Internet, are replaced by billions of tiny chips in local devices doing their own machine learning and communicating with other chips as needed. For example, devices such as speakers or coffee machines could learn to recognise and respond to the voices of their owners, rather than send signals back and forth across the Internet.

### Greensill

All of which explains Nvidia's interest. The company is huge, but not in these up-and-coming areas. And it is ideally positioned to take advantage of SoftBank's current financial woes – arising partly after it shovelled \$1.5 billion into Greensill Capital, which filed for insolvency in March 2021 amid political scandal.

**'Chips that use ARM's designs are in virtually every household...'**

...ive bid by US company Nvidia for one of the world's  
...gs...

# in the balance

This and other failed strategic moves brought SoftBank to an annual loss of \$12.7 billion in the financial year ending 31 March 2020, a record for a Japanese company.

Enter Nvidia, which specialises in graphics chips, with an offer that actually costs it much less than the \$40 billion headline figure: it will give SoftBank just \$12 billion in cash, with a 10 per cent stake in Nvidia making up the balance. But where does all this global financial wheeler-dealing leave Britain and its industrial strategy (if, indeed, the government actually has one)?

The answer is not comforting. Listen to ARM founder Herman Hauser talking to Sky News in September last year: "It's a disaster." The big worry is that putting the technology in the hands of a US company would mean that the American government could use its own definition of national security to determine where products containing ARM chips could be sold.

Hauser went on: "The decision on whether hundreds of UK companies that use ARM processors can export their products anywhere in the world will be made in the White House, not in Downing Street."

No wonder the trade union Unite, which has members at ARM in Cambridge, called on the government to stop the sale, which it says "risks the company's UK operations being run down and jobs and investment moved abroad". The deal is "not in the national interest", said Unite regional officer Matt Whaley.

ARM has 3,000 staff in the UK. Most work in Cambridge, but there are also sites in Manchester, Warwick and Belfast. They will share, to varying degrees one assumes, in a \$1.5 billion share handout. (Hauser later commented that the handout would make it "difficult" for workers there to "speak their mind".)

When SoftBank bought ARM in 2016 Hauser voted (as a shareholder) against the deal. His main objection was that once the company was foreign-owned "Britain would find it much harder to preserve ARM's independence which is the essence of its value to the country". How right he was.

In October 2020, a month after the

## When hi-tech *was* supported

ARM HOLDINGS has its origins in the BBC Micro computer, produced in the 1980s after the government was persuaded to license a British company to produce a computer for schools to go along with BBC programmes on micro-electronics.

Three companies were licensed, but the most successful was Acorn Electronics, led by Cambridge entrepreneur Herman Hauser. Austrian-born, Hauser first came to Cambridge as a teenager at a language school, and returned to take a PhD in physics at the university's Cavendish Laboratory.

Acorn Electronics set up production in Cambridge, where the software for the BBC computer, BBC Basic, was also written. ARM was later set up jointly by

Acorn and Apple.

Hauser's unique contribution to chip development was in his design, based on RISC (reduced instruction set computer) architecture. He proudly boasts that he has never designed a chip that needed a cooling fan.

BBC computers may have been big enough to include a fan had it been needed, but the same cannot be said for mobile phones. So when smartphones emerged, ARM chips were the natural choice. Estimates suggest that 95 per cent of all the smartphones made in the world contain at least one ARM chip.

Acorn Electronics did not last, but the technology behind it did, in the shape of ARM Holdings. It's a legacy that must be preserved at all costs. ■

Nvidia deal had been announced, Hauser wrote to the House of Commons foreign affairs committee calling on the government to act to ensure that the Nvidia deal includes legally binding undertakings "to secure and expand ARM jobs in the UK", to retain ARM's even-handed licensing model, and to ensure that ARM's intellectual property (IP) does not become "contaminated with US IP to the extent that it falls under US exports regulations".

### 'Collateral damage'

The letter should be compulsory reading for any workers seeking to understand the importance of technology sovereignty. It spells out what is at stake. "Not only do we lose one of the few remaining weapons at our disposal in global trade negotiations, but we are handing it to one of the two adversaries in the US-China trade war with the realistic consequence that Britain becomes collateral damage in this war," Hauser wrote.

It also includes a handy guide to determining what technology sovereignty actually means, suggesting that there are three key questions: Do we have the critical technology in our nation? If not, do we have several suppliers from different stable reli-

able countries? If still not, do we have unfettered guaranteed long-term (at least 5 years) access to monopoly or oligopoly suppliers from a single country (often US or China)?

"If the answer to all three of them is NO, we have to act and do WHATEVER IT TAKES until the answer to one of them is YES," he wrote (his emphasis).

Despite having it laid out so clearly that even a Cabinet minister should be able to understand it, it took until April for the government to refer the deal to the Competition and Markets Authority. The authority handed its report to the government on 20 July this year. Meanwhile, the European Commission is also looking at the sale, though that process is now delayed after Nvidia failed to file papers with Brussels before the eurocrats went off for their long summer break.

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, a government spokesman "declined to comment on when the minister would decide on the regulator's findings". Let's hope it's a better response than to the SoftBank purchase, when a minister hailed the sale abroad of our most successful information technology company as "a vote of confidence" in Britain. ■

**Having struggled with the impact of Covid-19, the education system seeks to take control of all aspects of teacher training...**

# Power grab threatens children's education

RADICAL CHANGES in rules for initial training could create chaos and even threaten the future supply of teachers by reducing training places by many thousands, according to the horrified response from many professionals working in the field. And there is puzzlement as to why such radical new government proposals are needed, and particularly at such speed.

The timing is terrible. After the horrors since March 2020 schools need a period of settled calm to re-establish themselves from the start of the new academic year in September – and that's if the virus allows.

Children and young people, and their teachers, have suffered constant disruption, never knowing if the next day education will be able to go ahead at all. Schools and class “bubbles” have been opening and shutting. Many have had severe staff shortages. Year 10 pupils, who will take GCSEs and BTECs next summer, have missed a quarter of their physical face-to-face teaching this year. And there has been the strain of the switch from physical to online learning and back again.

The new proposals, published on 5 July, come from a review of initial teacher training initiated by the Department for Education. An improvement in school mentoring schemes is welcome. But the field is now facing sweeping changes which include a new accreditation process for all training providers and a new curriculum.

Universities, which at present provide and supervise the majority of training places together with schools, are not mentioned at all in the review, nor are school-based schemes. The suspicion is that government is trying to push universities out of initial teacher training.

Under the new system all providers, regardless of prior experience, will have to apply for fresh accreditation by next spring, hardly any time given the completely new rules. A central body – yet to be nominated – will then take decisions about accreditation, with providers informed about the outcome by the end of the summer term.

In a cynical and deliberate move, the government announced its proposals shortly before schools broke up, giving providers a mere seven-week consultation period to respond, in other words over the



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**A big teacher shortage could be looming.**

summer holidays.

Re-accreditation against a new set of standards will be done by the end of the 2021-22 academic year. The standards will include: a curriculum for trainee teachers which explicitly fulfils all aspects of a new core content framework; and an assessment system which clearly matches the “planned and sequenced curriculum”.

## Abandoned

The existing framework for initial teacher training is to be abandoned. Providers wishing to be reaccredited will have to plan again from scratch. And if they are to meet the deadline they will have just five months to complete a radical reshaping process, regardless of the time and resources that such a process should be given.

Schools minister Nick Gibb speaks of the need for high-quality teacher training and justifies the seismic changes as central

to the government’s “levelling up agenda”. Of course quality teaching is essential for children’s education. But what’s wrong with the present training system?

Not much at all. Feedback from trainee teachers rates the quality of their training very highly, and Ofsted’s latest 2020 inspection of 340 training partnerships reported all to be good or outstanding.

What is called the new “quality” framework will throw out the present system with its majority of university – and schools – partnerships. In its place will come one far more prescriptive and centrally controlled.

The new framework characterises teaching far more as a set of techniques rather than as developing professional expertise. The government’s review panel is also clear that strict, uncritical adherence to the DfE syllabus will be required. It also states that there will probably be a reduction in providers, as it is unlikely that the

n profession is now facing turmoil as the government

# chaos in teacher training



new requirements can be met “successfully and in full” within the “current market configuration”.

All this is aimed at universities, which in teacher education emphasise and value critical thinking within a strong research base. Research-intensive institutions draw on the expertise of colleagues in their courses. These strengths will now be seen as weaknesses when it comes to gaining re-accreditation.

Not that everything is perfect now. Teachers who lead on initial teacher training within schools are reporting that some universities have been complacent about course content, which needs updating. A strong emphasis on theory, and on the philosophy of education, while crucial, can sometimes mean a lack of support on practical classroom skills for trainees.

A more effective balance is needed for universities, and they will need to address

this if they are to fight for their future role in teacher training. But the new framework pushes the pendulum way too far in the opposite direction.

Another danger for universities is the diminishing of control over their own courses in future, as they would need to be part of a larger accredited provider or even be a mere subsidiary. Given that teacher training courses don't bring in much money for universities, this alone could drive a number of them to leave the field.

Tim Bradshaw, from the Russell Group of universities, pointed out that there would be considerable disruption to partnerships between schools and providers through the requirement for reaccreditation. Already, Cambridge University has said it will quit teacher training if the new rules are forced through.

## Involvement

Strong university involvement is recognised as a feature of the best teacher training systems across the world. At present Russell Group universities alone work with 2,500 schools to train over 5,500 teachers a year. To put that into context, those numbers include almost a quarter of chemistry teachers, 28 per cent of language teachers and 30 per cent of physics teachers.

People across education are worried the changes will make teacher shortages worse. “There is simply no need for an expensive, untested and enormously disruptive reaccreditation process which puts providers and, therefore, the supply of teachers into our schools at unnecessary risk,” said the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers.

Already, teacher supply is inadequate, not because of the quality of training but because too few students want to be trained in the first place. And the worst teacher supply problems are in schools in the most disadvantaged areas, especially in subject specialisms, according to a report from the Education Policy Institute.

One positive feature of the proposals is in improvements to the school mentoring system to support new teachers. For the first time mentoring will be extended from first year to second year teachers. A second year course and mentoring process

**‘Already, Cambridge University has said it will quit teacher training if the new rules are forced through...’**

will be funded in future, with the timetable reduction for the first year (10 per cent) continuing with a new 5 per cent reduction in the second year.

It's a long-overdue recognition that most new teachers need support in the classroom beyond their initial year – the stresses of the second year of teaching in particular contribute to young teachers giving up. But teachers will keep leaving the profession until the workload issue is tackled and terms and conditions are improved.

Even with these changes, the rapid introduction of a drastic new training system, especially now, will impose huge burdens – not least on budgets – for schools and universities. And while universities might decide to opt out, schools cannot.

The reaction of professionals in the field has been overwhelming. The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers is trenchant: “...the DfE has achieved quite the feat in managing to alienate and unite a diverse range of bodies and organisations working across the sector, including those representing school leaders, teacher unions, professional associations and representative bodies.”

It warns that the overhaul represents “an existential threat to the very future of the teaching profession and its subsequent ability to provide a high-quality education”.

The loss of significant input into the initial training of teachers from higher education institutions would be a great loss to the teaching profession, and a significant danger to teacher supply. Workers in the sector will need to fight its corner strongly if it is to resist being pushed out by a government intent on weakening its influence. ■

The government's attitude to supporting public transport Londoners. Workers across Britain should heed this warning

# London on front line in fight



Chaz Bharj/shutterstock.com

**Chancery Lane, London. Many Londoners are still uneasy about travelling on the Tube.**

AT THE LAST general election one of the Conservative Party's slogans was "levelling up": the north and other economically struggling regions had to be primed to get society improving there. But that can't mean neglecting the rest of the country; there are clear signs of major problems elsewhere.

And when it comes to transport, Londoners have been abandoned as much as anywhere in Britain. Millions of working people either live or work in London. It cannot be neglected.

The government has largely written off the capital: it's not promising election territory and therefore not worth bothering about. On the other hand, the Labour Party and mayor Sadiq Khan take the metropolis

for granted and direct their energies into cultural agendas and vehicle reduction schemes rather than trying to help create an economic revival in London.

Like everywhere in Britain London's economy has been hit hard by the pandemic's lockdowns and restrictions. And transport will have an essential role in transforming London.

## Infrastructure

Almost nine million people live in London and hundreds of thousands more travel in to work there. A city of this size thrives or dwindles according to the efficacy of its transport infrastructure.

Covid has had a massive financial impact on TfL. The response, from both

government and opposition, has been completely inadequate. TfL entered the pandemic with a massive reliance on fares revenue: about 72 per cent of every pound spent on London's transport network came from fares – roughly double the 38 per cent in New York and Paris.

## Lockdowns

Then came the lockdowns and restrictions and the enormous drop in numbers of people using the Underground, rail and buses. The government reacted to TfL's financial crisis by sanctioning a series of short-term tranches of money. This presupposes the crisis will never be resolved or settled, which just postpones the decision.

The last tranche of money, extending support up to the end of December 2021, was authorised by government in June 2021. Even so, TfL will still be racking up debt: its revised budget, announced on 26 July, trumpeted "progress towards financial sustainability" – but still revealed a potential shortfall this year of £500 million.

Worse, government support has come with a long list of strings attached. These include a commitment to review TfL pension schemes, to expand the number of driverless trains, and by September 2021 to review and reconsider service levels on the Underground and Overground in light of observed demand across the network.

The concept of driverless trains excites those on the reactionary right who seem to think they would mean no strikes. That, though, is a pipe dream that ignores station and signalling staff, for example, who are also vital to a transport network. The only thing that is certain is that it would be

**'The government has largely written off the capital: it's not promising electoral territory...'**

in the capital doesn't just spell trouble for  
ing and unite in opposition against the threat to TfL...

# ght for public transport

ruinously expensive to convert existing Underground track, much of it shared with the rail network, to cope with it.

The strings are yet another example of using a crisis to attack workers and their hard-won conditions of service – in this case the transport unions.

The RMT signalled its opposition to the June funding deal immediately. “This is a disgraceful stitch up of a deal and it will be resisted by our members whether it comes from Whitehall or City Hall through London wide industrial action if necessary. It is completely unacceptable for transport workers who have risked and in some cases tragically lost their lives to now be asked to pay this political price for the coronavirus,” said Mick Lynch, the RMT’s general secretary.

Lynch called the attack on pensions “wholly unacceptable”, and said that driverless trains were “unwanted, unaffordable and unsafe”. And he laid out the political context clearly: “With funding only lasting until December London is being held to ransom with a gun to its head rather than being given the long term stable funding deal that is necessary to rebuild the economy as we move out of lockdown.”

## Service cuts

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and TfL have announced cuts to Tube and bus services. TfL board papers indicate weekend and off-peak services will be cut from next year. Fares will go up by around 5 per cent in January. And bus services will be reduced in following years. Even with these cuts TfL will require a further £500 million from the government to avoid services grinding to a halt between January and March next year.

In a taste of what may be in store, TfL has announced plans to axe the night Tube train driver grade. The move would have the effect of making night duties compulsory for all train operators, including women and those working part-time, with additional weekend duties. In response the RMT, following a solid vote for action, announced four 24-hour strikes across the Tube network in August, starting on 3 August. The strikes were later put on hold following apparent progress in talks at the conciliation service ACAS.

**‘More are working from home in the capital than in any other area...’**

Obviously a better long-term funding agreement is required instead of the recent pattern of short-term bailouts. But government wants TfL to be financially self-sufficient, by which it means the end of all government support by April 2023 “at the latest”. This continues transport funding policy predating the pandemic, which left TfL financially vulnerable.

Whatever cuts TfL makes – and it’s making plenty – anything approaching self-sufficiency will require more people to travel in the capital, and more often, too. One of the conditions of government support in June this year stresses the aim of planning for “future service scenarios that reflect extant [left at the end of the pandemic] demand”. That is deliberately ignoring the reality that reduced service levels in turn reduce demand.

At the start of June 2021 passenger usage across the network was still below 60 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. If TfL has to plan for future service levels far below pre-pandemic ones, it will mean massive cuts across the board – so deep that they will put even more people off using the network.

It’s a chilling scenario, all the more since it’s likely to be what the government wants to impose on public transport all over the country. That’s another reason why Londoners have to fight this attack, and why they should be supported by workers across Britain.

The fall-off in usage has been accompanied by a surge in the numbers of people working from home. That’s not a uniquely London phenomenon, but more are working from home in the capital than in any other area of Britain.

According to a survey by the Office for National Statistics released in May, around

36 per cent of workers in Britain worked from home *at some point* in the preceding year. In London that figure was 46 per cent. Yet far fewer are working from home *all the time*: in the week before the survey was taken, the figure for Britain dropped to around 26 per cent.

Even within London there are huge variations. In the week prior to the survey, for example, around 33 per cent of workers in Richmond-on-Thames were working from home. In Barking and Dagenham it was just 3.3 per cent.

Working from home is on the increase, but it is a long way from the norm. Most workers simply could not work from home, even if they were in a suitable job and had a spare room or a kitchen table to themselves and reliable broadband.

## Back in the world

Most Londoners want to get back in the world, to get back to their workplaces, to get back to travelling on tubes, trains and buses. And people from across Britain want to be able to visit the capital again.

Now that huge numbers have been double-jabbed with Covid-19 vaccinations, now that risk of serious illness is getting much less because of mass vaccinations, people must value the restoration of normal transport services.

But no one is going to flock back to an increasingly expensive network with increasingly unreliable schedules and increasingly crowded trains and buses. If they are to find a path back to the workplace, workers must take action themselves to save the transport system from being deliberately undermined.

As well as making the government support public transport systems financially, workers must force government to adopt a massive public campaign to convince people to come back to work in London and to return to travelling again on the Tube, rail and buses.

It has taken over 150 years to create the Tube and rail network, to move people to work and leisure locations. It is a factor in our civilisation. It is clear by its actions that government is out to reduce and destroy large parts of the transport network. ■

**Never waste the opportunity of a good crisis. So runs the can have seized on the pandemic as an ideal time to cut down o**

# Battle ahead for the future

RAIL UNIONS and their members are bracing themselves for a huge political and industrial battle as the detail begins to emerge about the government's intentions for the rail industry following the publication of the somewhat vague Williams-Shapps report in May.

The rail unions were worried that the government would use the structural changes in the industry flowing from the report as cover to attack jobs, pay, pensions and staff travel benefits. Those fears were enhanced by industry insiders who more or less confirmed that preparations are being made to take on the unions.

Lockdowns instituted in response to Covid-19 saw rail passenger numbers collapse. As the restrictions have eased, passenger numbers have drifted back up, with strong leisure travel pushing usage figures for August 2021 up to around 60 per cent of that of February 2020, immediately before Covid-19 struck. With many on holiday in August, the number of passengers travelling on business or as commuters is always less than in February.

## Back to work

September will see passenger numbers rise as workers return from summer holidays, but more significantly in many cases they are returning to work in offices now the requirement to work from home has ended. It is clear that there will be fewer commuting journeys in the future as at least some workers spend more time working from home, but the extent of that remains unclear. Business travel remains depressed, and will be for a while.

**'Industry insiders have more or less confirmed that preparations are being made to take on the unions...'**



Yau Ming Low/shutterstock.com

**King's Cross station, London.**

Rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris, asked in August if he expected passenger numbers to return to pre-Covid levels, said: "I think we will but I don't think there'll be the numbers at the same times of day that there used to be."

He confirmed that leisure travel was "recovering strongly". He went on: "Probably for the first time in the railway's history you're getting as many people travelling on Saturdays and Sundays as you

are during the week, and in lots of places more."

But more ominously, he talked also of "sweating the assets" and having to be "flexible and innovative". The rail unions and many in the industry will see this as a poorly disguised reference to cuts, with the industry's biggest asset, the staff, doing more for less.

Heaton-Harris went on to state that "rail has to compete for its market". The

capitalist mantra. Now the government and private operators on costs and boost profits. A huge battle beckons...

# Crisis of Britain's rail system



rail travel in order to justify its cuts agenda. It has failed in any way to encourage a return to the use of public transport, including rail. Indeed, it still sends out messages that suggest rail is not safe. And there are predictions that rail fares are going to be jacked up by the government by nearly 5 per cent, which will put off even more from using trains.

## Demand

There is a strong demand for travel. Car use in August was 111 per cent of that in February 2020, before the lockdowns and restrictions. Second-hand car prices have increased sharply as many are turning to what they see as the safer option of travelling alone. But that perception is misplaced. Travellers are 25 times as likely to have an accident on a car journey when compared with rail.

Research by rail safety body RSSB has shown the risk of contracting Covid-19 while travelling by train is about 1 in 11,000 journeys. This is equivalent to a chance of less than 0.01 per cent, based on an hour-long train journey in a coach with no social distancing or face coverings.

The report also shows that the risk more than halves if passengers wear a face covering. The RSSB's findings have been verified by the Chief Scientific Adviser's team at the Department for Transport in collaboration with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

Many fear that if commuters spurn trains they perceive to be unsafe and turn instead to the car, there will be massive traffic congestion and much greater levels of pollution, already at dangerous levels in many cities.

The chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport, Paul Tuohy, said: "If this shift towards car use becomes entrenched, we will see increased carbon emissions, air pollution and traffic-clogged streets.

He called for a freezing of rail fares for next year, and went on to state: "We really need to rebalance pricing towards greener modes: it makes no sense that bus and rail fares continue to rise while fuel duty for drivers has been frozen for a decade and the government is considering cutting air passenger duty."

**'As so often in the past, rail is fighting for market share with one arm tied behind its back...'**

The so-called safe and healthy option of cycling has been shown to be anything but. Many more are now cycling to and from work, but at what cost? Cycling has been shown by the RSSB to be 403 times less safe than rail – and that doesn't account for the increased exposure cyclists have to traffic fumes. And how many will still find cycling attractive in the depths of winter?

For those who cannot afford cars, or are not physically up to cycling, rail is the only option – but it may become somewhat less attractive than it is now as services and frequencies are cut.

It beggars belief that even state-owned rail freight company Direct Rail Services is seeking volunteers to leave instead of looking to exploit opportunities to reduce reliance on diesel powered lorries with their attendant emission issues. The growing, serious shortage of HGV drivers presents just such an opportunity.

But government policy is to cut services and staff. Publicly owned Network Rail, clearly under direct instruction from the government, has launched a less than generous voluntary severance scheme for its staff whilst publicly talking in terms of axing between 4,000 and 9,000 staff.

Network Rail was accused by the unions of jumping the gun, as it had previously been agreed that Network Rail would launch a voluntary severance scheme at the same time as the train operating companies. The companies have confirmed that they have no intention of following

problem is that as so often in the past, rail is fighting for market share with one arm tied behind its back. And at the moment, it looks like it will have the other arm tied as well as both feet.

There is an understandable reluctance among many to be in crowded spaces, one reason why cinemas, for example, are still only seeing 50 per cent of normal trade.

But the suspicion is that the government is deliberately choking off demand for

*Continued on page 14*



*Continued from page 13*

Network Rail's lead any time soon.

Pointing to rail minister Christopher Heaton-Harris's statement that he expects passenger numbers to return to pre-Covid levels, RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch said: "...there is absolutely no need for the government or the employers to be pressing for service and job cuts across the train operators, TfL (Transport for London) and Network Rail.

"Instead the government should be promoting the railways and the growth of public transport use while at the same time securing green jobs in a new, low carbon economy. No employers or politicians should be using Covid as a smokescreen for cuts on the national railway and Transport for London."

## Safety

The RMT said that the proposed cuts would "seriously compromise rail safety as key teams and functions are diluted and taken apart". White collar union TSSA's general secretary Manuel Cortes agreed, saying: "Network Rail's kamikaze approach to job cuts is a disaster for the safety of our rail network.

"Our union won't sit idly by whilst the already-heavy workload of our members – who will remain within the company – becomes intolerable after these cuts. That would pose a major threat to their health and wellbeing, as well as the safe running of the railway."

The TSSA is in dispute with Network Rail as a result of the company's failure to discuss and agree criteria for acceptance

of applications to leave under the voluntary severance scheme, and guarantee that workloads will not increase for staff that remain employed.

Cortes said, "Network Rail's handling of the industry wide Special Voluntary Severance Scheme (SVSS) has been chaotic and incompetent from the start. They've written to their staff looking for volunteers to go – and talked to the press – without first identifying which parts of their business can afford to lose staff, or where they need to keep them. That's no way to run a business."

The RMT is also committed to a campaign of opposition to proposals that it says would decimate the industry at a time when it needs to be building for the future.

Both unions have threatened to ballot their members for industrial action to defend affected members, if necessary.

## Pay freeze

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic most rail staff have received no pay increase. This was driven by the government which justified the pay freeze by pointing to the collapse in passenger numbers and therefore revenue.

While many staff have acquiesced in the pay freeze, the government should not assume that this will continue as the industry recovers. Members will be even less disposed to pay restraint following the payment of huge dividends to rail and bus giant First Group's shareholders, which was described by RMT as "pandemic profiteering".

The company announced a £500 million dividend bonanza to shareholders and then boasted of more to come after receiving extra subsidies to run services during the pandemic lockdown. And the sum was increased recently when the company pocketed an unexpected £50 million after agreeing with the government to terminate its TransPennine Express franchise.

FirstGroup told shareholders that the new National Rail contracts where the government (that is, the taxpayer) will shoulder all of the revenue risk will "support attractive dividends." RMT said that the contracts were "ushering in a new era of risk-free profiteering".

**'Other private companies will be enthusiastic about the risk-free profits to be made under the new contracts...'**

There is little doubt that other private operators will be similarly enthusiastic about the risk-free profits to be made under the new contracts while the staff are expected to accept pay freezes, increased workloads and lower pensions.

## Pension schemes

Many staff across the rail industry are members of a defined benefit pension scheme. A rapidly dwindling number of staff who worked for British Rail before privatisation were given legal protection and therefore have the legal right to such a pension. Most staff in both train operating companies and Network Rail are in defined benefit pension schemes, but without legal protection.

The private train operators have long sought to persuade the government to do away with defined benefit pensions and replace them with much inferior defined contribution schemes, a prospect that looks increasingly likely as part of the restructuring of the industry. While those without legal protection are clearly an easy target, laws can be changed to target ex-British Rail staff too.

There are also rumours that the government wants to cut deeply into the amount of free travel granted to ex-British Rail staff.

So much is at stake as the attacks intensify, and rail staff and their unions will need to prepare for what may be long, bitter and painful battles ahead to defend their industry and their pay, terms and conditions. ■

**The July protests in Cuba were hijacked by the CIA, promising money and leadership to desperate people...**

# Cuba and the protests



Joe Piette (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

**26 July: Rally in Philadelphia in solidarity with the people of Cuba.**

PROTESTS IN CUBA in the middle of July were hijacked by the CIA, promising money and political leadership to desperate people, said Radio Havana journalist Cristina Escobar at an online Zoom meeting held by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign on Monday 9 August.

The meeting was a timely opportunity to present an update of the latest situation in Cuba. Since Zoom is blocked in Cuba – by the company, not by the government – Escobar’s report from Cuba was given in a video recording.

Escobar explained there are real problems of food, electrical and medical shortages in Cuba. But, she said, these were due to the US’s recent harsh blockade measures (developed by Donald Trump

**‘The vast majority of Cubans came out in favour of the revolution...’**

and further enforced by Joe Biden) against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic and the absence of international tourism, a major component of Cuba’s economy.

Len McCluskey from the Unite union told the session that the blockade has cost Cuba billions of dollars each year. According to a speech to the UN in June by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, losses in 2020 were \$9.1 billion.

## US interference

Grahame Morris, chair of the British All Party Parliamentary Group on Cuba, added that the US had devoted \$17 million to fund counter-revolutionary activities, using agitators to rally for a violent “colour revolution” and instigate riots against ordinary Cubans (including damaging a children’s hospital).

In response, said Escobar, the vast majority of Cubans came out in support of the revolution. Meanwhile, Escobar also reported, the Cuban state is revising its policies and correcting mistakes to help meet the needs of the people to the best of the government’s ability.

The US agenda of inciting counter-revolution has failed, Cuba’s ambassador to

the UK, Bárbara Montalvo Álvarez, told the meeting. The country remains calm, and the Cuban government is doing its best to deal with the challenges with the support of the people.

## Distortion

The meeting also heard how mainstream media are biased, distorting and using second-hand information to push for a pro-US narrative. Ollie Vargas, a reporter from Kawsachun News, the English language service of the Bolivian peasant union radio station Kawsachun Coca, told the meeting that social media for the anti-Cuba campaign are mostly bots repeating slogans, propaganda and giving the appearance of “majority support”.

Reactionary forces in the US (especially in Florida) including Miami mayor Francis Suarez, are calling for a “humanitarian” intervention in Cuba, in other words, another violent unjust war – in fact, Suarez called last month for air strikes against the island.

Escobar said that if people want to be humanitarian, they must push for the lifting of the blockade and for the real situation of Cuba to be presented to the world. ■

The failure of the SNP to gain a majority in the elections to  
with the equally separatist Greens – and into a series of in

# SNP and Greens: a coalition



Workers

**31 July 2021: Opposition to spending cuts in SNP-run Glasgow brought hundreds out onto the streets.**

DUBBED A “coalition of chaos”, the new alliance in August between the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party has been born out of desperation, out of weakness. Seeing no way to legitimately induce the British government to grant the separatist cause another referendum on breaking up Britain, an artificial majority has been created in the Holyrood parliament by pooling the resources of the two underperforming separatist parties.

These parties are not only a threat to the integrity of the British working class, but are vociferously campaigning on a vision of re-joining the European Union. Indeed the draft cooperation agreement said the deal was aimed at “accelerating Scotland’s journey towards democratic renewal and independence in Europe”.

The SNP aim of pressuring the British government to agree to another referendum on Scottish independence was thwarted as they failed to gain a majority of the 129 seats at the elections for Holyrood in May. The Scottish Green Party seats are enough to create a voting majority.

## Referendum

With this new alliance the demand for another referendum will become more confident. They speak of a timetable of “within five years” and “preferably by Autumn 2023”. Whatever the timing, they have kick-started a renewed campaign for separation. No one who values the unity of the working class and a united independent Britain can now ignore it.

But several issues could derail sepa-

ratist plans and the alliance. Alex Neil, the dissident SNP former cabinet minister, pointed to the party being wounded by this alliance, describing the agreement as “the death knell of the SNP ever getting a majority in the Scottish Parliament”. And many rural SNP MSPs have campaigned hard for new and upgraded roads – a policy strongly opposed by the Greens.

The old slogan “It’s Scotland’s Oil”

**‘The Greens also seek to curtail many aspects of agriculture...’**

to the Scottish parliament has forced them into a huddle  
increasingly unpopular policies...

# tion born of weakness

reminds us that there is a strong lobby for oil and gas development within the SNP (it was once seen as the golden purse for a separate Scotland). But Scottish Greens want the shutdown of all North Sea and near Atlantic oil and gas activity. Meanwhile, no new nuclear power construction is permitted by the Scottish government.

The Greens also seek to curtail many aspects of agriculture, including the large salmon farming output which forms one of Britain's biggest food exports. And bodies like the Scottish Fishermen's Federation are wary of their ill-conceived headline-grabbing policies. Meanwhile, the Greens and SNP continue to wrangle over the divisive proposals for gender recognition reform and the curtailing of free speech underlying the Hate Crimes Act.

The run-up to the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow in November will no doubt be used by the SNP and the Scottish Greens to undermine the British government intention to portray the event as a UK-wide project and to gain publicity for their separatist and pro-EU views.

## The economy

Yet the most damning issue for this SNP-Green alliance is the economy. Scotland's public spending deficit more than doubled in 2020. Spending increased and revenues fell due in part to the coronavirus pandemic. That's true everywhere. But it's far worse in Scotland.

The 2020-21 deficit was published in August. It is estimated at £36.3 billion, 22.4 per cent of GDP – a huge leap from to 8.6 per cent a year earlier. In contrast the current UK figure is 14.2 per cent. It has been hard for pro-separatist critics to dispute the figures. They were published by the Scottish Government's own statisticians in the annual Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland Report (GERS).

Public sector spending increased by 21 per cent in Scotland to £18,144 for each person, £1,828 more than the UK average. And yet again – as with the failing Scottish banks – the taxpaying workers of the whole of Britain pick up the tab."

Public sector spending by itself is not a bad thing, of course, but the SNP's

spending plans contrast with its inability to create growth and real jobs, especially under the constraints of their Green Party partner's zero growth ideology. It would be tough to establish a new country with such a record of deficit. Could it afford to borrow? Who would lend?

With such a past, and a zero growth partner, all previous separatist economic plans have been rendered obsolete. Joining the EU won't help – it has only temporarily set aside its tight fiscal rules.

The GERS figures are seen as so bad for Scottish separatism that several pro-SNP pundits want to curtail their methods and publication in future years. Others like Scottish Finance Secretary Kate Forbes have tried to front it out. In response to the GERS report she claimed that if only Scotland were independent and had more borrowing powers, then a bright economic future lay ahead.

Some economists disagree. "The current GERS figures again highlight the sheer folly of the SNP's independence plans and the huge costs and disruption they would impose," commented Ronald MacDonald, an economics professor at the University of Glasgow.

Macdonald added, "With such a large external deficit, financial markets would from day one of independence, if not before, be expecting an abandonment of sterlingisation and a move to a sharply devalued Scottish currency at around 20 to 30 per cent." He underlined the importance of pooling and sharing fiscal risk in Britain.

## No more oil

Scotland's First Minister hit the headlines in August when she sent a letter to prime minister Boris Johnson demanding he reassess the Cambo oil and gas field project's licence. So the SNP has moved from proclaiming oil as the engine of independence to aligning itself with the view of its Green allies by opposing the new field and any extraction from it.

Cambo, 78 miles north west of the Shetland Isles, is one of two fields on the Corona Ridge Area, which has estimated reserves of over 800 million barrels, a valuable strategic resource. It was first discovered in 2002; permissions long predate the

**'All previous separatist economic plans have been rendered obsolete...'**

current dispute.

Deirdre Michie, chief executive of Oil and Gas UK, pointed out in *The Scotsman* that if the Cambo field were abandoned, the whole of Britain would still need oil and gas but instead "we would have to import [them] from overseas – frequently from countries with higher emissions and less commitment to act on them".

Michie said that over 100,000 jobs would be threatened by such an abandonment, particularly in the north east of Scotland, but not just there – there are workers in the industry all over Britain. The industrial strategy documents of the GMB and Unite trade unions, and the work of the Offshore Co-ordinating Group, give some hope that there can be resistance to this destruction of a strategic industry.

There's also opposition by workers and local communities against cuts and closures in cities governed by SNP and SNP-Scottish Green Party councils.

Glasgow is among the ten worst-hit cities in the UK for cuts. Glasgow Against Closures has brought several local campaigns against library closures together with seasoned campaigners opposing closures of venues like swimming baths, community centres and museums such as The People's Palace and Winter Gardens.

The semi-privatised culture organisation, Glasgow Life, has taken advantage of the Covid crisis to not re-open a number of such venues and is planning to privatise other previously publicly owned buildings. Over 500 jobs are being lost as a result.

In July this encouraged several trade unions and their members to attend the first large march and rally that Glasgow Against Closures organised. Several hundred attended and there was a festive atmosphere at Glasgow Green – with not an SNP flag in sight. ■

Most of the breathless headlines are now penned not by scientists but by self-styled climate activists, who believe that the problem with the world is people. They don't want to hear that the problem with the world is people. They don't want to hear that the problem with the world is people.

# The real cost of the zero

THE UNITED Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its sixth assessment report in August, setting off a chain reaction of apocalyptic responses. The UN Secretary General António Guterres set the tone, describing the report as "...code red for humanity".

IPCC was set up in 1988 to scientifically understand human-induced climate change, its impact and possible responses. But every IPCC report since the first in 1990 has been accompanied by dire warnings of imminent catastrophe. Inevitably, targets have been set for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, with a time scale for achievement.

Deadlines have been set and missed. Yet somehow the world carries on.

This approach is meat and drink to the "save the planet" lobby. Most of the breathless headlines are now penned not by scientists, but by self-styled climate activists, who believe that the problem with the world is people. Among those leading the charge, the *Guardian* pronounced on 9 August, "Humanity guilty as hell...of climate crimes", typical of the hysterical coverage of the report in the media outlets with footage of any and every climactic mishap they could find.

The IPCC report must be seen in context. It is not new evidence, nor does it pretend to be. It is an aggregation of current reporting on the effects on the climate of human activity, which is significant in scale.

## We're all doomed!

Most scientists would accept that human activity has an effect on the climate. But arguing that we're all doomed if we don't stop doing what we do is profoundly unscientific. Apart from anything else, such

**'Climate extremists say humanity is helpless in the face of a disaster of our own making...'**



Aerovista Luchtfotografie/shutterstock.com

**Planning can stop flooding: the Oosterscheldekering storm surge barrier, part of the delta works project**

thinking assumes there can be no mitigation against imminent disaster.

Flooding is a good example. We are familiar with the prediction of rising sea levels and the threat it brings. Coastal cities, we are told, will disappear. Countries like Bangladesh, with large swathes of the population dependent upon and therefore living near the sea, will be devastated. In reality, over time, sea levels rise and fall. We are currently experiencing a rise, but we are not helpless.

The Netherlands has lived for centuries with much of its land prone to flooding. But the Dutch have taken water management to new heights, not just with dykes and sea defences, but with the design of houses and the layout of towns and cities. The emphasis is on giving surplus water some-

where to go – and on reclaiming low-lying land for productive use.

Dutch advisors, working with Bangladeshi authorities, helped that country reduce deaths in recent floods from thousands to hundreds. Emergency shelters and evacuation routes were scientific solutions to natural problems.

The world of climate extremism has no use for such a level-headed and practical approach. Its article of faith is that humanity is helpless in the face of the disaster of our own making. "Stop driving, stop flying, stop eating meat" they cry.

Even more reprehensible are the politicians and policy makers who pay lip service to such nonsense. The government's supposedly independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) exemplifies this trend.

scientists, but by self-styled climate activists, who believe  
to talk about the real cost – or the possible solutions...

# carbon lobby



Protecting the Netherlands from high sea level.

Since its establishment in 2008, the CCC has become increasingly influential in shaping official policy – but only in the direction of climate change orthodoxy. Its role in the debacle over the Cumbrian coking coal mine was typical.

The CCC armed the government with assurances that its 2019 Net Zero report was fully costed. It calculated the cost to the British economy of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to be around 1 per cent of GDP. A small price to pay for saving the country from extinction, argued ministers as the policy was enshrined in law.

Not everyone was taken in. One body, the Global Warming Policy Forum, was convinced the figures could not be accurate. Using a Freedom of Information

request it asked to see the calculations behind the costings. Astonishingly, the CCC responded that it was unable to comply as the relevant data had been overwritten and erased, even though the report had only been published 6 weeks earlier.

After two years of argument and delay, the Information Tribunal ruled this August. It ordered the CCC to reveal its net zero calculations, and dismissed virtually all of its arguments. It also emerged that the costings were estimates from 2050 onwards, in other words after the transition to net zero.

## Misled

Were MPs misled in 2019? It seems so. But the government is in no rush to let the truth get in the way of its green agenda. Instead it's focusing on the COP26 climate conference to be held in Glasgow this November.

Luminaries from around the world will arrive in private jets while preaching the folly of burning fossil fuel. It's the latest step in an endless round of such events, stretching back decades, punctuated by the Kyoto Protocol (signed 1997, "effective" 2005) and the Paris Agreement (2016). In reality it's a shop window for governments to show off their latest green credentials.

China and India, the world's greatest polluters, will not attend. They are merely doing what every other developed nation has done in the past to industrialise and modernise, creating productive jobs and raising the standard of living for their citizens. They are utilising abundantly available natural resources – coal, gas and oil.

Western progress and growth were built on these energy sources, so why should they listen to us when we tell them not to do the same? Especially when many of their manufactured goods are heading to the developed world.

Closer to home, the price the people of Britain will have to pay for the transition to net zero is coming under closer scrutiny. One instance is the government decision to outlaw the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

Glossy adverts show a proud owner admiring the gleaming new vehicle on his drive, next to the in-built charging point.

**'The price for net zero is coming under closer scrutiny...'**

Not so attractive if you live in a block of flats, or a terrace with no drive, even if the price of electric cars drops and the charging network is expanded. Add to that the taxes which will inevitably come when the government wants to replace lost fuel and excise duty, estimated at £34 billion. That will leave motoring out of reach for many households.

Phasing out of gas boilers for domestic heating is a similar policy ignoring practicalities. In 2019 the government announced a ban on connecting new homes to the gas grid from 2025. This July it brought this forward to 2023. Again not everyone was convinced. The GMB union has been arguing from the outset that it's an unrealistic policy. It will leave many households substantially colder, either through the high cost of electricity or because air source heat pumps are not as efficient in the British climate as their advocates claim.

As people come to understand the real cost of "going green" they will ask why they weren't consulted.

## Resistance

There is some resistance in parliament. At the end of July the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Fair Fuel for UK motorists and hauliers produced a report calling for the threatened ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles to be immediately removed. It argues the government should instead incentivise the move to clean fuels by motivating industry and entrepreneurs to develop technologies that will not impact adversely on the economy, drivers or businesses.

Group chair Craig Mackinlay said "The only thing that's protecting the Government from electoral harm on this matter is the seeming Westminster consensus and lack of courage to stand up to the climate fanatics and say: Enough!" ■

After the postwar boom in planning which was so important for this country, Britain has been sliding back, with dire consequences.

# Planning for a better future



Willy Barton/shutterstock.com

High streets are emptying, while agricultural land is taken over by developers.

*Rebuilding Britain: planning for a better future*, by Kate Henderson and Hugh Ellis, paperback, 184 pages, ISBN 978-1447317593, Policy Press, 2014, £16.99 or less. Kindle and eBook editions available.

THIS BOOK was published seven years ago, but it remains both interesting and relevant to the future of planning in Britain.

The authors have long experience; they are respectively CEO of the National Housing Federation and director of policy

**‘Devolution has further fragmented environmental control...’**

at the Town and Country Planning Association. They explain that post-war Britain “proved the value and effectiveness of democratic collective action and delivered in the reconstruction of Britain the most remarkable achievements, from national parks to new towns. All of this, furthermore, in the context of a nation bankrupted by war.”

But now, “We live in a sophisticated world where vested interests of all kinds are adept at squashing the art of possibilities.” The 36,000 landowners who own half the rural land in England and Wales profit too much from the present system to want to change it.

## Empty shops

There are empty shops and buildings in towns and cities across Britain and other former industrial sites. Developers prefer to get planning permission to build cheaply on fields. The government has made that eas-

ier, with the detrimental effect of reducing available agricultural land.

Yet at the same time it is almost inevitable that city centre conversions will be low quality – in the name of “regeneration”. This trend has been evident for decades. In 1980 Margaret Thatcher abolished the evidence-based Parker Morris housing standards. And in 2012 the coalition government allowed “Permitted Development” office to residential conversions – which bypassed planning. Intended to be four-year trial, this was made permanent despite evidence that the average size of British homes was falling markedly – a trend that has continued.

Likewise the energy market is dominated by a few international companies, for which “...supply of energy has proved to be a highly profitable enterprise.” Successive governments have advanced the interests of big landowners and big business, at the expense of the rest of us.

In 2010 the Cameron government abolished the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. As a result, “Britain now has no body with the capability of investigating the environmental challenge facing the nation in a holistic way.”

## Climate change

On climate change, the authors write, “our current policy responses have some merits, particularly the Climate Change Act 2008, but high level policy lacks a national expression (there is no national plan), and localised policy lacks appropriate coordination and scale.”

As they point out, “Planning is the pivotal delivery framework for energy demand reduction and renewable energy and for addressing problems such as extreme temperatures and flood risk.”

Devolution has further fragmented and damaged environmental control. Two-fifths of Britain’s Grade 1 agricultural land is at or below sea level in a concentration around the Wash on England’s east coast. The Environment Agency observed that there is “less water available per person in this region than in many Mediterranean countries”.

The authors strongly urge the revival of the Garden City concept of “capturing and

ment in rebuilding the  
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redistributing the increase in land values which development creates for the long-term benefit of the whole community.” But, as they point out, “by 1952, key elements of the reform package, like taxing land values created by the state, had been abolished, much to the relief of landowners”.

They urge “the direct provision of a high-quality social rented sector would do more than anything to meet the acute needs which currently cause homelessness and overcrowding, as well as substantially increase the affordability of market housing by creating a real choice of tenures.”

### Food imports

The authors remark, “It would not, based on current evidence, be safe to assume that Britain can go on relying on significant food and energy imports.” They comment, “The defence of agricultural land should be seen in the context of these global pressures which implies much greater pressure on productive land for both food and energy crops.”

Over 80 per cent of the intended investment by the Coalition government in transport infrastructure was to go to London and the South-East, and just 6 per cent to the North of England. In 2011 it cancelled the Housing Market Renewal initiative, with only a quarter of the regeneration completed. On current form, the promises on “levelling up” by the current government are likely to go the same way.

In sum, “Britain has no unified industrial strategy where the future challenges of technological and business change can be considered alongside transport infrastructure or housing growth. ... The idea of planning the nation as a whole so that for the first time we can work out how housing, transport and flood defences can be delivered simultaneously in order to bring maximum efficiency and fairness might seem self-evident but it has been regarded as politically unacceptable because of the perceived interference with market forces.”

That’s just as true now as it was when written. The challenge remains to assert control over planning for our nation’s needs. We cannot rely on “free market” forces and certainly not on a government devoted to preserving them. ■

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TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

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**Seventy years ago, in the midst of post-war austerity and found the will to create a remarkable, popular festival...**

# 1951: the Festival of Britain

POST-WAR BRITAIN was beset by problems. For the majority of people, life was hard and difficult. The daily routine was still making do on very little. The euphoria of victory in Europe had long since given way to a more humdrum existence.

Proposed in 1943, the idea of a festival initially attracted much opposition. But in late 1947 the government decided to go ahead and set up a Festival Council with a broad yet specific brief for “a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future in the arts, science and technology and in industrial design”.

Journalist Gerald Barry headed the planning. He was a firm believer in putting the modernist architect at the centre of post-war reconstruction and had faith in economic and social planning. Barry acted swiftly to employ a large number of talented, young people, mostly left free to come up with ideas.

The festival was expected to meld education, inspiration and pleasure, and expose fresh ideas to a wide audience. It would give commerce and the arts in Britain a chance to show what they could do. It was to be “a tonic to the nation”, celebrate our recovery from the war and demonstrate that Britain had within itself the talent, imagination and energy to create a new society.

The selected site lay between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge on the south Bank of the Thames. It was soggy and derelict, but centrally placed with good communication links, close to iconic London landmarks. And as a bonus, the London County Council (using its own

funding) already had the go-ahead for a new concert hall to be opened there in 1951. Work began immediately on a wall to protect the area from flooding.

The team planned to create a commercial and cultural showcase of Britain; a display spectacle of the mechanical wonders of the age, of futuristic designs and bright colours to offset the drabness of war and postwar austerity. It was an assertion that, having won the war, the British people were not about to lose the peace.

A slender steel and aluminium structure in the shape of an outsized exclamation mark – Britain’s first high-tech piece of architecture – was selected to represent the festival. Named the Skylon, it rose 90 metres in the air and was seemingly free-standing and defying gravity, though held in place by high-tension cables slung between three steel beams. Lit from inside, at night it could be seen all over London.

## **Bold**

The festival’s icon was the pancake-shaped Dome of Discovery. With bold, clean lines, light and space, it combined practicality and beauty to display the best of British invention and enterprise.

The dome was 110 metres in diameter with a smooth metal cover of aluminium alloy, a material not often used for substantial buildings at that time. The ribs underneath were supported by a steel box ring girder, itself held 12 metres above ground by a series of slender lattice steel masts. To many children familiar with futuristic space comics, it looked pleasingly like a flying saucer.

Over 10,000 products of British enterprise were judged worthy of display – ranging in size from locomotives to lipsticks and in value from many thousands of pounds to a few pennies. In 1951 washing machines, water heaters, fridges, vacuum cleaners and electric irons were beyond the experience of well over half the population.

Pavilions dedicated to land, agriculture, mining and industry in the story of Britain surrounded the Dome. Elsewhere the themes were more about people – arts and crafts, education, depictions of the “British at Home”, their recreations and, trickier, their character. The river front was given a



Ben Brooksbank/geograph.org.uk (CC BY-SA 2.0)

**The Festival of Britain site with the iconic dome**

seaside makeover – a promenade, deckchairs, ice cream stalls and, optimistically, sunshades.

Overall the small site was planned so as to give a sense of space and allow for easy, leisurely movement between the pavilions. This feel was achieved by a series of connecting patios, each of contrasting shapes and colours, with new points of interest to catch the eye at every turn and an imaginative use of glass giving a transparency to buildings.

## **Poplar housing**

More space was required, in particular to show what could be achieved with socially motivated architecture. A site was selected in Poplar in order to create a purpose-built, lower living-density environment for 1,500 residents in a village-like community. This Lansbury Estate had its own schools and church, an old people’s home, a pedestrian shopping centre, covered market place, pubs and open spaces.

Also, a new wing was built at the

**‘It was an assertion that, having won the war, the British people were not about to lose the peace...’**

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(left) and Skylon (centre).

Science Museum in Kensington with its opening exhibition exploring the scope of the scientific revolution.

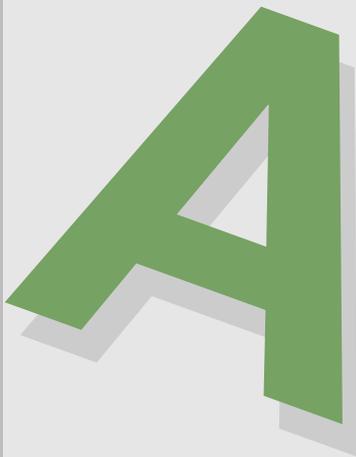
The Lion and the Unicorn pavilion, while probably promoting an artificial national self-image, was simply dotty and became one of the most popular festival features. Its odd name was supposed to represent two opposing facets of the British character – the stolid, unimaginative Lion and the highly individualised, eccentric, unpredictable Unicorn.

A public appeal for models made of unlikely materials or machines built for unpredictable purposes resulted in a delightful, bizarre collection of exhibits.

More land was acquired to develop Battersea Fun Fair and Pleasure Gardens with lots of entertainment and landscaped areas. A river shuttle service connected this venue to the main festival. Eight and a half million people visited both sites. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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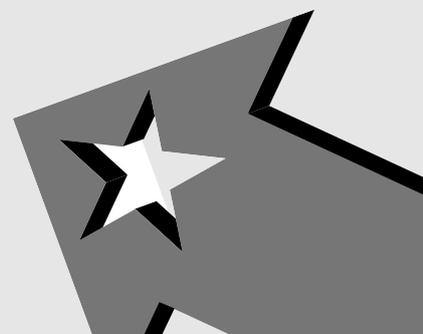
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# Why technology sovereignty matters

**'Like political sovereignty, technology sovereignty matters to British workers'**

BEWARE CAPITALISM when it talks about a level playing field, about open economies. The game is always rigged. Economic victory in "free trade" will always go to the strongest economy – and the disparity is growing.

Against this a new concept has emerged: technology sovereignty. This recognises that IT infrastructure lies at the heart of a modern society. And it's about far more than access to broadband.

Networked computers are not only essential for defence. They also run our transport systems, our power grids, satellites, weather forecasting and communications of all kinds. That matters to Britain, of course, as it does to all countries. It matters as well because Britain's industrial future is closely linked with the production of all manner of products essential to these systems.

Tech entrepreneur Herman Hauser laid out his preconditions for technology sovereignty in a letter to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs committee about the proposed takeover of Cambridge chip design company ARM Holdings. Britain has to have the key technologies to run a modern country, or guaranteed access to them for at least five years (by which time the technology will probably be outdated).

There are those who say that exploitation is exploitation. By their measure, it doesn't matter whether the employer is British or American, or Chinese. But that is to ignore intellectual property – the patents and ideas that drive technological progress.

Because foreign ownership of British companies will mean that research departments and production jobs will increasingly go abroad as well. Like political sovereignty, technology sovereignty matters to British workers.

Without technology sovereignty, Britain's IT infrastructure could be held to ransom by foreign governments or companies. In particular, Britain could become squeezed in the growing confrontation between China and the US.

This is precisely the issue raised in 2019 by the former First Sea Lord Admiral Lord West in relation to the takeover of Cobham by US venture capital firm Advent. And note Boris

Johnson's reaction, taking the side of the "free market" against technology sovereignty. "I think it's very important that we should have an open and dynamic market economy," he said.

In July this year Boris Johnson announced that he was referring the proposed takeover of Newport Wafer Fab, the country's biggest computer chip maker, on grounds of national security. He has been urged to do likewise with the ARM Holdings takeover.

But it's not immensely reassuring that the Newport Wafer Fab referral is to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The parliamentary committee conducting its inquiry into the takeover will almost certainly not have access to top secret information. That rules out any scrutiny of anything involving national security.

That's bad enough. But it's not just national security at stake. The US takes an aggressive view on technology. Its regulations are likely to prevent British companies owned in the US exporting advanced technology products without permission from the White House. China too is developing its own export regulations, broadly mirroring those in the US.

The iron laws of capitalist economics, rather than flattening out the mythical playing field, force stronger companies to seek to be even more dominant. Especially when combined with imperialist rivalries. If you want to see that process in action, look at the current wave of attempted buyouts of technology and defence companies by US and Chinese concerns. These companies all have one thing in common: they are developing technology vital to the security of the country and vital, too, to its industrial future.

Unions are recognising this, too. Last year the Commons defence committee published a submission from Unite on "sovereign capability" calling on the government to generate a list of technologies that need to be secured to give Britain freedom of action without the intervention of other countries. That's a crucial demand.

It will be a long list, but we wait forever for the government to draw up any list that it can be held to. Like most things, if workers want it done, they will have to do it themselves. ■

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