

WORKERS

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WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A WORKING CLASS RESPONSE

Energy policy What we need

Arctic Resource grab

Independence ...and peace

Debt Soaring

CPI A costly measure

Silica Hidden peril

Teachers Ready for action

plus Historic Notes,

Housing London hit hard

News, Reviews

Unis Struggle across Britain

and more

JOURNAL OF THE CPBML

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

WORKERS



Ask who wants this war, and why

THE RISK of an all-out conflict between NATO and Russia is higher now than at any point in the cold war period. The Ukraine war has increasingly become NATO's proxy war with Russia.

Britain's working class needs to take stock of where the EU/NATO war machine is taking us. The talk about an EU reset is about military spending. We are told that we are already at war. Britain is a member of NATO so there is a truth there.

Has there ever been a period where the population has been so pressured into the inevitability of war without even a question of why are we to join this war?

It is ten years since the vote to leave the EU, but just one year since the summit where Starmer entered into "a new strategic partnership" with the EU. This was mostly about "defence" – by which capitalists mean war; we should not be fooled.

This is embedded in the EU-UK joint statement, for instance paragraph 11 which says, "In line with our shared security interests, we attach particular importance to collaboration on defence. For the UK and those EU Member States who are NATO Allies, NATO remains the cornerstone of their collective defence."

This set in train activity aiming to enmesh Britain into the EU again and especially the European Defence Mechanism, much of it out of sight.

The European Parliament is not coy, saying in May that it welcomed closer engagement, and

framing the UK as a key strategic partner. It went on to argue for the "pragmatic inclusion, regulatory alignment and strengthened industrial integration" of Britain "into the European defence architecture".

That European defence architecture is taking a number of forms. In April, the German government entered into a strategic defence partnership with Ukraine, the first time it has done so with a country at war.

That agreement paved the way for co-production of weapons systems, including long-range drones and missiles. And the first drone was produced less than two months later.

The defence architecture is taking a different form in France, with a change to their nuclear doctrine to "forward deterrence". According to a UK parliamentary research paper, this envisages the temporary deployment of French nuclear aircraft to allied countries in times of crisis.

The EU economic model is now focused on propping up capitalism with defence spending. Starmer has embraced this model from the outset. But as we saw with ministerial resignations, the only official debate is with those in his party who want to spend more.

The working class challenge is this: How do we extract ourselves from this EU/NATO war machine? That must begin with a debate about the big questions: who wants this war and why?



Cover photo a Beirut suburb after Israeli bombing by mytaj/shutterstock.com



WORKERS is published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB.
ISSN 0266-8580

www.cpbml.org.uk @cpbml
Issue 255, July/August 2026

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Government debt soars

ACCORDING TO the latest official figures, government debt currently stands at around £2.9 trillion, equivalent to around 95 per cent of the country's gross domestic product.

Interest on this debt was, at £110 billion for 2025-26, the highest in several decades. Government borrowing in May was £23.3 billion, up 30 per cent on a year ago. At this rate, the debt will hit £3 trillion within a few months.

Occasionally we hear that borrowing costs are down following unexpectedly good economic news. But that's only transitory – the trend is relentlessly upwards, exacerbated by higher interest rates.

Borrowing ever more to cover an income shortfall would trigger alarm bells for any prudent householder. But it is endemic to government thinking.

The governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, warned a House of Lords Committee on 2 June of the risk of a "vicious circle" of rising borrowing costs if the government fails to control its debts. Despite that he is still defending the policy of selling gilts.

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph* on 8 June, Britain's national debt is growing faster than any country tracked by the International Monetary Fund. That's not something we hear about from the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves.

When we're told that taxes must rise or spending must fall, the right response is to challenge the spiralling cost of funding vanity projects (many of them "green") at the expense of safeguarding industry and looking after the basics. ■

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

PROCUREMENT

Words instead of deeds

IN LATE May, the *Guardian* reported that Chancellor Rachel Reeves had told ministers to buy British "wherever possible" when awarding government contracts for steel, shipbuilding, energy and artificial intelligence.

Before his resignation as defence minister, John Healey announced "a new approach" at the GMB trade union conference on 9 June. He said this "...looks to give credit in future defence contract decisions to British-based companies".

Neither Reeves and Healey mention that the free trade agreement between Britain and the EU, combined with World Trade Organization, rules allow companies based in the EU and many WTO member countries to bid for government contracts above certain amounts.

Hence the qualification to buy British "where possible". It is a long way from the impression the government tried to give. ■

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

FACTS MATTER

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If you want to check our references for a particular story, look it up online at cpbml.org.uk and follow the embedded links. If we've got something wrong, please let us know!

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 07308 979308 or email workers@cpbml.org.uk



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Youth unemployment – no answers

The latest government action on youth unemployment offers few new insights or solutions. The problem is evident and obvious – and isn't new.

Mother Courage – how wars are sustained

A new production of *Mother Courage and her Children* at the Globe Theatre is a bold and successful re-imagining of Brecht's 1939 masterpiece.

US charges former president of Cuba

The US government has made criminal charges against former Cuban president Raúl Castro in relation to the shooting down of an aircraft in 1996. Cuba has rejected this as a political move against its country.

Elections bring no change

The elections on 7 May changed little. Workers across Britain trounced the Labour Party. But it remains determined to cling on and to inflict as much damage as possible on the country.

Protests against paddling in poo

Britain's beaches and rivers continue to suffer poor water quality. Thousands took part in the latest protests around Britain on 16 May.

Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit cpbml.org.uk to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox. The sign-up form is at the top of every website page – an email address is all that's required.

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Crystals of sodium silicate.

Call for action over silica

PREVENTABLE INDUSTRIAL diseases are still with us. Trade union Unite is calling for action on exposure to crystalline silica. This material is used to make engineered stone. In December 2025 Australia became the first country to ban it completely. Inhaling fine crystalline silica dust can cause silicosis, an incurable lung disease.

And in California state officials recently voted for a ban. If that becomes law, California would become the first US state to do so. The decision follows 550 recorded silicosis cases and 31 deaths linked to crystalline silica inhalation. Numbers are rising rapidly.

This dust is released in dangerous quantities when workers cut quartz surfaces. The material is widely used for kitchen countertops in Britain. With 50 confirmed cases and four deaths reported here, there are calls for a government ban.

Silicosis is irreversible, progressive and often fatal. Dr Johanna Feary, a lung specialist at the Royal Brompton Hospital, believes the true number of UK cases is far higher than the number officially recorded. She says the disease is appearing in a young workforce – people in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

In May, the Health and Safety Executive issued new guidance aimed at preventing further deaths among stoneworkers. It has now declared that dry-cutting engineered stone is “unacceptable.” Employers must adopt preventative measures such as using water-suppression tools to control dust exposure. Unite says the guidance is impossible to follow during on-site fitting, cutting or finishing in people's homes.

General secretary Sharon Graham said, “Engineered stone is causing serious, preventable illness and death amongst workers. The UK should follow Australia's example and ban this deadly material outright.”

UNIVERSITIES

Nottingham threat

NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY wants to cut 609 academic jobs, including many posts in its prestigious physics department. It is facing resistance from its workers.

University and College Union (UCU) members there began action short of strike including a marking and assessment boycott on 20 May, with a one-day strike on 22 May. The university imposed a 100 per cent deduction on those involved in the boycott.

This response significantly inflamed members who have now announced strike days from 1 June to 31 July.

In May it had emerged that the university aimed to cut over 600 academic jobs and close down 42 courses. This raised fears that it could lose its research-intensive status. The plan includes compulsory redundancies at the university's prestigious

school of physics and astronomy. 56 of 71 staff members in the school have been told they are at risk of redundancy, with 20 roles set to go.

Six Nobel Prize winners and BBC science presenters have criticised the move. In an open letter, which has attracted more than 2,000 signatures, they call on the university “to reverse its plans to impose compulsory redundancies”. They say it would cause long-lasting damage to the physics department, among the best in Britain.

Jim Al-Khalili, BBC presenter and emeritus professor of physics at the University of Surrey, said, “Nottingham Physics is one of the most respected and prestigious departments in the country and this proposed ‘cull’ would be both devastating and foolish.”

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

EUROPEAN UNION

Meddling in Switzerland

ON 14 JUNE, the people of Switzerland voted in a referendum on a proposal to cap the country's population at ten million. In the end it was rejected, but even beforehand the EU sought to interfere.

Switzerland's population is now 9.1 million, 27 per cent of whom are not Swiss-born. In 2002 its population was 7.3 million. The proposition could have meant an end to

the free movement of labour across Switzerland's borders, which the EU has always been keen to force in negotiations.

The EU warned Switzerland that free movement is a core pillar of the EU, and that a Yes vote could lead to severe political and trade consequences, including limiting Swiss access to the EU single market.

At least the Swiss could have their say on a matter of national importance – unlike Britain, where any mention of border control or the impact of immigration is shouted down as right wing and racist. ■



University workers campaigning to protect education, London, May 2025.

Action sweeps universities

UNIVERSITY EMPLOYERS are undermining employment protections, attacking pensions, and casualising work across the sector, across the country. Workers continue to resist.

Dozens of UCU and Unison branches are in dispute with their employers over cuts, redundancies, fire-and-rehire tactics, pension attacks and intolerable workloads. From Dundee to Canterbury, from Cardiff to Newcastle, staff are forced into industrial action to defend jobs, pay and the future of provision in their institutions.

At the University of Dundee, staff are confronting severe financial cuts and the threat of compulsory redundancies. At Newcastle University, staff are resisting sweeping restructuring plans and job losses. In Wales, Cardiff University staff have forced the employer to pause job cuts proposed for this year.

At Southampton Solent University, staff are being threatened with the sack unless they agree to transfer their employment to a subsidiary company and leave their industry-standard pension scheme. UCU members at Goldsmiths, University of London, are in dispute over redundancies which risk the future of the institution. They are currently facing 100 per cent pay deductions for participating in a marking and assessment boycott, with a strike that started on 8 June.

Northumbria University wants to introduce two separate salary scales for staff depending on which pension scheme they choose. Those with the Teachers' Pensions Scheme (TPS) would be subject to a punitive pay freeze. UCU members have resisted through industrial action.

London South Bank University (LSBU) members voted for industrial action over LSBU's decision to terminate the contract of every single academic member of staff and pit them against each other in a redundancy selection process determined by the flawed Research Excellence Framework.

At the University of Sussex, UCU, Unison and Unite are opposing plans to cut 200 jobs, with around 600 staff placed at risk of redundancy. The job losses form part of a £35 million cuts programme. Meanwhile, at the University of Edinburgh, staff are taking industrial action over 1,800 job cuts. And at Cambridge University there is a rolling programme of strikes after the announcement of a significant real terms pay cut. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Tuesday 21 July, 7pm

Online CPBML Discussion Meeting (via Zoom)

"Did Brexit really happen?"



It is ten years since the referendum which saw the British people vote to leave the European Union. But the EU continues to have a hold over Britain, aided by the British ruling class and its servants who want to re-join the EU. Is Britain truly independent? Many would be forgiven for wondering if Brexit ever happened!

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

UNIVERSITIES

Victory at Sheffield Hallam

A DISPUTE at Sheffield Hallam University involving lecturers in the University & College Union (UCU) has been resolved – at least for now – following 13 days of solid strike action during May and June.

The employer scrapped plans to move most academic staff to a wholly owned subsidiary company to create a multi-tier workforce and evade the university's legal obligation to provide its teaching staff with access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

72.6 per cent of UCU members voted in a ballot for action, with 87.7 per cent of those voting for strike action and 93.2 per cent for action short of a strike, and this had resulted in a planned 18 days of strikes.

As reported in *Workers* in November 2025, the finances of many of Britain's universities are becoming progressively unstable, sliding deeper and deeper into debt. Hallam University claimed that its proposals were unavoidable in order to secure financial sustainability. ■

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

**A recent CPBML meeting discussed how workers here can
Britain from the crumbling NATO alliance would be a good**

War in the Middle East: a

WAR IN the Middle East – presently in Iran, Lebanon and Gaza – appals most people in Britain. But there is little agreement on what can be done.

The reality is that the British government and ruling class are entangled with the US in these aggressive adventures. That needs to change.

We could ditch the crumbling NATO alliance and end Britain's involvement in foreign wars. Then we could fully exploit Britain's energy potential, build our own defensive capabilities and so on.

Britain could be far more self-reliant politically and industrially. To make that happen, the British working class must take charge. But what does this mean and how can we bring this about?

Self-reliance depends on British independence and more. Importing gas and oil when we have our own gas and oil fields is not self-reliance. And the problem under capitalism self-reliance that it is always at risk.

Nothing 'special'

First, let's look at Britain and the USA. There is no such thing as a "special relationship", and there never has been. The reality is that the US demands that Britain as a NATO ally does as it is told. There is nothing particularly special about that. And this is definitely not in the interests of the British working class – no matter who the US president is or who forms the UK government.

Secondly, what does Britain have to do with the Middle East? This huge region has a history of wars and internal conflicts. And worse, imperialists – Britain, the USA and



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11 April 2026: smoke rises following an Israeli strike on the southern suburbs of Beirut.

others – have for over a century often intervened in their own economic interests.

The foreign exploitation is now dominated by the need for oil. It is often dressed up in other guises but always seeks to divide and subjugate the peoples of the area.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, fully supported by the Blair Labour government, was declared necessary because they had "weapons of mass destruction" that were never found.

The Chilcot report into the Iraq war eventually came out in July 2016, when the

Leave referendum result dominated news. It trashed just about all Blair's policy announcements and justifications.

This brings us to more recent events. The US and Israel started to bomb Iran this February – in violation of the UN Charter and without a Security Council resolution. Their war of aggression has no legal basis.

Pretext

The pretext for this war was to destroy Iran's missile programme and to bring about regime change. Neither has happened. Misinformation abounds.

'The problem is that under capitalism self-reliance is always at risk...'

...n respond to foreign wars. One conclusion: removing
...d start...

...n working class response



The US also claimed that its actions would stop Iran developing nuclear weapons, although there is no proof that it is doing so. Iran has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty for nuclear weapons. Israel has not – it has its own nuclear weapons but won't admit it.

At the emergency UN Security Council meeting on Iran, the US attempted to justify the war using ancient Security Council resolutions, a sign of desperation. Iran's Ambassador said, "True to a regrettable pattern the United States has attempted to distort facts and rely on misinformation to

justify the blatant aggression."

The US and Israel expected Iran to collapse within a short time. Iran did not, despite assassinations of leaders, and continues to resist.

So what should our response in Britain be to the US and Israeli attacks on Iran? And to the Israeli government's brutal bombing campaigns against Gaza and Lebanon?

As British workers, we can only influence what happens in Britain. There is opposition here to wars in the Middle East, but as yet little direct questioning of the adherence to NATO and the USA.

But it is Britain where focus is needed. There is little or no support evident in Britain for increased costs arising from the war – dearer fuel increases the cost of living all round. Workers protest and fight against rising costs and inflation, but that does not go as far as tackling the causes.

Does opposing NATO and wars abroad mean we are against defending Britain? Certainly not! But to defend Britain there is no need to engage in foreign wars or to finance them.

Staying out?

Starmer declares he will stay out of the Iran war. Yet he agrees (eventually) that the US can use its air bases here to attack Iran. He sends Royal Navy ships to the area. British jets shoot down missiles and drones over the Middle East claiming that protects British and allied assets.

Britain retains armed forces deployed across the Middle East – with bases in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Cyprus.

The government constantly says there is not enough money for what is needed in Britain. We have a cost of living crisis while the government spends billions on wars and supporting wars.

War abroad and war on workers at home go together. There is never a shortage of money for war.

Lacking the support of the British people, the government talks up the threat of Iran and Russia, urging national unity in the face of external threats.

It's not going to be enough to fight for better wages to counter rising costs here. Our working class needs to tell Starmer,

and anyone who follows him, to get out of wars everywhere and to stop financing countries that are involved in wars. That means distancing Britain from the US government, and the EU, by calling for us to leave NATO.

Such calls would be a start in taking charge of Britain's involvement with the rest of the world. It would challenge politicians and the ruling class who would have us believe we have no power or influence.

Why is our working class so reluctant to get out of NATO – or even to ask the question whether we should? Do we believe it is possible to defend ourselves outside NATO? Apparently not – or not yet.

Shut the bases

Only by leaving NATO can we demand that US bases here are closed and US forces are told to leave. The US will be furious of course: it never likes being told what to do and believes only in its own sovereignty, no one else's.

Britain was most influential in the formation of NATO (notably promoted by Ernest Bevin, former trade union leader, foreign minister in the post war Attlee Labour government and ardent anti-communist). Why should we not be just as influential in leaving NATO?

Does a focus on Britain mean ignoring wars elsewhere? Certainly not!

We say that war is inherent to capitalism, and it is impossible to have capitalism without war. Marching against war without challenging the causes of war, without challenging capitalism in its homeland, will not achieve change. And sectarian marching for one side or another in a foreign war will set back the unity of the British working class.

To move forward against war and for the future of Britain will mean the British working class deciding that it will no longer live with capitalism but will reject it.

Once question of the necessity or inevitability of capitalism is on the agenda in Britain, we will have a new direction, and we will be starting to take charge.

Bringing this about can't happen without struggle and debate. A clear and determined response to the current drive to war can help to create the climate where such progress is possible. ■

How to measure the rate of inflation may seem a technical matter for workers, not least because of its role as a refer

Counting the cost of infla

MOST PAY negotiations involve arguments about the rate of inflation. Whether a pay rise meets the inflation rate determines whether it's a real increase in terms of purchasing power or not.

Or sort of. Because the way the headline rate of inflation is calculated can significantly underestimate the real costs facing workers. And beware: the government is planning changes to the way it measures inflation.

The changes coming down the track in Britain may not have been given much publicity, but they will have consequences. And not just for pay bargaining: the government uses one particular measure of inflation, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), as a reference point for changes in pensions.

The first systematic cost-of-living index in Britain began as a monthly publication by the Board of Trade from July 1914 and was used during World War I as the basis for wage increases.

It continued to be calculated by the Ministry of Labour up until 1947, when it was developed into a new Interim Retail Prices Index. Further advances in the collection of price information then carried through to the first official Retail Prices Index (RPI) from 1956.

The rise of CPI

Some of Britain's finest statisticians played an important role in establishing the index, which then largely remained unchallenged for half a century as Britain's principal measure of inflation until the rise of the CPI began to assert itself.

The two rates rarely align, and the RPI tends to be higher than the CPI. The latest calculations from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) put the CPI at 2.8 per cent



Workers

RMT workers on a TUC march, 2023. RMT policy is to use RPI in all negotiations, and to inform h

and the RPI at 3.1 per cent. According to Trading Economics, since 2015 the RPI has risen by around 10 percentage points more than the CPI.

And for all this, we can thank the European Union. That's because the CPI is the British version of the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices, developed by the European Union and adopted by it in 1997 to assess whether EU member states fulfilled the inflation convergence criterion for joining the European Monetary Union.

Significantly, the Harmonised Index,

and therefore the CPI established in Britain, excluded housing costs. Why? Because the statistics couldn't be collected from member states at the right frequency, and the data couldn't be incorporated into a harmonised index because owner-occupation and rental percentages vary hugely from country to country.

Mirage

In other words, the idea of a harmonised EU inflation rate was a mirage. Of course, that did not deter Brussels. Nor did it deter

'We can thank the European Union for the Consumer Prices Index...'

l, dry subject. And much of it is. But its implications
ence point for pay bargaining...

ation measures



Head Office if an employer tries to use CPI.

Blair's Labour government from following its European dream.

Rather than accept the reality that the EU's index was totally unsuitable for Britain, the Labour government adopted it. In 2023 it established the CPI as the target rate for the Bank of England in setting interest rates, as a follow-up to one of the first acts of the government on attaining office in 1997, when it handed over control of monetary policy to the bank.

Consequently, like a cuckoo in the nest, the CPI rose from a footnote in ONS infla-

tion reports to a dominant position, relegating the RPI to the footnote. In so doing, it dealt a massive blow to lower income groups whose housing costs typically account for far more than those of higher earners.

According to the Trust for London, housing costs of people in poverty account on average for 57 per cent of income, as against 12 per cent for those not in poverty.

The UK Statistics Authority (the UKSA, which oversees the work of the ONS) then swung its support firmly behind a version of the CPI called CPIH, which makes an adjustment for the fact that the CPI does not take account of owner occupier costs (despite the majority of dwellings in the UK being owner occupied).

And it got worse. In 2020 the then Conservative government accepted a recommendation from the UKSA to effectively abolish the RPI from 2030.

Displaying a sleight of hand even in the way the change is to be made, a measure called RPI will be retained, but the way in which it will be calculated will be entirely shifted to CPIH.

Every time the proposal to downgrade the RPI had been put out to consultation, it invariably met overwhelming opposition, but the UKSA appeared set on a course from the outset that no arguments would deflect it from erasing the measure.

Unconvincing

This was despite a marked inability to offer a convincing case to justify the dumping of the RPI. Firstly, the authority made the case on the basis of "substitution" – the concept that people switch to cheaper alternative goods and services when faced with price increases. But it was then forced to acknowledge that the effect on the RPI was uncertain because of lack of accuracy in deciding the scale of substitution.

Then the government resorted to a statistical tendency called "price bounce" – until it found that this contributed less than 0.1 per cent to the value of the RPI. And finally it has fallen back on "international best practice", which is suspiciously similar to the argument that a lot of other countries use the CPI so we should follow suit.

The RPI tends to run about 1 per cent

'The discrepancy between RPI and CPI can have a significant impact over time...'

above the CPI – and the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) expects it do so until at least 2030. A discrepancy – the OBR calls it a "wedge" – may seem small but it can have a significant impact on the cash value of wage increases for workers, particularly over time.

Of course, there's nothing automatic about inflation translating into pay rises. The collective strength of the workforce against the employer will always be the main driver of winning increases.

Upward pressure

But the RPI is an upward pressure on wages and for the average full time wage in 2025, 1 per cent means around £400. Multiplying that across workplaces, as well as the effect of increases year upon year, puts the total effect in perspective.

The government benefits bill is also affected as the CPI is generally linked to Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance, maternity benefits and the state pension. The total cost of the welfare system – 55 per cent of which is the cost of the state pension – is around £330 billion, so an extra 1 per cent in the measure of inflation would add billions to government costs.

When dealing with anyone who has specialist knowledge, such as a doctor or a mechanic, there is always a tendency to accept a diagnosis on the basis that "they must know what they're taking about". But there's no economics without politics.

Workers who are unwilling to get to grips with political economics are in danger of being hoodwinked. And in the case of inflation measurement, workers are vulnerable to a statistical mugging. ■

When talking about energy policy, it's worth looking in detail at the means for industry and households...

Accounting for energy

PEOPLE KNOW what is going on with their energy bills. A More in Common poll in March showed that rising energy bills have overtaken higher food prices as the public's biggest cost of living concern.

The average household energy bill is to rise by £209 a year to £1,850. Household energy debt has more than doubled over the last three years to £5.5 billion.

The government blames Brexit for these rises, but they are the effect of its own net zero policies. Its charges and levies are the main driver of higher household bills, not wholesale gas prices. And they could add a further £300 to each household bill over the next 4 to 5 years.

Each successive government has had decarbonisation as an overriding aim. But this compromises the need British industries have for secure, reliable and cheap energy. "Sustainable growth" has undercut real growth.

The UN accounting system for carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions doesn't count emissions from making products from imported goods, or from using imported hydrocarbons. Imported goods often create far higher emissions than their British-made equivalents.

For example, using North Sea gas rather than importing liquefied natural gas from the USA would cut CO₂ emissions by an estimated 218 million tonnes. Or there's the possibility of gas from the Gainsborough Trough field in Lincolnshire. It holds at least 480 billion cubic metres of recoverable gas.

Britain is importing ever more goods –

'Net zero policies result in a perverse incentive to send British industrial production and supplies abroad...'



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with their own carbon footprint arising from their manufacture and transport. These imported goods now account for over 60 per cent of Britain's carbon footprint.

The government claims a reduction in emissions of about 50 per cent between 1990 and 2022, in line with its targets. But take account of imported emissions and the fall is less than 20 per cent.

Net zero policies result in a perverse incentive to send British industrial production and supplies abroad. Offshoring may help to meet arbitrary net zero emissions targets. The cost is that Britain is heading to net zero industry.

In 2024, Britain still relied on oil, gas and a little coal for 75 per cent of primary energy consumption. Gas alone accounts for 40 per cent. Oil and gas fuel the cement, ceramics, glass, aluminium and steel industries. High energy costs penalise

these industries, vital for building, driving up construction costs.

The output of Britain's energy-intensive manufacturing industries is at its lowest level for 35 years. The share of manufacturing in Britain's gross domestic product has fallen dramatically – from 16 per cent in 1990 to 8 per cent in 2022. Unsurprisingly, CO₂ emissions have halved.

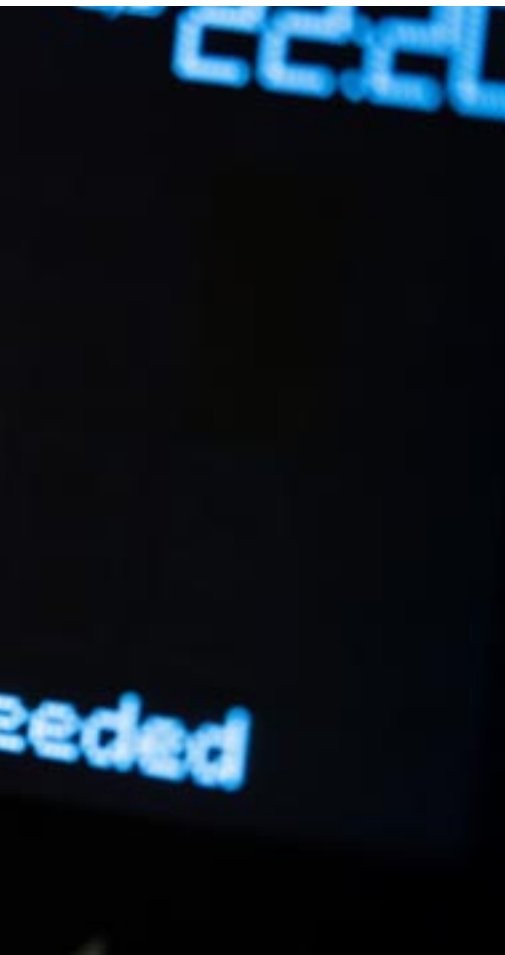
Falling production

But British oil production fell from 53 million tonnes in 2009 to 31 million in 2024. Gas production fell from 436.5 gigawatt-hours in 2009 to 343.9 gigawatt-hours in 2024.

Even the Climate Change Committee admits that Britain will need 13 to 15 billion barrels of oil equivalent in fossil fuel energy each year from 2025 to 2050. We are on track to produce only 4 billion.

Successive governments have encour-

Crail at Britain's energy needs and supply – and what that



Doomsday? No way

THE COUPLED Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP), the international committee responsible for producing the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has just published the next generation of climate scenarios. And they differ markedly from the previous doomsday forecasts.

This new framework has eliminated the most extreme scenarios that have dominated climate research for decades

– including RCP8.5 (Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5), which predicted a 5 degree increase in global temperatures by 2100.

The IPCC has had to withdraw this forecast. It now deems implausible the extreme scenarios that it has employed to justify the extreme policy reaction of trying to commit the world to net zero by 2050. This is an important development, which ought to change climate policy. ■

always be available to make good any shortfalls in supply. On this theory, it is always rational to replace domestic production with imports whenever they're cheaper.

But capitalist economics doesn't hold when there is any kind of international crisis affecting the flow of supplies. In these times, to depend on foreign suppliers is risky and expensive. The USA, from 1975 to 2015, chose to ban oil exports to ensure its own domestic supplies.

And Britain still has about 77 million tonnes of proven, recoverable coal reserves that could be profitably mined. Anti-coal activists try to prevent this, for example managing to close down Ffos-y-fran at Merthyr Tydfil, a mine with workable reserves.

Penalised

Coal-fired generation is cheaper than gas and renewables, when it is not penalised by the Emissions Trading Scheme and the Carbon Price Support mechanism. Without these, wholesale electricity prices would fall from £78.45 per megawatt-hour (in December 2025) to under £49. The Climate Change Levy adds 5-7 per cent to a typical non-domestic electricity bill, and raises the electricity price by £7.75 per megawatt-hour.

Britain will be short of reliable baseload electricity generation soon unless new capacity comes on stream fast. Baseload power is the minimum, continuous amount of electricity an electrical grid must supply to meet constant consumer and industrial

demand 24 hours a day. New gas-fired power plants take eight years to build. Coal ones can be built quickly – in China it takes two years. Coal storage is easy and cheap.

Renewable energy payments cost British consumers over £17 billion a year. Renewables Obligations – separate subsidies paid to renewables companies – cost £7.8 billion in 2024-25.

Fossil fuels still account for over 80 per cent of the world's energy consumption. Over three-quarters of the world's population live in oil-importing countries. Net importers spent \$1.7 trillion on fossil fuels in 2024. Every \$10 increase in oil prices adds about \$160 billion to the world's import bill.

Global CO2 emissions rose by 3 per cent between 2022 and 2024. They rise in line with manufacturing output. Growing economies like China and India account for 40 per cent of the world's emissions.

In 2024 Britain accounted for 1 per cent of world emissions, now for 0.8 per cent – 367 million tonnes, 54 per cent down from 1990. But global emissions increased by one per cent, 500 million tonnes, to a record high of 38.1 billion tonnes. All those decarbonisation efforts aren't affecting global emissions.

Net zero by 2050 is still government policy, as it has been since 2019, when the Theresa May administration amended the 2008 Climate Change Act. This current government has just announced that it wants us to achieve an 87 per cent cut in emissions by 2040, accelerating the drive to destroy industry. ■

aged companies to import energy. That amounts to just under half the oil, half the gas, and almost 90 per cent of the coal. According to the *Digest of UK Energy Statistics* published in July 2025, Britain depended on imports for 44 per cent of the total energy need in 2024, up from 40 per cent the previous year.

Yet the North Sea Transition Authority – the government regulator – has said that up to 25 billion barrels of oil and gas could be recovered from our waters if world prices and our taxes were favourable.

Increasing domestic supply would cut industry's energy costs, helping to revive industry, and would cut unemployment. North Sea Brent Crude is well suited to producing petrol, diesel, jet fuel and chemicals.

Conventional supply-and-demand economic theory assumes that imports will

We live in dangerous times – often said, but it’s true. The way forward: independence...

For British independence



Workers

Demonstration outside the US Embassy, London, 20 January 2025.

AFTER THE Second World War it must have seemed that the main cause of war in the world was fascism, and that with its defeat there would be no more war.

Communists had always said that fascism was only a more violent, aggressive form of capitalism. Supporters of capitalism – which they like to call “democracy” – have always worked to create an entirely opposite point of view.

They lump fascism together with communism as “totalitarianism”. They deliberately ignore the fact that Hitler’s first and main objective was to eradicate Marxism, to destroy communism – the same aim as that of present-day supporters of capitalism.

Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are described as “allies” because of their 1939 non-aggression pact. Yet Britain had already signed a treaty with Hitler in 1935, and in 1938 signed a further agreement, at

Munich, to allow Hitler to carve up Europe. That’s ignored too. As is the Soviet Union’s earlier wish for a pact with Britain, which was refused.

But it was not fascism that led to the Second World War, it was capitalism. And since the cause of war was capitalism, and as capitalism was not uprooted in 1945, then the threat of war continued to exist.

The other, equally dangerous element of pro-capitalist thinking is that communism – the force which ended the first world war as well as the second – is labelled as the problem, not the solution.

Hounded

Communism and communists have been hounded and diminished to a dangerous level. That makes a third world war more likely. Before socialism triumphed in 1917, wars occurred in Europe in pretty much every generation since antiquity. With the

triumph of socialism over fascism in 1945 there was nigh on half a century of peace in Europe – unprecedented.

Post-war supporters of capitalism falsely claimed that the USSR was the greatest threat to peace. Communists tried to explain that without socialism in the world restraining capitalism, war would follow. History has borne this out completely.

NATO was formed in 1949 to oppose the supposed threat of the USSR. The end of the Soviet Union in 1991 also saw the dissolution of its military alliance, the Warsaw Pact. NATO should have been abolished then as well, according to its apparent reason for existence. But within two years, NATO bombed the formerly socialist country of Yugoslavia

NATO has doubled in size since 1989; now there are 32 members. It is not a defensive organisation but an aggressive, warmaking organisation of belligerent

world is getting steadily more dangerous. But there is a

e, for peace

states led by the USA and Britain.

The truth that generations of communists sought to explain before, during, and after the last world war will have to be explained afresh – capitalism causes war. Until and unless capitalism is uprooted there will be war. And the more unchallenged capitalism is, the bigger the war, and the greater the threat.

That is why the times we live in are so dangerous.

But there's another, possibly unpopular, idea: an even greater threat would come from failing to oppose capitalism and all its impacts. Our inability, or worse still, our lack of desire to oppose it, threatens us all.

The inability of enough people to oppose fascism in the 1930s led to war. Now the inability of enough people to oppose NATO will lead to another world war – unless something changes.

Where is Britain in all this? Britain is the USA's second in NATO. The older, willier ruling class, Britain never fails to be there for its transatlantic boss. But opposition here will need to be on its guard. Given half a chance Starmer will do Trump's bidding.

Crucial to any ruling class attack plan is to make sure that the people do not oppose them. And key to this is to demonise those with whom they want to go to war.

Saddam Hussein, who the west had supported for decades, suddenly became

a bad man because he wouldn't do what he was told, and because the US ruling class wanted Iraq's oil.

Too many people avoid seeing the truth. Some believed, or chose to accept, lies about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in 2003. And now they blame Iran for having non-existent nuclear weapons, which the USA until recently agreed they didn't have!

The truth about WMD is the direct opposite of what we're constantly told. Iraq, Iran and the 30 or so countries attacked or invaded by the USA since the end of the Second World War suffered precisely because they do not have WMD. Those countries with WMD – Russia, China, and now North Korea – have not been invaded.

The US view of Russia as untrustworthy and aggressive is paraded as undeniable truth. Yet it was the USA who broke agreements it made with the Soviet Union. The deal was clear: in return for the USSR agreeing to a reunited Germany joining NATO, NATO would move no further east. That was simply ignored.

And now we must apparently accept the US view of China as a country that steals technology and is an unfair trade competitor. China is painted as militarily aggressive because it wants to take back part of its own territory, Taiwan, stolen from it with US support in 1949.

'An even greater threat would come from failing to oppose capitalism and all its impacts...'

To the extent that peace exists, how to protect it? There is a permanent, undeclared war, war against workers, at home and abroad. Our class, the working class, needs to recognise this first of all. And then we need to declare war. Class war against our class enemy.

The first world war was only ended by the Bolsheviks in Russia declaring war on their class enemies, pulling tsarist Russia out of the war by destroying the tsar, and his ruling class.

The second world war wouldn't have ended when it did unless that war had been successfully waged by the world anti-fascist coalition, led by those same pesky Russian Bolsheviks who, even Churchill

Continued on page 14



Workers

CPBML discussion meeting

Tuesday 21 July, 7 pm, via Zoom

“Did Brexit really happen?”

It is ten years since the referendum which saw the British people vote to leave the European Union. But the EU continues to have a hold over Britain, aided by the British ruling class and its servants who want to re-join the EU.

Is Britain truly independent? Many would be forgiven for wondering if Brexit ever happened!

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



Continued from page 13

had to admit, did most of the fighting.

Remove those anti-war forces who are prepared to take up arms against capitalism and capitalism will kill us all. And that is the threat before us now.

What to do here in Britain?

We must be independent of mind, not easily swayed by the organs of propaganda. Our predecessors had to develop such independence.

All the freedom and rights we enjoy had to be wrenched away from a ruling class who never conceded anything unless they felt threatened.

All of the advances of 1945, the NHS and the rest, came because a million workers were under arms. But there are deep roots to workers' independence of mind going back to the great Reformation of the sixteenth century.

The controlling of religion that this great movement proclaimed had lasting benefits

'We have blazed a brave trail in leaving the EU. We can be even braver by leaving NATO and becoming independent of the US...'

for the development of Britain – right through to the industrial revolution and the modern working class.

What are the tasks in hand today? First of all, we must as a country assert our independence.

The EU represents capitalism just as certainly as fascism does, just in a different way. We took a huge step forward by declaring our independence from the EU in 2016. But we didn't uproot capitalism, so we have the threat of the EU all over again.

The EU and NATO are two faces of the same coin. To join the EU a country must become a member of NATO. To share the perceived benefits of EU membership you must be prepared to die for NATO. So to be independent you must leave the EU, and then leave NATO.

We have blazed a brave trail in leaving the EU. We can be even braver by leaving NATO and crucially becoming independent of the USA.

How to do this? Well first of all we can make it known that no US or British planes must go from these shores to kill people in independent countries overseas, whether in Iran or anywhere else.

Withdrawing from NATO will be twenty times harder than withdrawing from the EU, but twenty times more important and necessary. We can't expect a referendum on an exit from NATO. That will be our national liberation struggle.

We must also make it clear that the gangster capitalism exercised by the US is not supported in Britain. Kidnapping elected presidents is Trump acting in a long tradition of US hegemony and also stepping it up.

While Venezuela has oil, Cuba is the running political sore for the US. For our part we cannot allow the name of the British government to be put to any single move against the Republic of Cuba. The British government must oppose the Americans' criminal blockade of Cuba, and must break it.

Class conscious

Secondly, we must as workers be independent at work, independent of our employer.

That's what our trade unions are for. Use them as the place to discuss what's

wrong at work, what should be done to improve things, and then take the necessary steps to assert control. That's how we can really act as a working class.

Our trade unions must be used to meet, support and embrace each other, not to divide and exclude. Unity is not only the strength of our class, it is now a matter of life and death.

For Britain, independence and peace are now indivisible. We cannot have peace without independence. And unless we assert independence, war will come.

Hate

Hate is a horrible thing – the opposite of love and almost always a negative characteristic. But sometimes it is necessary to hate. We must hate exploitation and exploiters. We must hate torture and torturers. We must hate oppression and oppressors. We must hate fascism, and we must hate capitalism.

Our enemies hate us. Look at the language of Trump, of Starmer, of Thatcher. Not to hate our enemies hands them the advantage. It is because we love our people, our families, our country, that we hate those who would harm all those things.

Capitalism and its political parties and governments hate our people, and want to deny us our country. They want to rule unopposed, and if we don't oppose them war will come to us, to our families, to our country.

British workers have had more than two centuries' experience of capitalism, of the exploitation, the poverty, the sadness it creates. We should put up with it no longer.

On this May Day we celebrate, and we warn. We celebrate our working class, its refusal to be subservient, but we warn that permanent defence means permanent subjection, not freedom.

We celebrate our bold decision, against all the odds, to leave the capitalist club, the EU, ten years ago. Now we must be even bolder, and leave the capitalist war machine, NATO. ■

• This article is an edited extract from the speech given at our May Day 2026 meeting in London.

Teachers are heading for struggle, returning to issues not settled after action in recent years...

Gearing up for action

TEACHERS ALL OVER Britain are steeling themselves for a fight over pay and funding. The largest teaching union in England and Wales, the National Education Union (NEU) has announced a formal ballot on industrial action after the summer holiday. That's unless the government significantly improve its recommended pay award of 6.5 per cent spread over the next three years.

This figure represents an erosion of real pay with annual inflation at around 3 per cent. And even those pay rises will not be fully funded. Again, schools will have to cut budgets elsewhere. Existing teaching and support staff, special needs provision and buildings and equipment maintenance are likely targets.

The School Teacher Review Body has yet to publish its 2026 report with pay recommendations. If, as expected, these are in line with the government's recommendation, redundancies and increasing workload will certainly follow.

Falling school rolls have brought redundancy and closure in primary schools. This now affects secondaries. Teachers could in response demand smaller class sizes, both improving the quality of education and reducing their excessive workload.

Ballot

The NEU's formal ballot of teachers and support staff begins on 3 October. In the indicative ballot held earlier in the year, 96 per cent of responding teachers voted to reject the offer, with 90 per cent willing to take industrial action.

Around 55 per cent of support staff voted in their own indicative ballot, with 86 per cent prepared to take industrial action in the fight for better funding.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson condemned the union's decision as "wildly premature" in a BBC interview on 7 June. She said "We haven't even gone through the pay review process. And we are investing record sums in our schools, and they have had big and generous pay awards".

Announcing the decision to ballot, NEU general secretary Daniel Kebede, said, "The cracks in our education system are obvious to all. Schools are running on empty. Pay and workload issues are driving



Workers

Teachers marching in London, February 2023, in their last campaign.

many out of the profession, resulting in a recruitment and retention crisis that is directly impacting on the education of our children and young people."

The NEU is digging in for a long campaign. The government always delays pay discussions and publishes recommendations at the start of teachers' holidays.

By announcing its decision well before the summer break, the union is preparing its members by flagging up now that it intends to ballot. That will help with planning for local and national initiatives aimed at creating a fully committed workforce.

The union describes this action as part of its campaign to save education. It invites the support of parents and all workers who desire a high quality, properly funded education system for their children.

Other teaching unions are taking a similar stand. The other main union for class-

room teachers, NASUWT, agreed at its 2026 annual conference in April to ballot for national strike action if demands are not met. These include significant new investment in special needs education, a reversal of job cuts across the country, and urgent national action to tackle excessive workload.

The NAHT head teachers' union has also backed calls for an indicative ballot on industrial action. At their annual conference in May, delegates supported a motion calling "for all steps necessary, up to and including industrial action" towards a fully funded, inflation-plus pay award.

With a range of unions representing one profession, successive governments have exploited differences to blunt the impact of any action. This present unanimity of thought bodes well for a successful campaign. ■

In the second of a two-part feature *Workers* looks at the contest for the Arctic's natural resources...

The fight for the Arctic: g



Manuel Ernst/UFA-Filmteam (CC BY 3.0)

Drone image of Chinese polar vessel.

THE MAY/JUNE issue of *Workers* looked at a European Parliament report signalling the EU's ambitions for leadership in the Arctic, and warned of Britain being dragged into war over the Arctic by the combined forces of the EU and NATO.

In this part we look at the contest between the EU and the other imperial powers – the USA, Russia and China – for the Arctic's natural resources, and the risks of surrendering economic independence and sovereignty through unreliable partnerships with foreign powers.

For Britain, neutrality and self-reliant industrial development should be the path to economic security, peace, and working class progress.

The EU, through undermining the authority of the Arctic Council, poses a threat to unity and peace in the region. The

2025 European Parliament report to the Commission spelled out exactly why the EU aspires to be an Arctic contender.

It says, "...the Arctic's abundant hydrocarbons, rare earth elements, fisheries and other resources are increasingly coveted." It means, by China and Russia. And continues, "the Arctic holds diverse energy resources crucial for the EU's green and digital transitions."

EU self-interest

EU self-interest wants China and Russia out of the way. A new package of sanctions aimed at slashing Russian oil revenues was passed in Brussels in April. Britain followed suit. The EU blacklist of shadow tankers was expanded to 640. UK forces seized a Russian vessel for the first time in June, shortly after defence minis-

ters' resignations, and challenges to the PM's leadership. The timing is unlikely to be a coincidence.

Within its own sphere of influence, the EU continues to push a policy of keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground. Even where nations like Norway have asserted their independence, the EU pursues a strategy of ignoring national decision-making.

And, like NATO, the EU responds to indecisiveness or resistance with predatory "partnerships" – as with Greenland, Iceland, and Norway – to exert its influence right up to the Russian border. The EU calls this "peaceful cooperation".

Norway is pushing back against EU calls to halt Arctic oil and gas development. Last year it launched the Johan Castberg oil field, its second largest and most northerly in the Barents Sea. It will produce

Contest between the EU and the other imperial powers for

grabbing its resources

220,000 barrels a day for thirty years, positioning Norway as a reliable long-term supplier to Europe in place of Russia.

The rupture in relations between Canada and the USA due to threats of US annexation and tariffs has resulted in a nation-building programme. This entails strengthening Canadian energy and defence systems, building critical mineral supply chains, developing low emissions alternatives to diesel for heating and ventilating mines – and Inuit-Canadian sovereignty over the Northwest Passage.

With planning and investment, extraction and decarbonisation are not mutually exclusive. For instance Canadian universities have recently shown that a key Arctic naturally occurring, non-fossil hydrogen gas known as “white hydrogen” is escaping in significant amounts from deep below the earth’s surface in northern Ontario and elsewhere.

Crowded

The Arctic is rich in untapped minerals. It’s now a crowded and competitive field, with critical minerals at the heart of policy. In 2019 the USA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Greenland to “jointly survey the region and exchange scientific and technical knowledge to develop rare earth and critical mineral resources”.

But the Chinese company Shenghe Resources was already there, jointly developing the Kvanefjeld Rare Earths project. This later hit snags: rare earths are often bonded with uranium, the extraction of which is prohibited by law in Greenland. The other developer is now apparently looking to a NATO-oriented partner.

Although drilling for uranium has been authorised in Alaska, the USA has been neglectful of its own mineral potential. Between 2020 and 2022 it invested around \$100 billion in gigafactories for processing. Meanwhile the raw materials were piling up in China, which pursues a strategy of stockpiling and weaponising export of rare earths.

Now the USA hopes that Nordic deposits will boost its own supplies. In 2024 it signed a Critical Minerals Agreement with Norway, promising to cooperate on energy security.

Greenland is thought to contain significant deposits of indium, essential to the supply of semiconductors. This new must-have ore promises independence from China to whoever can secure that supply (and presumably from Taiwan as well, semiconductor capital of the world).

Three years ago Sweden discovered the largest deposit of rare earth metals in Europe at the Kiruna iron ore mine in the Arctic north of the country. Geological surveys estimate that Greenland may contain even more rare earths – 25 of the 34 raw materials identified as critical. This led to the EU and Greenland signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2023.

“Nothing about us without us”, runs the Greenlanders’ slogan in defence of their autonomous right to strike their own deals. So they are undeterred in seeking ties with China.

Since 2017 the Royal Greenland Seafood company has brought in Chinese workers for fish processing. Greenland has a massive trade surplus with China – the reverse of China’s usual economic position. In 2022 Greenland exported \$353 million worth of goods, with a mere \$788,000 of imports.

To the imperial powers now massing in the High North, conflict in space has also now become a realistic prospect, with launch sites in Sweden and Norway. The EU wants money for space from the Starmer-led “Coalition of the Willing” – supposedly just about Ukraine’s war with Russia.

But undoubtedly the Arctic is central to Russian military thinking. Its northern coast is heavily militarised and it has a foothold on Svalbard, identified by NATO as a potential flashpoint. China also has a presence there, with a research station established in 2003.

The USA wants to open at least three new bases on Greenland and, without a trace of irony, have them designated “Sovereign Base Areas”. The arms control treaty between the USA and Russia expired in February, further augmenting the potential for conflict.

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO has provoked Russia into repeated probing and testing of NATO

‘The Arctic is now a crowded and competitive field, with critical minerals at the heart of policy. ...’

defences. A House of Lords report, titled *Our Friends in the North*, warned, “NATO’s enlargement will unavoidably increase Russia’s sense of vulnerability...It has heightened the role of the Arctic as an area of confrontation.”

The latest NATO initiative is the Task Force X-Arctic, led by the research ship *Alliance*, which set sail from Italy in June to help “maintain the fighting edge...to prevail in the High North”.

As cheerleader in chief for Ukraine, Starmer puts Britain in danger with his increasingly bellicose statements as he prepares his “big leap forward” with the EU and the next NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, on 7-8 July. And there’s no indication that a change of prime minister would mean a change of policy towards the EU or NATO.

A security pact here, a memorandum on minerals there – the four powers circle one other, hungry for the spoils. They are no friend to the workers who fish or mine or fight for them.

Establishing friendly supply chains is essential for any nation. But caught between competition and conflict, the safest path for Britain, and our best contribution to a peaceful Arctic, is to disengage from this war dance now: stop pretending the EU is our ally or that NATO is other than an instrument of war.

Let’s invest in our own considerable natural and human resources, and rebuild our embarrassingly depleted defences to serve the needs of the British people, not imperialism. ■

Homelessness and high rents are two linked aspects of the

London: the sharp end of



THE ABOLITION of “no fault” evictions finally became law in May after many years of campaigning. But that alone does not address the wider housing crisis, as people on a national rally and march in London on 18 April were keen to point out.

There’s much to be done: refurbish the many empty homes, and build homes that are truly affordable and where people need to be – rather than where developers can make the most profit.

Social housing underpins the rental sector. Yet its decline continues – according to the housing charity Shelter, a net loss of 170,000 in England alone over the past decade. Shelter says 90,000 new social homes are needed every year over the next ten years.

Housing problems are evident across Britain, but are most acute in London. Around one in every 45 Londoners is homeless, according to the Single Homeless Project. This includes over 210,000 people living in temporary accommodation, and around 102,000 children.

And many young Londoners are forced to live with their parents – which is also a nationwide issue. Official statistics show that around one in five of all those aged 20-34 years do so.

Priced out

In London rents are so high and housing benefits so low that thousands are priced out of secure homes. The average Londoner spends half their income on rent, leaving little for essentials. Someone becomes homeless every eight minutes.

The charity Crisis emphasises that homelessness is not only about sleeping on the streets. It includes people living in hostels, B&Bs, and unsuitable temporary accommodation, or sofa-surfing because they have nowhere else to go.

But rough sleeping has increased sharply over the past decade. London and the South East now account for nearly half

Placard at the National Housing Demonstration, London, 18 April 2026. The march began in Soho Square and ended in Berkeley Square, Mayfair, outside the offices of Blackstone.

the housing crisis for workers in Britain...

of the housing crisis

of all rough sleepers in Britain – evidence of how concentrated the crisis has become. In London rough sleeping is now spreading beyond the centre and rising in outer London.

According to Evolve Housing + Support, a majority of people sleeping rough in London last year were not originally from Britain, with 139 nationalities recorded. The Chain Annual Bulletin (Greater London 2024-2025) reports that UK nationals made up 47 per cent of those seen rough sleeping, while 21 per cent were from European Economic Area countries, including Romania and Poland.

Asylum support

In March last year, a quarter of rough sleepers had come from asylum support accommodation, the vast majority of whom were illegal migrants. The Migration Observatory reported that by March this year, 58 per cent of asylum seekers in accommodation were still living in hotels in London, almost unchanged from 60 per cent in March 2023.

Statistics show that the average wait for a social home in London is 27 years, and in some areas families needing larger homes face waits of over 100 years. Those figures simply mean that social housing is impossible for many people in London.

A major cause of homelessness in England is eviction from private rented housing. Unfair evictions, soaring rents, and short-term contracts make it difficult for many people to keep their homes. Yet anyone homeless tempted to occupy empty property risks prosecution. It is a criminal offence to squat in a residential building.

Across Britain the severe shortage of social housing has wider consequences for people's lives and health too. They are trapped in unaffordable or poor-quality housing, or stuck in temporary accommodation for months or even years.

Meanwhile, many homes remain empty for financial reasons. Some owners cannot afford repairs. Others buy properties as investments and leave them vacant – so-called “buy to leave” homes. Many more become empty after the owner dies, and remain so until there are new owners who

can manage the property.

Action on Empty Homes reports that there are around 161,000 empty homes in England in 2026. Census data suggests that the real figure may be closer to 300,000. London accounts for a third of all empty council homes, with around 11,000 council properties sitting empty – many cleared for regeneration schemes that often fail to deliver new social rent housing.

Like the national government, the Mayor of London has ambitious targets for housing, but fails to meet them by a long way – even after downward revision.

Each year, more social homes are demolished or sold than built, largely due to the “Right to Buy” scheme in England which lets most eligible council tenants purchase the home they rent at a heavily discounted price.

The housing situation in London may be the most acute in the country, but the problems are everywhere. For example, Bristol is now the least affordable place for rentals – and it is widely recognised that all aspects of housing are critical in that city. The situation is similar in many other cities.

Unaffordable

Such problems shouldn't exist in an advanced nation like Britain. As well as campaigning on the direct impacts of unaffordable and poor housing, the working class needs to address some crucial questions.

We need to ask what prevents workers

‘The average wait for a social home in London is 27 years, and in some areas families needing larger homes face waits of over 100 years....’

from being able to afford housing? That requires having the right to work, and high enough wages to ensure independence, rather than dependence on low benefits.

And then, how can we secure rationally allocated and decent quality social housing? This means prioritising workers already in Britain and controlling immigration.

Only by addressing these fundamental questions and challenging the shortcomings of government – national, devolved and local – can we as a nation permanently put homelessness where it belongs – in the past. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of public, in-person meetings will continue in September. All meeting details will be published on What's On, as well as in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M **As well as our in-person meetings, we hold regular Zoom discussion meetings – the next one, on whether Brexit has actually happened, is on Tuesday 21 July at 7pm. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation. We also run study sessions**
M **for those who want to take the discussion further.**

If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 07308 979 308 or send an email to info@cpbml.org.uk.

The modern world would be unthinkable without the World Wide Web, invented in a physics laboratory and made available to the world for free.

How the Web can be rechecked



CERN

Tim Berners-Lee at his desk at CERN, 1984.

This is for everyone: the captivating memoir from the inventor of the World Wide Web, by Tim Berners-Lee, hardback, 389 pages, ISBN 978-1035023677, Macmillan, 2025, £25. eBook and Kindle editions available. Paperback edition due out 3 September 2026.

TIM BERNERS-LEE invented the world wide web. His fascinating book spells out the opportunities it offers, and the threats which could sabotage them.

He writes, "In the early days of the web, I put my design tools in the hands of individuals, not administrators or corporations primarily motivated by profit. This was one of the best decisions I ever made."

At that time the web belonged to CERN, the joint European particle physics lab in Geneva. If someone above Berners-Lee's pay grade there had a mind to, they could probably have started charging to use it.

"The only way forward, I realized, was to donate the intellectual property behind the web to the public domain. I had never intended to profit personally from the technical protocols I'd written for the web, so this decision didn't impact me – and it

didn't matter. For the web to succeed, it had to be free."

Berners-Lee always knew that the profit motive and possible monopolies might corrupt what he was trying to build.

For anyone to use

So, on 30 April 1993, CERN published the complete source code to his protocols, client and web server software, relinquishing all intellectual property rights, and gave permission to anyone to use, duplicate, modify and distribute it.

Phone technology has revolutionised communications. After about 13 years the web had a billion users. There were two billion smartphones two years after they became available.

And now, a few providers have become dominant, unregulated monopolies. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X – each is a variation on the same concept, delivering media in an endless feed of algorithmically managed addictive content.

These new channels have pushed aside the open space for collaboration and experimentation that defined the web through its first twenty years.

The main obstacle facing the web is the power concentration among a few major sites. In the web, like everywhere else, capitalism's invisible hand of competition does not work. We need an inclusive hand that lets everyone benefit from AI.

Apple took a 30 per cent commission of the apps it sold, and continuing income from subscriptions and in-app purchases. It was far more profitable for Apple to direct developers to build an app than to build a mobile website. Apple got a cut from the former, nothing from the latter.

Providers guide users into the app ecosystem. The toll booths the web had managed to avoid on the PC found their way into the mobile realm. The Apple Store was exactly the kind of for-profit gatekeeping that Berners-Lee had always hoped the web could navigate around.

Yet the web powers most of the apps on our mobile phones and delivers much of their content to them. It powers videoconferencing, augmented reality and AI, whose potential and impact are only just starting to be understood. AI needs data to train on, mostly sourced from the web.

The app marketplace has not replaced the web. The mobile apps were superseding the browser, but the infrastructure that serves the content to these apps still runs on hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) – the foundational set of rules that dictates how data (like text, images, and video) is requested and transmitted across the web.

Apps like X, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok all use HTTP to retrieve content. The web is still there, running behind the scenes.

Social media companies use machine-learning techniques to make users addicted to their platforms, feeding people more and more extreme content. We need to regulate the addictive algorithms, the ones that guide people into rabbit holes.

Berners-Lee believes that we should legislate to control "hostile activism" – harassing people online, intentionally spreading disinformation, and threatening or even committing violence.

The addictive forms of social media have morphed into something misleading, toxic and habit-forming. Too many governments now use the web to spread

Wide Web – invented
free...

claimed

“The only way forward, I realized, was to donate the intellectual property behind the web to the public domain...”

disinformation and surveil their own citizens. Most web traffic is now concentrated in a few large platforms which harvest private data and share it with commercial brokers and repressive governments.

Instead we should work towards the ideal of data sovereignty – that you, not Facebook and so on, should own your profile and your history of interactions. We have to build tools and systems that empower individuals once again.

Control

Berners-Lee has developed a system called the social linked data protocol, or Solid for short. It permits users to take control over all the data in their lives and use it to achieve new results.

As he sums up, we can restore the web as a tool for collaboration, creativity and compassion across cultural borders. We need web agents to serve people, not corporate profits, not governments. Combining collaboration and creativity “could reach a new state of intellectual production I termed ‘intercreativity’: the ability of a group of people to be creative.”

A remarkable book, by a truly remarkable man. By his sheer moral and intellectual integrity, he lines up with the working class, the force of progress. All his working life he has had to struggle to keep his achievements out of the clutches of those enemies of progress who would grab everything good and useful into their own hands, for profit. Hence the huge significance of his work and ambitions. ■

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Mining has never been risk free. A year before the First World War explosion in a South Wales colliery led to Britain's worst mining disaster.

1913: the Senghenydd explosion

MINING IN British deep coal mines, now all closed, was hazardous even in later mechanised pits. Over a hundred years ago, mining in deep coal mines was positively dangerous.

There were over 100,000 deaths in British mines between 1900 and 2000, over 84,000 of them before 1950. In Wales this included the explosions at Senghenydd in 1913 which killed 440 people, Gresford in 1934 where 261 perished and Six Bells in 1960 where 45 lost their lives. Yet such incidents accounted for only a small percentage of the total mine-related deaths.

Also coal-related was the Aberfan disaster in 1966. A coal spoil tip collapsed with the resultant slurry hitting the school as well as cottages and houses – 116 children and 28 adults died.

At about 8am on 14 October 1913 at Senghenydd Universal Colliery in the Aber valley in south Wales there was an explosion in the west side of the mine. 439 miners died, including eight boys aged 14, and one rescuer was killed by a rockfall.

Spark

This was the worst disaster in British mining history. The explosion was probably caused by a spark, perhaps from electric signalling gear. This ignited methane gas (or firedamp as it was known). The explosion caused coal dust lying on the floor of the mine to rise; this also caught fire and exploded. The shock wave promptly caused more coal dust to rise into the air and this also then ignited.

The fires spread through most of the

west side underground workings, quickly followed by afterdamp. This consists of various gases formed by the explosion, including asphyxiants like carbon dioxide and nitrogen as well as poisonous carbon monoxide. Miners who had escaped the explosion would be suffocated due to lack of oxygen unless they could quickly get to the surface or somewhere safe.

Hampered

Rescue teams from other valleys arrived at the scene but attempts to get the men out were hampered by fallen debris, by a series of roof falls and by raging fires. When a rescuer was caught and killed in one of these roof falls, still the other rescuers worked on.

And they did find 18 men and boys still alive in the wreckage. But as the days wore on, survivors grew fewer and carrying out bodies became the norm. The rescue attempts lasted for three weeks although, by then, the chances of finding anyone alive had long since gone.

Both the manager and owners of the Universal Colliery Company were subsequently prosecuted. The £24 fine imposed on the manager produced the headline "Miners' Lives at 1s 1¼d" – the equivalent of around £12 per death today. After court challenges the owners were eventually fined £10 with £5 5s costs – a paltry £2,250 in today's money!

Universal Colliery was back in use by the end of November 1913: full production was again achieved by 1916. The mine was later closed, however, with workmen and staff being given just one day's notice of closure in March 1928.

Until recently there were few memorials to the men and boys who lost their lives at Senghenydd. No memorial was unveiled until 1981 (by the National Coal Board). But in October 2013 on the 100th anniversary of the disaster a Welsh National Mining Memorial and Universal Colliery Memorial Garden was opened in Senghenydd.

This disaster did not come out of the blue. Twelve years earlier, on 24 May 1901, the same colliery had experienced its first disaster. At 5am on that day an explosion killed 81 men on night shift and 50 horses. Just one man and two horses survived.

A miner who survived the 1913 explo-



Workers

Welsh National Mining Memorial and Universal Colliery Memorial statue, designed by Les Johnson, depicts a rescuer helping a miner. It is just some of the many plaques at the memorial.

sion later said, "My father always said there was more fuss if a horse was killed underground than if a man was killed. Men came cheap – they had to buy horses."

Despite recommendations made by the inquiry into the 1901 explosion, and evidence that the Senghenydd pit was dangerously dry, dusty and gas-prone, production continued to expand, reaching 1,800 tons a day by 1913.

The Coal Mines Act 1911 collected together a number of regulations for safe working learned from bitter experience. The act covered control of electrical equipment to prevent sparking, and watering of dusty areas. It also said mines needed to have reversible fans so that clean air could be provided in the case of emergencies.

This law demanded that the fans be reversible by 1 January 1913. The mine owners at Senghenydd asked for and secured approval to extend until 16

"My father always said there was more fuss if a horse was killed underground than if a man was killed..."

World War, an ominous disaster... disaster



Senghenydd Colliery Memorial Garden at Senghenydd. The
worker coming to the aid of a survivor. Inset:
of those who died in October 1913.

September 1913 to implement changes to allow the fans to reverse. This was further extended to 30 September 1913.

Safety failings

At the time of the 1913 explosion, the fans were still not capable of being reversed at Senghenydd. Other aspects of the Act were also not implemented. If the full terms of the legal regulations had been operational at Senghenydd by October 1913, there may well have been fewer deaths. There were no respirators at Senghenydd; the subsequent inquiry deemed that this failing cost lives.

The deaths at Senghenydd in 1913 took the unwanted title of worst disaster nearly half a century after the previous worst disaster – at Oaks Colliery, in Bamsley, Yorkshire, on 12 December 1866, when 361 workers died in two separate explosions. ■

Worried about the future of
Britain? Join the CPBML.



ABOUT US

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

All our members are thinkers 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 as well as online meetings, 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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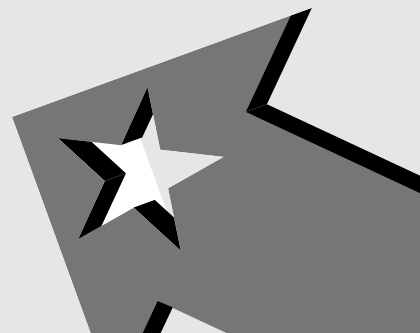
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Britain needs socialism

'The efforts and achievements of the people of Britain should be devoted to their needs and wants. It's as simple as that...'

WHAT WOULD socialism mean for Britain? And what would it take to achieve it?

The ruling class loves passivity in workers – individually and in our class as a whole. Workers are attracted by passivity too. And why not? They have lives to lead and many can't see how to change things.

But when the consequences of not acting become too great and can't be ignored, you can't as an individual or as a class spring into action to fix it unless you have prepared, fought and developed your capacity to resist and assert yourself.

We are told that war is inevitable, but climate change is reversible. It's the other way round. There will always be conflict of some sort but wars are the result of human politics and decisions – which can change.

Climate change is a global, natural process. It is affected by human activity, and we can adapt to it by applying science and engineering, but reversing and controlling it is the stuff of fantasy.

Workers are not passive, even if they choose not to fight the ruling class. But when frustration and division intrude in response to problems caused by capitalism, workers can start to turn on each other instead of the ruling class – chasing illusions and ignoring past lessons and the necessity of unity.

Capitalism does not work, but the ruling class says there is no alternative; they would, wouldn't they? Britain faces many problems: inflation; falling real wages; poverty; lack of work; absence of long-term planning; poor services; failing infrastructure; lack of investment, ineffective regulation. These are said to be "natural" and unavoidable – or at times blamed on greedy, lazy workers, or on Brexit.

Can socialism work instead? The ruling class of course says not; they would, wouldn't they? Do workers believe that too? Do they accept that "human nature" would prevent such a progressive society where ownership of the means of production is held in common and the fruits of production are for the common good?

Do they look to the demise of the Soviet

Union over 30 years ago as proof that such ideas are fanciful and impractical? Or is that an excuse to confirm what they choose to believe?

Workers cooperate – in their daily lives and when exercising political or economic power. They also compete – for jobs and limited resources under capitalism. Capitalists both compete and cooperate as well. The difference is that without cooperation workers can't make any real progress, but capitalists in the end need to eliminate their rivals (as well as exploit their employees).

Apart from nature itself, labour power – the exercise of hand and brain – is ultimately the only source of wealth. That idea is not uniquely Marxist, but capitalist economists try to avoid the consequences. As communists, we say that while we allow the ruling class to control the accumulated products of labour – in short, capital – the economic activity of the country will be devoted to the service of increasing profits, increasing capital.

While capital rules Britain, workers will pay directly by contributing their work, their labour, and paying again in many ways to prop up capitalism. Nationalisation can be positive, even necessary at times. But although it increases opportunities for planning, in a capitalist world it ends up as just another way of subsidising finance capital.

We say that instead, the efforts and achievements of the people of Britain should be devoted to their needs and wants. It's as simple as that – but to be clear it will be immensely hard to achieve and maintain. So the sooner a conscious start is made, the more likely will be its success.

The idea of democracy that began in ancient Athens planted a seed that took centuries to grow, despite many attempts to eradicate it. Nearly 200 years ago, the emerging British working class helped to create the idea that workers can rule without capitalists. Despite changes and setbacks, this idea won't go away.

Stop propping up rotten capitalism. It's time to embrace the possibility of socialism and to work out what that could mean for Britain's future. ■

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