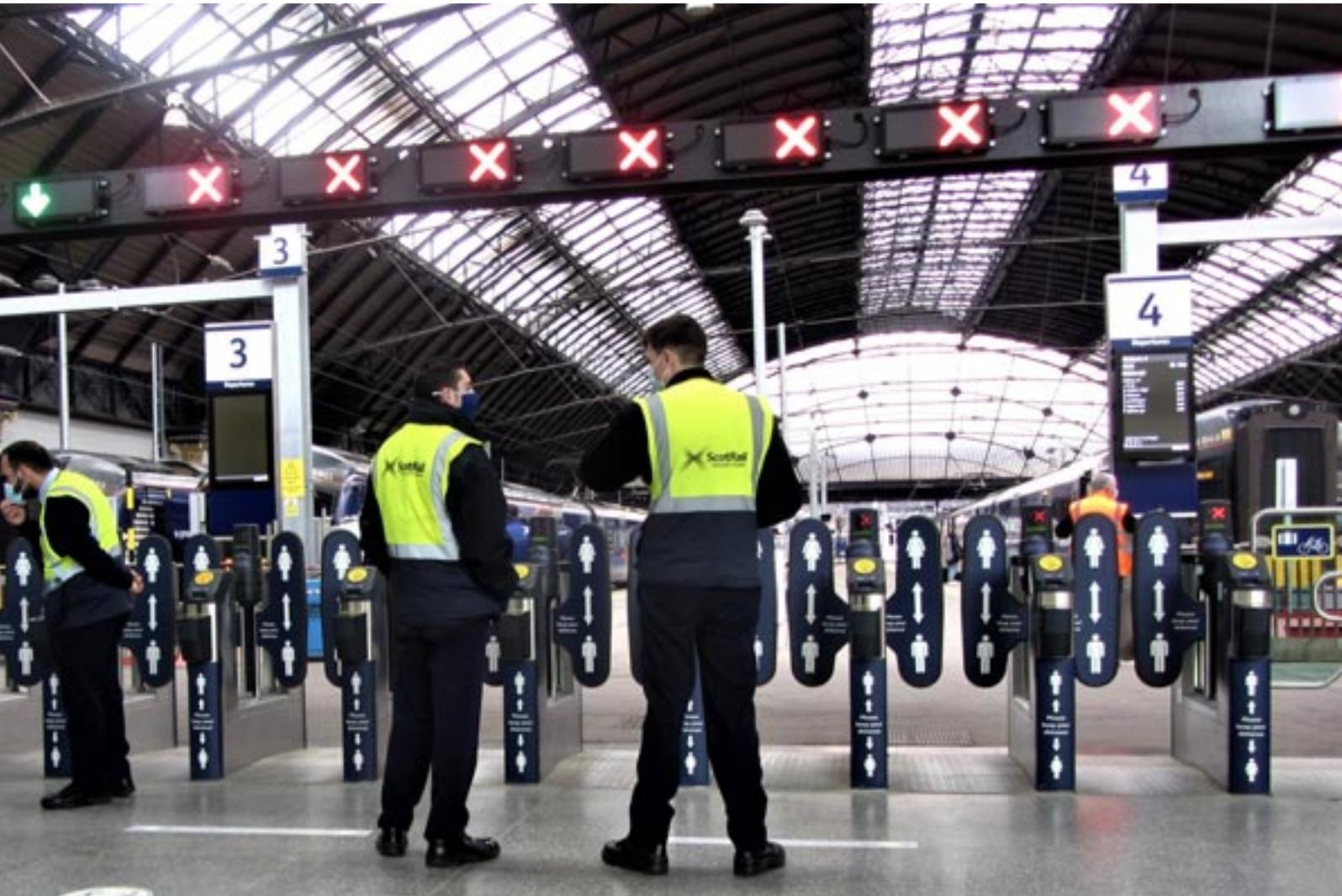


WORKERS

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WORKERS



Workers – the force for change

GLOBAL CAPITALISM warps development across the world. Countries and peoples everywhere become the playthings of billionaires and finance capitalists. Policies and economies serve the capitalist masters rather than meeting the needs of working people, the vast majority. This applies to Britain too.

The 2016 Brexit referendum vote to leave the EU was the first sign that British people were starting to grapple with this. That vote showed an understanding that a nation capable of self-determination is the only effective antidote to global capitalism.

Our EU departure was not as neat and total as it should have been. But it was a crucial beginning. Yet four years into independence, improvements have been small and at the margins. That's insufficient for a nation desperately requiring a wholesale rebuild.

Largely this lack of progress is because our political establishment was against leaving. And it is still disinclined to do anything that might revive production, develop infrastructure or upskill our people. They prefer instead to keep Britain as close to the stupor of EU regulations as possible. Such an approach won't reverse the spiral of decline.

There is only one force that can compel change. Us, the working class of Britain. The British ruling class is thoroughly enmeshed within global capitalism: it won't initiate progress. The mainstream Conservative and Labour parties, with remarkably similar policies, are utterly subservient to Capital.

As workers are the catalyst for radical change, we must not lessen our impact by endlessly chasing election outcomes. Not should we trail after parties that will never challenge or overturn the failing system. We should never reduce our social pressure or drain away momentum by becoming diverted into that supreme cul de sac, Westminster.

To change the direction of Britain we have to rely on ourselves.

Workers in many industries and services have moved into action on pay and other issues, raising questions about how these sectors need to be developed if they are to meet the needs of the people in the future. Even more millions should join in.

And it is not just up to trade unionists. The working class in Britain is vast. Professional and trade bodies can play a vital role. Those campaigning over single issues such as energy, sewage and water should create permanent active pressure points on poorly functioning parts of the system. The mass of people will always overcome the stifling of the state.

Our working class has the capability to be a transformative force refashioning Britain as a productive, skilled nation. In the process global capitalism will be flushed down the pan.

Self-reliant workers want a self-reliant Britain cast in their own image that works for the people's interest. A fight for the soul and practice of Britain is under way. Join in! ■

Cover photo Workers



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Workers

Billboard in Sheffield with the steel campaign message.

Campaign for future of steel

UNITE THE UNION has launched a new campaign to highlight the decline in Britain's steel industry. Its plan for the future of the industry includes a demand that public contracts in Britain are obliged to use British steel.

The union wants to safeguard existing employment and calls for a doubling of steelmaking capacity to rebuild the industry and create thousands of new jobs. It points to past underinvestment in the industry, but says it has a future with the right political choices.

The union has launched the campaign in Sheffield, Scunthorpe, Middlesbrough and Port Talbot, areas where steel is still a crucial part of local industry. This campaign quite rightly challenges both prime minister Rishi Sunak and Labour leader Keir Starmer – it asks about whose side they are on when it comes to steel making.

The union has commissioned huge billboards along with local newspaper adverts to get the message over. This is supported by a team of union organisers who are charged with talking to local people, seeking to persuade them to make demands on their local MPs and other politicians to support the aims of Unite's campaign.

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

BORROWING

Britain's ballooning debt

THE GOVERNMENT has been borrowing at a huge rate – something that tends not to be reported in general news, appearing rather in the relative backwaters of newspaper business sections. That means more of our money is going to finance capital.

In September, public sector net borrowing hit £14.3 billion, according to the Office for National Statistics – the sixth highest for a September since records began in 1993.

During the first six months of this fiscal year, the state racked up additional debt of £81.7 billion, up more than £15 billion over the same period last year.

The British state will spend about 10 per cent of total government revenue on debt interest this year, more than £110 billion. These are the highest interest payments among industrialised countries.

Debt service is now the second-largest area of government expenditure. It is effectively dead money – of no use to working people or the real economy.

FACTS MATTER

At *Workers* we make every effort to check that our stories are accurate, and that we distinguish between fact and opinion.

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

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



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Critical period for UCU members

Members of the Universities and Colleges Union face difficult choices in continuing their action on pay and conditions in the face of employer resistance.

Chips are essential

Semiconductor chip technology is essential to modern industrial production, and a British firm's designs lead the world, but processors are becoming pawns in a US-China trade war.

Net zero – wider discussion needed

Rishi Sunak has postponed the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles and gas boilers. This is welcome but only a first step in challenging net zero orthodoxy.

Birmingham – political bankruptcy in council provision

Birmingham City Council announced that it could not meet its financial liabilities. Essentially it is bankrupt, threatening both jobs and services.

Horizon Europe – hidden strings revealed

Details of the agreement signing up Britain to the EU's Horizon Europe research programme show that it is a dodgy deal.

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.

Workers



Arriva Cross Country train, Newcastle.

End privatisation, says RMT

MANY BRITISH rail and bus companies have ended up being owned by overseas state transport enterprises. Now one of the largest has been sold to a private equity company. That's not good news, according to one of the rail unions.

US private equity firm, I Squared Capital, has bought bus and rail operator Arriva in a deal worth about \$1.69 billion, including debts.

I Squared, whose headquarters are in Miami, already owns the UK power generating company Conrad Energy, trailer leasing company TIP, and energy solutions group Aggreko. Worldwide, it has over £37 billion assets under its management.

Arriva currently employs over 34,000 people, including over 18,800 workers in Britain. It operates bus and rail services across ten European countries, including Britain. It transports 1.5 billion bus and rail passengers a year.

Arriva is one of the largest train operators, running the London Overground rail network, and the Chiltern, Grand Central and CrossCountry franchises. It also runs 4,700 buses, including the largest fleet of London's double-decker red buses.

It is a profitable operation. Since 2010 Arriva has paid out a total of £340 million in dividends from its British rail operations: £103 million from CrossCountry, £32 million at London Overground, £26 million at Grand Central and £179 million from its former franchise Arriva Trains Wales. Last year alone, Arriva received dividends of £9.5 million from London Overground, and its top director got over £1 million.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union reacted angrily, pointing out that I Squared is registered in the Cayman Islands tax haven. General secretary Mick Lynch said, "This sale of Arriva by German state railway to a tax haven-registered company underscores what a perverse and corrupt system rail privatisation is in this country."

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

UNION BUSTING

Unite takes fight to Paris

UNITE THE UNION has taken its fight to end union busting to the doorstep of the French company Bouygues, whose offices are based in Paris. Bouygues is a French construction company which together with J Murphy and Sons has been shortlisted for a contract to build the multimillion-pound Lower Thames crossing.

In addition to Bouygues, the union is targeting other French-based companies including Plastic Omnium, Equans, and Colas. The dispute came about because of the dismissal of four union members including a union representative employed by J Murphy and Sons Ltd, a subsidiary of Murphy International Ltd.

The workers had been undertaking work

at a site in the Republic of Ireland when they were dismissed after organising a meeting of fifteen workers to discuss the non-payment of travel and subsistence payments.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Murphy's behaviour...is deplorable, and it is guilty of flagrant union busting. No reputable company should have anything to do with Murphy's considering the manner in which it treats its workers."

The protests are just a sample of a number that Unite has been holding across the country and internationally to apply further pressure on the company to reinstate the workers. As Murphy's was still failing to act, the protests and ensuing disruption to clients and contractors associated with the company has further intensified, with several more protests at the British Ports Association conference and gala dinner on 18 and 19 October.

WALES

Waiting times exposed

THE ROYAL College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) has forced the Welsh Government to admit that it has been misrepresenting the extent of waiting times in Accident & Emergency departments for years.

Data obtained by a Freedom of Information request reveals that A&E waiting times have been missing thousands of hours from official monthly figures.

The discrepancy is caused by a policy from 2011 issued by the Welsh Government, which allows for patients whose waits will

exceed the four-hour target to be excluded from the data if they are expected to complete their treatment within A&E. This is known as “breach exemptions” and the Welsh Government created these claiming that other parts of Britain did the same.

The RCEM Vice President for Wales said: “We have long been campaigning for transparency in the reporting of the waiting time situation in Wales.”

He went on to say that they had been raising the issue with the Welsh Government for years, but it has fallen on deaf ears. ■

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



Teesside offshore wind farm, South Gare, Redcar.

Blow to renewables policy

THE GOVERNMENT’S approach to future energy supply depends heavily on wind power, dedicated as it is to net zero aims. But it’s as much off course with wind as it is with nuclear energy.

In the latest renewable energy auction this September, offshore wind turbine companies were invited to submit bids for the right to sell electricity. But not a single bid was made. And it’s not making great progress with onshore generation either.

Government advisers had agreed a strike price of £44 a megawatt hour, hoping to maintain the illusion that the cost of wind power was coming down as they had predicted. The going rate only eight years ago was three times that amount, guaranteeing huge profits. This time round, the industry reckoned there was nothing in it for them and walked away.

GMB, one of the principal unions involved in wind farm construction, and a long standing opponent of reliance on net zero, was unsurprised. GMB general secretary Gary Smith commented, “Whitehall told us wind was getting cheaper and cheaper. Now there will be no bids for the next round of licenses because the wind industry can’t afford to put up the projects”.

Speaking before the 27 September announcement permitting development of the Rosebank oil field, Smith was equally scathing of the Labour Party’s commitment to a net zero carbon electricity system by 2030 and the elimination of licenses for North Sea oil and gas drilling.

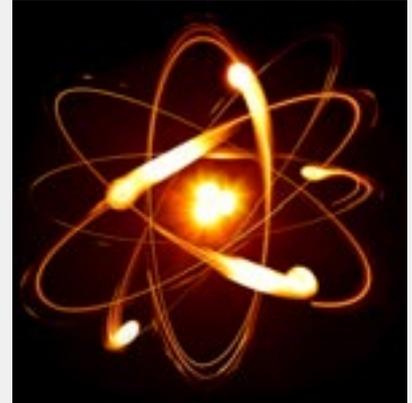
He said, “I don’t worry about it, it can’t be done. No amount of enthusiasm can overcome these particular hurdles. The National Grid can’t get (undersea) cables. There are four suppliers of cables in the globe, they’re all booked out to 2030”. ■

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

WHAT’S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER



Wednesday 15 November, 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

In-person CPBML public meeting

“Nuclear energy – essential for Britain’s energy security”

For too long British government energy policy has been dominated by superstitious and dogmatic opposition to developing our nuclear energy potential. How can we overcome this? Come and join the discussion. All welcome. Free Entry.

Wednesday 29 November, 7pm

Manchester, venue to be announced

In-person CPBML public meeting

“Nuclear energy – essential for Britain’s energy security”

All welcome. Free Entry. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for a venue address when it becomes available.

DECEMBER

Tuesday 5 December 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“Modern transport: for workers, for industry”

Transport binds a nation, moving people and goods around. Our infrastructure needs modernising. What can workers do about this? Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation

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

All the bluster about illegal immigration – which continues determination to raise migration levels even further...

Why the employers love



Sean Aidan Calderbank/shutterstock.com

Migrants brought ashore at Dover by Border Force.

THERE'S A myth circulating in Britain, propagated by all the parliamentary parties and plenty of groups outside parliament, that there's no link between migration and pay. Some go so far as to advocate open borders: let in anyone who wants to come.

Many weighty academic tomes have been produced to back the myth up, all seeking to turn the real world on its head. For in the real world a large increase in the supply of labour must inevitably tend to lower the price of labour, or reduce expected increases in the price of labour.

All this despite the clear evidence. The Covid-19 pandemic brought immigration figures down sharply, leading (among other pressures) to the inevitable: a sharp rise in wages.

Likewise, the stronger than expected recovery since the pandemic has led to renewed upward pressure on wages. And – surprise, surprise – that also coincides with

a key indicator, the ratio of unemployed workers to vacancies.

Data released by the Office for National Statistics in September shows that since the middle of 2021 there have been fewer people chasing each job than at any time since 2001, when the dataset begins.

That's bad news for employers, and bad news for shareholders. And they evidently decided that immigration needs to be stepped up.

'Experimental'

All of this would be worrying enough even if it were clear what the immigration figures actually are. But it's far from clear. Even the Office for National Statistics, which recently revised (once again) its methodology, says that its figures are "experimental".

For an area of political discussion and national interest, it is surely a scandal that no one in Whitehall knows how many

people are coming into Britain nor, by extension, how many people are living here.

But then, the real numbers are not something the establishment wants discussed. Employers and governments are united in wanting to increase – massively – the pool of workers they can draw on.

Fortunately for the proponents of immigration, every recent British government has agreed that more and more people

'Elected on a mandate of controlling migration, they have presided over a huge rise...'

s unabated – is designed to obscure the government’s

rising immigration

must be let in. In fact, the current government, elected on a mandate of keeping migration under control, has instead presided over a huge rise in migration.

What is beyond doubt is that leaving the EU has reduced the numbers of people coming in from Europe, but not from outside Europe. Indeed, quite the reverse. Immigration from outside the EU has soared, ruthlessly enabled by a series of official exemptions.

Skilled Workers visas, the new designation used by the government, are available for a list of trades that goes on, and on, and on. There’s one list for health and education, another for other occupations.

In health, it applies to all doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, radiologists, pharmacists, psychologists, even senior managers (of which, some might say, there appears to be an over-supply). On top of this, it includes all jobs in care homes and home carers, plus senior care workers.

Radical?

A story in the *Daily Mail* at the beginning of October, citing “Whitehall sources”, said the government was drawing up “radical plans” to recruit thousands of overseas doctors and fast-track registration with the General Medical Council (GMC) “in a bid to break NHS strikes”.

The *Mail* article said the move was likely to “outrage” the British Medical Association, the doctors’ union. Perhaps, though any outrage would be long overdue, given that the “radical plan” has been in effect for over a year: thousands of overseas doctors are already being recruited under the Skilled Workers visa.

As for fast-tracking, it’s hard to see how the GMC could make things move much faster. As long as an application meets the criteria, it will be approved within ten working days. Unless, of course, the government wants the GMC to lower the qualifications and experience needed to practise in Britain – which would cause great outrage, and not just among doctors.

In education, the Skilled Worker exemptions cover any maths, modern languages and computer sciences teacher, as well as any science teacher (provided they

Tough? It’s just a show

THE CONSERVATIVE conference went into overdrive as government ministers vied with each other to be seen as tough on immigration. But all that mattered to them was the being seen part. Actually being tough is beyond them.

Witness the fact that – according to Home Office data – more than 45,755 people came to Britain illegally on small boats in 2022. How can that happen when the country has military satellites in the sky that can track objects the size of a football, and drones that can identify cars in distant countries?

Meanwhile, opposition leader Keir Starmer said that under a Labour government Britain would negotiate with the European Union about taking asylum

seekers from the EU in return for agreement on returning illegal immigrants.

As with most politicians’ promises, it’s hard to pin down exactly what that would mean. One thing is sure, though: it would mean more people entering Britain from the EU.

In 2022 more than 800,000 people applied for asylum in the EU. By the end of July 2023 almost 700,000 applications were awaiting a first decision, up more than a third on July 2022.

That’s a vast pool of people, and by any normal calculation a deal with the EU on returning illegal immigrants in return for taking asylum seekers would increase net migration into the country. What might happen in practice? Who knows? ■

teach a bit of physics). And in a piece of unintended humour, the Scottish government has listed secondary and primary teachers of Gaelic, a language they are trying to force upon Scottish students.

The construction exemptions cover all masons, bricklayers, roofers, tilers, slaters, carpenters, plasterers and joiners – basically, just about everyone working in the industry.

No wonder people are entering Britain each year in their hundreds of thousands. And governments keenly grab any opportunity to use international crises to boost immigration even further.

A word of warning: it’s impossible to be sure about the numbers of people coming in, legally or illegally. And granted, Office for National Statistics figures are experimental. But if they are even half right they show an alarming trend.

At the time of the EU referendum annual net migration figures from inside and outside the EU were broadly similar: 207,000 from the EU, 162,000 from outside, for a total of less than 400,000. By the end of June 2020 the total was 458,000.

That was an increase of 24 per cent, more than a quarter, in four years. Bad enough, but the figure disguises a vast

difference in the sources of immigration.

In the year to June 2020 net immigration from the EU was estimated as negative, with 51,000 more leaving than coming. Net immigration from outside the EU was estimated at 509,000 – more than three times as high as in 2016.

To anyone who has followed the labyrinthine intricacies of migration politics that should have come as no surprise. Scheme after scheme has been introduced to make it easy for people to enter Britain from low-income countries to work and study.

Between June 2019 and June 2022 Home Office visas granted for student immigration from India rose by 215 per cent, from Pakistan by 377 per cent, and from Nigeria by 686 per cent. And the rise in work visas is fuelled by a huge expansion in health and social care workers, mainly from India.

So the referendum and the 2019 election have been followed by a set of policies designed to increase immigration – not something wanted or expected by the majority of voters in that referendum.

Quite simply, the employers and the state have thwarted the wishes of the people. ■

**Britain has to continue to modernise, and that means new
allow capitalism's decline to take the working class with it**

HS2 – Sunak condemns



John B Hewitt/shutterstock.com

October 2023: poster in Manchester in a vain attempt to influence the Conservative Party Conference. The government is determined to turn back

RISHI SUNAK'S announcement at the Conservative Party conference in October that he was cancelling HS2 hardly came as a surprise given his long-term antipathy towards the railway industry. It calls the future of the rail network into question with a scorched earth approach.

HS2 has not been completely cancelled – but the government intends that a new high speed railway should be built only from Old Oak Common in west London to Birmingham. This will mean that British taxpayers will pay much of the costs but will get few, if any, of the benefits of the HS2 project.

Sunak left a remote possibility of run-

ning into Euston if private investment is forthcoming. But that looks very unlikely to be sanctioned. Sunak's plan for Euston reduces the HS2 station from 14 to just 6 platforms.

That arrangement could not handle more than 8 trains an hour, well short of the 17 trains an hour that would be needed to serve places beyond Manchester in the North West and Scotland. And HS2 services to North Wales and North East England would definitely be out.

Sunak has decided that land and property already acquired in preparation for the new line will be sold off. Valuable prime land around Euston will be released, and is

sure to be snapped up at knock-down rates by developers. This would impede the construction of more platforms later.

This poison pill ensures that it would be difficult to resurrect the HS2 line north to Manchester and beyond.

Potholes?

Sunak tried to sweeten his decision by announcing that money saved by not building HS2 beyond Birmingham would be spent on other transport projects, as well as mending road potholes and keeping bus fares down.

The list of potential rail re-openings and other public transport enhancements in a

y infrastructure. That is expensive. But the alternative is to
t...

Britain's rail to decline



Where's the capacity?

EAST-WEST RAIL is a project currently renewing and rebuilding a largely disused rail line between Oxford and Cambridge. Oxford to Bicester is open, and works between Bicester and Bletchley are well advanced.

When the line opens, East West Rail envisages running many extra trains over a short distance of the West Coast line from Bletchley and Milton Keynes Central, where trains will reverse and

then run back to Bletchley before going on to Bedford, and eventually to Cambridge.

But there is little or no capacity for these new services. The problem would be exacerbated if the company then reinstates services north from Aylesbury. Services operated by Southern from Clapham Junction to Milton Keynes have been cut back to Watford for the same reason – the line is full. ■

There was no consultation with any interested parties like Network Rail, the northern mayors, local authorities, or railway experts.

With no sense of shame, Sunak made his conference announcement from behind a rostrum blazoned “Long Term Decisions for a Brighter Future”. He has decided to cancel a long-term project which enjoyed wide support.

Within hours of the speech, the government's own website shortened the list of projects. Transport secretary Mark Harper then suggested that the document was not a plan but a list of examples of what might be done, despite it clearly saying the opposite. Sunak has now said that money will be given to mayors and local authorities for them to decide how to spend it!

Worse still, *Network North* is a thoroughly dishonest document. As an attempt to appeal to voters in the north of England it is probably in vain. And as it tacks on references to Tavistock, Bristol and Felixstowe, it's unlikely to impress people in East Anglia or the South West either!

Most of the rail projects listed as alternatives to HS2 are unlikely to be achieved, because they will not meet the business case requirements of the Department for Transport and the Treasury. And examination of the consequences of cancellation reveals the lack of thinking by government about what Britain needs from its rail network.

Renewed commitments to building the Northern Powerhouse rail network

connecting cities across northern England can't be taken at face value. Those plans assumed in evaluating expected benefits that HS2 would be built at least to Manchester. As previous commitments about HS2 have been discarded, who will now believe in commitments to Northern Powerhouse Rail?

The document does at least concede that the principal aim of HS2 was to relieve long-term capacity constraints in the rail network. But in trying to justify why only the first phase will be completed, it states that those constraints only exist between London and Birmingham. This is not true.

Rump

The rump of HS2 that will now be built is unlikely to even relieve the southern section of the West Coast Main Line. That line south of Rugby into London is close to running at capacity despite the downturn in passenger numbers after the Covid pandemic.

Few train paths are available on that route for additional passenger services and none for freight trains. Yet everyone agrees they are needed to relieve congested road networks – and there's an impact on other rail services.

Mixing fast inter-city services with local trains and freight trains eats up the capacity of any rail network. Capacity increases markedly when trains run at roughly the same speed and without frequent stops.

Continued on page 10

document titled *Network North* was cob-
bled together in time for the conference
speech. It was compiled so hastily that it
included some works already in place and
others that the government had already
committed to.

**'Taxpayers will pay
the costs but get
few, if any
benefits...'**

Continued from page 9



The primary purpose of HS2 was to transfer fast inter-city trains along the West Coast route onto a dedicated high-speed line. That would have allowed frequent trains to follow each other at around 250 mph – twice as fast as current inter-city trains. Then, more local stopping trains could be run giving a much better service to cities such as Coventry, Oxford, Cambridge, and Milton Keynes as well as to London.

If HS2 terminates at Old Oak Common rather than Euston in central London, it will fulfil the prophecies of the project's many detractors who called it a white elephant – and which will have cost around £45 billion.

Significant capacity constraints already exist outside the London to Birmingham line. The Midland Main Line from London St. Pancras to Sheffield is nearly full at the southern end and in the East Midlands. The East Coast Main Line is also nearing its capacity to cope with traffic. The recently axed Phase 3 to serve the East Midlands, Sheffield and Leeds had been planned to

relieve both those lines.

And on the West Coast line, there is a bottleneck around Crewe, which Phase 2a of HS2 would have relieved. Cancellation will limit the number of services which can be run over the much-reduced section HS2 that will be built.

Delays and contraction of the HS2 project have an effect beyond rail operations. They have put at risk the future of the train building plant at Derby, Britain's largest and most advanced train building facility.

Sunak's latest decision makes that site even more vulnerable. There are also concerns about the future of Hitachi's factory at Newton Aycliffe. Thousands of highly skilled jobs and others in the supply chain hang in the balance.

The government has tried to justify its decisions by saying rail passenger numbers and revenue are not back to pre-pandemic levels. That's only partly true.

Revenue

Revenue is down by nearly a quarter from the year before the pandemic. This is largely due to a huge drop-off in business travel and a reduction in commuting, particularly in the London area. Much higher fares have affected both markets.

But there has been a considerable increase in leisure travel, with some services and stations seeing patronage at 130 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Remarkably, despite cuts in services and uncertainty created by industrial action, passenger numbers are climbing fast and

can be expected to carry on doing so.

The government has also claimed that soaring costs made HS2 unaffordable. Costs have risen massively, partly because the project was saddled with expensive noise mitigation measures and excessively long tunnels in order to appease objectors – who continued their opposition anyway. Poor project management and the continuing uncertainty have also forced up costs.

HS2 as previously conceived was far from perfect in several respects.

The design speed of 250 mph increased costs. The higher the line speed, the less sharply the route can curve. The 200 mph lines more usually found across western Europe can more easily avoid obstacles which would otherwise be expensive to mitigate.

The new high-speed network was going to have no less than four "dead-end" termini in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Through stations would be far more efficient, if more expensive to build. But it was not going to be linked with HS1, which runs from the Channel Tunnel to St Pancras, which seemed a perverse decision.

But whatever the government thinks, Britain needs to expand its railway capacity for both passenger and freight. A long-term solution was always going to mean a new railway.

Upgrading existing routes is extremely disruptive. Design is constrained by existing buildings and so on. And trains have to be kept running during construction works. All this makes upgrading expensive – potentially much more so than HS2!

Britain built a new motorway network from the 1950s on. The existing road network, much of it pre-dating the industrial revolution, could not cope with increased traffic. This did not just benefit long distance road users – it freed up road capacity for local journeys too.

Now, the Victorian railway network needs to see a similar quantum leap forward with the construction of a new railway network built to 21st century engineering standards. The new Elizabeth Line in London shows that new railways make journeys much quicker and easier – and are enormously popular. ■

More delay, more cost

TO FIT with the government's scaled-down plans the station at Old Oak Common will have to be completely redesigned with more platforms to act as a terminus rather than a through station as originally planned. And that means more delay, and much greater costs.

Having been whisked on HS2 at 250 mph to Old Oak Common, passengers will be forced to get out and transfer to the new Elizabeth Line to get to central

London (or anywhere else!), a line that has been extremely successful and whose trains are already very crowded.

Despite the high speed of the HS2 trains, there is likely to be no journey-time reduction for around two-thirds of passengers. Many passengers may see a through train to Euston on existing lines as more convenient, undermining the benefits of reducing overcrowding on the West Coast line. ■

Manchester is an example of a supposedly booming city where housing problems are acute...

Homeless in Manchester



Homeless man begging on the street in Manchester.

A NORTHERN powerhouse? Manchester has the highest rate of families in temporary accommodation outside of London (apart from Luton). For every thousand households in Manchester, 13.02 are in temporary accommodation. This compares badly with similar sized northern cities and outstrips some London boroughs.

Almost a third of these families, including nearly 4,000 children, are living outside the city in neighbouring boroughs, due to the pressure on temporary accommodation. They are far from wider family networks and schools.

Why is Manchester experiencing such a problem? Private sector rents in the city have risen so much that the housing benefit for the private rented sector fails to cover the average rent, requiring the claimant to find the difference.

This problem is exacerbated by a prop-

‘People hoping to buy have been forced to rent...’

erty development boom, primarily in the city centre, but fuelling a housing crisis in other areas of the city. Much of this new development has been funded by overseas capital.

The independent Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping reported in September. It concluded that the government’s target of ending rough sleeping by 2024 would not be met. Much of the problem is attributed to the severe shortage of social rented housing, though it extends right through the housing sector.

Rents

People hoping to buy have instead been forced into the private rented sector, leading to increases in rents. Many private landlords have exploited the situation, evicting families unable to meet high rent increases.

A report by Greater Manchester Housing Action highlights one example of a partnership between Manchester City Council and ADUG, a private equity group that has close ties with the Abu Dhabi state, to build over 1,500 apartments.

The report concluded that the partnership has effectively offshored parts of the city. It suggests that the council has agreed

999-year leases of land at significantly below good value. Abu Dhabi has several other partnerships with the council.

Developers have been allowed to make soaring profits without making any significant contribution to affordable or social housing. The approach of the council was not to push for social housing in return for development opportunities.

On the contrary, the city council view has been that the city had enough social housing, and it wanted to create more “market rent” homes, particularly in the city centre and adjoining neighbourhoods. So the rents for new apartments far exceed what many families can afford.

This has had a knock-on effect on the remaining private rented sector. Landlords raise rents to meet the perceived heightened demand. Families are forced out of their existing homes, being unable to afford the new rents even after claiming benefits.

In thrall to a developer-led model of regeneration in the city, Manchester has sought inward investment at any cost. It has sold off its assets at low value with little in return and created the conditions for inflicting a housing and homelessness crisis on many of its most vulnerable citizens. ■

**Can Britain afford not to transform social care? It's up to v
fobbed off with more delay...**

Social care – too costly



Dmytro Zinkevych/shutterstock.com

REFORM OF social care in Britain has been too long delayed – by decades, with no end in sight. And the longer things stay as they are, the more important it becomes. It's necessary to restate the reasons for change, though that alone is not enough.

Social care is a broad term; picking on one aspect alone masks the size of the problem. The first thought is that this is about looking after the non-medical needs of older people in care homes. But it also includes people living in their own home with support, working age adults and children. None of them are served well by the way care is organised and provided across Britain.

Care workers suffer too – they know too well that things should be better. They experience poor pay, with low job security in a sector where employment is fragmented. Public sector provision has

declined, and what remains is underfunded. Too many private care providers are either inadequate or put the profit demands of their owners first – or both.

The impact of inadequate social care on the NHS is frequently mentioned, and it cannot be underestimated. Far too many patients can't be discharged from hospital as soon as they are medically stable. This all takes time and diverts NHS resources.

Delay

More important is the impact of delayed discharge – often for weeks – on patients. It results in far worse recovery, both short and long term. Inadequate care during recuperation is known to create further medical problems later on.

Care provided at home is the best option for most conditions – not only for recovery but also for long term outcomes. For working adults with chronic conditions,

care at home can make the difference between becoming socially isolated and not. For some, and for the parents of children needing care, adequate support can keep them in work.

The notorious 15-minute care visits may have ended (though Warrington was using them at the start of the year), but provision is patchy and often poor. Local council budgets are under pressure, even where they try to prioritise social care over other services. Funding allocated to social care has dropped over the past decade – and that looks likely to continue.

Many people eligible for care at home don't receive it, and give up trying to secure the help they need. And local council support for occupational health assessment and equipment also suffers from underfunding, leading to delays. These factors contribute to poor outcomes.

Some councils have completely

workers everywhere to demand change and not be

not to act

contracted out their front-line care services. Others rely on private companies in part – for example, when they can't recruit and retain enough workers. And for some unfortunate people, the benefits system requires that they directly engage care support – adding to their stress and strain.

The cost of care, even part time and in your own home, can be crippling. Those few people who can afford it will be able to manage by paying for all of their care themselves. But for the great majority, that's not an option – certainly not in the long term.

Frozen

The limits on personal savings above which councils will pay for part or all of care needs have remained frozen since 2010-11. Inflation since then is about 40 per cent. No wonder the proportion of people receiving full or partial care support is diminishing. Dealing with this problem of contributions has delayed social care reform by decades.

After the 2019 general election Boris Johnson said that his government would "fix social care" – it didn't even start to tackle the problems. The pandemic exacerbated them, but was not the cause. Since then, governments have repeated the political manoeuvres of the past 20 years without getting any closer to an answer.

Jeremy Hunt has twice kicked proposals down the road – once as health secretary and again as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The health and social care levy was announced by Johnson in September 2021 as an extra tax on individuals and employers – £12 billion a year ring fenced for those purposes.

From the outset, the emphasis was on health care in the wake of the pandemic. But with the promise of the extra money, nothing more happened about reforming social care funding. And a year later, Kwasi Kwarteng, during his short term as Chancellor of the Exchequer, cancelled the levy.

Local councils talk about a funding gap for social care, not maintaining levels. Governments have offered extra cash at times. But these announcements are often all smoke and mirrors – counting money already committed. And, under other

pressures, councils don't always spend on social care what extra they have.

A long-term plan for reform of social care funding is needed – one that no government or council can afford to ignore. The Dilnot Commission, appointed by the coalition government in 2010, reported a year later with such a plan.

The proposals were to cap lifetime care costs and to raise the means-tested threshold considerably. This was designed to give certainty and stability to the sector. The report was praised by the government...then buried.

Some say the problem of social care is intractable because the population is ageing. No – that is to accept that people are to be left uncared for.

Life expectancy has risen steadily in Britain for many decades, at least until recently. That's something to celebrate, and an imperative to improve care rather than put off reform. So too with disabilities that would in the past have made life much shorter.

Manageable

Governments say that social care is unaffordable, which is in effect what happened to the recommendations of the Dilnot commission. Yet that report estimated the direct cost to the state would be around 0.25 per cent of GDP – a significant amount, but manageable. The knock-on costs of inaction on the NHS, and the benefits of getting those needing care or their families back to work, are left out of the equation.

And while there's deadlock on care costs, nothing is done about any other aspects of care – or the woeful levels of pay and uncertain employment.

What's the answer? The Blair government proposed a National Care Service. Inspired by the NHS, it might have been a small step in the right direction. But anything like that would still have to deal with the questions of payment by those in need of care and potentially unlimited care costs, as well as employment conditions in the sector.

And a national care service can't be implemented as an add on to the NHS either – which has plenty of its own

'Life expectancy has risen steadily in Britain for many decades, at least until recently. That's something to celebrate...'

challenges to deal with.

In Scotland, the SNP-led administration has proposed its own National Care Service. But that seems ill-thought out, and has been deferred. Funding is not assured and councils see it as a purely centralising measure (as with several other aspects of SNP policy).

Care workers in the sector, where organised, have understandably concentrated on securing decent pay and conditions. It's a sector where skills are not recognised and casual work is commonplace – with chronic staff shortages across the country. Yet they know best where the shortcomings are and how they might be put right.

In August, the TUC set out the case for changes in conditions for the care workforce. That's essential, but needs reforms to the structure of the sector to go alongside it. This is for the whole class to take up, not only workers in the sector. Otherwise the next 13 years will see as little progress as the last 13.

The Dilnot proposals might not be the answer, but they are the best place to start. No other policies since then have looked at the needs of the whole sector. Parliamentary parties and local councillors are too concerned about whether they will be elected again rather than about what needs to be done to reform social care.

It's in the interest of the whole of the working class of Britain to shout loudly for reform – and to trust no one until something workable is on the table. ■

The public inquiry set up soon after the Grenfell Tower Fire to publish its final report in 2024. There's much to learn already.

The Grenfell Tower Fire –

ON 14 JUNE 2017 the fire in Grenfell Tower killed 72 Londoners, injured many others and left hundreds of people bereaved or homeless, their lives changed forever.

Evidence given during the course of the public inquiry hearings, and publicly available, shows a shocking catalogue of incompetence and deceit. Time and time again bad decisions had been made, neglectful of the consequences. And too often these decisions were accepted or not challenged.

As workers we should be concerned about the culture, both institutional and political, in which we earn our living. The inquiry has shone a light on practices which are the antithesis of what it means to take charge, to take control of our lives.

Avoidable

The catastrophic spread of the fire was ultimately avoidable and mainly attributable to external flammable cladding fitted during refurbishment completed the previous year. This was the conclusion of Phase 1 of the inquiry in October 2019, which also pointed to systematic failings by the London Fire Brigade in several respects.

Phase 2 considered the causes in detail through 85 weeks of evidence and over 300,000 documents. The aim was to determine how Grenfell Tower was in the condition that allowed the fire to spread as it did.

The inquiry chairman, Martin Moore-Bick, said: "Although it is possible to identify some decisions relating to the refurbishment that had an immediate effect, the wider causes of the fire have their roots in the culture of the construction industry and the regulatory regime. Many decisions, taken by many people over the course of many years, conspired to create a building

'A shocking catalogue of incompetence and deceit...'



Londisland/shutterstock.com

2019, two years after the fire, a commemoration in London. Justice has still not been done.

which in June 2017 was vulnerable to a catastrophic fire."

In this article we look at some of the evidence about one aspect of the disaster, the use of flammable panels. It is illustrative of what was happening not just in one company or organisation but also of systemic failures in many places.

There was an early indication that unquestioning reliance on the judgement of team leaders could contribute to unsafe outcomes. QC Richard Millet, Lead Counsel to the inquiry, asked a witness for Kingspan Insulation (Inquiry transcript Day 83, 7 December 2020), "You let them get on with it?" The witness answered: "Yeah".

Kingspan Insulation had put out misleading marketing literature in order to sell a type of protective cladding which had not been tested, instead of more expensive material that had. The company's head of marketing had knowingly failed to revise the product literature. He "believed", without scientific evidence, that there was no difference between the tested and untested material.

Cynical

Two members of his technical team conducted a Messenger chat cynically commenting on the product but decided to keep quiet: "Shit product"; "Scrap it"; "But

... completed its hearings last November and is expected ready...

and accountability



don't tell anyone that"; "What's like the literature?" "Fire Performance"; "Ha ha"; "Fire Performance" "Woops"; "Fire Performance"; "Whey"; "Look who knows their shit"; "Yeah all lies mate"; "All we do is lie in here."

Arconic, another cladding manufacturer, gave evidence (9 February 2021). It was the job of Arconic's sales manager to specify whether cladding was purely fire-retardant or highly flammable. Under cross-examination, the manager was asked how much attention she paid to the properties of the material when selling it. She replied: "not very much...it was not something that was discussed."

This was irresponsible, since before Grenfell there were many warnings resulting from cladding igniting on high-rise buildings in Dubai. She received an email from a supplier after the 2012 Dubai fire saying: "Half of the country [UK] is full of this rubbish due to price."

On 14 February 2022 the Inquiry took evidence from a Fire Suppression Manager at the Building Research Establishment (BRE). Her team had been shocked and surprised during tests on polyethylene sandwiched between aluminium sheets, which resulted in an inferno.

Yet shocked as they all were, no-one thought to alert the industry or local authorities. Meetings with government were sloppy and informal, with no notes taken. Emails requesting clarity around the use of combustible materials were ignored. Smiley emojis accompanied internal memos about the Dubai fires – again, the cynicism.

No one thought it "appropriate" to have discussions with the government about suitability for high-rise buildings. The manager explained: "We would not go out and make comment around that, no...we wouldn't have stepped into that space."

Here, as in many other instances uncovered by the inquiry, a group of workers saw themselves as passive cogs in the machine. Someone higher up would take responsibility – a false and eventually fatal assumption.

Finally someone writes, "What a buck-passing load of incompetents." Counsel inquires: "Can you explain how that [buck-passing] was professionally or ethically acceptable...?"

Lack of professional curiosity was confirmed in a later piece of evidence (21 March 2022) from a former BRE manager. Asked how he felt on being shown a section of the cladding which had burned so fiercely during testing, he replied: "...it felt like a conversation amongst colleagues about an interesting result."

Counsel exploded – "Well, it's more than interesting, isn't it? This was a conflagration, a 20-metre fire." Asked why he did not give consideration to fire risk, the witness answered that the opportunity never arose. This was untrue.

In 2009 there was a fire in Camberwell,

south London (the Lakanal House fire), in which six people died. The coroner had made recommendations, including the re-writing of fire safety documents in clear language, which were never followed up.

Not only was there another Lakanal waiting to happen, there were civil servants waiting for it to happen before taking action. 'Where is the evidence? Show me the bodies' seemed to be the thinking. Data from fire tests was never made public, as evidenced by enquiry statements such as: "It just got forgotten and fell between the gaps..." because "Fire safety is a very subjective subject."

Deregulation

Deregulation was government policy at the time – the Red Tape Challenge from the coalition government. The BRE could have requested exemption but didn't. "We didn't really have a strong argument for doing so." Counsel: "Well how about life safety being a strong argument...?" Here was a departmental fire safety expert deferring to inexperienced politicians eager for deregulation.

When workers fail to prevent a catastrophe, by not speaking out or escalating an issue, or simply through inertia, it can prey on their conscience and take a toll on mental health.

The final stumbling words of the BRE manager seem to suggest this: "...perhaps the mindset that we'd adopted as a team, and I think, as a result of that, I ended up being the single point of failure in the Department, and I think that's why I think we failed to stop this happening. For that's something I'm bitterly sorry."

The Grenfell Phase 1 recommendations aren't yet fully implemented – and there are concerns that little will change. Certainly deregulation is back on the political agenda, and that worries firefighters.

Workers – including those in managerial and professional jobs – don't have to carry the can for capitalism. Trade unions are there to support whistle-blowers. Use them and save lives! ■

• See the Inquiry website for all the evidence, documents and Phase 1 report at www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/

The British government is clear: it wants the war in Ukraine and anyone that works for peace...

End the long war in Ukraine



Houses of the Oireachtas (CC BY 2.0 DEED)

Devastation in Bucha, Ukraine.

THE UKRAINE war threatens to become permanent. The British government has continually intervened by sending weapons and urging no compromise. But, along with the US and NATO, it was already involved there before the Russian invasion.

‘The US and UK governments are using Ukraine, not saving it...’

US President George H. W. Bush assured Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev during their meeting on Malta in December 1989 that if the countries of Eastern Europe were allowed to choose their future orientation by democratic processes, the USA would not “take advantage” of that process.

Assurances

Subsequently, NATO took in 13 Eastern European countries, clearly “taking advantage”. In 1990, Gorbachev was assured, though not in a formal treaty, that if a unified Germany was in NATO, there would be no movement of NATO jurisdiction to the

east, “not one inch”.

Ukraine declared itself an independent country on 24 August 1991. The Russian government recognised its independence four days later. On 1 December, on an 84 per cent turnout, 92 per cent of the population voted in favour of independence.

The Soviet Union broke up shortly after. Since then Russia and NATO have been competing for influence over Ukraine. Ukraine remained in a precarious – but peaceful – balance between the pro-EU western regions of the country and the pro-Russian eastern regions.

But in April 2008, at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, NATO stated that Ukraine

... to go on and on, and it will seek to sabotage anything

ne!

and Georgia would be welcome to join NATO. The Russians made it clear at the time that they saw this as an existential threat. Nevertheless, NATO moved to include Ukraine. NATO expansion is the heart of the strategy, but it includes EU expansion as well.

Within Ukraine, demands grew to join the EU, especially by politicians in the western regions. The elected President Yanukovich swung one way and then another.

The current Ukrainian government initially came to power via a US-sponsored coup against the elected government in 2014. The NATO-backed regime change in 2014 triggered a bloody civil war, killing over 14,000 people.

Separatists

The pro-Russian eastern regions were so alarmed that they formed separate mini-states in Donbas and Luhansk. And Russia occupied the disputed and strategic Crimea in the south and was involved in supporting the separatists in the east.

NATO started training 10,000 Ukrainian troops annually in 2014. The UK's training programme for Ukraine's armed forces, Operation Orbital, started in 2015.

In February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on 4 February 2023 that the US and its Western allies "blocked" his mediation efforts in March 2022. Bennett said that NATO "decided that it is necessary to continue to smash Putin, and not to negotiate..."

When President Zelensky announced in April 2022 that the war would end in negotiations, Boris Johnson rushed to Ukraine. The Ukrainian online newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda* reported that Johnson had "two simple messages... Putin is a war criminal. Pressure must be put on him. No negotiations are possible. And secondly, if you are ready to sign any agreement with him, then we will not be part of it." After Johnson's visit, the Ukrainian government withdrew from the peace negotiations.

British parliamentary parties all oppose doing the decent, necessary thing, of calling for a ceasefire and a diplomatic end to

the war. The SNP's Ian Blackford said, "all of us in this House stand together in solidarity." Parliament acts as a one-party state: a war party state.

What is NATO's war aim? President Biden said that President Putin "cannot remain in power". Do British workers want regime change in a nuclear-armed Russia?

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has repeatedly said that the USA (that is, NATO) will never negotiate and that he will not countenance a ceasefire in Ukraine.

US Congressman Dan Crenshaw said, "Investing in the destruction of our adversary's military, without losing a single American troop, strikes me as a good idea."

The US and UK governments are using Ukraine, not saving it. They are prolonging the war, and the longer the war goes on, the more Ukrainians will suffer. Johnson said, "We are in it for the long run." The long run war on Afghanistan did not end well.

Suppressed

Public debate is suppressed. Meetings calling for peace in Ukraine find bookings cancelled. This shows the weakness, not the strength, of the ruling class's drive for a longer and wider war. They have not forgotten that workers saw through their lies for wars against non-aligned Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

Efforts for peace won huge popular

'Britain's NATO membership is the root of the problem...'

support in Britain, but failed to stop those wars. Why? Because Britain's NATO membership is the root of the problem and was unchallenged.

The US/British alliance is at the centre of NATO. For as long as Britain is in NATO, we are a key part of an alliance which exists only to promote the interests of the US and British ruling classes.

The US and British governments have played a decisive role in instigating this conflict and in keeping it going. Britain has committed £4.6 billion in military aid to Ukraine, second only to the USA. Without NATO support, Zelensky would have no choice but to negotiate an end to the war.

Even the best settlement in Ukraine will not end the danger of war, even of nuclear war.

These dangers will persist as long as we allow imperialisms to exist, and for us here in Britain, that must mean that we get out of NATO. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 5 December on the subject of transport. All meeting details are published on What's On, page 5, in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M As well as our Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with one in London and another in Manchester in November (details on page 5), as well as informal meetings with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further.

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

**Reluctant to invest in infrastructure, successive governments
nuclear – and failed, too, to provide the clean electricity that**

Nuclear power? Yes, please



John Fielding (CC BY 2.0)

Sizewell B, in Suffolk: Britain's most modern nuclear station, it started producing power nearly three decades ago.

BRITAIN WAS a pioneer in atomic power generation. Yet in 2022, nuclear power provided only 13.9 per cent of total electricity supplied in Britain. Its contribution has fallen significantly since the 1990s, when it provided around a quarter of Britain's total electricity supply. Governments have failed to keep pace with growing public support for nuclear power by replacing our ageing nuclear reactors with modern ones.

Since 1995 there have been eight nuclear plant closures, with no new plants coming online, reducing installed nuclear capacity by more than a quarter. The rise of renewable energy has not compensated for the cuts in nuclear capacity, even though renewables' share of electricity generation

rose from 3 per cent in 2000 to 42 per cent in 2022.

Remember all the promises about cheap renewable energy? It hasn't exactly worked out like that. Instead Britain has relied on gas-powered generation and biomass to cover shortfalls in renewables.

Falling

As reported by the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, nuclear power output is due to decrease further over the coming years. The Committee notes that the contribution of nuclear to Britain's energy mix will "fall substantially by 2028, when all plants bar Sizewell B are scheduled to come to the

end of their lives."

That means trouble. The capacity increase offered by the Hinkley Point C plant – currently under construction and due to come online later in the decade – will be outweighed by these upcoming retirements.

Hinkley Point C is the first new nuclear power station to be built in Britain since 1987. A second new plant is planned as Sizewell C in Suffolk. Both are dual plants, with two reactors each.

We have fallen behind other countries. By comparison, France currently has nine times more nuclear capacity than Britain. For decades, successive governments have failed to make the necessary

ents have failed to keep in step with public support for that nuclear can deliver...

ase!

investments in British nuclear power.

The government published *Powering Up Britain*, its energy security plan, in March 2023 which included a plan for more nuclear power “up to 24 GW” by 2050. This plan is short on detail, but this would represent three times the current levels and almost double the highest nuclear installed capacity Britain has ever achieved. The wording “up to” is also an excuse for not reaching that target of 24 GW.

When both Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C come online, the total of these two new reactors will be around 6.4 GW. Before Sizewell B reaches end of life that will add some capacity, but only a small amount as it is running below its theoretical capacity of just under 1.2 GW. The chance of achieving anywhere near 24 GW of nuclear capacity by 2050 is remote unless small modular reactor (SMR) capacity expands rapidly.

SMRs are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW, which is about a quarter of the theoretical capacity of Sizewell B. Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C each have a total of about 3200 MW. The advantage of SMRs is in the modular nature, with the option to manufacture then ship them to install on site.

What is clear is that nuclear power is a better long-term option to reduce CO2 emissions than gas-powered generation or biomass, although these options will be needed for some time yet. And CO2 emissions from nuclear are comparable to those

from wind power over the production life cycle.

Predictably, Greenpeace is opposed to any expansion of nuclear power. Interestingly, an article in *The Guardian* highlighted that young climate activists in Europe are in favour of nuclear power and called on Greenpeace to drop its “old-fashioned and unscientific” campaign against nuclear power.

Opposition

You could say the same of the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, who are all opposed. Scotland’s last remaining nuclear power plant in Torness is due to close in 2028. The people of Scotland are in favour of nuclear power (see below) so the SNP have no justification for opposing it.

The Labour Party has expressed support for nuclear power. Keir Starmer described it as a “critical part of the UK’s energy mix” including Hinkley and Sizewell new reactors as well as SMRs. Whether this translates into action remains to be seen.

What do the British people think? Since 2012 support for nuclear power has been slowly increasing while the percentage of those opposing has fallen from 27 to 11, according to Statistica Research. But most recently, support increased significantly over less than two years, according to research from the Stonehaven Global consultancy. The research looked at polls

‘Remember all the promises about cheap renewable energy? It hasn’t happened.’

from July 2021 to January 2023 based on net positive or negative support and how attitudes have changed.

Net support is defined as the percentage of people who support nuclear power minus the percentage of people who oppose it. Net support has increased overall from minus 1 per cent in July 2021 to plus 24 per cent in January 2023.

Net support maps show regional support for June 2021 and February 2023. Scotland for example has gone from minus 9 per cent to plus 25 per cent (even though among SNP voters support is negative). All areas of Britain now have positive support for nuclear power, which was not the case in 2021. There is also significant support on key energy statements. For example 87 per cent agree that “It is critical that the UK becomes much more self-sufficient for our energy.”

The real question is how this support can be maintained. ■

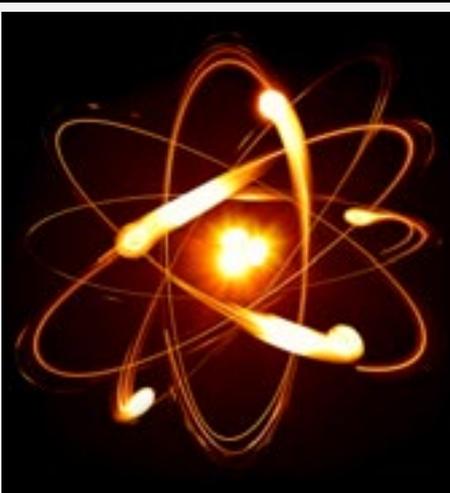
CPBML public meeting

Wednesday 15 November, London, 7.30pm

Wednesday 29 November, Manchester, 7 pm

**“Nuclear energy –
essential for Britain’s energy security”**

For too long British government energy policy has been dominated by superstitious and dogmatic opposition to developing our nuclear energy potential. How can we overcome this? Come and join the discussion. All welcome. Free Entry. For details, see What’s On, page 5.



To raise the question of taking control runs counter to the w
 competing claims to act on our behalf...

Can workers control Bri



Workers

March 2019: demonstration in London.

Taking control: Sovereignty and Democracy After Brexit by Philip Cunliffe, George Hoare, Lee Jones and Peter Ramsay, paperback, 226 pages, ISBN 978-1509553204, Polity Press 2023, £13.90. Kindle and eBook editions available.

THIS THOUGHT-PROVOKING book sets itself no less a task than to "...identify what more is needed to create a more democratic nation in which ordinary people can truly begin to take control of our collective life". The authors, academics and researchers who campaigned assiduously for Brexit, take as their starting point the recognition that leaving the EU can only be a first step on the road to building democratic national sovereignty.

Raising this question of taking control of our own lives makes a sharp contrast to all the parliamentary political parties with their competing claims that we should elect them to run the country because they know what's best for us.

The authors look in detail at the anti-democratic character of the EU. They argue that it is neither a benevolent pooling

of national sovereignty nor a foreign super-state that "dominates its member states from without". Rather, they assert it is a huddling together of European governments and their agencies who have "...abandoned their responsibility to their own citizens and avoid accountability for their policies and actions".

Advocates of Britain's continued EU membership often claimed it offered enhanced protection for workers' rights. But here that argument is turned on its head with factual evidence that key rights were won by workers in Britain before the EU existed, and remain superior to EU minima in almost every respect.

The book places great emphasis on the voiding of national sovereignty which results when democratically elected leaders willingly sacrifice their autonomy. It outlines the key role of the Thatcherite counter revolution, which effectively stopped national development and deliberately made the state less responsive to popular demands.

The ensuing wholesale privatisations and accompanying mass unemployment compounded the growing sense of so

many workers that the political establishment had no interest in understanding or acting to meet their material needs.

The stage was set for Brexit, a resounding declaration of a people's desire to be recognised as an independent sovereign nation.

The knee-jerk explanations put forward by those who did not share this desire, that British people were gullible, racist, ill-educated little Englanders who didn't know what was good for them are here systematically dissected and exposed as the lies they were.

These slanders on the electorate reveal most clearly the ruling class's antagonism to any notion of being accountable to the people. In short, the thoroughgoing decay at the root of Britain's representative democracy.

In this context, it has come as little surprise that the post-Brexit period has seen no real advance in British self-determination or sovereignty. The anti-Brexiters, who continued to dominate in Parliament, ensured that what had been reliance on the EU was simply replaced by other forms of reliance. Underlying them all, "the market will provide".

No plan, no concept

The authors note that while Boris Johnson and others were able to secure an enormous electoral victory in December 2019, on the back of a "Get Brexit done" campaign, they had no plan for any restoration of sovereignty, nor any real concept of what that meant.

Their lack of a vision for British manufacturing, energy, food production and other essentials for life and progress made them unable to develop the kind of independence that Britain needed. And their enthusiastic endorsement and promotion of the war in Ukraine signalled a further retreat from addressing deep-seated domestic problems. Despite its landslide victory a little over two years earlier, the Johnson government's lack of real authority saw it implode in 2022.

The final chapter, "Taking Control: Towards a Democratic Britain", details a series of proposals that the authors consider stepping stones on the road to

world of politicians'

tain?

'It's no surprise that the post-Brexit period has seen no real advance in sovereignty...'

reviving a democratic British nation. Firstly, as a counterblast to the globalists who currently dominate political and cultural life, they recommend that Britain withdraw from global alliances, most particularly NATO, an antithesis of national sovereignty.

Alongside that comes the call for a truly independent nuclear deterrent, effectively ending dependence on US policy. That would mean banishing American bases and weaponry from our soil.

A further proposal is that we embrace the re-unification of Ireland. That is a matter for the people of the whole of Ireland to decide, but it cannot be denied that the EU is exploiting northern Ireland as a debilitating toehold on British life and policy.

In the same vein, they suggest ending devolution, and that Britain relinquish overseas territories claimed by other sovereign peoples. There are further suggestions to democratise parliament by expanding it, to say one MP per 50,000 constituents, and to outlaw corporate financing of political parties. Also to abolish the House of Lords and to repeal all laws limiting political expression.

The book is limited by a lack of clarity on the question of class where it infers the existence of a middle class, references middle class union leaders and so on. It characterises unions as relics of the past, ignoring that they are the one creation of the working class that can serve their interests, (when they choose to use them, as in recent pay disputes).

But overall this is a brave and necessary attempt to make sense of the malaise of political life, and to recognise that this can only end when workers begin to take control. ■

WORKERS

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A little-known event in medieval times is still of interest to how people can exercise their power...

1217: The Charter of the Forest

IN 1217 the Charter of the Forest re-established for “free men” rights of access to the royal forests that had been eroded by King William the Conqueror (1066-1087) and his heirs.

The charter was part of a peace settlement after a period of civil war. In many ways it complements the better known Magna Carta. Many of the charter’s provisions remained in force for centuries afterwards.

To the Normans, who invaded England 150 years earlier, “forest” meant an enclosed area where the monarch, or sometimes another aristocrat, had exclusive rights to animals of the chase and the greenery (“vert”) on which they fed.

Forests included large areas of commons such as heathland, grassland and wetlands. These areas could be used for food production and for grazing as well as for fuel and other resources.

Before the Norman takeover, two aspects of life in Anglo-Saxon England were different. First, Anglo-Saxon kings – though great huntsmen – never set aside areas declared to be “outside the law of the land”.

And secondly, commoners – typically peasants or villagers – did have some rights to use forests and common land. The contrast with Norman forest law was marked; Anglo-Saxon ways were less rigid and less exclusive.

The charter redressed some applications of the Anglo-Norman forest law, under which the Norman kings had begun to reserve some of England’s vast forests for their own private use. People resented the cruel punishments that forest courts gave out to those who broke the rules.

‘Many of the charter’s provisions remained in force for centuries afterwards...’

These royal enclosures deprived the common man of the ability to forage for food, hunt for meat or gather firewood. These grievances were among the issues raised at the time of Magna Carta in 1215. Significantly they were of lesser concern to the barons opposing the King and so failed to be incorporated in the great charter itself. Two years later, however, this matter received its own charter, which was reissued alongside Magna Carta in 1225.

At its widest extent, royal forest covered about a third of southern England and became an increasing hardship on commoners trying to farm, forage and otherwise use the land they lived on: for example, in charcoal burning industries; pannage (pasture for pigs), estover (collecting firewood), agistment (grazing), or turbarry (cutting of turf for fuel).

Pasture

The first clause of the charter protected common pasture in the forest for all those “accustomed to it” And clause 9 added, “Henceforth every freeman, in his wood or on his land that he has in the forest, may with impunity make a mill, fish-preserve, pond, marl-pit, ditch, or arable in cultivated land outside coverts, provided that no injury is thereby given to any neighbour.”

Clause 10 repealed the death penalty (and mutilation as a lesser punishment) for capturing deer (venison), though transgressors were still subject to fines or imprisonment. Clause 13 declared, “Every freeman shall have, within his own woods, ayries of hawks, sparrow-hawks, falcons, eagles and herons: and shall have also the honey that is found within his woods.”

Special verderers’ courts were set up within the forests to enforce the laws of the charter and officials were employed to enforce fines and punishments. At times their annoying behaviour led to rural riots, as in Cheshire in the 1350s.

Historians disagree about the significance of the charter. Some believe it asserted not only the rights of ordinary people to access the commons for the means of livelihood and shelter, but also that it represented a constitutional victory for ordinary people over the wealthy elite, opening or reopening forests to the use of



Public domain

British Library copy of the charter – one of three – r

non-aristocrats.

Others quibble that the concessions in the charter were only granted to “free men”. It excluded the unfree, a large proportion of the population, and allowed lords to make the forest profitable; peasants using forests had to pay to let their pigs root or to gather loose wood or cut trees.

Rights of the free

Undeniably, the charter was a vehicle for asserting the right of commoners against the privileged landed class that normally could employ the power of the state for their own interests. But objectively it was not about the rights of the poor but the rights of the free.

The charter did not apply to serfs (agricultural labourers tied by the feudal system to working on the lord’s estate) or villeins (feudal tenants entirely subject to a lord or manor). Probably less than half of the population benefited. But for free men it was a

day – it tells us

Forest



made with additions in 1225.

vital change that reversed rights eroded for 150 years.

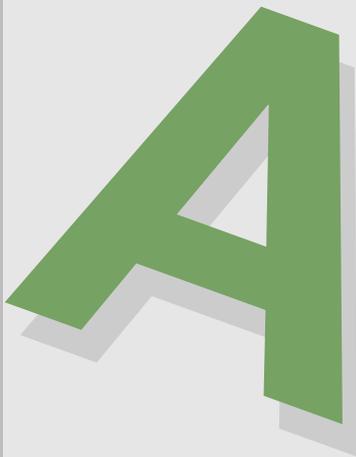
The charter was undoubtedly, for its time, a radical assertion of practical freedoms. As with most laws, its provisions did not emerge out of the blue, nor was it a piece of altruistic benevolence handed down from those on high.

The free commoners had for centuries been exercising, or attempting to exercise, many of the activities allowed in the act. The ultimate force behind the passing of the legislation was the refusal of the free to be denied what they had before.

Equally, after the charter was agreed, the free commoners continued a struggle to defend, uphold and ensure proper implementation of the act. That was the necessary impetus sustaining their rights and which kept their acknowledged place within the forests and commons alive.

Then as now, it is the people who make things happen and then sustain them. ■

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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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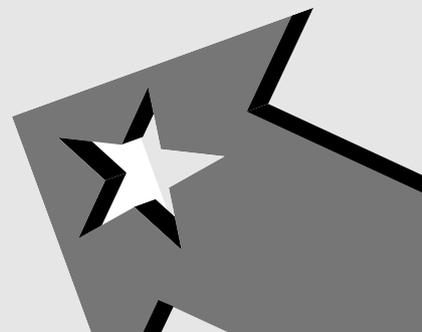
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Stay out of Israel and Palestine!

Events in Israel and Gaza have appalled workers everywhere. Workers should demand an end to external interference, opposing both terrorism and reprisals...

THE UNFOLDING events in Israel and Gaza have appalled workers everywhere. But British workers must focus on Britain and not think it's for us to tell other peoples how to conduct their struggles or solve their problems.

It is not for workers in Britain, or elsewhere, to add fuel to the fire by supporting either terrorism carried out under a false flag of national liberation or a state waging sectarian war on its neighbours in retaliation.

In that light, what can we say about the events in Israel and Gaza?

We condemn the Hamas attack that began on 7 October: it is a terrorist action. Hamas is not fighting for national liberation or waging a people's war. What it is doing and what it stands for are a perversion of such struggles.

We condemn the Israeli response: it has nothing to do with justified self-defence. Reprisals and collective punishment directed against the whole civilian population of Gaza are not justified (and may be illegal under international law, notwithstanding Hamas's action). This perpetuates Israel's ongoing policy of intimidation and ghettoisation of the two million people trapped there.

We condemn Rishi Sunak's willingness to give more military aid to Israel. Outside interference has maintained this running sore, and blighted the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians for decades.

We condemn importing support for either side onto the streets of Britain. Celebrating the murder and kidnapping of civilians and tourists is anti-working class and anti-people. So too is calling for the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in their homes and blockade of essential supplies, or unquestioning support for such actions.

Attempts to prevent criticism of Israel and to allow it to pursue whatever acts it likes in Gaza are totally unjustified. It is not anti-Semitic to oppose the obliteration of Gaza, it is not anti-Palestinian to oppose Hamas's terrorist actions. Attempts to portray the assault by Hamas as a step in the cause of Palestinian liberation are totally unjustified.

Such responses are not in the interests of Britain and British workers – they perpetuate the conflict and attempt to bring those divisions to our country. We have many tasks and problems of our own to resolve. Dividing our working class on sectarian lines, no matter what their origin, is no answer – indeed this will prevent progress here.

But something must change in Israel and Palestine, otherwise their peoples will be condemned endlessly to repeat the cycle of violence and mutual recrimination.

External interference in the region has lasted for over 100 years. It's time to end it. That alone will not bring resolution, but it would be a giant step.

The US and its allies use Israel as a client in their struggle against Iran and for economic control. Iran and its allies use the Palestinian cause as a pretext for their own political and theocratic ends. Neither is truly interested in Israeli or Palestinian workers, except as client soldieries in their wider battles.

Change is also needed within Israel and Palestine. That will be far more likely to happen without foreign interference.

Hamas and the Israeli government feed off each other's hatred; neither appears to want resolution. And we should not forget that Israel initially supported Hamas as it opposed the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

The latest Hamas attack looks like an attempt to block the possibility of peace for years, if not decades. The Israeli government has seized on this as an opportunity to brush aside growing internal civil and military opposition.

Proposals for two states, Israel and Palestine, and recognition that each has a right to exist in peace, have fallen by the wayside, or have been sabotaged. Neither Hamas nor the Israeli government want two states. Yet the alternative to peace is continued conflict.

In the end only the people of the region can decide what resolution and peace might involve. Supporting them means confronting those in Britain who support continuing the conflict there and bringing it here. ■

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