

WORKERS

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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

BRITAIN: A NATION UNITED BY STRUGGLE

Rail A government crisis
Research Take control
Freedom Right to fight
Treasury Secret power
Health Workers need a plan

NATO Just leave!
Finance Dollar danger
Steel On the edge
plus Historic Notes,
News and more

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

WORKERS



Assert the right to fight

THE NEW Public Order Act, finally hurried through a pliant parliament just days before the Coronation, is a giant step towards a far more repressive state. Peaceful protest is under threat. The Labour Party refuses to say it would repeal the Act if elected.

Groups such as Just Stop Oil and Animal Rising have worked to bring this about through “protests” aimed at working class events and activities: sports events, travel, art galleries, and at our places of work such as oil refineries and depots. These antics were a gift to the state.

On Saturday 6 May, the Metropolitan Police arrested and detained 62 people for several hours before releasing them. Wearing campaign T-shirts seemed to be sufficient to warrant arrest. Few of them were charged with any offences.

On the day, the Met also used facial recognition technology for the purpose of surveillance and arrest, another step towards a far more authoritarian state.

Even more crucially, the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill is on its way through parliament. It would allow employers to name individual workers who they can compel to come to work on strike days, and for the government to set minimum service levels during strikes in public services.

Workers in public services, who have been fighting for jobs and pay to improve staffing levels and services, have condemned these minimum service levels as a stunt.

For example, doctors’ union the BMA said it had long called on the government to ensure safe staffing levels across the NHS. The government focus on minimum staffing levels to curtail strike action while claiming to protect the NHS, “...goes to the heart of why healthcare workers are striking and considering striking”.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced yet another new crime, conspiracy to cause a public nuisance, so widely defined as to make almost any protest an arrestable offence. This Act also gave the government even more powers, so it can in effect bypass parliament.

The Home Office has used the new Act to increase its powers over peaceful protest. In doing so it directly overruled parliament, an unprecedented move. The House of Lords had also rejected the government’s proposed amendments toughening the Public Order Act.

Instead of arguing its case in parliament, the government then reinstated its amendments by using its powers under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.

Protests by publicity seeking activists are a world away from collective working class action at the workplace. At ambulance workers’ picket lines at hospitals in the recent pay disputes, the police were either diplomatically absent, or chose not to enforce anti-trade union law. We are not satisfied with “protest”; we want to take charge.



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Workers

Doctors in dispute

JUNIOR HOSPITAL doctors in England were on strike for 72 hours from 14 to 17 June – their third strike since March in support of their pay campaign. Their trade union, the British Medical Association (BMA), has a mandate for further strikes – three days each month through the summer. It is re-balloting members during that time, in case further action is needed.

Hospital consultants are also voting on industrial action: the ballot closes on 27 June. If the ballot is successful, the BMA has announced two strike days on 20 and 21 July, when consultants, the most senior hospital doctors, will provide only emergency cover.

In Scotland an offer to junior doctors of 14.5 per cent over two years was decisively rejected. BMA members have voted for three days of strikes starting on 13 July.

The erosion of doctors' pay has contributed to a staffing crisis in the NHS. Medical schools turn away highly qualified candidates, because of a government cap on British medical student numbers, though medical schools are allowed to recruit overseas students willy-nilly.

Like the nurses, doctors no longer put their trust in their pay review body, the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration, as governments consistently ignore its recommendations. ■

GSK

Pay dispute escalates

WORKERS AT pharmaceutical giant GSK are to escalate their strike action in a dispute over pay. Around 750 workers at sites across Britain have turned down a below inflation pay offer even though the company admits it can afford to pay more.

The workers, members of Unite, undertake a wide variety of roles and include engineers, process technicians, laboratory analysts, warehouse workers and fire officers. They refused an offer of 6 per cent and a lump sum of £1,300 – substantially below the current level of inflation.

GSK, previously known as GlaxoSmithKline, is a wealthy and profitable company. Its latest financial results show an operating profit of £8.15 billion last year, 26 per cent up on the previous year. The union says the cost of resolving its pay claim would be just 0.05 per cent of the company's profits. ■

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

FACTS MATTER

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

If you want to check our references for a particular story, look it up online at cpbml.org.uk 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



Gary Bembridge via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)



The North Sea is still an important source of Britain's energy.

ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Waiting on the NHS across Britain

In NHS England and across Britain, hospital waiting lists are increasing, with little sign of progress.

Rail pay struggle continues

RMT members working on trains and in stations across the country held another strike on Friday 2 June, the latest in their long-running pay dispute.

The mirage of universal basic income

The idea of a universal basic income does not stand up to close examination and offers nothing for workers. The latest proposals, from consultants Autonomy, are no different.

Nurse shortages – retain, don't plunder

Importing nurses from other countries is no answer to NHS staff shortages. Retaining nurses already working would be a step in the right direction.

Strike to hit Europe's largest Coca Cola bottler

Unite members at the Coca Cola Europacific Partners plant in Wakefield, Europe's largest, will strike for fourteen days this month after 87 per cent of those voting in a ballot rejected the employer's offer of a 6 per cent rise.

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.

Offshore pay gains

OVER 700 offshore oil and gas workers at Bilfinger UK, members of Unite the union, have accepted a "vastly improved" wage offer. This brings a pay dispute between the workers and the company to an end.

Unite's Bilfinger members accepted a further 6 per cent increase on basic pay in addition to a 4 per cent rise in January 2023. Bilfinger had initially refused to increase pay above the base rate set in the Energy Services Agreement for 2022, which was set at 4 per cent.

The Bilfinger offshore contractors were scheduled to participate in two recent rounds of strike action – from 1 to 3 June and then from 8 to 10 June. This action was suspended to allow a vote on the improved wage offer.

Unite official Shauna Wright said that this was a good deal for the Bilfinger workers and is the highest annual pay increase ever at the company – a 10 per cent pay increase this year. And since last November the basic hourly pay for some Unite members has risen by up to 19 per cent. Wright added, "It's a great result which has only come about due to the resolve and strength of our members."

When asked to comment on Unite's latest statement, a Bilfinger spokesperson told industry website Rigzone, "We're pleased to have worked with Unite to bring forward an offer that our colleagues and clients agreed best supports our workers, and their families."

The German-based multinational engineering company also said that, "This deal enables our employees and our organization, as co-signatories of the Energy Services Agreement, to work together to ensure a secure and sustainable oil and gas industry and energy sector for the future."

Around 1,650 offshore oil and gas contractors across many different trades planned two rounds of 48 hour strikes in June following strikes in the two previous months affecting producers in the North Sea fields. Besides those working for Bilfinger, this involved Stork Technical Services, and Sparrows Offshore Services. According to Unite this was the largest such action in the offshore industry. ■

MANCHESTER

New offer for tram drivers

TRAM DRIVERS at Manchester Metrolink have won an improved pay offer from the company following planned strike action.

The strike was to have taken place over the weekend of 10 and 11 June. It would have affected travel to a number of music events and other entertainment in Greater Manchester over the weekend.

The 600 plus workers were originally offered a 5 per cent pay rise for a 15-month period. Their union, Unite, described that as a "very substantial real terms pay cut".

Metrolink initially refused to talk about any revision to that offer, but changed tack after the ballot. An overwhelming majority of workers at the company voted to take strike

action – 95 per cent on an 84 per cent turnout. The strike action has been suspended while workers are balloted on the new offer. If it is rejected new strike dates could be announced.

Metrolink is owned by GMPTE, but is managed and operated as a joint venture between Keolis (majority owned by SNCF, the French state-owned rail company) and Amey (acquired by two private equity firms last year, it also operates the Docklands Light Railway in London).

- Unite members working for First Manchester buses are balloting for strike action in pursuit of their pay claim. The union says First is paying less than other companies in the area and as a consequence the shortage of drivers and overwork will get worse. ■

HEATHROW

Security staff win offer

HEATHROW SECURITY officers have won an improved pay offer from Heathrow Airports Ltd (HAL) after voting by a majority of 85 per cent for strike action. The strikes, due to begin on 24 and 25 June, have now been postponed as a gesture of goodwill while the workers are balloted on the offer.

If they reject the offer then the remaining 29 days of planned strike action will be spread across the summer, beginning

before the end of June.

Industrial action had already begun at Terminal 5 and Campus Security (officers who check all workers and vehicles entering the airport). Only after those at Terminal 3 voted to join the action, bringing the number involved to over 2,000, did the company finally come up with an improved offer.

The company fired and rehired its entire workforce during the Covid pandemic in 2020, while awarding its chief executive John Holland-Kaye a rise of 88 per cent and now paying out over a £1 billion to shareholders in the next few years. ■



Trent turbofan under test at Rolls-Royce Derby, where it is currently testing UltraFan the next generation of efficient engine technology.

Rolls-Royce claim stalled

WORKERS AT aerospace and defence company Rolls-Royce plc recently rejected the company's pay offer in response to the workers' cost of living claim made on 2 February this year. They are considering their next step in the face of obstructive tactics by the company.

The workers claimed a 6.5 per cent pay increase plus a £500 consolidated cash lump sum. They later included a 1 hour reduction in the working week. This was hailed by their unions, Unite and GMB, as fair and reasonable in the current inflation and industrial relations climate.

The offer, made after messy negotiations, was for a 6.5 per cent increase and a £500 unconsolidated cash lump sum with no reduction in hours. It went to a consultative ballot at the request of Rolls-Royce, which claimed that it could afford no more.

The ballot result, announced on 3 May, showed a decisive rejection by all four bargaining groups nationally – ranging from 97 per cent to 85 per cent. It seems Rolls-Royce workers feel strongly that the company can afford to meet the claim in full and are holding out on a relatively small part of the settlement.

This sent a clear message to the company that the offer was an insult to those struggling to cope with the crippling rate of inflation. And it was after significant efforts by the union negotiating team to be positive and reasonable at all times.

To the workers this looks like a carbon copy of the 2022 pay round. The company dragged its feet, while telling the workforce that it was doing its utmost and the problem was union intransigence.

The company also made the bizarre claim to its workers that it does not have influence over how and what the union asks the members in the ballots that are held. These ballots are held in accordance with the restrictive law imposed on trade unions.

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

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

JULY

Tuesday 4 July, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“What should be the working class response to the ongoing financial collapse?”

Removing the dollar's influence opens the door to political and economic independence for Britain and means once and for all rejecting bloc politics. In effect, Brexit from the dollar. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

Friday 14 July to Sunday 16 July

Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, Tolpuddle, Dorset

The eclectic mix of music, talks, cinema, comedy and theatre is looking forward to another year's festival, culminating in the traditional march to the ancient Martyrs' Tree. Full details from the festival website, tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 3 September, 10.30am

Burston, near Diss, Norfolk

Burston Strike School Rally

Celebrating the longest-running strike in British history, lasting from 1914 to 1939. The strike began when teachers at the village's Church of England school, were sacked after a dispute with the area's school management committee and schoolchildren went on strike in their support. The rally is fully funded by trade unions, so no charge for access. Performers include Hank Wangford. Full details are available from

burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com

Tuesday 26 September, 7.30pm

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

In-person CPBML public meeting

“Our health service, our responsibility”

NHS workers from all professions have shown discipline, tactical ingenuity and unity in their fight for pay and for the future of the service. The whole class, too, must play its part. Come and join the discussion. All welcome.

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

The NATO drums for war are beating loudly. British workers

Britain out of NATO – no



Workers

Britain out of NATO: the next step to independence.

NATO IS AN organisation for war, not peace and has always been. The Russian invasion of Ukraine should not blind us to NATO's nature.

NATO's biggest air exercise over Europe, Air Defender 23, took place from 12 to 23 June. Involving 25 nations, including non-NATO members Sweden and Japan, it simulated NATO's response to an attack on a member country. The exercise included 250 aircraft, some flying to

Estonia, bordering Russia, and to Romania, bordering Ukraine.

We must demand an end to the involvement of British forces in such exercises. We must also demand an end to the British government's interference in Ukraine. It should cease its escalation and its deliberate sabotage of diplomatic efforts to end the war.

Air Defender 23 was preceded in May by the annual Exercise Spring Storm, this

year based in Estonia. All three services of the UK armed forces were involved, deploying 1,500 personnel alongside over 12,000 from ten other NATO nations.

Lieutenant General Michael A Loh, director of the US Air National Guard, said the Air Defender 23 exercise goes beyond deterrence: "It's about the readiness of our force. It's about coordination, not just within NATO, but with our other allies and partners outside of NATO."

ers should not ignore this, still less support it...

to war, yes to defence

Loh continued, “So this is about now establishing what it means to go against a great power, in a great power competition.” His remarks were directed at Russia. But NATO also has China firmly in its sights.

In November 2022 a British patrol ship took part in one of NATO’s largest military exercises in the Pacific, another exercise that involved NATO member nations and their “partners” Japan and Australia.

NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept document spells out that Russia and China are significant threats to “the rules-based international order” and in detail how NATO proposes to deal with them. In other words, they are threats to US-led finance capitalism and will be taken down – whatever the consequences for working people across the world.

That document says: “We will strengthen our ties with partners that share the Alliance’s values and interest in upholding the rules-based international order... We will continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries in [the Western Balkans and the Black Sea].”

‘Shared threats’

It also talks about working with “partners” to counteract “shared security threats” in other regions strategically important to NATO – including the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel regions. And it does not stop there: NATO has similar aspirations for the Indo-Pacific region, “given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security.”

The EU is identified as a key partner, “[It] is a unique and essential partner for NATO... For the development of the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU, non-EU Allies’ fullest involvement in EU defence efforts is essential. NATO recognises the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO.” So much for the EU as a benign customs union!

These statements show that NATO is warmongering and seeks to bring as many countries as it can across the world into its control. In other words, “Watch out world.”

NATO claims to be upholding “the

rules-based international order”. But in its wars against Yugoslavia, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan, NATO has consistently broken the rules of the UN Charter, which are based on respect for nations’ sovereignty.

War and nuclear war are dire threats to all workers: we are on a knife edge. This is why we must demand that Britain leaves NATO and takes a non-aligned stance. Not only will this benefit the British people, but it would also be a blow to NATO, to the benefit of workers everywhere.

Warmongering

Warmongering is not peculiar to NATO. It is a logical phase in capitalism, especially finance capitalism. Wherever imperialism arises, it leads to war between competing blocs – and war against the working class. It is axiomatic that repression abroad brings oppression at home.

At this point in history, US- and UK-led finance capitalism sees NATO and war as useful tools to stave off economic decline. American pro-NATO think tanks are calling for the dismemberment of Russia and China. And for their natural resources, including their peoples, to be exploited.

In demanding that Britain leaves NATO we must be aware that we will need to defend ourselves against all imperialists. On leaving, Britain is likely to be declared a pariah by warmongers. We will need our armies; we will need our defence systems, including nuclear weapons. But the sole purpose of these armies and defence systems will be to defend Britain and the people who live here.

Meanwhile we need to build the popular demand for Britain to leave NATO. For example, the University and College Union at its recent Congress became the first trade union to call for an end to the war in Ukraine.

On 27 May, the Union passed a motion titled, “Stop the war in Ukraine – peace now”, which noted that “NATO is not a progressive force: escalation risks widening war in the region; only through a peaceful resolution can lives be saved.” The union called on Russia to withdraw its troops, for the UK government to stop arming Ukraine, and for “a peaceful resolution to the war”.

But a few days later their general secre-

‘We need to build the popular demand for Britain to leave NATO...’

tary issued a public statement regretting that the motion had been passed and saying that officers would seek to ensure that the issue would be “debated further” – presumably until the policy was reversed.

The Labour Party doesn’t even want a debate. Starmer declared that Labour is the party of NATO and that anyone criticising NATO would be expelled.

Events organised to discuss the issue of war have been cancelled where venues have been threatened. The Scottish organisation “Glasgow against NATO” recently had a meeting cancelled at the last minute; they had to meet in the park instead.

A meeting planned for Conway Hall in London, the venue of many dissenting meetings over the years, didn’t take place. It seems that threatening emails came from Germany. Conway Hall pulled out and then so too did the replacement venue.

Attempts to stifle debate are part of NATO’s plans, outlined in NATO 2022 Strategic Concept document (point 43). That document is about partnership with the EU to “increase cooperation on issues of common interest”. That’s the common interest of the capitalist class, not British workers.

In 2016 the people of Britain voted to leave the EU and to be an independent nation. Ever since, the British ruling class have done everything they can to tie us to other transnational blocs. Any thought of an independent Britain is demonised.

We, the people of Britain, have an urgent responsibility to pull Britain out of NATO, to call for peace and for Britain to be non-aligned. ■

This article is based on the discussion at a CPBML online public meeting in May.

Rail workers should ensure that the strong workplace org support for their campaigns of industrial action is not diss

Rail – a crisis created by



Bradley Caslin/shutterstock.com

Transpennine Express train in York, en route to Liverpool Lime Street, March 2022. At the end of May this year it was taken away from its operator, FirstGroup, and into public control as an “operator of last resort”.

BRITAIN'S RAILWAYS continue to face an uncertain future. Industrial disputes with drivers' union Aslef and with the main rail union RMT are still ongoing in the face of the government's refusal to allow the train operating companies to offer an acceptable pay deal that wouldn't mean rail workers giving up hard-won conditions.

The Sunak government is not only engaged in attacking both rail workers and the industry within which they work, but is also clueless about railways in general including the purpose of them.

Rail workers are rising to the challenges from Sunak. On 14 June, Aslef published the results of the 13 ballots anti-trade union laws force them to hold after every six months of industrial action. That's a ballot for every train operator that provides passenger services under contract to the Department for Transport (DfT).

Train drivers delivered impressive and conclusive voting figures to continue their

disputes. For example, in Cross Country, over 85 per cent of members voted, with over 95 per cent of those voting for more strikes.

Mick Whelan, Aslef General Secretary, said: “Train drivers are sick to the back teeth of their employers and the government failing to negotiate in good faith, and blaming drivers for their inability to manage services and the rail industry effectively.”

Overwhelming

The Aslef results follow the announcement in May that RMT members had also voted overwhelmingly to continue strikes, and both unions took strike action during June resulting in very few trains running across England.

Pay deals have been achieved with those train companies controlled by the Welsh and Scottish governments, and also Merseytravel. That underlines just how much the Sunak government's political

strategy is designed to undermine both the rail industry and those who work in it.

June 2023 saw RMT members in Scotland, having had annual pay rises, settle for a 5 per cent basic pay uplift with the lowest paid receiving as much as an 8 per cent increase. Aslef is recommending a

“Train drivers are sick to the back teeth of their employers and the government failing to negotiate in good faith...”

organisation that has been developed when they built
dissipated...

y government

similar offer to its members. In contrast, many train company workers across England have had no pay rise for 4 years.

The government has recently added another train company to its growing portfolio of publicly owned passenger operators, Transpennine. The company was operated by FirstGroup – heavily criticised for cancelling huge numbers of services daily since the Covid pandemic – leaving the government with no option but to take the contract away.

Too few drivers

Transpennine, operating services across northern England, had procured too many different train types for such a small operator, which meant it required large training commitments for its drivers. It also relied heavily on employing too few drivers, who were expected to work large numbers of rest days and longer days.

Once the company got caught up in the Aslef dispute, goodwill evaporated and drivers stopped working overtime, causing the cancellations. Now the return of the company to public ownership has seen a deal with Aslef that will ease problems for passengers.

Many train operators are now publicly owned under the DfT's "operator of last resort" policy. And those that are still in private hands are no longer franchises. Instead, they provide train services under contract to the DfT with a guaranteed profit built into the contract.

But the government is in control, determining the level of services. These have been cut back since the Covid pandemic, even though passenger numbers now often exceed pre-pandemic levels – with a huge growth in leisure travel despite the uncertainties created by mismanagement and strikes.

So the demands of the rail unions for the railways to be returned to public ownership and control have been largely realised. Yet the industry continues to be in crisis because control of most passenger services in England lies with Sunak's government. What is actually needed is for the railways to be under workers' control, run in the interests of the working class.

Rail workers should ensure that the

strong workplace organisation that has been developed out of necessity to build support for their campaigns of industrial action is not dissipated once the disputes have run their course, and that it is used to exert positive influence over the future direction of the railways.

Fragmentation has proved to be the biggest problem created by rail privatisation. The most notable manifestation of this was the timetable fiasco of May 2018, when the lack of what has come to be termed "a single guiding mind" resulted in train services falling apart, and emergency timetables being introduced to keep the trains moving.

The Johnson government decided to address this by creating "Great British Railways" (GBR) which would absorb Network Rail and direct the industry going forward. A GBR Transition Team has been created under the leadership of the Network Rail CEO and Chairman and now employs hundreds of staff.

Expensive

An expensive public competition was held to determine where GBR's HQ would be – and the railway city of Derby was awarded this honour.

Except that Sunak has apparently now got cold feet about introducing the necessary legislation to give GBR the powers it needs to function properly. "Not a priority", "no room in the parliamentary timetable" have been the weak excuses proffered for failing to proceed. Not that GBR was the solution to the industry's problems, but it would at least have been a step in the right direction.

Sunak's rail minister, Huw Merriman, dismayed the rail industry at a recent conference when he said, "we must replace diesel trains, ideally without the need for expensive and intrusive overhead lines".

In its obsession with cutting back on rail spending, the government does not see that instituting a rolling programme of electrification will be the cheapest and most effective way forward in the medium to long term.

The government has form on this. It has delayed parts of the construction of HS2 to save money in the short term, but dramati-

'Fragmentation has proved to be the biggest problem caused by rail privatisation...'

cally increasing the final cost of the project.

Further woolly government thinking is exemplified by Network Rail's latest Strategic Business Plan for Control Period 7 (2024-29), published in May. In that report Network Rail said that it will be forced by government reductions in real-term funding to cut back on renewals during this period – which will inevitably result in increasing delays to trains caused by infrastructure failure.

Perhaps more in hope than expectation, the plan also says that safety will be protected! But many rail workers and passengers still remember the days of Railtrack, when safety was relegated in favour of financial imperatives, resulting in a number of serious rail crashes.

Most of the national railway network was built in the 19th century, and many structures are now becoming life-expired, as rail industry jargon has it. For many, detailed information and plans about how they were constructed do not exist.

The recent closure of the strategically important route from Birmingham to Reading for nearly two months perhaps illustrates the potential for future problems. Nuneham Viaduct, built in 1844, which spans the River Thames between Oxford and Didcot, was known to be a problem for years, but maintenance on it was delayed again and again. Eventually, it partially collapsed, forcing the issue. There are likely to be other problems of a similar nature that cause the closure of key routes.

Sunak's government may well soon be voted out but many rail workers know that the battle for the railways is one that will continue long after Sunak is a footnote in history. ■

The government's fear of real independence from the European research – and it's a fear shared by too many who work in

Research: take control

THE GOVERNMENT seems incapable of taking full control of how taxpayers' money is used to support scientific endeavour in Britain.

The latest turn in a long history of dithering and delay came on 8 June. The government announced that it was extending for a further three months the provisional arrangements to guarantee funding for British researchers and research organisations that have had their bids accepted by the EU's Horizon Europe research programme.

How long can the government carry on extending "provisional" arrangements? Indefinitely, apparently. The arrangements were introduced in November 2021. Since then they have been extended four times – in March 2022, September 2022, December 2022, and now this June.

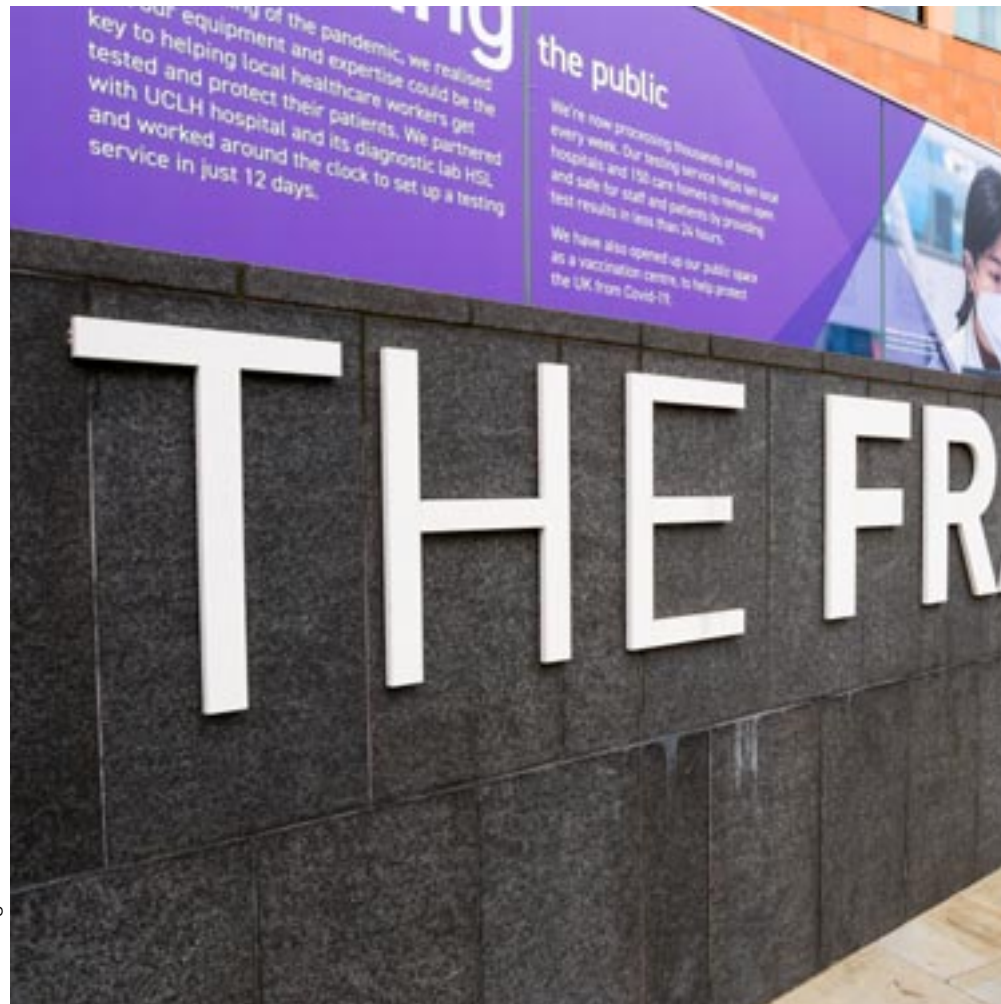
Frustrated

Researchers are understandably frustrated. The programme is a lucrative source of research funding, with a proposed budget of 12.8 billion euros (£11 billion) in 2024. Before Britain voted to leave the EU, British researchers won 12.1 per cent of the previous Horizon programme's funding.

Researchers here and in the EU are united: they want Britain to join Horizon. In a statement published two days after the Windsor Framework which apparently cleared the way, all Britain's main non-government research funders urged swift action, as did the CBI.

They were joined by key European research alliances. Kurt Deketelaere from the League of European Research Universities (LERU), for example, said: "The UK has some of the most prominent research-intensive universities in the world (of which five are LERU members), and their association to Horizon Europe will be of immense value."

'It's not as though Horizon Europe is the only option...'



The Francis Crick Institute, London, the biggest single research centre in Europe – and created

It's not as though Horizon Europe is the only option. In April, science minister Michelle Donelan unveiled the £14.6 billion Pioneer programme, a fleshed-out version of the "Plan B" announced last year.

Pioneer is a detailed plan to support research and innovation guaranteeing the same level of investment that association to Horizon Europe would entail, should negotiations to join that programme fail.

And fail they may well do. In the short term, at least, there is huge uncertainty in Brussels with the sudden departure of Mariya Gabriel, the EU commissioner responsible for research. Given the tortuous way the EU commission is appointed, she won't be replaced. Instead her brief will be covered by the competition commis-

sioner, who has a full workload as it is.

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement included a commitment from both sides that Britain would affiliate to Horizon Europe. Since then, nothing concrete has happened.

At first the delay was clearly down to the EU. Brussels refused point blank to negotiate the terms of access to Horizon Europe while disagreement continued over the Northern Ireland Agreement.

When that roadblock was cleared at the end of February with the signing of the Windsor Framework, many expected swift movement on Horizon Europe. It hasn't happened.

The government is reported to be concerned to ensure that affiliation to Horizon

European Union is nowhere clearer than in funding for research...

of our funding



without the help of the European Union.

Europe will be “value for money”. And it should be: the affiliation fee of some £2 billion per year is equivalent to around 20 per cent of Britain’s budget for research and development in 2021.

A particular concern is that Britain has played no part in shaping the programme’s priorities. So affiliation to Horizon would mean that upwards of £14 billion of British taxpayers’ money will be spent between now and 2027 on research projects that align with the EU’s political and economic agendas.

Some of Horizon Europe’s scientific priorities do align with those of Britain, but others – especially in the social sciences – are purely there to seek academic justification for the underlying principles of the EU.

Swathes of British academics have happily buried their snouts in this trough of money for years, creating an army of EU cheerleaders in our universities. These included whole departments of support staff whose sole job was to assist researchers to bring more EU money into their universities. Many of those jobs have now evaporated.

Dependency

Dependency on Horizon programmes over many years has created a body of researchers who could not exist without it – particularly in the arts and humanities. The most recent figures available (from 2014) suggest that in Archaeology, Classics, IT, Media Studies, Law and Philosophy more than a quarter of their total funding came from EU programmes.

EU funding for those disciplines is certainly more generous than that from the British government. But what independent nation allows other countries to set its research priorities and budgets? If there’s a good case for a research project, it should be argued for in Britain and in line with national priorities.

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement, signed by the Johnson government on 30 December 2020, includes another funding twist. This agreement set out the basis of Britain’s contribution to Horizon, and created a significant imbalance – to the detriment of Britain, naturally.

If Britain joins Horizon Europe and – as is likely – British researchers win, on merit, a greater share of the funding than anticipated, our government will have to pay more if the excess is 8 per cent or higher. But on the other hand it would only get a rebate from the EU if our researchers win 16 per cent less than expected. If that doesn’t seem fair, well, it isn’t. But it’s what the EU insisted on.

And there’s worse in the agreement inherited from the Johnson government. On top of the funding imbalance, the British government agreed that the ultimate arbiter of any disagreement about funding decisions under Horizon Europe would be ... yes, the European Court of Justice.

Surprisingly, the EU is not insisting on Britain paying for 2020 and 2021, when it

‘What independent nation allows other countries to set its research priorities?’

was not associated and benefiting at all. But universities and other research bodies will not get anything like full value from 2023, having to bid for programme money from a standing start.

There are other cost issues arising from the EU setting Horizon priorities. A significant proportion of Horizon Europe money, for example, goes to support for the Marie Curie programme of international postdoctoral mobility and training, from which Britain stands to gain relatively little.

The Marie Curie budget comes out at 6.6 billion euros for the seven years of Horizon Europe, and would cost Britain close to £140 million a year, which could be better used. But for many of the EU’s friends in Britain, such costs are dismissed. They talk only of how important it is to be part of Horizon Europe.

Critics

Paul Nurse, one of 15 Nobel prize-winners who wrote to prime minister Rishi Sunak last year urging association to Horizon Europe, criticised even the existence of the Pioneer plan. “I think we are dithering too much, frankly,” he told MPs in April, “and I think we’re getting mixed messages with Plan B.”

There’s nothing mixed about ideas such as those Nurse put forward. Thinking like that is not helpful: it sends a clear message to the EU that it should play hard in the negotiations over Britain’s association to Horizon Europe. Which is just what happened with the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The government should hold firm. International cooperation in science has been going on for centuries, and it will continue with or without help from the European Union. ■

Photo feature: workers are fighting back against attempts to restrict the right to withdraw their labour...

The right to strike



Left: RMT pickets, Wolverhampton, June. Right and below: scenes from the TUC emergency protest in London against restricting the right to strike, May. All photos Workers.





With the SNP administration in crisis, Scots can see that Britain-wide – as is the financial crisis...

Britain-wide view gaining

AS A REVITALISED May Day march wound its way through Glasgow earlier this year there was a palpable feeling of solidarity and optimism in the air among the two thousand trade unionists.

One buzz of conversation to be heard was of younger marchers being told that this route – from Glasgow's central George Square to its southside Queen's Park – was traversing the same roads that the famous African American singer Paul Robeson had walked when he led the march on 1 May 1960.

At the rally Robeson addressed the crowd of several thousand and sang a selection of his songs. This year music was again on display, with local groups singing, following speeches from various trade union representatives.

The energy shown on May Day had built up over several months of solidarity actions that had seen fellow trade unionists, students and community groups out on picket lines in support of striking workers. With most of the major British unions involved, the sense of a nation in struggle had grown and has not diminished.

A remarkable feature of both the picket lines and the May Day rally, organised by Glasgow Trade Union Council, was the large percentage of younger people involved and fully committed.

A large contingent of students were highlighting their own problems and were part of the Living Rent campaign, fighting against corporate landlords and unaffordable rent increases.

National campaigns

In all cases a firm UK perspective was gaining traction. Many of the strikes for better wages and conditions are Britain-wide, as is the financial crisis.

When interviewed by *Workers* back in March at the end of a large PCS and UCU strike solidarity rally in Glasgow, the Deputy General Secretary of the Scottish Trade Union Congress, Dave Moxham also showed this approach. He commented:

"We've been joined by a whole range of supportive trade unions – and the message here today, and it's a message



May Day 2023 march, Glasgow.

Workers

right across the UK, is that no worker who is currently on industrial action will be giving up until they receive pay justice and no part of the trade union movement will be leaving them behind. We're in it for the long haul."

Recent disputes have brought workers into direct confrontation with the troubled Scottish National Party-Scottish Greens coalition at Holyrood in Edinburgh.

The disarray of these separatist forces continues apace, with the arrest of the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. For example, they were accused by Unison, Britain's largest union, of a privatisation agenda which would remove

powers from local councils and the NHS, transferring them to quangos with members appointed by ministers.

At its recent annual conference in Liverpool, Unison called upon the Scottish Government to withdraw the Bill that would enable this.

Kate Ramsden, a social worker in Aberdeenshire and member of Unison's National Executive, told the conference that this Bill "offers nothing at all to our social care members but, if passed, will devastate local government by taking staff, functions and services out of councils and give them to unelected quangos."

She warned that the plans would be

many of the strikes for better wages and conditions are

ing ground in Scotland



“an outsourcer’s charter which would expand rather than remove the market in care and would re-create the purchaser/provider split in the NHS.” This campaign continues and will build – the Bill is not due to be voted on in the Scottish Parliament until January 2024.

Energy

Another bone of contention with the Scottish Government is over energy. With bans in place on any new nuclear power development in Scotland, oil and gas production and exploration is also to be wound down by them in the North Sea.

Now the Labour Party has jumped on the virtue-signalling ship with its own ver-

sion of bans, one of also stopping new oil and gas production or exploration licences in the North Sea (presumably applying to a larger area, as it speaks for a Britain-wide policy).

This has not stopped workers becoming fully involved in ongoing disputes over jobs, pay and conditions in the offshore sector (see News, page 4). Over 1,600 contractors were involved in rounds of 48-hour strikes in May and June.

These trades cover a wide range of skills such as technicians, deck crew, scaffolders, crane operators, platers and riggers working for companies such as Bilfinger, Stork Technical and Sparrow Offshore Services. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said:

“With the support of their union Unite, an army of 1650 offshore workers are taking the fight to multibillion pound oil and gas corporations. The latest rounds of strike action in June will see the biggest group of offshore workers to date taking strike action. Unfettered corporate profiteering at the expense of our members will not go unchallenged. Unite is determined to deliver better jobs, pay and conditions in the offshore sector – and deliver we will.”

A statement by Unite pointed to BP’s and Shell’s historically high profits of £11.7 billion in the first quarter of 2023, that could have saved each household £1,800 on their energy bills.

Reverse cuts

In the midst of a difficult forest fire season in the Scottish Highlands, the Fire Brigades Union have demanded of the Scottish Government and various local authorities in Scotland that any cuts to the fire service be reversed.

FBU Scottish Regional Secretary John McKenzie told a rally in Dundee against the cuts that the service requires “modern workplaces with fit-for-purpose decontamination facilities, the equipment required to resolve these incidents and an end to the last decade of savage cuts”. This echoes campaigns in other areas of Britain.

The record of the SNP/Scottish Greens administration remains woeful in

‘The disarray of the separatist forces continues apace...’

many areas: the highest rate of drug deaths in Europe, a collapse of public transport (especially on the “lifeline” sea routes to the islands), record NHS waiting times and crises in education and policing. Their much-touted Gender Recognition Act did not even get over 50 per cent of SNP members supporting it in polls.

The state of the roads also shows their failure – in 2022, 13 people died on the dangerous A9 stretch linking Perth and Inverness. The upgrading of this and other routes has been delayed for years and both communities and construction companies are at loggerheads with Holyrood over it.

And another record has been broken: a report from the BBC’s Shared Data Unit has found that businesses in Scotland have the highest rate of insolvencies in Britain. 248 liquidations jumped by 150 per cent to 608 in 2022.

Enough of SNP failure

Many workers feel they have had enough SNP failure and put their energies into a united struggle. Many also reject the Labour Party’s announced panacea, *A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy*, launched by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown last December, but increasingly tipped as Labour Party policy for their next election campaign.

This is nothing but a rehash of federalism, a recipe for another way to weaken and break up Britain and return to the embrace of the European Union. Workers should fight for a Britain as their own unitary state and reject division, as is beginning to happen now in Scotland. ■

Global financial events may appear to be removed from workers' lives, but how international finance operates and affects us, so that

Abandoning the dangerous



Max Zolotokhin/shutterstock.com

SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT is afoot in global finance. It relates directly to workers' daily battle with inflation, potentially also having far wider impact.

What does it matter that many G20 member countries, as well as others, are buying gold? This is happening at a volume greater than at any time since the 1950s. And it is occurring while those countries outside of the G7 (the group of seven leading capitalist countries) are simultaneously reducing their US dollar reserves and pricing their exports in their own currencies instead of accepting the dollar as a means of payment.

This ongoing change in international practice may seem innocuous and inconsequential. But if this continues, it will cause a massive change in the international monetary system. And that has the potential to result eventually in a significant improvement in independent everyday life – an undoubtedly welcome turn of events.

The US dollar has been the international currency of choice since the Second World War under the Bretton Woods currency agreement. The move away from it is

multi-faceted and the grounds for discontent varied.

Some countries are completely dissatisfied with US “casino capitalism”. Others are no longer prepared to put up with a financial dictatorship brought about by weaponising the dollar through what the US describes as the “rule of law”.

The US legalistic logic is that the dollar is the property of the US government and any use of US property makes it the legal business of the US government.

This legal construct is not based on international law or within the spirit of the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement. Instead the US position rests on what it claims as the “rule of law”. The US and their globalist allies consider it legitimate, even where other countries use dollars to trade with each other but have no US connection.

US sanctions

Currently about 3 in 10 of all countries face sanctions applied by the US through its self-declared legal reach. As far as the US is concerned, any country in the world is a potential future sanctions target. And its

sanctions are often backed by US or NATO military intervention.

In polite circles this is called “US exceptionalism”. The proper, and clearer, description is that it is an attempt at US dictatorship. In practice, the US authorities are always looking for someone to sanction on some or other pretext once they have worked out the advantage to the USA.

Since the early 1980s, successive US administrations have deliberately shorn their own country of its industrial base. And over that period its national debt has risen to over \$30 trillion. The dollar is by no means a safe financial bet for the future.

Instead, countries outside of the G7 are discovering their own value. This is based on the knowledge that if their country is productive in raw materials and commodities, then their own currency will be internationally respected.

This is simply because people will know that such a country's currency is based on a tangible value, which includes gold reserves. In effect those countries are saying that the raw materials and commodities they export are no longer going to

working class life. But we need to get better informed about we can more quickly join up the dots...

us dollar



be priced and exchanged for an essentially worthless US Dollar devoid of tangible value and backed by nothing.

It should be apparent that removing the dollar influence opens the door to political and economic independence. Britain needs to become involved in this movement as a means of rejecting bloc politics once and for all. In effect Brexit from the dollar and US economic hegemony.

From a British perspective it is important to recognise that Britain is currently importing from the US a part of the inflation we are now experiencing. And that's true for other countries too. This is due to the current economic role of the dollar.

The cost of printing the dollar is trivial in comparison with the value of the products that the US can buy with those dollars. In the case of Britain, the US can, and does, buy British assets at virtually no cost. In that way the US exports its money-printing inflation to Britain. It can only continue to do so provided the dollar is accepted.

This is not primarily about buying goods. US "investors" are hoovering up manufacturing businesses and property in

Britain – our future productive potential – as well as plenty of retail firms and sports clubs.

There are wider impacts too. Because raw materials across the world have been priced in dollars, then dollar-denominated price hikes are cost neutral for raw materials imported to the US. On the other hand, for Britain and any other country whose currency has fallen against the dollar, raw material imports priced in dollars are inflationary.

Simply put, the dollar for the US works like one big Ponzi scheme. It can only be reversed where the amount of dollars thrown into world circulation are no longer used. They would have to be repatriated to the US, forcing them to deal with their own currency. A complete turnaround from the present situation where the US says to the rest of the world in respect of the export of inflation, "it's our currency and your problem".

Those in Britain fighting for wages and seeking to widen trade union influence need to take these factors into account. And come to that, anyone in Britain who sees the importance of basing manufacturing, research or other economic activity here and values national independence.

Out of NATO

This has implications too for anyone seeking to get Britain out of NATO and to put an end to imperialist war adventures. The US is by far the main contributor to the NATO budget. If the dollar can be dumped as a means of international settlement it will also

'The US dollar works like one big Ponzi scheme...'

help end US military might.

Foreign countries with trade surpluses (exporting more than they import) have in the past parked their monetary surpluses by buying US Government Treasury Securities ("Treasuries"). This has been considered a safe class of asset that paid interest.

Another attraction has been liquidity. Those countries holding US Treasuries could quickly sell their holdings on the open market if that country suddenly needed cash for another purpose.

For many years this process of buying and holding US Treasuries has allowed the US government to use other countries' trade surpluses as a means of running deficit funding for the US industrial military complex and thereby NATO. In effect other countries' trade surpluses have been used to fund military aggression.

British workers need to quickly join up the dots between pay disputes and inflation and the global economy. In that way we can start to gather an integrated set of operating ideas to counteract and pull away from an unfolding global economic mess. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 4 July on the subject of finance. 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 the next one in September (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

Without a steel industry Britain will be dependent on other countries. The government will not take the steps needed to keep it alive.

Steel: hanging by a thread

Leighton Collins/shutterstock.com



Port Talbot steelworks, South Wales. It is owned by the Indian conglomerate Tata.

THE BRITISH STEEL industry now hangs by a thread. In 2019, British companies produced a mere 7 million tonnes of steel. In contrast, the EU produced 157 million tonnes, and China made 996 million tonnes.

In May, trade body UK Steel said that high energy prices and weak demand were taking an “enormous toll” on steel production in Britain. Its figures show that production in 2022 slumped 17 per cent in just one year, with output down to the lowest level since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

“The already challenging demand environment is only worsened by elevated

energy prices,” said UK Steel director Gareth Stace. “Steel companies in the UK are footing electricity bills of 60 per cent more than our direct competitors in Germany.”

Yet for all that, as Alun Davies, national officer at steelworkers’ union Community, pointed out after the government’s *Powering Up Britain* policy paper was published at the end of March, the steel industry is a vital component of Britain’s economy, and plays a critical role in the country’s national security.

The 33,000 skilled jobs in steel and the 40,000 in the supply chain provide well-paid employment in areas like South Wales

where such jobs are in short supply. The government talks of “levelling-up”, with no indication of how that will happen – it has no idea how, and no real wish to do so.

Accusing the government of “inaction” and “negligence”, Community warns that a failure to invest and safeguard the future of the steel industry now threatens its future. Without its own steel industry, Britain will be left vulnerable, completely dependent on other countries for strategic infrastructure and at the mercy of unpredictable global supply chains.

Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite the Union, has also slammed the government’s failure to support the steel

... countries for our strategic infrastructure. Yet the

and

industry in the recent Budget. She expressed disappointment at the absence of measures to tackle the serious threats facing the sector despite ministerial commitments that steel would be supported.

Writing to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak after the March budget, Graham highlighted union concerns that the recovery in manufacturing following the Covid pandemic could bypass Britain's steel industry.

Welcoming the government's financial support to keep Britain's last four blast furnaces going, Graham pointed to the much greater levels of support that the steel industries in Germany and France receive from their respective governments.

Unite has called for much tougher measures to ensure that domestically produced steel is used in new infrastructure projects. These projects are being cut back, another unwise government policy.

Worries

The unions are right to be worried. In February, Business Secretary Kimi Badenoch was asked on Sky News whether Britain would always need a steel industry. Astonishingly, her answer was: "Nothing is ever a given."

The government's energy strategy set out in *Powering Up Britain* inevitably talks of meeting "net zero" commitments. But it also sets out four goals: energy security; consumer security; climate security; and economic security.

Alun Davies at Community was not impressed. He said: "We are disappointed to see the Government failing again to address the burning issue of crippling

energy costs in the steel sector...

"The Government promised we will have affordable energy by 2050, but jobs are being lost now and our steel industry cannot wait any longer. We urgently need to reduce energy costs to compete internationally..."

The government, he said, must deliver on its Brexit promise to slash energy costs and protect our steel industry.

In May, Tata Steel said there was "material uncertainty" over the future of its business in Britain. Tata Steel has an enormous local and regional impact on Wales. It owns Port Talbot steelworks, an integrated steel-making site using imported ore and local and imported coking coal.

The use of local coking coal has been attacked because of climate change and the drive to net zero. Different proposed solutions to the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at Port Talbot include carbon capture and replacing the blast furnaces by an electric arc furnace.

Together with Llanwern steelworks (the blast furnaces at Llanwern are mothballed), the South Wales plants produce up to 3.5 million tonnes of hot rolled and cold rolled steel coils each year, for a variety of different end uses. Output is taken by rail to Shotton in North Wales for coating; Trostre in South Wales near Llanelli for tinplating; or direct to the Midlands for the motor industry and domestic goods manufacture.

Port Talbot is capable of producing nearly 5 million tonnes of steel slab a year. This makes it the larger of the two major steel plants in Britain and one of the largest in Europe. Over 4,000 people work there.

'Government must deliver on its Brexit promise to slash energy costs and protect our steel industry...'

Trade unions are not the only people talking about the importance of steel. Henrik Adam, chair of Tata Steel UK, was quoted in the *Financial Times* in May as saying, "I believe that having a manufacturing industry is a core of a modern economy... If you stop making steel in the UK, why should the remaining manufacturers stay in the UK?"

The message from the employers cuts through the waffle from the government about making all production "green". That can only be achieved with present levels of investment and technology by axing everything else.

The government talks about achieving its aims by 2050. At this rate, though, there may not be a steel industry in this country by 2050. The industry needs firm guarantees on investment from the government, and action to subsidise electricity prices – at least to the level that competitors in Europe and elsewhere enjoy. ■

Konstantin Chagin/shutterstock.com



CPBML online discussion meeting

Wednesday 4 July, 7 pm, via Zoom

"What should be the working class response to the ongoing financial collapse?"

Removing the dollar's influence opens the door to political and economic independence for Britain and means once and for all rejecting bloc politics. In effect, Brexit from the dollar. Come and discuss. All welcome. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for a Zoom link.

The Treasury is a key part of the capitalist state, and this study is a scathing critique of its operations – despite its reformist conclusions

Inside today's Treasury



Workers

HM Treasury, one of Britain's oldest, most powerful and most secretive institutions.

Bankruptcy, bubbles and bailouts: The inside history of the Treasury since 1976, by Aeron Davis, paperback, 293 pages, ISBN 978-1-5261-5977-9, Manchester University Press, 2022, £16.99.

THE TREASURY is one of Britain's oldest, most powerful and most secretive institutions. Its whole history is inseparably bound up with the City of London. Together they have led the centuries long development of capitalism in Britain through to the current domination of finance capital.

The author, Aeron Davis, is Professor of Political Communication at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has based his fine book on interviews with over 50 key figures.

The Treasury's experience and power bend all governments to its purposes. Almost every government for the past 300 years has embraced it. Any government that has tried to resist its domination, even briefly, has been swiftly corrected. It exists to promote particular policies, which it con-

siders the only path to Britain's success.

But for Britain's working people there is nothing positive about the Treasury's record. It enforces the wrong policies on the country. In the 1920s, Churchill said he wanted to see "Finance less proud and industry more content". But then he obeyed Treasury dogma, and took Britain back onto the Gold Standard, sacrificing industry to finance, leading to the Great Depression.

Adoration

Ever since, Treasury policy has been to make finance more proud and industry less content. It adores the City of London whose word is law, as far as the Treasury is concerned. The result? Ever-lessening growth, stagnant or falling wages, the 2007–2008 crash, falling investment in industrial production, ever-growing debts – all the conditions building for the next crash.

History shows that the Treasury consistently acts against our national industries,

against balanced national development, and against central planning of the economy. It promotes huge inequalities of wealth between regions, and opposes skilling up, levelling up. The financial market must decide everything.

At the same time the government is for giving foreign companies incentives to move to Britain – whether through tax breaks, regional development aid, free enterprise zones, or free ports. And it makes it easier to buy, break up, and sell a company here than in any other advanced economy. So, vital companies are sold abroad: jobs, manufacturing capacity, investment, R&D, revenue and profits all go abroad.

This is not neo-liberalism but financialisation – putting finance in command. It imposes botched privatisations, where financial firms snap up almost all the privatised companies' shares. It backed the mass sell-off of social housing. When council house sales started, it blocked councils from reinvesting the profits and took three-quarters of the profits.

Its policies create vast debts at all levels – individual, corporate, public institutional and local and central government. This has led to rising interest rates which are "catastrophic to an economy now built on such huge debts".

Since the 2007–2008 crash, we've had the lowest rate of corporation tax in the G7 countries, supposedly to increase investment, but it hasn't worked. The rate of private sector investment, particularly in R&D, is the G7's lowest. Instead we have higher dividend payments.

Naturally this dogmatically anti-public spending, anti-industry, anti-protection, anti-planning, anti-national, pro-monetarist, pro-austerity, pro-globalist, pro-finance capital body was, and is, fervently pro-EU. People there were in tears the day after the Brexit vote.

The Treasury, like the Foreign Office, has sabotaged every effort to deliver the independence we voted for. Why has the NI Protocol not been ditched? Because the FO has blocked it. Why is immigration soaring? Because the Treasury believes mass immigration is good for the economy. Davis does acknowledge that Brexit came

dy provides a fine

‘The Treasury has sabotaged every effort to deliver the independence we voted for...’

about partly because working class needs were not met.

Yet, after all this, Davis comes out in defence of the Establishment status quo and Treasury orthodoxy, and writes that “there is much to suggest that no change is best.” He calls the Treasury’s officials “the adults in the room’ with “a sense of committed public service”.

Yet these are the same people who Davis admits have always fought public spending, industry, and planning, and supported monetarism, austerity, globalism, capitalism and the capitalist EU.

And what does the Treasury now propose? Austerity, spending cuts, benefit cuts, more devolution, return to the EU and so on.

Indeed, austerity was never about economic sense. It was class warfare, designed to hurt the working class, and to use the global financial crisis as an excuse to shrink the state.

Davis concludes the book by proposing “the devolution of tax and spend powers”, giving substantial financial independence to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and also to the regions of England. This proposal sounds rather like splitting the Treasury by creating four — or more — mini-Treasuries.

The book provides a fine critique of the Treasury’s damaging effect on Britain. But its timid reformist conclusion of proposing yet more devolution would worsen, not solve, the problems we face.

The Treasury is part of the capitalist state machine, no more reformable than the EU, or than capitalism itself. A working class that wants to take control of our country must have a different kind of

WORKERS

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Eighty years ago, the greatest land and tank battle ever was one from which the invading Nazi forces never recovered.

1943: The battle of Kursk

RAGING FEROCIOUSLY from July to August 1943, Kursk was the most decisive battle of the Second World War. It transformed anti-fascist fortunes.

By 1943 fascist Germany had been drawn into a protracted war completely at odds with its preferred military strategy. Even worse, it had also been dragged into a protracted industrial and economic contest that it was losing.

The growing disparity in the capacity of Germany and the Soviet Union to produce the means to wage war meant that the Soviet Union had attained superiority in military hardware, and the gap was widening.

After the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, fighting paused as both combatants regrouped. Both sides were planning for the next conflict, but the Soviet plans were better and more feasible.

Both sides realised that the summer of 1943 would see a monumental clash of arms, because Soviet forces were gaining military confidence and offensive capability whereas Hitlerite Germany had to muster a territorial gain to deter Soviet advance or they would be forced into more retreats.

Blitzkrieg

So in March 1943 Hitler and his generals planned a summer offensive, codenamed Operation Citadel, along classic blitzkrieg lines. The aim was to remove the Kursk Salient, a vulnerable 250 mile-long front jutting out beyond Soviet lines.

Using detailed intelligence reports of these intentions, the Soviet leadership decided not to make a pre-emptive strike beforehand but rather to “meet the enemy

attack in a well-prepared defensive bridgehead, to bleed attacking German groupings dry, and then to launch a general offensive”.

They packed the salient with tanks and troops who dug in deeply and created a fortress. The plan was to draw the German Army in to a carefully devised trap, destroy much of its armoured power, and then launch a major strategic offensive.

To counter the panzer tank and dive-bomber attacks, extensive Soviet defences were constructed in great depth, hoping to snare the enemy in an intricate and extensive cobweb of defensive constructions.

More than 3,000 miles of trenches were dug, laid out in a crisscross pattern. Inside were deep and extensive entrenchments with strongly constructed anti-tank resistance points. Further defensive protection was provided by 500,000 anti-tank mines and 400,000 anti-personnel mines.

Importantly, there was a deeper-held reserve of supporting armies intended for decisive counterattacks when the advance stalled. The Soviet forces had over 1,900,000 men, close to double the strength of the German troops, tanks and aircraft and four times the number of guns and mortars.

All Soviet front line formations in the Kursk Salient received psychological as well as technical training to deal with the armoured threat and overcome the “tank panic” that had been in evidence since the German invasion began. Partisan forces had developed and were able to mount over 1,000 attacks against the railways in June.

Also the Soviet Union had developed its air force so that it might better compete with the Luftwaffe and provide a similar type of support for their own ground forces.

On the morning of 5 July the German offensive began with a 50-minute bombardment of Soviet positions. German artillery fired more shells than they had during the campaigns in France and Poland combined. But the Germans were forced to attack frontally rather than using their planned blitzkrieg tactics, and after several days of intense fighting, had made no significant breakthrough.

The Soviet defences were not



Alexander Persona Grata, CC BY 2.0

T-34 monument at Prokhorovka, site of the Battle of Kursk.

breached. After 6 July the Luftwaffe was forced to prioritise air-support missions. It was unable to intercept all Soviet airstrikes and the balance of power in the air began shifting.

The German military machine, the Wehrmacht, was not used to this situation. The Soviets aimed to wear the enemy out as the Germans were hit hard at each defensive obstacle.

Dominance

The German army was contained. It could not make a breakthrough to Kursk, realising it probably never would. The Soviet air force was gaining dominance over the battle area too.

At this juncture the Soviet Supreme Commander Stalin conferred with Zhukov, his Deputy. They directed a planned offensive against the German-held Orel salient on the 12 July. A colossal battle took place lasting until the next day.

This time the Soviets were doing the attacking. On 13 July Hitler discontinued Operation Citadel in the north of the Kursk salient, although prolonging it in the south

‘For the first time during summer conditions, the Soviet army outperformed their enemy...’

as fought at Kursk,

..

k



f Prokhorovka, a major armoured confrontation

to prevent a rapid rout.

The Soviets fed fresher divisions into the fray at this point, while the Germans had no reserves to call upon. Their attacks began to peter out and the German army withdrew from or were forced out of the salient.

German losses of manpower and armoured fighting vehicles at Kursk meant the Wehrmacht could not resist the Soviet counterattacks during July and August. For the first time during summer conditions, the Soviet army outperformed their enemy.

But victory came at a huge cost. Soviet casualties reached 177,847 during the battle of Kursk.

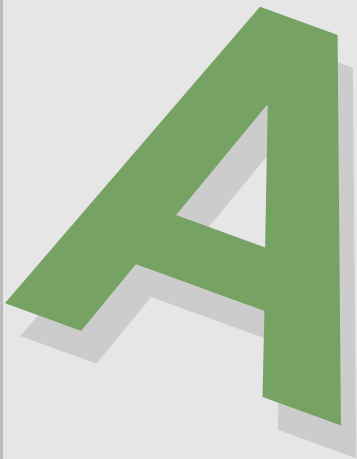
The Battle of Kursk stripped the last vestiges of invincibility from the Wehrmacht. Nazi Germany was ruined on the Eastern Front. It never recovered.

Wartime prime minister Winston Churchill summed it up: "Stalingrad was the end of the beginning, but the Battle of Kursk was the beginning of the end." ■

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

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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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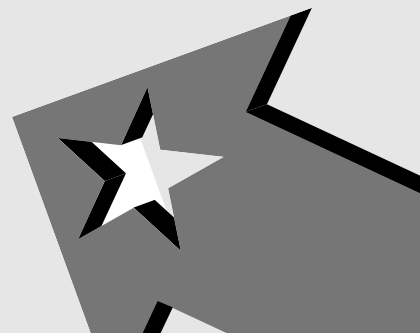
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Health workers need a plan

‘Each trade union must give careful thought as to how to conduct the struggle in the short, medium and long term.’

EXACTLY HOW we fight to defend the NHS as health workers has never been more important at any point in NHS history. It involves a good understanding that our enemy, in the shape of the current government, is probably resigned to losing the next general election and is relaxed about leaving the NHS in a mess.

The government hopes that its scorched earth policy will make the wider working class lose confidence in the service. It wants us as a working class to give up on the NHS and accept privatisation as the solution without the government having to make all the running.

Faced with an enemy with this position, all NHS trade unions need to plan and struggle will need to be persistent and protracted. Each trade union must give careful thought as to how to conduct the struggle in the short, medium and long term.

In September 2022 the government imposed a real-terms pay cut on all 13 trade unions in the NHS Staff Council without negotiation or even discussion. They thought that ambulance staff, nursing staff and other health professionals, exhausted by the pandemic would roll over. They didn't and they skilfully won votes to take action.

Ambulance workers in Unison, striking from December, led the way with coordinated action involving them, Unite and the GMB. The government would have dearly loved a death during the ambulance workers' strikes that they could blame on the unions. They could not, because of the organisation and discipline of workers, who asserted class control.

They were joined by nurses in the Royal College of Nursing in January, most taking strike action for the first time, then physiotherapists in February.

And so it was that on 15 March the unions received an improved offer which they recommended to members. Crucially it was a fully funded offer and not the raiding of another health budget.

All those unions know that they will need to continue the fight. In preparation for future struggle a historic decision was taken at the

Unison Health Care Service Group Conference in Bournemouth on 18 April when members unanimously backed a motion to call time on the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) system. They will now seek direct negotiations on pay.

In May the Royal College of Nursing at their Congress in Brighton also decided to withdraw from the pay review body. Multiple previous attempts to move towards direct negotiations were rejected by Unison, and many RCN members also thought it unthinkable. Taking action changes thinking.

The situation now facing the British Medical Association is challenging. Its industrial action continues. Inevitably, prolonged strike action will harm patients. The doctors acknowledge that both action and inaction have ethical costs, and they must continue to distinguish themselves from a government that doesn't care about that damage.

Nearly fifty years ago the CPBML published a pamphlet called *For Health – a revolutionary struggle*. In it we said:

“The National Health Service represents the pinnacle of what social democracy can achieve – the ultimate reform within capitalist relations of production. Never let us forget that our health service was not ‘given’ to us by a benevolent ruling class but was won by the organised working class and by the health workers in particular.”

When the historic pamphlet was written trade unionists from other occupations had the power, now illegal, to take industrial action in support of health workers and in defence of the NHS they had created.

The pamphlet goes on to say that anything we gain under capitalism is never safe. On 5 July 2023 the NHS will be 75 years old, and that sentiment is very pertinent.

The commitment of the working class to the NHS it created has stayed strong over its 75-year history. Despite the restrictions on joint action, the BMA must harness that power of constructive collaboration with the wider class to demand a return to the negotiating table. ■

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