

WORKERS

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO 'TAKE CONTROL'?

- Transport** Buses take a hit
- NATO** Get Britain out!
- Biodiversity** And food?
- P&O** Workers rally
- Migration** Record levels
- Wales** Greenwashing
- Scotland** The resistance
- plus* Historic Notes,
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WORKERS

“ Britain out of Nato!

“THIS IS not the 1930s, with the European powers egging on Nazi Germany to destroy the Soviet Union. It’s more like 1914: imperialist war to divide up the spoils of the entire planet,” we said in our Party’s 2021 Congress in November. Imperialist war is now unfolding before our eyes.

Imperialism is not some old, out-of-date concept from history. It is dying capitalism in its most predatory stage, when finance capitalism dominates, with intense rivalries between capitalist blocs. Fierce competition for markets, resources and territory – the new term is “globalism” – with its massive export of capital, leads inevitably to armed conflict.

All imperialisms are to blame for the present war in Ukraine. Russia’s invasion is one side of the story. But Nato has stoked the fires too, treating Ukraine as a more or less willing pawn in its own bid for greater power.

What did Nato think would be the response after Ukraine incorporated into its constitution a policy of joining Nato (one of the last acts of the government led by the oligarch Petro Poroshenko, whose motto was “military, language, faith”)?

Let us be clear. Our main enemy – and the only one we can do anything about – is our own imperialist state. The British working class cannot deal with Putin. Russian workers must do that. The job of the British working class is to deal with our own capitalist class’s imperialism.

And our first responsibility, the first step in this

struggle, is to call for Britain to leave Nato, a call so far avoided. Led by the US but functioning as the military wing of western imperialism, Nato is a war machine which aims to bring any nation state seeking independence to heel. Britain has no business being a member.

The history of Britain’s involvement with Nato is littered with brutal destruction, intense suffering, and war. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, the Balkans. The list is long. The best and most immediate contribution to peace that workers can make is to force Britain to leave Nato.

Calls for peace alone are futile. Demands for ceasefires or negotiation leave the initiative with imperialist diplomacy, both open and secret. They are calls for governments to do something, avoiding the requirement for workers here to deal with our own ruling class.

War and the threat of war will continue as long as imperialisms compete to divide up the world. Only the overthrow of imperialism can usher in peace for Britain and the world.

War abroad and war on workers at home go together. Here, we fought against the dictatorship of the EU bloc and won. But the struggle for independence is not over. It continues on many fronts, with the battle for food, energy, industrial and technological security – and crucially, in the midst of war, the fight to leave Nato.

Britain out of Nato!



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Luca Boffa / No 10 Downing Street (CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0)



No good news for civil servants from the Chancellor, pictured before last year's Budget.

Civil service pay blow

CIVIL SERVANTS have strongly criticised the government, their employer, for setting a low cap on pay rises. In the face of sharp increases in the cost of living, their trade unions are taking stock before deciding on the next steps.

Pay is negotiated separately by each department or government agency, but central government sets out a "remit" each year which puts a limit on settlements. This year's announcement at the end of March set the figure at a maximum of 2 per cent, with the possibility of a further 1 per cent flexibility for "specific priorities".

The Cabinet Office minister told Parliament, without any hint of irony, that the government "...wants to ensure that it is attracting the best and brightest to work for the Civil Service, and rewarding hard working staff fairly."

Civil servants are unimpressed. Even 3 per cent is nowhere near enough to maintain standards of living, especially since settlements have been zero or very low since the 2008 financial crisis, an effective drop of around one-fifth in real pay. And their experience is that any flexibility in settlements works only in favour of the employer.

PCS union, representing the majority of civil servants, described this as an insult to members, who include many on low pay whom the government says it wants to help. PCS had already made a claim for a 10 per cent rise and a return to national pay bargaining.

Around 45 per cent of PCS members voted in a consultative ballot conducted before the remit announcement, a far higher proportion than normally do so. They overwhelmingly agreed with the pay claim (97 per cent of those voting). And 81 per cent said they would be willing to take industrial action. ■

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

MIGRATION

Record inflow

THE HOME Office reports that rising numbers of migrants have come to Britain since the introduction of post-Brexit immigration rules. In 2021, the government granted 239,987 work-related visas – 25 per cent higher than 2019 (192,559) and a 110 per cent increase on 2020 (114,528 visas).

The Home Office says that the biggest growth in visa numbers was for what it calls skilled workers. But there were year-on-year rises, too, for temporary workers (mostly seasonal workers) and other visas.

The figures also revealed that applications from EU citizens for UK citizenship were higher than they were in 2019, before the Brexit agreements came into force.

Later in March, Home Secretary Priti Patel told the House of Commons that the government "has taken back control of legal immigration". Ignoring the numbers produced by her own department showing sky-high legal immigration, she went on to talk almost exclusively about her Rwanda scheme for asylum seekers. ■

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

Coventry bin drivers fight for pay

Coventry Council bin workers are fighting back as a long-running pay dispute escalated with the suspension of a shop steward.

Energy price rally forced to cancel

A campaign set up to win a referendum on the government's rush to enforce net zero policies cancelled a planned rally due to threats and intimidation.

Barts NHS victory reverses outsourcing

London health workers have won a significant victory against outsourcing. Facilities management workers at Barts Health NHS Trust, but employed by Serco, will re-join the NHS.

Independent school teachers' strikes win early gains

After six days of strike action, teachers at the Girls' Day School Trust have won concessions from management about the future of their pension rights. But the fight is not over yet.

University employers reject UCU pension proposals

Universities have rejected out of hand union proposals to secure the future of their pension scheme – raising the stakes in the ongoing wider dispute about university pay and conditions.

Plus: the e-newsletter

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Workers

21 April: Sacked P&O workers demonstrate at DP World offices, London.

Ferry workers rally to fight

THE RMT and Nautilus International, the trade unions representing workers sacked by P&O Ferries, continue to fight the sackings. They have held a series of rallies at ports around the country, including Dover, Liverpool, Hull, Cairnryan and outside the London offices of DP World, P&O's Dubai-owned parent company.

The 800 workers were sacked on 17 March by a Zoom call with thirty minutes notice. Replacement crews with cheaper foreign labour (paid on average £5.50 an hour) had already been hired through agencies.

P&O's heavy handed tactics continue. On 30 March 40 cadets were ordered to disembark and await further instructions. The cadets, future workers in our maritime fleet, report that their requests for return of belongings left on board go unanswered.

Two of P&O's ferries on the Dover–Calais route, the *Pride of Kent* and *Spirit of Britain*, have been seized and forbidden to sail by the Marine and Coastguard Agency after inspections found a number of safety deficiencies on those vessels. This has contributed to congestion around the port of Dover.

On the *European Causeway*, serving the Cairnryan–Larne route, the Agency found 31 infringements of regulations on training, fire safety and lifeboat drills. According to media reports, seven of the agency workers have been sacked for having alcohol while on duty.

In April inspectors from the International Transport Workers' Federation were refused access to check on the welfare of the replacement crews after the workers had raised concerns, even though the inspectors have the right under the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code to enter all UK ports and board all vessels in UK waters where seafarers request assistance.

DP World is owned by the UAE government, yet receives subsidies from British taxpayers for the Hull–Rotterdam route, and tax breaks in the London Gateway and Southampton "freeports". Trade unions are forbidden in the UAE. ■

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

FCA

Action on pay

THE ONGOING pay dispute at City regulator the Financial Conduct Authority has entered a new stage, with action set to start in May.

An indicative vote by Unite members in February had showed clear support for action against cuts to pay and conditions. The FCA responded with a further "offer" that it claimed increased pay.

The workers were not impressed that this ignored their complaints about the new

pay structure and changes to conditions. On 12 April Unite said they had voted 75 per cent for industrial action, with almost 90 per cent supporting action short of a strike, the first time they have ever done so.

Unite does not represent all FCA workers and has yet to gain bargaining recognition, but the strength of feeling is evident. After the vote Unite called on the FCA to meet the union at Acas to discuss concerns.

The FCA has yet to make a positive response. Strikes are due to take place on 4 and 5 May, with more days planned in June and July. A work to rule begins on 6 May. ■

LEGAL AID

Barristers vote for action

BARRISTERS BEGAN industrial action on 11 April over criminal legal aid fees. Rates have dropped to the point that hundreds of barristers have left this work, damaging the criminal justice system. The system could slowly grind to a halt within weeks.

The Criminal Bar Association ran a ballot in March after the government refusal to implement a recommendation to increase pay. The result was overwhelming: 94 per cent of the 1,908 members who took part (out of a possible 2,400) voted for a “no returns” policy. This means that barristers will not cover for legal aid colleagues who have a diary clash.

After swingeing cuts to the legal aid

budget led to a mass exodus of criminal legal aid lawyers, the independent Bellamy review reported at the end of last year. It described the situation as extremely urgent and recommended an immediate 15 per cent boost in funding for criminal legal aid.

The backlog in cases waiting to be heard in the crown courts in England and Wales was nearly 60,000 in quarter 3 of 2021, according to the most recent published figures.

Justice minister Dominic Raab waited to hear the outcome of the ballot before announcing, the next day, that he accepted the recommendations. But lawyers on the ground are angry, describing the increased budget as “a masterclass in deception”. ■

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



The former Wyfa nuclear power station, Anglesey, Wales shut down in 2015. The site was intended to house a new station until Hitachi withdrew in 2020.

Energy for the future – maybe

PRIME MINISTER Boris Johnson announced the government’s new energy security strategy on 7 April. It drew immediate fire from self-professed “green” lobbyists for its commitment to expanding nuclear capacity, along with more oil and gas exploitation in the North Sea. The government appears to have accepted the logic of nuclear, combined with gas and oil as the only energy mix reliable enough to keep the lights on and the motors running when we need them.

To the environmentalists’ delight, the policy also commits to five-fold expansion of offshore wind capacity and the effective go-ahead for further, and larger, onshore wind farms. And both lobbyists and government have a rose-tinted view about the scale and cost of moving away from gas as a source of domestic heating. Never mind, John Armit, the head of the National Infrastructure Commission thinks everything is fine. In an interview in the *Daily Telegraph* on 16 April he said the answer is to ban the sale of gas boilers, which will force people to make “greener” choices.

The GMB union responded to the announcement by pointing out that plans have to be decided and implemented, not just publicised and changed later on. GMB general secretary Gary Smith said, “The government has to get on with it, secure the UK’s energy future, and make sure the next generation doesn’t face the same crushing cost of living crisis.” ■

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

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

The CPBML is back to holding in-person public meetings as well as continuing our series of online discussion meetings via Zoom.

MAY

Sunday 1 May, 7.30pm

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

In-person CPBML May Day Meeting: “Real Control for Real Independence”

A meeting about how the working class must lead in the fight for a future for Britain – based on ideas coming out of the CPBML’s latest party congress statement. Come and join the discussion. All welcome.

Other in-person meetings will be announced in due course. To keep up-to-date as things change, make sure you’re signed up to receive our electronic newsletter.

Tuesday 10 May, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“What is working-class democracy?”

Parliamentary democracy is not fit for purpose. It does not represent people or serve their needs. What’s the alternative? For an invitation, email info@cpbml.org.uk.

JUNE

Tuesday 7 June, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“The future of the rail industry”

The government has finally abandoned the discredited franchising system – but it is still relying on private companies for delivery. And it is using its position to drive an agenda of service cuts even as passenger numbers recover from the Covid-19 slump. How will rail workers and rail users defend services? For an invitation, email info@cpbml.org.uk.

Saturday 18 June, 12 noon

TUC national demonstration, London

“We demand better”

Assemble Portland Place from 10.30am, march departs at noon, rally at 1pm.

“Working people have had enough. Everything’s going up but our wages... tell this government: we DEMAND better!” says the TUC. More information at www.tuc.org.uk/DemandBetter.

It's been over a year since the transition period ended and wrested from the EU than the government set about outsc

Whatever happened to ‘T



Workers

Rally to support the sacked P&O workers, London, 21 April.

ONE OF the landmark decisions of the European Court of Justice – a decision that revealed its institutional, constitutional subservience to transnational capital – was the Viking case.

Viking is a Finnish ferry company. In 2004, when Estonia joined the EU, it took advantage of the EU’s single market to sack all its workers and employ Estonian ones on cheaper wages.

The Court of Justice stood by Viking, along the way ruling that the right to strike did not apply if a strike against the “free movement” of capital and labour had a

chance of succeeding.

That sad story was a major reason why leading trade union barrister John Hendy called the EU “a disaster for the collective rights of workers and their unions”.

It’s now 2022. But instead of control coming back to the people, it’s still in the hands of multinational capital – and we have the grotesque spectacle of the Viking scandal being re-enacted in Britain, with Dubai-owned P&O Ferries sacking its British staff to employ foreign workers.

The idea of taking control was the guiding spirit of the movement that won the

‘Hardly a week passes without a new government scheme making it easier for people to come to Britain to work...’

Britain left the EU. But no sooner had control been
 pouring it to the market and the multinationals...

Take Control'?

referendum to take Britain out of the European Union. The idea was both powerful and clear: Britain should be free from the European single market, which imposes free movement of capital, goods and labour.

Britain has now left the European Union after a long struggle to implement the decision. But there's no sign of the greater control that millions of people were waiting for. Quite the reverse – in area after area the government is handing control to the unregulated free market. Except in Northern Ireland, where it perversely continues with allowing the European Union to control what can be produced or imported.

Hardly a week passes without a new government scheme to make it easier for people to come to Britain to work. At the beginning of April, for example, Home Office figures revealed that City firms were sponsoring visa applications at the fastest rate since Britain left the EU.

Numbers will rise

An expert in employment law was quoted as saying, "I think the numbers will continue to rise. We're only seeing the start of it. There's a war for talent."

The number of schemes encouraging firms to import skilled labour is unending. They include the Skilled Worker visa; the Global Talent visa; the Global Business Mobility visa (that one came into force on 11 April).

And at the end of May new rules come into operation making it even easier to come to Britain to work, with the introduction of the High Potential Individual visa.

A huge range of skilled workers are being lured into Britain, often from countries that can ill afford to lose them. The listed occupations run for pages and pages. But that's not all: the government is also making it easier for employers sponsoring visa applications in shortage areas to pay the imported workers below the going rate for the industry.

The list of occupations where employers can get away with undercutting the going rate includes health managers and directors, residential and day care managers, engineers of just about every type, any biological scientists, IT business ana-

lysts, vets, actuaries and architects.

On top of this are the moves to relax rules on importing what the government describes as unskilled labour, in particular seasonal agricultural workers and HGV drivers. Last year, a temporary scheme for pork butchers was also introduced.

When *Workers* looked at the figures in November 2021, 4.9 million people with EU citizenship had been granted settled status to remain in Britain. By the end of February, that number had risen to nearly 5.3 million – extraordinary given that in May 2019 the government's Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration reported confidently that there were an estimated 3.5 million EU citizens living in Britain at the time.

The overall result, according to the Office for National Statistics, is that during the year ending March 2020 immigration to Britain was at its highest level ever. Emigration was high, too, but net migration, at 313,000 was the second highest since 1964.

More recent figures are not yet available, and they will be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. But given government policies, it's hard to see how net migration will be heading downwards once the effect of the pandemic eases.

Farming

Meanwhile, the government has used its newly repatriated ability to sign trade deals to phase out tariffs on agricultural imports from Australia. Within 17 years, Australia will be able to export 170,000 tonnes of beef and 125,000 tonnes of lamb to Britain completely free of tariffs. No wonder farmers are worried.

The New Zealand free trade agreement, signed on 28 February this year, continues the trend; even more tariff-free beef and lamb is set to flood into Britain. National Farmers' Union president Minette Batters commented that the real risk was not individual deals in themselves but the cumulative effect of successive deals. "This deal today shows I was right to be concerned," she said.

As the government pursues new free trade deals with the US, Canada and India, and seeks to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the agricultural sector in Britain

'As the government pursues new free trade deals, agriculture can expect to be further undermined...'

can expect its ability to compete to be further undermined. That's not taking control: it's handing it over to market forces.

The free trade agreement with India – negotiations began in January – is likely to centre not so much on agriculture but on a massive expansion of visas and work permits to allow Indian companies to send their employees to work in Britain, and equally to allow British companies to recruit Indian workers at below the going rate.

One of the key benefits of Brexit was – or should have been – that it removed Britain from the fate of being absorbed into a new EU army. Now there is another threat on the horizon. Emboldened by burgeoning European unity over Ukraine, pro-EU politicians and think tanks are once again seeking to enmesh Britain in the EU's military machinations.

On 21 March the Council of Europe formally adopted what it called a Strategic Compass, an "ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030". The plan envisages a permanent "rapid deployment" force of 5,000 soldiers, among other moves.

A week later Lord Frost, the government's chief Brexit negotiator from January 2020 to December 2021, warned on Twitter against Britain being "sucked in" to the EU's emerging strategy. "Many in Whitehall will want to join to get 'influence'," he wrote. Think tanks like the Conservative European Forum are saying that the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces "has underscored the necessity of cooperation and coordination among European allies".

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On 29 March the same message also came from Robin Niblett, head of the Chatham House think tank. His ideas, according to an article in the *Guardian*, are “likely to be influential in Whitehall”.

And then there’s the disaster of the Northern Ireland Protocol. By any yardstick, the Protocol, agreed by the Johnson government in 2019 and finalised in December 2020 as part of the Brexit negotiations, is constitutional nonsense. Brought in to try to appease the EU, and in particular the Republic of Ireland, it says that Northern Ireland is outside of the EU’s single market – but that the rules of the single market still apply!

Internal border

The result is that while goods move freely and without checks to and from Ireland, in effect a border exists between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. It led to the EU blocking the import of British sausages into Northern Ireland, and more significantly the application of EU pharmaceutical directives so that some 2,000 drugs available in the rest of the UK could not be given to patients in Northern Ireland until the EU backed down to “allow them” in December 2021. That’s just one of the reasons why the Protocol must go (see Box, right).

The government is at best marking time on Brexit, at worst actively undermining many of its objectives. And all the while, the enemies of Brexit are looking for ways of overturning the referendum decision. Despite all the achievements, the independence of Britain is still in the balance. Time for the people who voted to leave to tell the politicians to get back on track. ■

Now Covid tests are banned...

NEW EU rules for Covid tests are set to replace British law in Northern Ireland despite warnings that this may cause shortages and a lower quality of tests. A new EU regulation, the Diagnostic Medical Devices Regulation, is coming into effect on May 26, which will remove Northern Ireland from the UK’s Coronavirus Test Device Approval.

The Northern Ireland Protocol requires EU regulation to take precedence over the British one. Since Northern Ireland gets most of its supplies of tests from Britain, this may lead to shortages, and lower-quality Covid tests. The EU shows complete disregard for the impact upon Northern Ireland caused by its spiteful interference in its trade within the UK.

A year earlier at the height of the pandemic the EU interfered with Northern Ireland’s vaccine supplies. It even threatened to withdraw from the Protocol in order to stop the trade in Covid-19 vaccine between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. In February 2021 it announced a ban on export of Covid-19 vaccine to Northern Ireland from the Republic, alleging that the vaccine might find its way to Britain “through the back door”.

After an outcry from the Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin and all five parties in Northern Ireland’s devolved government, this was quickly reversed, but not before the EU’s malign and contrary position on the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland had been exposed.

These and other matters require protracted negotiation. But there is a simple solution: the government can invoke Article 16 – unilaterally, as provided for in the Protocol – to protect against “serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist”.

Indeed, back in November Lord Frost said that invoking Article 16 was a “very real option”. But nothing happened then.



Rossographer/geograph.ie (CC-BY-SA 2.0)

Donegal Square, Belfast.

And even less is happening now with the appointment of one-time Remain campaigner Liz Truss as Foreign Secretary. She has huffed and puffed, but then in March used the excuse of the Ukraine war to put off invoking Article 16.

Now, once again, there are “rumours” that the government will trigger the article after the Northern Ireland elections in May. It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that the rumours are just shabby electoral politics, designed to boost the chances of Unionist politicians in the elections – and that nothing will actually be done.

A united Ireland is surely in the interests of all who live in the island, but it can only be created by the will of those who live there. The EU cynically used the status of Northern Ireland under the Good Friday Agreement, freely agreed between sovereign governments in Dublin and Westminster, to extract concessions from Britain during Brexit negotiations.

No good will come of the EU continuing to meddle and seeking to prise Northern Ireland away from the UK in the name of the single market, or to use the Protocol to sneak its regulations back into Britain.

Invoke Article 16 now! ■

Welsh farmers, along with others across Britain, are finding out the real cost of some “green” schemes...

Greenwashing in Wales



Farming in Wales threatened by changing land use.

WELSH FARMERS, along with others across Britain, are finding to their cost that “green” environmental initiatives are not always what they seem – and often have unintended consequences.

Big corporations are keen to buy up farmland for tree planting. Estate agents working for them cold call farmers, pushing them to sell up. Or else they outbid farmers on land up for sale.

Emissions

This is all in the name of offsetting carbon emissions. It’s either directly for the

company’s own emissions, or to make a tidy profit by selling off or renting out parcels of newly planted forest to other large companies.

Rather than reduce their own emissions, these capitalists can simply engage in carbon trading. Job done! The whole process is described by the new term “greenwashing”. And the planting is often fir tree monoculture, which is not good for biodiversity.

The risks for Welsh agriculture are obvious. One tenant farmer with three young sons, Ian O’Connor, had an offer accepted for a 270-acre sheep farm in Carmarthenshire, only to be gazumped by an offer 10 per cent higher. The buyer was private equity company the Foresight Group, incorporated in Guernsey. Young would-be farmers cannot compete.

Three years ago, the Welsh government declared a climate emergency. Its plan was to plant 43,000 hectares of new woodland by 2030, on the way to meet its 2050 net zero target. So it’s in a hurry.

Farming unions say that this is offsetting our way to net zero while taking land out of the much needed production of food for people.

Once covered with trees, it is unlikely ever to return to farmland. The displacement of existing ownership patterns and family farms could change rural life and the Welsh countryside forever.

Farmers’ union NFU Cymru has a more balanced view. They don’t see planting trees as an end in itself and recognise the need for food production and contending demands on land use.

Targets

On the other hand land agents Savills has praised the development of carbon offset. It says, “investors have an important role to play” in the delivery of the Welsh government’s green targets.

Savills can make direct approaches to farmers on behalf of their wealthy clients, easily outbidding buyers committed to agriculture, such as Ian O’Connor.

Foresight Group has already bought six farms in Wales for afforestation. NFU Cymru says 12 farms have been bought by similar companies in Carmarthenshire alone. Since the Welsh government set its target, 75 per cent of the largest plans for planting trees in Wales have been made by companies based outside of Wales.

These companies are cashing in on the grants on offer from the Welsh government, hoovering up Welsh farmland in the process, and boasting of their green credentials in their annual reports to shareholders.

Scotland too

A similar pattern is emerging in Scotland according to a report published by the Scottish Land Commission on 12 April.

As in Wales, commercial investors are swooping to buy up farmland – accounting for almost half of sales last year. Inevitably prices are rising sharply – by nearly a third during 2021. The increase across the rest of Britain was around 6 per cent.

Although some of this investment reflects higher timber prices, the report attributes much of the activity to carbon offsetting. The Scottish government is unsurprisingly in favour of carbon offsetting. It sees agriculture as a problem – its policy on agriculture and the environment focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. ■

‘Rather than reducing their own emissions, these capitalists can simply engage in carbon trading...’

Biodiversity policy creates risks for our food security. It sounds good but is not really about protecting the environment. By trying to put a market value on nature, it will take land out of production. This process must be halted.

Biodiversity Net Gain – b

A POLICY said to increase biodiversity creates risks for our food security. It sounds good but is not really about protecting the environment. By putting a market value on nature, it will take land out of production. This process must be halted.

Biodiversity Net Gain sounds good. But there are significant catches, which will have an impact on farmland and food production. There is a growing community movement determined to say what they believe are the planning priorities for Britain, including food production.

Threat

The Community Planning Alliance (CPA) is part of that movement. It has recognised the threat and seeks to protect land for domestic food production, and is calling for an emergency food strategy for the UK.

The CPA demand is that good farmland must be kept for food production. Its message is “Farmland for food: not for solar, not for roads, not for biofuels, not for industry, not for offsetting and not for housing.”

Most people would agree that something should be done to reverse the current decline in biodiversity in Britain. The Environment Act 2021 requires developers to measure biodiversity on a site before beginning development and to show on completion that they have provided a 10 per cent increase in biodiversity.

The process of demonstrating Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) relies on the Biodiversity Metric, a habitat-based approach to determining a proxy biodiversity value developed by government advisor Natural England. This places a financial value on the many benefits that nature gives us for free, from breathtaking views to functions such as the way trees and soils absorb climate-changing carbon or how pollinators put food on our plates.

‘This places a value on the benefits that nature gives us for free...’



Workers

Productive arable land in East Anglia – useful for food, not finance.

Once the metric has been applied and the “biodiversity units” calculated, the developer of the housing estate – in London or Leeds for example – is allowed to provide the biodiversity increase on site or off site.

Cramming more housing units onto expensive city land generates more profit. Unsurprisingly the developer will often choose to purchase BNG “units” elsewhere. That can have an adverse effect in

the area – reduced green space for people living in these new developments and degradation of the urban environment. But the main impact on land lies elsewhere.

The impact on farmland has already begun. We’re now at the start of a transitional period of up to two years to consult on and implement secondary legislation. This will set out how developers will have to consider biodiversity net gain principles for any upcoming projects.

sounds good but is not really about protecting the
will end up taking land out of production...

Beware false promises



Yet there are already private organisations such as Environment Bank encouraging farmers to lease them land from 10 up to 500 hectares at a time. They claim to be looking at “less or unproductive land”, but there’s no obligation on them to do so. In the terminology of these opportunist intermediaries, farmers become “offset providers”.

There is to be a national register for net gain delivery sites (in England). According

to Environment Bank it already has access to land in every local planning area. The register is supposed to play a key role in preventing businesses “gaming” the BNG system. The risk is that the same parcel of land is claimed to deliver BNG for multiple developments.

Resources

Planning lawyers already have a term for the practice of selling the same credits to multiple buyers – called “stacking” – and no doubt they anticipate plenty of work. On the other hand it’s certain that local authorities will have few resources for monitoring these processes. And even when the vigilant public identify an irregularity, there won’t be resources for effective enforcement action.

An academic study was published last September on the way local authorities in England have coped with previous voluntary and pilot biodiversity policies. It reported that around half of them think it’s practical to deliver biodiversity measures, although the total amount of land in pilot biodiversity offset schemes was minuscule – less than 2,000 hectares.

Many of the councils referred to a lack of resources and experience and a described wide variety of approaches and practices that fall well short of what the 2021 act is likely to need.

Allies

The CPA was set up last year to support local planning campaigns, with over 500 groups signed up. And now they are actively seeking allies in the fight to use land for food production. As well as the development threat, they have drawn attention to solar farms and biofuels, both of which take land out of production for environmental reasons

The National Farmers Union has also said that net gain policy must be balanced with the use of land for food production, as that is a limited resource. It’s not yet clear how it thinks the balance can be achieved. But with an eye on increased farm incomes, at least in the short term, the NFU are focused on farmers (including tenant farmers) getting fair payments under the scheme.

‘Even when the vigilant public identify an irregularity, there won’t be resources for effective enforcement...’

In Britain the government ran a few limited pilots from 2011 onwards. The results reviewed in 2016 were inconclusive or negative, but that doesn’t seem to have influenced the government’s desire to go ahead in England.

The devolved administration in Scotland is going ahead with a similar scheme. Wales is working on the same lines, but its version does not seem to involve any quantified measurement of the claimed gain.

Tradeable

But BNG is not confined to Britain, and it is not a new idea. “Natural capital accounting” is presented as being about protecting nature, but it is all about turning it into a tradeable commodity. It was promoted by the United Nations, and enthusiastically adopted by the EU.

Experience with such schemes in Australia and other places has not demonstrated that these monetised policies work to improve the environment – or that they can avoid the consequences of commercialising nature.

A 2014 Australian Senate enquiry was told that over a 10-year period there were no studies showing a net gain in biodiversity; if anything the opposite was true. The BNG policy in practice turned out to be far removed from the stated aims.

The challenge for Britain is to hold this policy up to scrutiny, starting with the demands on food production that the CPA has put so well. ■

Back in the nineteenth century Karl Marx wrote that society is divided into two classes: the working class, and those who live from exploiting the labour of

What is the working class



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Rush hour in London.

THE WORKING CLASS is changing, but does that mean that the fundamentals of class have changed? Why the need to discuss class now? Some see the term working class as harking back to the 19th century – what’s it got to do with Britain in the 21st century?

The discussion matters.

Because society and politics are all about class. There are just two classes in Britain, those who have to work to get a living and those who do not need to work for a living because they live off the work of others.

The relationship to the means of production is the key. Here, now, they are privately owned, though production always has to be social. Capitalists have command of labour. Capitalism, not socialism, is a command economy.

The vast majority of us in this country

are working class. Only a tiny minority is not working class, able to live from the exploitation of the labour power of others.

In the *Communist Manifesto* (1847-8), Marx described this particular class structure. “The bourgeoisie (the capitalist class, which owns the means of production) has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.”

Middle class?

There is today no middle class in Britain. “Middle class” is a term for those who for one reason or another either do not want to call themselves working class, or don’t want to call others working class. In 2016, a British Social Attitudes survey reported that most people call themselves working

class. The survey said “those in middle class jobs are likely to see themselves as working class.” The survey’s authors, instead of respecting the views of the people whose attitudes they were surveying, imposed their own views.

Are any particular jobs really middle class? Which ones?

What about barristers? These seemingly most middle-class workers have been taking forms of industrial action fairly frequently over the past few years, on behalf both of themselves – they do after all need to live and feed, clothe and house themselves and their families, as well as protect the interests of their clients, who are often not at all well-off workers.

And as *Workers* has reported (see p5), criminal barristers voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in protest at the lack of funding for legal aid.

ty was dividing into two great hostile classes: the others. It's a perfect description of Britain today...

s?

If you mainly live by working, you are a worker. That's it. Talk of A, B, C1, C2, D and E voters is just useful (perhaps) for pollsters, although they seem to get predictions wrong most of the time, or to work out sociological categories to judge access to services such as health, or to target advertising. It doesn't describe reality.

Real work

Some people work in production, some work in distribution, some in services. All these jobs are real work. There is no point in producing goods if they are not then distributed and used, no production is possible without the services needed to maintain the workforce.

Some talk of skilled workers and unskilled workers. Fair enough. But what work is completely unskilled? Some jobs are repetitive, but you still need to concentrate to do them properly and safely. The original Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution – no longer in existence – spoke of “workers by hand or by brain”. So some workers use only their hands while others use only their brains? Someone felling a tree uses only their hands but not their brain? And an IT worker uses only their brain but not their bodies?

Actually, all workers use their hands and all workers use their brains. We are not minds alone, nor bodies alone; we are not divided beings, so don't try to divide our working class.

Marx himself never used the divisive phrase “labour aristocracy”. Engels (in his 1887 preface to *Condition of the Working Class in England*), wrongly wrote that the engineers and others “succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position”. “Enforcing” implies that they succeeded against opposition from the employers. “Relatively comfortable” means comfortable only as compared to the wretched condition of the other members of the working class.

In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (see page 22), Lenin wrote in the section on The Export of Capital, “As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the living standards of the masses in a given country, for this would

mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries.” So employers would never voluntarily “raise the living standards” of part, or of all, of the working class. Workers have to do that for themselves, in struggle.

The few winners from globalisation have never compensated the vast majority who have lost from it. The vast, ever-growing inequality between the 0.1 per cent and the 99.9 per cent shows that wealth does not trickle down – it surges up.

Nobody can become a billionaire without exploiting the labour power of many other people. When there are billionaires in a country, that country is based on exploitation. So, in the USA and in Britain, as in China and Russia, there is exploitation, there is capitalism. Each of these countries is essentially run by an oligarchy – “a small group of people having control of a country or organisation” – with the same economic essence, in different forms.

Some claim there is a “New Cold War” between so-called democracies and authoritarian states. In reality, there is no sharp ideological conflict between the rival oligarchies. The new confrontation is actually all too traditional: great powers maximising self-interest and coming into conflict over spheres of interest which can generate profits and new opportunities for exploitation.

Exploitation

If you ask, “Is a little girl in India sewing footballs and being paid 50p a day exploited?” people say, “Yes!” As indeed she is. But if you ask “Is an IT worker earning £60,000 exploited?” many might say “No.” But the IT workers are actually more exploited (oppression is a different concept) because they create greater wealth and they do not get back in wages anywhere near the value of what they produce.

The more highly industrialised a country is, the more productive is its labour power, and the greater is the value that its working class produces.

We reject the entire approach of Thatcherism, with her ultra-capitalist, free market mantra ‘there is no such thing as society.’ A Thatcher policy adviser said, “of

‘Any attempt to divide our working class by promoting differences instead of looking for shared interests weakens us in our class struggle...’

course, there is no such thing as a collective interest, only a coincidence of individual interests.” But our working class – the great majority of the people – has essential interests in common – the daily struggle to live a decent life and look forward to a decent future – interests which capitalists cannot and will not provide.

Any attempt to divide our working class, whether by setting interest groups against each other by emphasising what we don't have in common – black versus white, women versus men, young against old – by promoting our differences instead of looking for our shared interests, weakens us in our essential class struggle against the opposing capitalist class.

We are also one working class, in Scotland, Wales and England. Anyone who pursues or supports divisive or separatist policies fights on the side of the capitalists.

So why does it matter that we ask about the nature of the working class? Because only a working class can define its needs, say what the country must plan and fight for, define what a decent Britain can and must be. We had better be quick to assert this, our essential class nature. Because the capitalist class will fight it with all its might. ■

• This article is based on the introduction given at a CPBML public meeting held at Conway Hall in March 2022.

Recent polling has confirmed that most voters in Scotland deterred Nicola Sturgeon and her coalition allies...

SNP, Greens pursue breakaway



Workers

One of Scotland's "lifeline" ferries loading at Oban. Now the SNP has outsourced two new ferries for the Isla route to a Turkish yard.

SCOTLAND IS making its view clear. Two major polling initiatives at the end of March were remarkably similar in their results, showing that opinion was holding firm against separatist plans to break Scotland away from Britain and to hold a referendum on the issue next year.

One poll, conducted by BMG Research for the *Herald* newspaper between 25 and 31 March, found that 53 per cent did not want Scotland to leave, with 47 per cent saying they did.

Another poll carried out by YouGov on behalf of the These Islands forum between 29 and 31 March also found a 53 to 47 per cent split in favour of rejecting Scottish breakaway.

And the numbers wanting to leave diminished further when the question was put another way. Asked "Should Scotland remain inside or leave the UK?", 59 per cent opted for staying while 41 per cent

chose leave. As for a second independence referendum being held next year, only 36 per cent supported that.

Despite the Scottish National Party (SNP) facing a persistent lack of majority support for their cause ever since losing the 2014 referendum, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has firmly set out plans for a new referendum by the end of 2023 with the aim of full independence by 2026.

To strong criticism, the civil service in Scotland was widely used to draw up plans and blueprints for a breakaway during the campaign leading up to the 2014 referendum. A similar process has been happening over recent months.

Pamela Nash, chief executive of Scotland in Union, pointed out, "Nicola Sturgeon and her ministers are increasingly out of touch with the people of Scotland. Amid a cost-of-living crisis and pressure on local public services, the last thing the gov-

ernment should be focused on is how to divide Scotland once again. Taking up civil service time and resources like this is irresponsible and inappropriate."

As things stand, the British government seems committed to turning down any request from the SNP-led administration in Edinburgh for the necessary legal powers to hold a meaningful referendum. Sturgeon, however, says that if such requests are vetoed, a Bill for a referendum would be presented in Scotland. That would leave the British government no option but to challenge that legislation in the courts.

The economy

Economic facts boost the case for the Union. There are consistent benefits from UK-wide pooling of resources – estimated by the government at £36 billion for the 2020-21 tax year. The SNP's pro-capitalist and pro-austerity Sustainable Growth

d continue to oppose the breakup of Britain. That hasn't

kaway despite resistance

Commission proposals were shelved without replacement. Questions abound on the negative impact of creating a customs border with England, the false dream of rejoining the EU, the challenge of creating a new currency and the economic shock of trying to unpick Britain's thoroughly integrated machinery of state.

Indeed subversive efforts to attempt to split Britain's Financial Conduct Authority, dividing the Edinburgh office off from the London centre, are being resisted by staff. On top of that, research into Britain-wide information, such as the Census, as well as economic data, has been hampered by a decade of splitting up information streams, leaving researchers hobbled by the lack of comparable data.

The Health Foundation has pointed out that it has become impossible to compare health outcomes generally across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland because Scotland has changed the way it collected the data since devolution.

The Foundation has, though, launched an independent inquiry this year into health outcomes in Scotland because on one measure – life expectancy at birth – Scotland clearly trails the rest of Britain, and indeed most of western Europe.

Energy

Instead of the SNP's fake "independence" within the EU, workers across Britain would be better occupied paying attention to another aspect of independence for the whole country: independent energy supply.

In recent years the influence of the net-zero obsessed World Bank, Conservative Environmental Network and World

Economic Forum has pushed the British government into discouraging exploration and investment in oil and gas, both on land and sea. It became beholden to the European Union's Green Deal Policy.

Now a welcome re-think is under way for plans that would have seen the abandonment of Jackdaw gas field in the North Sea east of Aberdeen (holding up to 250 million barrels equivalent) and the Cambo field in the Atlantic north west of Shetland (holding over 800 million barrels of oil).

Britain could meet only a third of its future needs if it fails to invest in new oil and gas extraction. Between January and March 2021 we had to import 56 per cent of the gas needed.

Cambo is one of at least a dozen possible oil and gas fields located in the Corona Ridge Area of Britain's continental shelf. And in February approval was given by the UK Oil and Gas Authority for the Abigail oil and gas field in the central North Sea off the coast of Peterhead.

All of this development has been rejected by the Scottish Greens and the SNP. Sturgeon symbolically demolished the iconic Longannet coal-fired power station last December, pressing the button that ignited 700kg of explosives. No new nuclear power stations are to be built in Scotland and all coal mines are abandoned. Fracking is prohibited.

The Cambo oil and gas field – and its possible 1,000 jobs – was ditched after Sturgeon said last November that she opposed any development of new oil and gas fields in the North Sea. The Scottish Greens took credit for her change of heart.

For years she and Alex Salmond had been promoting the SNP mantra "It's Scotland's Oil". What she had attempted was putting a stop to energy production, and halting that would have adversely affected the whole of Britain, not just Scotland.

False jobs projections

For years, too, the SNP and Scottish Greens have trumpeted a coming jobs boom in renewable energy. What it has got is a damp squib. 130,000 workers would be employed in the low carbon economy, it was claimed, but by 2020 only about

20,500 jobs had been created.

The development has been complicated by the European Union starting legal action in March this year through the World Trade Organization. The EU claims that subsidies for green energy projects, including wind farms off the British coast, discriminate against imported energy. Crown Estate Scotland pointed to more hurdles that ScotWind licensing applicants needed to clear before work could start on wind-farm construction. These include planning permission and adequate financing.

The GMB trade union also warned that much of the fabrication work could go overseas. NOV, a company involved in developing three big floating wind farms, is negotiating with Dubai-based Lamprell Plc to provide fabrication, assembly and outfitting for Cerulean Winds' three 1GW floating windfarms off the west of Shetland and the central North Sea.

GMB organiser Gary Cook said, "... instead of securing the vital skills and tens of thousands of jobs for UK workers, Ministers at Westminster and Holyrood have been asleep at the wheel."

Ferries from Turkey?

To be an independent maritime nation Britain must protect its shipbuilding. Nowhere has been more iconic as a shipbuilding area than Clydeside, now celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' work-in.

It is tragic to see the unfolding saga of failure to build the ferries essential to link the mainland with the many west coast islands. The initial cost of the ships was £97 million, but after several setbacks the final cost is heading to over £250 million.

It is galling to learn that the two new ferries on the Islay route are to be built by Cemre Marin Endustri in Turkey. The shortlist included yards in Poland and Romania, but no British yard.

This shows the weakness of leaving these matters in the hands of the pro-EU Scottish separatists.

The strength of being part of a united Britain is shown by the benefits of having a UK National Shipbuilding Strategy (updated just this March). It must now be implemented. ■

'To be an independent maritime nation Britain must protect its shipbuilding....'

The government says Covid-19 is to blame for the disaster
are responsible for the carnage that commuters and travel

Public transport in crisis



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Red double-decker buses at Ash Grove garage in Hackney, East London. Transport for London faces cuts as the government continues to starve

BRITAIN'S PUBLIC transport is in crisis. And while ministers may seek to put the blame on Covid, in reality the crisis is one the result of deliberate government policy.

The government is ignoring the problems of road traffic pollution and congestion, and pumps money into encouraging private car use. Meanwhile, it is actively discouraging public transport use by star-

ving it of the funds needed to recover and expand, and using stunts and downright lies in an attempt to disguise the government's true agenda.

Backbone

Buses are the backbone of the country's public transport system. Despite a slow decline in bus usage since 2006. In

the last set of figures unaffected by Covid-19, those for 2018/19, 4.32 billion passenger journeys were made by local bus in England, 2.20 billion of those in London. In Scotland the 366 million bus journeys made accounted for 73 per cent of all journeys by public transport.

A steady decline in passenger numbers has been driven by service cuts as a result

er engulfing public transport. That's a lie. Its own policies
 allers see all around them...

as buses take a hit



re it of funding.

of cash strapped local authorities slashing bus subsidies in reaction to the squeeze on funding provided by government. The decline was also driven by bus fares rising faster than inflation, and slower journey times caused by increased congestion.

In April 2022 the Campaign for Better Transport highlighted the fact that nearly 5,000 bus routes were axed in the last

decade, around a quarter of the total. It drew attention to research by the RAC Foundation which showed that bus and coach fares rose by 58 per cent over the decade while petrol went up by just 19 per cent.

Now we are seeing a fuel crisis which has caused petrol prices to leap by around 40 per cent in a year. The government's response was to cut fuel duty by 5 pence a litre and then freeze it for two years. Five pence a litre represents a tiny saving for the most motorists – if they see it at all. Mostly it was wiped out given that the oil companies and petrol retailers are using the fuel duty cut to increase further their huge profits instead of passing the duty cut on to the motorists.

Ignored

While Chancellor Rishi Sunak cut fuel duty in his Spring Statement, there was nothing for public transport. Sunak's move is costing the exchequer around £5 billion, a significant sum which would be far better spent on improving public transport provision.

Paul Tuohy, Chief Executive of the Campaign for Better Transport, said: "Buses are relied upon by millions of people and should play a central role in a green transport future, but they have been struggling for some time, and the pandemic has made things much worse." Buses should be a priority for central government, but they're definitely not.

Given the strong government messaging in the early part of the pandemic to avoid public transport, the campaign believes that there is a segment of the public that will not return until the government overtly tells them it is safe to do so.

It reckons that the government campaign should be accompanied by fare incentives and offers to encourage people back on board. And it contrasted the 5p cut in fuel duty in Britain with moves to cut public transport fares in countries such as New Zealand and Germany.

A much-criticised government stunt was to award some local authorities money to develop their public transport systems as part of its so-called levelling-up agenda – just over £1 billion was awarded to 31

'Buses should be a priority for central government, but they're not...'

authorities.

Transport union RMT described the announcement as "a postcode lottery". General Secretary Mick Lynch said: "This announcement of funding is a drop in the ocean compared to what our bus and local transport desperately needs after years of government cuts, austerity, and mismanagement by the private bus industry."

Bus and coach industry trade body, the Confederation of Passenger Transport, pointed out that millions of passengers would be left disappointed because their local area had missed out. And Paul Tuohy said, "Improving buses in a minority of places does not live up to the promise of a national bus strategy..."

Bus usage in London represents more than half of that of the whole of England. The reason for that is because London was spared the deregulation of buses that took place in 1986. Elsewhere, it visited a free-for-all on the country which took years to settle down to the current highly unsatisfactory position.

Powers

Instead Transport for London (TfL) has the power to determine bus routes and service levels along with fares, and franchises the routes out to the private sector to operate. This results in much more stable services firmly under public control.

But bus usage in London has also fallen for the first time since 2012, and Transport for London continues to lurch from one funding crisis to the next as the government deliberately starves TfL of the funding it needs to keep going. Workers in TfL and London Underground face further cuts in staff numbers, and attacks on their

Continued on page 18



Continued from page 17

free travel provision and pensions.

The Wales administration has set up Transport for Wales very much on the lines of TfL, and now that it is able to do so, intends to replicate a TfL-style franchised bus service network across Wales. Like TfL, fares will be set by Transport for Wales. How successful this will be in the face of central government policy remains to be seen. And funding is key. This, though, would appear to at least put Wales's buses under significant public control.

Uncertainty on rail

Meanwhile, railway services and the staff that provide them continue to face great uncertainty. The ending of the franchise system for passenger train services has put the government firmly in the driving seat when it comes to decision-making. And it has decided it wants big cuts as part of a reorganisation of the rail industry that will put the government very much back in control, while continuing to use private companies as the means of delivery.

Despite overcrowding on many rail ser-

'The government is deliberately starving Transport for London of the funding it needs to keep going...'

Plenty of time for gimmicks

RAIL USE is currently around 80 per cent of pre-Covid levels, but it is expected to recover and grow further in time. Leisure travel has bounced back strongly – in some cases to above pre-Covid levels. It is the money-making commuter and business sectors that have lagged behind.

So the key issue at present is winning back passengers. But all Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps seems interested in is gimmicks. He continues to pump out cheesy videos on the telly of him telling us all how he wants more people to use trains. His latest wheeze is the "Great British Rail Sale", with lots of cheap fares to win passengers back.

The scheme has been widely criticised as the cheap tickets are extremely hard to get. Any retailer trying to win back customers would discount popular

lines – in the railway this would be business and commuter tickets – but Shapps clearly has no intention of doing that. Commuters and business users are still expected to pay through the nose despite the "Sale".

Another of Shapps's gimmicks is to hold a competition to decide which town or city should be the location of the HQ of the new "Great British Rail" which will soon be controlling the rail industry on the government's behalf.

Over 40 towns and cities have spent large sums of public money on bids, despite the fact that those in the industry expect it to be located in Milton Keynes. The reason? The current HQ of Network Rail – which will form the core of the new GBR entity – is based in Milton Keynes and the cost of moving those staff somewhere else would be huge. ■

vices, the operators of passenger services have been instructed by the government to run many fewer trains as a new timetable comes in. Its directly owned infrastructure owner and operator Network Rail has been told to cut thousands of jobs, and the government-controlled industry is under extreme pressure to cut costs by slashing pension entitlements along with free travel and conditions of service, and by continuing the pay freeze that has largely been in place for over two years.

Ballot

As we go to press, mass meetings of RMT members are being organised across the country as the union begins its ballot of over 40,000 workers employed by 15 train operating companies as well as Network Rail.

A national rail strike could start as early as June, warns RMT. The union fears that up to 2,500 maintenance jobs may disappear, and believes that this will mean the undermining of safety standards that have taken many years to establish. RMT has also set its sights firmly on ending the two-

year pay freeze.

White-collar rail union TSSA looks about to follow suit. The government has already clearly stated that it aims to get rid of ticket offices, and both TSSA and RMT fear that this will lead to fewer staff on many stations and more unstaffed stations.

Fewer staff raises issues about the security and safety of passengers, as well as accessibility for people who cannot afford hi-tech ticketing solutions, and those needing staff to assist them with boarding and alighting from trains.

The government pulling back on HS2 commitments while diverting funds to inordinately expensive road building programmes. It clearly cannot be trusted.

Public transport is vital to the health of the economy. It will be for transport workers to defend their industry, transport users to campaign for better public transport services and against cuts, and for many others to stand up against the congestion mayhem that the government seems hell bent on imposing on Britain for its own petty ideological reasons. ■

The government is looking to fund its “new world order” – on the backs of workers...

A budget for capital



Valeri Potapova via Shutterstock

‘What’s behind the inflation driving down living standards?’

in addition to large numbers already provided. We weren’t told the cost of these missiles.

The government also “put forward £25 million for Ukrainian forces”. And in addition it announced £4.1 million to fund BBC World Service coverage of the region. It was not clear if that was for Ukraine alone or Eastern Europe more generally.

Workers are paying for this ramped up military expenditure, set to continue indefinitely. A lot of funding is already committed. It’s as if their thinking is, “let’s do this military spending quickly before the people begin to ask awkward questions”.

But these questions will be raised. Millions of British workers were already finding it hard to manage and now millions more will join them. Claims for higher wages are increasing, some escalating into industrial disputes. People will ask what’s behind the inflation driving down living standards.

Wealth

Workers by their labour generate the wealth of a country but don’t see the benefit. After paying for the consequences of speculation by finance capital that wealth is now being used to fund a war.

Capitalists on the other hand see opportunities. The stock markets are content because there are profits to be made in war, regardless of companies making a show of withdrawing from Russia.

Priorities

Meanwhile in Britain the number of food banks and the number of people using them keeps growing. This cannot be the solution to inflation and poverty. It cannot go on indefinitely. The government is now fond of referring to “the new world order”. It is time for workers to impose our priorities in this situation. ■

THE GOVERNMENT’S Spring Statement delivered by Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 24 March was a budget by a finance capitalist for finance capital. No more, no less.

The government’s every action is an assault on our living standards – tax rises, increased student debt repayment, capping state pension increases. This is driven by a mounting legacy of debt. This debt was not created by the coronavirus pandemic or the Ukraine war, although both are making conditions even worse.

The debt burden goes back at least as

‘For workers this means living standards will fall further this year than at any time since records began in 1956...’

far as the economic crisis of 2007-2008. The recession it triggered is still with us. The subsequent economic measures adopted by capitalist governments, such as quantitative easing (printing money), are set to make things worse still.

Tax burden

For workers, after a decade of little or no increase in real wages, this means living standards will fall further this year than at any time since records began in 1956. The tax burden will reach its highest point since shortly after the Second World War.

Once again, finance capital is arranging for workers to pay the price for its misgovernment of the nation’s affairs. Without growth in the real economy – an economy which involves making goods or growing food – the debts will only carry on piling up.

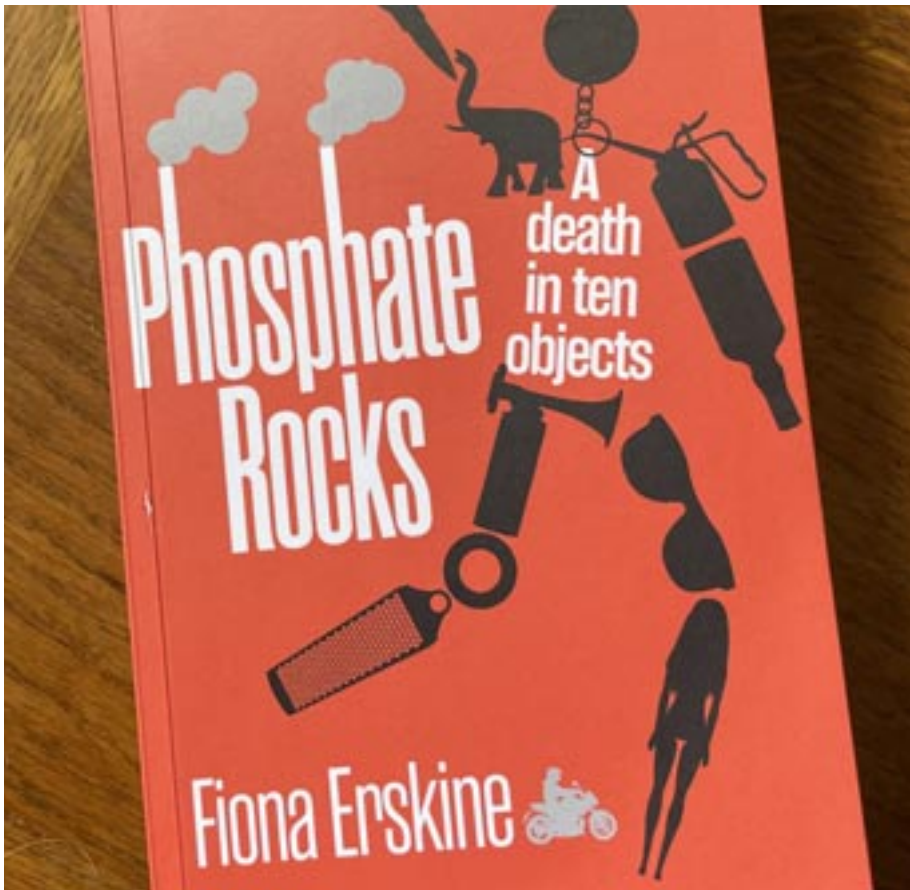
The answer to energy price rises is to reduce dependence on international markets. That takes long-term planning and effective delivery – qualities lacking in this government and those which preceded it.

Costs

On the same day as Sunak’s statement, the government announced that it will send 6,000 new “defensive” missiles to Ukraine,

Part detective story, part hymn to the power of chemistry, the Erskine also describes how an industrial powerhouse declines

Death in – and of – a chem



Workers

Phosphate Rocks: A death in ten objects, by Fiona Erskine, paperback, ISBN 978-1-913207-52-6, Sandstone Press 2021, £8.99 but widely available for less. Kindle and eBook editions available.

AROUND A dozen pages into Fiona Erskine's *Phosphate Rocks* you realise this is no ordinary detective story. A whiff of sulphur detected by the laconic protagonist John Gibson, now retired from Scottish Agricultural Industries (SAI) in Leith, leads to a short, gripping discursion into the hellish sulphur mines of 19th-century Sicily.

From there the narrative leads to the creation of the Mafia as a strike-breaking army, and on to mass emigration after the mines were closed.

The theme of closure runs throughout the book – the end of Scotland's fertiliser industry above all. SAI, with a history going back to the nineteenth century, used to employ 2,000 workers in Scotland, 340 of

them at Leith, where this story is set.

In the second part of the twentieth century, SAI was run down by the parent company, ICI. The Leith factory, the last to go, shut in 1991 as ICI's whole fertilizer division was sold to Norwegian conglomerate Norsk Hydro.

The story starts with the discovery of what clearly is (or rather was) a body encased in phosphate rock at the site of the SAI plant. By the body are the ten objects of the title: each has its own tale, which John Gibson unravels. What follows is in part a hymn to the glories of minerals and their role in production and agriculture. Sulphur, phosphate, potash, ammonia, guano, platinum and silver.

Occasionally you feel you're getting a little too much information. But you need to bear with the author as Erskine worked at SAI for four years as a chemical engineer. Every incident – bar one – described in the book took place at some time during her

stint there. John Gibson, too, is a real figure, still alive and a firm friend of Erskine's.

The book progresses as a detective story: histories and tales are woven around each object. But gradually another theme emerges with increasing clarity: work, how workers combine to produce despite the greed and stupidity of the factory owners.

At this point, a very good book becomes something outstanding. By the end of it you have more than an inkling of how the decline of Britain's manufacturing industry played out.

Skills

One of the key sections is about a group of "unskilled" workers known as greasers (one of whom is the only truly fictional character in the book, Becksy). The chapter about them starts with a forceful declaration: "They called them unskilled men. John always bristled at the lazy language. Some of the most highly skilled men he had ever worked with had been labelled 'unskilled'. Management-speak for someone without paper qualifications."

Erskine relates how a reorganisation from head office – snappily titled "The Way Ahead" – inspired by management consultants started with decentralising maintenance. The greasers, so-called unskilled and paid a pittance, were the first to go.

Yet the greasers did more than apply the right quantity of the right grade of grease at the right time, they listened to the machinery to decide what was needed, and told the mechanics if there was something off. "Now, no one was listening," writes Erskine.

So a key gearbox seized up, and an entire granulation plant had to be taken offline, at a cost of £150,000 for repairs and £400,000 in lost production. Never short of a minerals comparison, Erskine takes the price of gold at the time (1988) – £250 an ounce – and translates £550,000 into 70 kilograms of gold. Becksy, she concludes, "had literally been worth his weight in gold".

A similar debacle is described with the commissioning of a new plant to make ammonium nitrate, a key fertiliser sold by SAI under the brand name Nitram. The task was assigned to the hapless Keith. When someone is introduced as "a contract

his novel from Fiona
ned and fell...

anical plant

'The author peppers her story with anecdotes that both entertain and shine a light on society...'

mechanical engineer who could quote British Standards verbatim but avoided eye contact", you know disaster is just around the corner.

The extent of the disaster is mind-boggling, and Erskine describes it in forensic detail, including erroneous (and eventually, very expensive) assumptions about the specifications for the new machinery. Other factors contributed to the debacle too: flowing through them all like a sparkling seam of fool's gold is the lack of respect for the knowledge of workers.

Solved

In the end the detective puzzle is solved, and the identity of the body encased in phosphate revealed. But a number of things raise this book from being merely a good crime story. Erskine writes well, with an economy of style sprinkled at times with searing irony. And she peppers her story with anecdotes that both entertain and shine a light on society.

For example, she writes, as she must, about Fritz Haber's invention with Carl Bosch of a process to make ammonia from nitrogen and hydrogen. But she also writes about his wife, Clara Immerwahr, the first woman to get a doctorate in chemistry in Germany.

Haber enthusiastically developed chemical weapons in the First World War. Immerwahr was violently opposed. In 1915, they argued as Haber was about to go to the eastern front to supervise a chlorine attack. Erskine continues: "She took his pistol and shot herself. He left anyway; it took her several days to die." That's all you need to know about Haber. ■

WORKERS

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Deep into the First World War, Lenin produced a seminal study on the economic origins of the conflict and a political analysis to

1916: Lenin on imperialism

A STUDY of Lenin's landmark work on the phenomenon of imperialism is worth anyone's time. It is a shining example of political thinking from the only party to effectively oppose the First World War – and an investigation of a significant error about what drove the working class in Britain and other capitalist countries into war.

Written in exile, Lenin's work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, provided political leadership and direction as well as analysis. In Britain and across Europe, the majority of "socialist" parties abandoned pre-war declarations of international solidarity and turned into jingoistic cheerleaders for their own ruling class.

Some who opposed the war, such as the Independent Labour Party in Britain, called for "peace between nations". Lenin explained how that is impossible in the long run under capitalism – peaceful periods are but intervals between conflicts, not always military, but always economic.

New development

Lenin's great contribution was to explain the progress of capitalism in the previous 50 years and how that created monopolies and the political empires which went to war. Imperialism – of the capitalist sort – was a new development.

Lenin demonstrated how the growing capitalist economy in the 1860s led to concentration of production and a tendency to monopoly – the control of markets, areas of industry or even whole countries. This became the dominant aspect of capitalism by the end of the nineteenth century.

In this period technical improvements and mechanisation spread widely, but the concentration of capital (which controls

production) became ever greater as more capital was needed to develop new enterprises. And the rate of exploitation of workers increased too – a point that Lenin does not fully explore.

On the back of this development of industrial and commercial monopolies, banks also became concentrated. They emerged from a role as enablers of capitalist transactions to become their master, creating a monopoly of capital itself – which Lenin describes as imperialism, or the domination of finance capital.

The separation of finance capital from production leads to the employment of capital simply to generate more capital. Capital is no longer a by-product of industry and commerce but is a parasite feeding on it.

Many of the features of capitalism we see today were present by 1914 – multinational conglomerates, leveraged control of enterprises, reliance on debt and "financial engineering". Today we would call this globalism, though it has developed even further – capital now sees nation states as a limitation.

Others had already described imperialism. Lenin showed not only that it was endemic to capitalism rather than accidental, but that it also produced uneven development between countries. Simply, some grew even more powerful by the export of capital rather than goods. It took the early capitalist domination of colonies by unequal trading to a whole new level.

Now the industrial conglomerates controlled raw materials and whole industries across the world.

These empires, some new and some like Britain reinvented, raced to control the world, its people and resources in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The demand of each was that they had their "own" colonies.

But monopoly and imperialism did not end competition. Once the whole world had been "discovered" – opened up to capitalism – the only way for the dominant countries to expand was to wrest control from independent states or other empires – at first economically, then increasingly by open wars.

Russia entered the First World War on



Public domain

German trench occupied by soldiers from the 11th Army, Somme, 1916. The bloodbath that engulfed Europe

the side of Britain and France, both imperialist powers with control over much of the Russian economy.

By 1916 Russian losses were increasing and its troops disaffected. Conditions for civilians worsened with shortages of food and other essentials.

Revolution

Against that background the Russian Bolsheviks set out to transform a war between contending empires into a war to free their country from capitalism. Lenin's analysis of uneven capitalist development explained the shortcomings in earlier socialist thinking that a revolution could not be made in one country alone.

But on one point Lenin's analysis was inadequate. He described a "labour aristocracy" holding back workers in the imperialist countries, Britain in particular. He suggested the vast profits made by imperialists were used to bribe skilled workers, as if workers in those countries were not themselves exploited and were only comfortable because of excessive exploitation elsewhere.

Lenin does not back this up with facts and rigorous analysis in the way he does elsewhere in the book. This view taints all

'Many of the features of capitalism we see today were present by 1914...'

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to guide action...

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h Cheshire Regiment during the Battle of the
e was a direct result of imperialist greed.

of the British working class – except possibly the most downtrodden – with being stooges of the imperialists, living off the crumbs of others’ exploitation.

It’s a misleading and corrosive idea which takes many forms – such as “white privilege” currently. All are unscientific and fundamentally deny the economic basis of capitalist society – the division into workers and capitalists.

Our party programme totally repudiates the idea that workers have been bought off or that there is peace with capitalists, who never give up any “crumbs” willingly. Struggle varies across time and place, but does not go away – as events in Britain during WW1 showed.

The years leading up to the outbreak of war were marked by intense class struggle. But the struggle for wages and conditions was immediately and deliberately abandoned by trade unions – “to help the war effort”.

The industrial peace did not last long. There was unease at “dilution” – the replacement of skilled labour with unskilled. With shortages, price rises and static wages, struggle developed around Britain – led by people in local workplaces and not the official trade unions. ■

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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 (Covid permitting), study groups and less formal discussions. Talking to people, face to face, is where we have the greatest impact and – just as importantly – learn from other workers’ experience.

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

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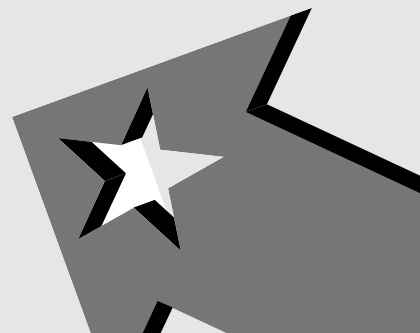
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Employers look after themselves

'The Johnson government long ago abandoned its promises to control Britain's borders.'

THE RULING class never misses a chance to undermine workers. Under the cloak of helping refugees, they can't resist the opportunity for hiring cheap labour.

A number of employers' organisations – the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the Association of Labour Providers, the National Farmers' Union and giant temp provider Adecco – are urging the government to give all refugees the immediate right to work here.

Employers always seize every chance to keep wages down by importing cheaper labour. P&O Ferries is conspicuously doing that right now – but it isn't alone. Employers love every chance to make money out of desperate people.

The Johnson government long ago abandoned its promises to control Britain's borders. Its commitment to the EU's four freedoms – the free movements of capital, goods, services, and persons is absolute. Every international emergency – Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and now Ukraine – creates another surge of refugees, accompanied by the call of "we must do something".

Home Secretary Priti Patel's 1 March speech on the government's "bespoke humanitarian support package for Ukrainians" made no mention of any extra spending that will be needed to support the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine that the government eagerly anticipates.

The employers' organisations claimed it is "more urgent than ever" to lift the current ban on the immediate employment of refugees, because there is a record staff shortage across the country. That is only half the story.

Did anyone really think that this government is going to provide the services needed to house, educate and care for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees they hope for? They will be abandoned to the mercies of cowboy employers and cash-starved local authorities.

And even if that number of people don't arrive from Ukraine, it's not going to directly solve employers' problems. Their interest is in driving down wages for everyone.

Importing labour from other countries is a form of colonial exploitation. There's a growing

tendency to attack the colonialism of the past while ignoring – or more often, trying to justify – this colonialism of today. Calls for "no borders" aid this exploitation.

It is an imperial delusion that Britain has a unique responsibility for the current huge flows of migration. Britain is supposed to be particularly guilty, and so has a particular obligation to accept refugees.

The call for "open borders" is also a demand that all asylum seekers be given the right to settle here. But those who have come from war-torn Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Somalia, and then try to reach Britain from France are no longer fleeing oppression – they are not persecuted in any country in Europe through which they have passed.

Meanwhile, job vacancies here were around 800,000 in the quarter to January 2020, double the level ten years earlier. Since the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, reported vacancies have risen every quarter, up to 1.3 million this March. And the ratio of registered unemployed to vacancies are at a record low.

Several factors are at work: an increase in vacancies in all sectors compared to pre-pandemic levels and an increase in older workers leaving the workforce over the past two years. And in response to the rising cost of living that's driving industrial action, many firms are holding vacancies rather than increasing wages.

This is a structural problem with the economy. Training and improving skills are vitally important for our manufacturing, industry and services. Shortages will not be solved by token measures allowing some refugees to seek work in Britain sooner than they can now.

But as with almost all other areas, there's little sign of positive action from government. Prime minister Johnson made a speech in September 2020, long on "ambition", short on effective detail. And the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper the following January from then education secretary Gavin Williamson announced lots of measures, but they added little.

Government has no intention of acting on behalf of workers, only employers. Workers must take matters into their own hands. ■

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